

**THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA DURING CIVIL UNREST: A CASE OF THE 2021
LOOTING IN KWAZULU-NATAL**

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DECLARATION

I Luthando Valencia Ngubane do hereby declare that unless otherwise indicated, this dissertation is solely the result of my own work. This work has not been submitted to any other tertiary institution for a degree award or other purposes and all the authors whose work contributed to this study have been accordingly referenced. I hereby give consent for this work to be made available for inter-library loan, photocopying, and made available to outside interested organisations and students.

Signed

Luthando Valencia Ngubane

02/04/2026

Date

Dedication

This work is a humble offering to Jehovah, my Lord and Saviour. His grace has guided me and illuminated my path through all challenges and triumphs. To my mother, a source of love and support, I express my deepest gratitude. Her unwavering faith in me, even in moments of self-doubt, has been a source of strength and inspiration. Her caring spirit was the foundation on which I built this study and made it possible for me to tackle and successfully complete it.

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“Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you, and I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”—Isaiah 41:10

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I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to my brother. Your support has been instrumental in my ability to complete this study. Your faith in me has given me the confidence to persevere and finish this work.

Most importantly, I would like to thank my daughter who is three years and my late partner. This study is also dedicated to them. Their love and support were my driving force, and even though my partner is no longer with us, I am doing this for our daughter. The memory of you lives on in every page of this study because when I started this journey, you were there encouraging me and always reminding me that I was doing this to better myself and to secure a better future for our daughter.

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Abstract

Social media has significantly transformed communication and information dissemination considerably, particularly during civil unrest. Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram play a crucial role in shaping public discourse, mobilising communities and providing real-time updates. However, they also contribute to misinformation, incitement to violence and social tensions (Himelein-Wachowiak *et al.*, 2021: 635). This study investigates the role of social media during the July 2021 looting in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) as a case study to explore its function as a communication tool in times of crisis. The primary objective of the study is to examine the role of social media as a communication tool during civil unrest.

This study adopts a quantitative, descriptive research design to assess the impact of social media. A random sample of 299 social media users aged 18 to 60 who had witnessed the unrest completed an online questionnaire via Google Forms consisting of 15 structured questions. The data was analysed using SPSS (version 28.0) and Microsoft Excel, using statistical tools to analyse patterns and relationships between demographic factors and social media perceptions.

The results of the study show that social media played a central role in the dissemination of information before, during and after the riots. In KwaZulu-Natal, people relied heavily on social media platforms for up-to-date information during the looting. Real-time updates on platforms such as Twitter and Facebook not only provided immediate information, but also facilitated the coordination of looting activities. The study recommends increased online monitoring, improved crisis communication strategies and fact-checking mechanisms. In addition, incorporating social media into crisis response plans can strengthen public engagement and response efforts. This study contributes to the growing literature on social media and civil unrest, offering insights into how different groups use social media and how these platforms can be optimised to communicate effectively, engage the public and manage crises.

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

KZN	KwaZulu-Natal
SNS	Social networking service
G-CUT	Global Civil Unrest on Twitter
UNOFDRR	United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction
SMMA	Social media marketing activities
CX	Customer experience
MIL	Multi-instance learning
LMS	Learning management systems
NYU	New York University
GDP	Gross domestic product
ICASA	Independent Communications Authority of South Africa
SAPS	South African Police Services
SAPOA	South African Property Owners Association LIST OF
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Sciences
FREC	Faculty Research Ethics Committee

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Social media have profoundly changed how information is communicated during civil unrest. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram have become important forums for shaping public discourse, mobilising the masses and disseminating information in real time. These platforms allow citizens to voice their discontent, organise protests and share personal accounts of events as they unfold. However, the unregulated nature of social media also facilitates the spread of misinformation, incitement to violence and the amplification of societal tensions (Himelein-Wachowiak *et al.*, 2021: 1).

The use of social media to mobilise and organise protests is becoming increasingly evident. Activists and organisers use these platforms to coordinate actions, disseminate locations for protests and provide logistical information, enabling the quick and efficient assembly of large groups (Vorholt, 2017: 625). The role of social media during the July 2021 looting in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, serves as a relevant case study. As Karambo (2021) points out, this event was characterised by widespread violence, destruction of property and looting. An important factor that contributed to the escalation of the situation was the use of social media. The platforms were instrumental in mobilising people to participate in the looting. Videos, images, texts and voice messages were used to disseminate information about gatherings and calls to action (Malinga, 2021).

Furthermore, some studies suggest that social media influenced the coverage and public perception of the event and may have exacerbated tensions (Mathe & Matsaathebe, 2022; Makonye, 2022). This chapter provides an introduction to the role of social media during the looting and unrest in KwaZulu-Natal in 2021. It outlines the background, aim and objectives of this research. The chapter concludes with a description of the design of the research study.

1.2 Background of the study

According to Chan (2011: 2), social media can be defined as a new form of media that facilitates social interaction and communication through internet-based online platforms. Yang (2013: 711) states that the role of social media as a powerful means of communication has proven to be an important tool in promoting social and political change around the world. Solace Global (2019) notes that social media has been widely used as a communication tool in protests for a decade. Without it, the Arab Spring of 2011, one of the largest waves of civil unrest, would never have happened. The role of social media in fostering unrest and violent destruction in Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal, which began as a politically motivated campaign of sabotage, showed how social media can be mobilised with devastating effects (Ellen, 2021).

The unrest in South Africa in July 2021 was sparked by the arrest of former President Jacob Zuma for contempt of court on 11 July 2021 (Patel, 2021). Initially, there were demonstrations in response to his imprisonment, but these quickly escalated into violent unrest, particularly in Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal. Over several days, the situation came to a head with widespread looting, vandalism and destruction of property. Social media played a key role in mobilising and coordinating activities during the unrest. While some protests appeared to be spontaneous, later reports suggested that certain elements were strategically planned and fuelled by online messages. According to the July 2021 expert group report on the riots (2021: 2), the unrest resulted in 354 deaths, thousands of injuries and an estimated economic loss of over R50 billion. What began as a reaction to Zuma's arrest developed into one of the most destructive episodes of civil unrest in post-apartheid South Africa, severely impacting economic activity and social stability.

According to Sonjica (2021), the KwaZulu-Natal government declared a state of disaster in the province due to the extent of the damage caused by the unrest. People used Facebook, WhatsApp messages and tweets to spread information and support the unrest. Social media experts have drawn attention to the way in which the rioters used social media such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and TikTok to coordinate the riots and incite violent attacks (Malinga, 2021). Lamb (2021) notes that the looting of shops, shopping

centres, supermarkets and banks in KwaZulu-Natal had far-reaching effects, affecting not only the poor and middle class, but also private businesses and government institutions. The destruction caused severe economic disruption and deepened existing social inequalities. During the unrest, there was an information gap as the government did not provide accurate information. Journalists had difficulty accessing the looting sites due to security concerns, allowing social media to fill the gap with unverified and sometimes misleading information (Allen, 2021).

Considering the significant role of social media in the July 2021 unrest, it is imperative to conduct further research on its influence on public perception, mobilisation and the spread of misinformation in times of crisis. Boulianne (2015) cited in Erdgomus and Ergus (2017: 224) states that further research is needed to gain a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between social media and civil unrest. Therefore, this study needs to be conducted. There is a need to gain insight into the use of social media during civil unrest and to gain a deeper understanding of social media as a communication tool during such unrest.

The study of social media during civil unrest provides valuable insights into how different groups use these platforms to communicate and coordinate. The results will contribute to a deeper understanding of the impact of social media in such contexts and could provide strategies for dealing with similar situations in the future. In addition, the study can help identify ways to optimise social media for more effective use during crises

1.3 Aim of the study

The aim of this study is to examine the role of social media in civil unrest, using the 2021 looting in KwaZulu-Natal as a case study

1.4 The objectives of the study are to

1. To examine the role of social media as a communication tool during civil unrest.
2. To explore how social media is utilised to mitigate risks in civil unrest situations.
3. To assess the impact of social media during the 2021 looting in KwaZulu-Natal.

1.5 Research questions

1. What role does social media play as a communication tool during civil unrest?
2. How is social media utilised to minimise risks in situations of civil unrest?
3. What impact did social media have during the 2021 looting in KwaZulu-Natal?

1.6 Rationale of the study

The increasing reliance on social media as a means of communication and as a driver of social and political change requires a thorough understanding of its role in civil unrest. This understanding is crucial, especially in areas such as KwaZulu-Natal where the impact of such unrest has been particularly pronounced. The unrest and looting in KwaZulu-Natal in 2021 were a clear example of the power of social media in the orchestration and mobilisation of unrest and looting. This study aims to explore these issues, focusing on the experiences of people who were directly affected by these incidents. It will shed light on how social media platforms were used to incite violence and mobilise participants, but also how they were used to share information, provide support and demonstrate against the riots. The study of social media during the unrest provides valuable insights into how different groups used these platforms to communicate and coordinate. The results will contribute to a deeper understanding of the impact of social media in such contexts and could provide strategies for dealing with similar situations in the future. In addition, the study can help find ways to optimise social media for more effective use during crises.

1.7 Theoretical framework: Theories of the public sphere and agenda setting

The theoretical framework for understanding the role of social media as a public sphere during civil unrest is based on agenda-setting theory and the concept of the public sphere. These two theories are used in the study to explain how social media not only reflect the public mood, but also actively shape and amplify issues that can fuel and escalate civil unrest. Agenda setting theory describes how the prominence of issues in news coverage influences the public's perception of the importance of those issues. The more a topic is reported on in the media, the more important it is perceived to be by the public. Max McCombs and Donald Shaw first presented this theory in 1972 (Caldwell, 2023: 1). In their ground-breaking study, they analysed the 1968 presidential election and found a

strong correlation between the issues highlighted in the media and the issues considered important by the public. Moy *et al.* (2016) mention agenda setting alongside related theories such as priming and framing. Caldwell (2023: 1) explains the criteria that make agenda setting a "good" theory using perspectives from different areas of communication such as small group, organisational and intercultural communication. This theory states that the media does not tell people what to think, but rather what to think about, thus influencing the public agenda and discourse about the unrest (Papacharissi, 2018: 43). The role of social media in shaping the public sphere during the unrest can be analysed within the framework of agenda-setting theory. The concept of the 'public sphere' introduced by Jürgen Habermas has changed considerably with the advent of digital media and communication technologies. While Habermas initially defined the public sphere through traditional forms of communication, the emergence of digital platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube has revolutionised the way in which public discourse is conducted. These platforms now provide new spaces for individuals to engage in discussions, share opinions and mobilise for social and political causes (Cela, 2015: 195).

The agenda-setting theory developed by McCombs and Shaw (1972) states that the media can influence public perception by emphasising and prioritising certain issues. Originally, this theory was applied to traditional media, but it has been expanded to include the role of online platforms in shaping public discourse. In the digital age, social media serves not only as a space for discussion but also as a powerful tool for setting the public agenda, making it crucial for understanding its impact in times of civil unrest. Benrazek (2021: 153) notes that since the Arab Spring, research on the role of social media in protests and unrest has increased, particularly in relation to mobilisation and the dissemination of information. Studies have shown that social media acts as an alternative public sphere that promotes political participation, democracy and freedom of expression. In the context of the 2021 looting in KwaZulu-Natal, this study will examine how social media functioned as a public sphere through the lens of agenda-setting theory. Specifically, it will examine how social media platforms shaped public opinion and influenced societal developments during the riots. This theoretical framework has been

applied in various contexts, such as the Arab Spring, where social media played a key role in organising the protests (Howard and Hussain, 2013: 334). Furthermore, the influence of social media during the looting in KZN was evident through the widespread dissemination of images and videos that drew public attention to the chaos (Zhong, 2021: 136). Similarly, the Occupy Wall Street movement showed how social media helped to set the agenda for traditional media coverage (Grzywińska and Borden, 2015: 5), while the Arab Spring also showed how social networks challenged the role of traditional media in agenda setting (Grzywińska and Batorski, 2016: 20).

To summarise, agenda-setting theory offers valuable insights into the relationship between social media and public opinion, especially in the case of real-life events such as the unrest in KZN. As technology and societal dynamics evolve, it is crucial to continually revisit and refine the core concepts and applications of the theory. By incorporating the public sphere framework and agenda-setting theory, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the functioning of social media platforms during the 2021 looting in KZN, with a focus on their role in shaping public opinion and influencing societal developments in times of civil unrest. In addition, the theoretical framework has been applied in various contexts, such as the Arab Spring, where social media facilitated the organisation and mobilisation of protests. Social media also played a central role during the unrest in KZN in 2021 by disseminating content that influenced public attention and discourse

1.8 Research Methodology

A quantitative study approach was used, focussing on data collection using a Google Forms questionnaire. This method was chosen to enable a systematic and rigorous investigation of the research objectives. The target population consisted of adults aged 18 to 60 years who reside in Durban and who witnessed the unrest and looting in KZN. This demographic group was selected to gain insights from individuals who directly witnessed these events and were active on social media during this time. The data was collected using an electronically administered online questionnaire created using Google Forms. The aim of the questionnaire was to gather detailed information about

respondents' experiences and perspectives on the unrest and looting in KZN in 2021, as well as their use of social media during this time.

1.9 Outline of the dissertation chapters

This dissertation is divided into five chapters, each dealing with a specific aspect of the research. It begins with the introduction chapter and ends with the conclusions and recommendations chapter. The chapters are organised as follows: Introduction, Literature Review, Methodology, Research Findings, and Conclusion and Recommendation. Each chapter is designed to systematically address different components of the research study

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the study, including the background, the research problem, the aims, the research questions and the significance of the study. It sets the scene for the rest of the dissertation by outlining the context and purpose of the research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter analyses the existing literature on the role of social media in triggering looting. It examines the theoretical frameworks and other empirical studies to provide a comprehensive understanding of how social media platforms influence public behaviour in times of civil unrest. Key themes, debates and gaps in the literature are identified and discussed to contextualise this study.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter details the research methodology used in the study. It outlines the research design, including the approach and techniques used, and describes the data collection process. This chapter also addresses ethical considerations such as informed consent, confidentiality and the potential impact of the research on participants. The methodology is designed to ensure the reliability and validity of the findings.

Chapter 4: Research Findings

This chapter analyses the data and results using various statistical techniques. It systematically analyses the collected data and highlights important patterns, trends and anomalies. The findings are discussed and interpreted in the context of the research questions and the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. Visual aids such as tables, graphs and charts are used to enhance the presentation of the results.

1.10 Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the study and discussed the research problem. It has also outlined the aims and the proposed framework for the study. The next chapter presents the literature review, which provides a comprehensive overview of the existing research relevant to the study. Through an examination of previous studies and theoretical perspectives, the literature review will provide a solid foundation for analysing and interpreting the research findings.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter introduced the study and explained its background. This section reviews the existing literature on the use of social media during civil unrest and looting in KZN. The aim is to gain insight into the use of social media platforms during civil unrest. This chapter discusses the role of social media as a means of communication during civil unrest and provides an overview of looting in KZN. It explores how social media is used to mitigate risk during civil unrest and assesses the impact of social media during the 2021 looting in KZN. This section looks at the relationship between social media and civil unrest, highlighting how platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp were used to mobilise and coordinate protests. It also explores how social media acts as a communication tool in times of crisis, enabling real-time information dissemination and public participation.

2.2 Overview of the looting in KZN in 2021

The residents of KZN and parts of the South African province of Gauteng were plagued by violent protests and socio-political unrest from 9 July to 17 July 2021. These events were accompanied by widespread looting of shops and businesses as well as the torching, burning and destruction of public infrastructure and private property (Vhumbunu: 2021). According to Visage *et al.* (2021: 1), the scale of looting and acts of sabotage in KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng has made social protests and civil unrest a talking point in South Africa. South Africans took to social media to document and follow the unrest and looting that took place in Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal due to demonstrations against the arrest of former President Jacob Zuma. The hashtags #ShutdownSA, #ShutdownGauteng and #ShutdownKZN were frequently used by local users on Twitter on 12 July.

Vhumbunu (2021) emphasises that the detention and arrest of former President Jacob Zuma was the catalyst for this socio-political unrest and violence. The South African

Constitutional Court sentenced the former president to 15 months in prison for defying the court's summons to appear before the commission of enquiry set up to investigate allegations of state capture, corruption and fraud in the public sector and other parastatal institutions, and for undermining the court's authority through his casual and scandalous attacks and defence tactics.(Vhumbunu, 2021) It is debatable whether or not President Zuma's detention was the cause of the #ReleaseZumaRiots, looting and social unrest. Although the resentment of Zuma's supporters served as a catalyst for the unrest, the truth is that the roots of the social unrest lie deeper (Visage *et al.*, 2021: 2)

Emaramu (2021: 1) reported that Sbu Zikode, the chairperson of the KwaZulu-Natal Shack Dwellers' Movement, told the Human Rights Commission in Umhlanga that "something else" would have triggered the violent and devastating riots in July 2021 if Jacob Zuma had not been imprisoned. This assertion is at odds with the fact that the social economic ground of South Africa is ripe for a revolution of impoverished and starving people (Emaramu, 2021: 1). On the other hand, Mongale (2022: 2), citing Gilje (1998: 312), notes that violence, vandalism and damage to private and public property are common during riots. At the same time, they may be directed against specific targets based on people's pre-existing resentments and perceptions that shape their attitudes and perceptions towards their political leaders or public representatives.

2.2.1 Causes of the looting in KZN

According to (Smith: 2021), the formal imprisonment of former President Zuma can be seen as the last straw. In South Africa, youth unemployment was already high before the COVID-19 pandemic and the number of hungry people was growing. The gap between rich and poor was widening, making South Africa appear as an unequal society and bringing back memories of the pre-apartheid era. Oxfam South Africa (2021) reports that the real reasons for the July 2021 protests and the socio-political upheaval are being hotly debated among academics, political circles and the public. According to South African President Cyril Ramaphosa, the protests were "nothing less than a deliberate, coordinated and well-planned attack on South African democracy", he said in a speech

on 16 July 2021, adding that "the constitutional order of South African democracy is under political threat".

About half of South Africa's adult population lives below the poverty line, and in some areas the vast majority of African youth have few employment prospects. This situation has led to growing frustration and tensions over the past decade. As frustrations grew, the arrest of former President Jacob Zuma, who refused to face the panel set up to investigate corruption, became a major catalyst for social unrest. Zuma's arrest is often seen as the final spark that unleashed a wave of anger and frustration across the country (Musumeci, 2021).

Stats SA (2021a) argued that socio-economic and political aspects of South Africa such as deprivation, high crime, high inequality, disappointment over broken promises that coincided with COVID -19 and led to the loss of livelihoods and jobs for hundreds of thousands of people, together with bleak future prospects, political corruption and a culture of impunity serve as indicators that the country was already in a precarious situation prior to Jacob Zuma's imprisonment. According to the South African Department of Health (2021), the national lockdown measures introduced by Covid-19 angered citizens as poverty, unemployment, food insecurity and inequality increased. The events of July 2021 and the scale of the unrest have highlighted South Africa's underlying economic problems, which are exacerbated by high unemployment and poverty. 50% of South Africa's 60 million people are food insecure and more than 20% live below the poverty line (Africa News, 2021).

StasSA (2021b) highlights that total employment in the formal non-farm business sector declined by 5.4% in the first quarter of 2021 compared to March 2020, a loss of 552,000 jobs. The July 2021 protests may have been politically motivated, but they were based on deep-seated and acute socio-economic problems that have severely affected the country's poor, hungry and disgruntled citizens, especially in the townships, and have created a favourable environment for social unrest (Vhumbunu, 2021). It is evident that people's trust in their government to solve their social and economic problems has

dwindled. This leads to frustration and despair, prompting people to protest against the government on the streets or join extremist groups or criminal gangs to assert their interests and fulfil their basic needs (Gounden, 2021).

On the other hand, Visage *et al.* (2021) argue that it is not just the level of service provision, but a sense of unjust inequality that typically leads to protests such as the July 2021 riots; as a result, inequality in society creates grievances and resentment that cause social unrest. For example, the long-standing inequalities in facilities between nearby cities show that the government is unable to fulfil people's basic needs. It is important to point out that this contrasts with the reality faced by residents of informal settlements, which have been identified as hotspots for protests. Visage *et al.* (2021: 2) emphasise that the violence must be seen in the context of South Africa's numerous crises and challenges, which include in particular the erosion of state institutions, high unemployment with youth unemployment exceeding 70% and the lack of a coherent, continuous plan to address this challenge. StatsSA (2021) reports that the economy grew by only 1.1% in the first quarter of 2021, 2.7% less than in the first quarter of 2020. The July 2021 protests may have been politically motivated, but they were fuelled by the severe and pervasive socio-economic problems of impoverished, hungry and disgruntled people, especially in the townships - these problems created an ideal environment for social unrest.

2.2.2 The severity of the looting in KZN

According to Gounden (2021), during the riots in July 2021, numerous long-distance trucks were set on fire and torched along the main artery between the port of Durban and Johannesburg (the economic heartland) to express their discontent. This was done to destabilise supply lines and cripple the country's weak economy. Mogale (2022: 4) reports that within six days, property worth 50 billion rand was destroyed in rioting and looting in and around the town of eThekweni and in certain areas of Johannesburg. This came after there had been more than 118 cases of damage to property through public violence, arson, looting and other tactics during other riots.

In addition, Davis (2021) highlights that 161 shopping malls, 11 warehouses, 8 factories and 161 liquor stores and retailers were robbed. The Economist Intelligence Unit estimates the damage from stolen products, burnt trucks and damaged property at 10 billion Rands (680 million dollars) (Africa News: 2021). It is important to note that the provinces of KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng account for 50% of South Africa's gross domestic product (GDP) and that the July 2021 riots were limited to these two provinces. (Africa News, 2021). The Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA) reported that 113 networks were vandalized, resulting in the disruption of network services and community radios. Telecommunications infrastructure was destroyed (Icasa, 2021).

According to the authorities, more than 2,500 people were arrested for theft and vandalism during the week-long riots and looting in July 2021, and at least 215 people died as a result of the unrest. The people who died in the July 2021 riots were crushed *en masse* due to the disorderly looting of stores. However, the Minister of the South African Police Services (SAPS), Bheki Cele, stated that there were at least 20 deaths in the Phoenix neighbourhood in KwaZulu-Natal due to Indian residents protecting their community from alleged intruders (Africa News, 2021). The human security approach emphasizes that loss of life or death is one of the current security challenges. Due to the transformation of the Indigent Party into a "war party" as a result of the July 2021 riots, the sense of security of residents in both the KZN and Gauteng provinces was compromised (Ardé, 2021: 34).

The human security approach emphasizes that loss of life or death is one of the current security challenges. In light of the urban riots in July 2021, in which more than 200 people were killed, the provinces of KZN and Gauteng have an impact on the sense of security of their residents. The murderous acts, especially the widespread destruction of small, uninsured stores in the townships, underscore the sad irony of this kind of planned violence, which is the result of anger and other issues such as inequality. The fact that most of the victims are impoverished and displaced many of them belong to the Zulu

ethnic group; they belong to the same ethnic group as the divisive former president Jacob Zuma (Tharoor, 2021)

Africa News (2021) highlights that the July 2021 unrest could have long-term consequences for the South African economy, especially if domestic and foreign investors interpret the unrest as proof that South Africa is not a safe location for their capital interests (Africa News :2021). Vhumbunu (2021) claims that the nine days of unrest in KZN and Gauteng provinces resulted in the loss of a variety of assets, including financial services, agriculture, telecommunications and seaport facilities, as well as food distribution centers, business stocks, jobs and livelihoods, and essential services such as medical and pharmaceutical care in hospitals and clinics.

In addition, the unrest hampered government initiatives such as the vaccination program. In this regard, the July 2021 riots are considered the worst and most unusual in the post-apartheid era (Africa News, 2021). According to a report by the South African Property Owners Association (SAPOA), a total of 3,000 stores were looted and 1,199 retail outlets damaged during the riots, including large stores and businesses (Warby, 2021). To summarise, the impact of the July 2021 unrest in South Africa is multifaceted, ranging from severe economic disruption to profound social consequences.

Reconstruction and recovery efforts require a coordinated approach by government, private sector actors and civil society to address immediate needs and restore confidence in the country's economic and social resilience. While it is undisputed that social media played a role in disseminating information and potentially influencing behaviour during the looting, there is a need to fully understand how social media specifically contributed to the mobilisation of individuals and groups involved in the unrest. Examining the content, reach and dynamics of messages on social media can shed light on the factors that influenced participation in the looting.

2.3 Definition of social media

Sandel and Ju (2019: 1) note that people can define social media in many different ways. People refer to web-based applications and user-generated content as social media, allowing them to connect and collaborate through computers, mobile phones and practises. This is in contrast to traditional media, which is tied to a specific technology. (Wolf *et al.*, 2018: 5) go further and define social media as the use of online or internet technologies. Following the ideology of transparency, sharing and integration of Web 2.0, many of the applications, websites, mobile applications and online systems should include the technological internet and mobility, the ideological transparency, sharing and integration and the functional components.

Davis (2016: 1) provides a more concrete example of the diversity of social media platforms, which can be broadly characterised as a collection of interactive internet apps that facilitate the creation, maintenance and sharing of user-generated material individually or in groups. Social media platforms come in many different flavours. To name a few, there are dating sites, Craigslist, Facebook, Friendster, Wikipedia, YouTube, Instagram and recipe sharing sites. Although all social networks have the same characteristics, they are also very different. Furthermore, Wolf *at el.* (2018: 5) notes that any definition of social media includes the use of online or internet technologies. The table highlights the key elements that define social media and emphasises its core characteristics: content creation and sharing, which allows users to freely disseminate information, interactivity, which enables engagement through replies and comments; and convergence, which integrates different media formats such as text, photos, videos and links. Table 21: below lists the components that are often used to characterise social media

Table: 2.1 the key elements for the definition of social media

Creating and sharing of content	Users are free to create and distribute content.
Interactivity	Interactivity The user can share the post, respond, and comment.

Convergence	Media contains text, photos, videos, and links in posts.
Speed	There is instant access to all uploaded files.
Cost	Most social media sites are free to use.
Reach	The reach of social media is globe.

Source (Duong 2020: 115)

Duong (2020: 115) emphasises in the above table that social media differ significantly from traditional mass media. An important difference is the freedom they offer all users to create and distribute content. The table highlights the key elements that define social media and emphasises its core features: content creation and sharing, which allows users to distribute content freely; interactivity, which allows users to engage by sharing, responding and commenting; and convergence, where different media formats such as text, photos, videos and links are seamlessly integrated into posts. This summary summarises the fundamental aspects of social media as shown in the table.

2.3 Types of social media

Boswell (2016) explains that social media encompasses a variety of technologies, all with the aim of promoting communication. Examples of these platforms include forums, blogs, microblogging sites, podcasts, video sharing sites, image sharing platforms, social networks, virtual communities such as online games and community moderated content. Sharma and Verma (2018: 19) categorise the types of social media based on their main uses. They describe various platforms, including wikis, social websites, blogs, forums, podcasts and video sharing. Social media encompasses a wide range of platforms, each serving different purposes and drawing information from different user interactions. Social networks such as Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter derive their information from user profiles, status updates and shared content (Boyd and Ellison, 2007). Media sharing networks such as Instagram, YouTube and TikTok rely on photos, videos and interactions uploaded by users (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010: 59)

2.3.1. Social networking sites

A social networking service (SNS) is an internet-based platform for building and developing social relationships. It allows users to interact online with people who have similar interests, whether for romantic or social reasons. Users can exchange emails, instant messages, online comments, wikis, digital photos and videos, and blog posts. It also allows people with disabilities to express their thoughts and opinions in a virtual environment (Sadiku *et al.*, 2019: 126). In addition, social networking sites are applications that allow users to network by creating personal information profiles, inviting friends and colleagues to view these profiles, and communicating via e-mail and instant messaging. These personal profiles can contain all kinds of information, such as photos, videos, audio files and blogs (Kaplan and Heinlein, 2014: 63).

Oyd and Ellison (2017) describe SNS as web-based services where users can (1) create a public or semi-public profile within a bounded framework, (2) specify a list of other users with whom they are connected, and (3) view and navigate both their own list of connections and those of other users within the framework. People often use social networking sites for a variety of purposes, such as keeping in touch with relatives, making new acquaintances, participating in general social interactions, and keeping up to date with news or current events, such as on Instagram, WhatsApp, and Facebook (Brandtzaeg and Heim, 2009).

2.3.2 Facebook

Coles (2014: 30) emphasises that Facebook, which was founded in 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg, Dustin Moskovitz, Andrew McCollum, Eduardo Saverin and Chris Hughes, has grown exponentially over the last two decades to become one of the most used social media platforms in the world. Facebook has become one of the most popular social media platforms. Facebook offers its members the opportunity to communicate and share content with friends, family members and work colleagues. People can quickly post texts, photos, videos and links on Facebook. Facebook users can follow people or pages to get up-to-date information about others in their news feeds. Facebook has been the most popular social network in recent years, with user numbers on other social media platforms

growing exponentially over the last decade. In the first quarter of 2020, Facebook reported 1.73 billion daily active users and over 2.6 billion monthly active users (Clement, 2020: 1).

Figure 2:1 Facebook Post



Source: Facebook eNCAnews (2021).

Figure 2.1 is a screenshot of a social media post from eNCAnews showing the casualties (180 in KZN, 32 in Gauteng) and arrests (1,692) during the 2021 KZN looting, illustrating how Facebook was used for real-time crisis updates.

2.3.3 Twitter (Officially known as X)

All registered users of the microblogging platform Twitter, officially known as X, can publish short messages, known as tweets. Twitter allows users to follow other users, publish messages and tweet from a variety of internet-connected devices. Jack Dorsey came up with the idea for X and eventually developed it in 2006, and it was released that same year. Unlike Facebook, where users can interact with their contacts and share many types of information (Coles, 2014: 30). Twitter requires them to connect with relevant news on topics that fascinate them the most. Twitter users can express their ideas in a post, which is limited to 280 characters, and submit photos or short videos. The real strength of X is real-time communication. A hashtag can be used in a Twitter post (tweet) to label the topic so that users can easily find similar tweets. Twitter has become one of the most popular social networks with over 386 million active members (Clement, 2020: 1)

Figure 2.2 X post



Source: X.com/eNCA (12, July 2020)

Figure 2.2 shows a Twitter/X post by eNCA from 15 July 2021 reporting on ongoing looting and unrest in KZN with more than 72 deaths and 1,700 arrests. The post includes a live update from reporter Dasen Thathiah and the hashtag #DStv403, reflecting the crisis triggered by the political tensions following the imprisonment of Jacob Zuma

2.3.4 LinkedIn

Gray (2020: 42) describes LinkedIn as a social media platform that allows people, companies and organisations to connect on a professional level and is a great resource for recruitment and job search. Similarly, Scott (2015: 255) describes LinkedIn as a social network for professionals that offers more personalised information. It is used by people looking for work and by companies looking for potential new employees. The aim of LinkedIn is to connect professionals from all over the world and make them more active and effective, unlike social networks that users use to maintain relationships with friends.

Figure: 2.3 LinkedIn post



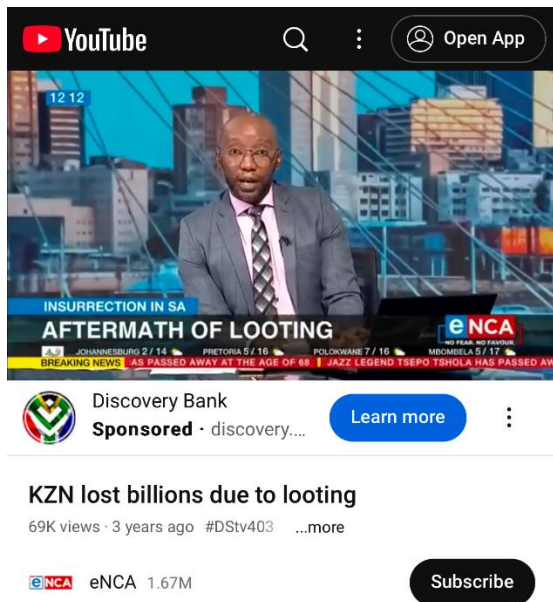
Source: LinkedIn.Gosai (2021).

Figure 2.3 shows a screenshot of a LinkedIn post by Amith Gosal, a senior electrical engineer at Zutari, documenting the company's humanitarian response to the July 2021 unrest in KwaZulu-Natal. The post highlights coordinated efforts across its South African offices to donate and deliver basic relief supplies to the eThekweni (Durban) office to address the shortages caused by the massive looting and destruction.

2.3.5 YouTube

According to Gray (2014: 18), YouTube was founded by Jawed Karim, Stev Chen and Chad Hurley. In 2005, Hurley and Chen were struggling to share films they had made with the public, and so they came up with the idea for YouTube. According to Weaver (2013:46), YouTube is one of the largest online video communities in the world, owned by Google, and also one of the most popular and most used websites in the world. Aslam (2020) emphasises that YouTube is a well-known video sharing website and has been owned by Google since 2006. Users can stream, upload and share videos on YouTube. They can also subscribe to YouTube channels that other people have created. With 80 different languages, YouTube attracts around a third of internet users who watch 150 million hours of YouTube every day.

Figure: 2.4 YouTube Video



Source: YouTube. eNca (2024).

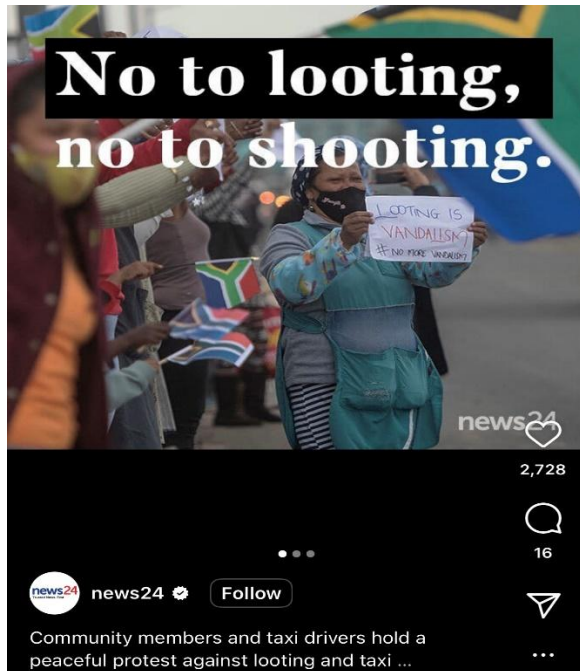
Figure 2.4 shows a YouTube screenshot with the title 'aftermath of looting'. The video highlights the severe economic impact of the KZN 2021 July unrest. It shows that the province has lost billions of Rands due to widespread looting. The screenshot shows the platform's user interface suggesting that it is a news report or documentary analysing the financial impact of the crisis.

2.3.6 Instagram

Instagram is a mobile photo-sharing app that allows users to take, edit and then share photos. Instagram has grown rapidly in recent years. Instagram is considered one of the sharing platforms with one of the fastest growth rates in the world, with 1 billion active users in 2018, up from 800 million in 2017 (Clement, 2019: 3). Instagram is a prominent social media platform that focuses primarily on sharing visual content, allowing users to upload photos and videos, apply filters and share them with their followers. Instagram was launched in October 2010 and has quickly evolved into a versatile platform that serves multiple purposes, including personal expression, marketing and social activism. The platform's design encourages users to curate their online identity through carefully

selected images and captions that often reflect their personal or professional lives (Prianti, 2020; Hu *et al.*, 2014).

Figure: 2.5 Instagram post



Source: Instagram. (2025). Brand Resources: Logos and

Figure 2.5 shows Instagram post features a message of resistance against violence, with the text 'No to looting, no to shooting' alongside the hashtag #NOVES2. The accompanying image or video shows community members and taxi drivers uniting, likely to protest or protect their neighborhoods during the July 2021 unrest in South Africa. The post reflects grassroots efforts to combat the chaos and promote solidarity amid the crisis.

2.4 Characteristics of social media

In recent decades, the popularity of social media has increased immensely. The widespread use of social media leads to features that add value to the platform and satisfy consumers. These are the main characteristics of social media (Doung, 2020: 11). Social media is characterised by several key features, including user-generated content, interactivity, community building, real-time information sharing, personalisation, accessibility, multimedia integration and the potential for vitality (IGI Global , 2024) Social

media thrives on content created by its users, including text, photos, videos and links. This feature is fundamental as it allows users to contribute their own content and interact with others. Users create personal profiles that serve as their identity on the platform. These profiles often contain personal information, interests and a history of their interactions (Popiolek, 2015: 75)

2.4.1. Information Sharing

According to Ghaisani *et al.* (2017), social media has grown rapidly in recent years as a medium for sharing knowledge and information online. The number of internet users utilising social media for sharing is constantly increasing. Social media users have a wide range of options for creating and sharing content. Wikis are used to share information, while microblogs are used to send short messages. Educational content, while a forum is a discussion board where users can participate in discussions about specific topics, goods or events (Budz and Starosta, 2018)

2.4.2 Participation of many users

The popularity of social media has increased recently. In 2019, 2.95 billion people worldwide will use social media, up from 2.78 billion in 2018, and it is predicted that the number of social media users will increase to 3.43 billion by 2023 (Clement, 2020). The following factors contribute to the popularity of social media. Firstly, individuals can like, hate or react to the comments of others. Secondly, social networks are characterised by a user-friendly design. Popular platforms are easy to use and require no special training or prior knowledge to sign up. The mobile applications of social media platforms, in particular, are much more entertaining and allow for many connections. Most popular social media services, including Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Wikipedia, are free and therefore accessible to all users (Kohli *et al.*, 2018: 1773). Fourth, social media is already having a significant impact on the labour market. Professional social networks allow users to list their qualifications, achievements and experience in order to stand out from colleagues or future employers. Another advantage is the ability to search for jobs through these professional social networks in the same way as through other job portals (Gaikwad, 2020: 10).

2.4.3 Community-orientated

Social media are based on and have evolved from the idea of a community that is their users share interests or values (Tella, 2015: 30). It is easy to find groups of people with similar interests, as is the case with university alumni, universities, social media platforms or travel organisations. It is also easy to rekindle existing friendships and find new ones based on the same interests. Social networks also offer the opportunity to meet people from all over the world. Social media profiles have made it easier for people to research others before connecting with them (Sharanyaa and Sangeetha, 2018: 36).

2.4.4 Multi-sided interaction

According to Jensen and Helles (2017: 16) all four-communication prototypes are used in social media: one to one, one-to-many, many-to-many and many-to-one. For example, one-to-one contact is when one person interacts with another person, one-to-many contact is when one person or organisation broadcasts to many people, "many-to-many contact is multi-way contact between many people and "many-to-one contact is when the actions, decisions or attitudes of several people are aggregated, transformed and presented to one person (Dron and Anderson, 2014: 10). Social media provides real-time communication that the recipient can see, hear or read at a different time than when it was posted, or both (Dron and Anderson, 2014: 9).

2.4.5 Multimedia content

The special thing about social media is the variety of information material it can contain, including text, photo, video and network. Multimedia content can include links to other blogs or websites and can include text, graphics, video and other media. Users of video sharing platforms can upload and share videos, just as users of photo sharing platforms can save and share photos (Ariff *et al.*, 2018: 304).

2.5 Civil unrest

Mansbridge (2012: 1) defines civil unrest as "deeply disturbing public disturbances, demonstrations and political movements that can range from peaceful protests to violent clashes between civilians and authorities." This broad definition covers a wide range of actions. Olubumni (2015: 1) highlights that civil unrest has demonstrated the efficiency

and effectiveness of social media as a real tool for networking and mobilisation. The motives range from non-violent resistance to open defiance of the law. Civil unrest is a form of collective behaviour characterised by public demonstrations, protests, strikes and acts of civil disobedience, often aimed at redressing perceived political, economic or social grievances (Roberts & Garton 2009: 2; Luders 2010: 1; and Arias 2017: 257). These actions can range from peaceful protests to violent clashes and reflect the intensity of public discontent and desire for change. The ability of social media to mobilise the public against authoritarian leaders is crucial. Oppressed populations are using social media to voice their opposition to bad governance and populist policies. This article examines the global wave of current protests and shows how individuals are using social media and new media platforms to network, strategise and spread their messages worldwide.

According to the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR), civil unrest includes both violent and non-violent group actions such as protests and riots, which are often triggered by socio-political and economic factors (Maryville University, 2024). They can take various forms, including organised and spontaneous demonstrations, violent and non-violent riots, and general or limited strikes (UNDRR, 2023). Civil unrest typically arises from a chain of historical events that disrupt regional or global stability, followed by periods of relative calm. In addition, social media has intensified the coordination of protests, riots and uprisings across cities, regions and nations (Braha, 2012: 2).

2.5.1 Causes of civil unrest

Jenkins (2014) argues that the causes of civil unrest are due to a combination of socio-political and economic factors. Jenkins explains that political oppression, economic inequality, corrupt governance, social injustice, and ethnic or religious tensions are major contributors to civil unrest. On the other hand, this study argues that the causes of civil unrest are often multi-faceted and can include factors such as economic grievances, political marginalisation, human rights abuses and ethnic or religious tensions. Examples of civil unrest include organised demonstrations, spontaneous demonstrations, organised

violent riots, spontaneous violent riots, general strikes and limited strikes. (United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, 2023).

2.5.2. Economic factors

Espinosa-Méndez (2021: 1243) emphasises that economic hardship is a major cause of civil unrest, especially in economies dependent on commodity extraction and production. The risk of instability increases when these economies face a financial downturn. Similarly, Brunnschweiler and Lujala (2019: 481) identify economic backwardness as a key factor contributing to social tensions and consistently link economic instability to civil unrest. Rising food prices, unemployment and increasing inequality further fuel discontent, particularly in developing countries where financial volatility has a direct impact on livelihoods (Bellemare, 2014: 2; Weinberg & Bakker, 2014: 2). Extractive economies, which are heavily dependent on global commodity prices, are particularly vulnerable to economic shocks that increase the risk of unrest (Espinosa, 2021: 2). Aside from economic hardship, social injustices such as discrimination based on ethnicity, gender or socio-economic status exacerbate public resentment and increase the likelihood of both non-violent and violent uprisings (Study.com, 2023; Essex Sheriff, 2020: 1).

2.5.3 Environmental and climate change

Brannen *et al.* (2020: 18) emphasise that environmental changes, such as those caused by climate change, can also contribute to unrest. The effects of climate change, including extreme weather events, rising sea levels and changes in agricultural productivity, can have a profound impact on food and water supplies. When communities face a shortage of vital resources, social tensions can escalate and lead to civil unrest. For example, prolonged droughts can lead to crop failures and food insecurity, prompting the affected population to protest and demand government intervention.

Environmental factors such as natural disasters and climate change have also been shown to exacerbate tensions and contribute to civil unrest. Studies suggest that natural disasters can significantly increase the risk of violent civil conflict, particularly in regions with high levels of inequality and weak governance (Nel and Righarts, 2008: 159). The

interplay of environmental stressors and social grievances can create an unstable situation in which communities are more likely to mobilise against perceived injustices or failures of the state (Nardulli *et al.*, 2013: 1).

Similarly, natural disasters can displace large numbers of people, leading to competition for resources and increasing the potential for conflict. These environmental factors illustrate the interconnectedness of environmental and social stability, with changes in the former having a significant impact on the latter. The displaced city residents triggered protests and unrest, which led to the Assad government's brutal response. Recent studies point to a link between climate impacts and conflict. Lower rainfall and higher temperatures lead to civil unrest, particularly in areas with poor governance (Muller, 2018: 5).

2.6 Social media and civil unrest

According to Altunbas (2018: 181), social media especially Facebook and Twitter played a crucial role in coordinating the unrest. These platforms served as effective communication tools for both non-violent protesters and radical voices, allowing like-minded individuals and groups to coordinate and share information in real time. Several historical events illustrate the impact of social media on civic movements. For example, during the 2009 Iranian presidential election protests, social media was used extensively to mobilise demonstrators. Similarly, during the Egyptian uprising in 2011, online platforms facilitated discussions about the country's new leadership and the changing political landscape. Another example is the Occupy Wall Street movement in 2011, where protesters used social media to highlight social and economic inequalities.

Eltantawy and Wiest (2011) claim that we now live in the age of social media, which has profoundly changed our lives. These platforms enable discussions on a variety of topics ranging from daily news to economic news to television and political events. In recent years, social media, especially Twitter and Facebook, have played a central role in social movements. These platforms serve as important tools for coordination and communication, enabling both peaceful protesters and radical voices to network and

organise in real time. Empirical evidence from studies, including research by Eltantawy and Wiest (2011) and Chen *et al.*, (2015), shows that social media has become the most important global communication channel for activists and protesters over the past decade. However, researchers often face the challenge of understanding the motivations and justifications for protesters' use of social media.

Tüfekçi and Wilson (2012: 379) highlight how social media played a crucial role during the Arab Spring in Egypt by providing important messages and social support, ultimately motivating people to participate in the protests. This challenges previous views that downplayed the importance of digital platforms for mobilisation. Similarly, Karduni and Sauda (2020: 1) examine the Black Lives Matter movement and show how hashtags and online platforms have become an integral part of contemporary protest dynamics. Rahbarqazi and Baghban (2019: 89) analyse the 2018 protests in Iran and note that social media improves communication and facilitates the sharing of beliefs and goals among members of the movement. This is particularly important in authoritarian contexts where traditional media can be limited. González-Bailón *et al.* (2011: 1) extend this argument by showing how online networks contribute to protest participation by enhancing mobilisation efforts and fostering interconnected communities of activists. On the other hand, Benkhelifa *at el.* (2014: 565) emphasise that social networks such as Twitter and Facebook have proven to be effective tools for organising demonstrations. Mishler *et al.* (2017: 17) note that protests, strikes and "Occupy" movements are examples of disruptive activities that often originate from online social media activity. It shows how such unrest can use social media to mobilise supporters and recruit volunteers to their cause. The use of social media to predict social unrest has received more attention following the events of the Arab Spring.

DeLucia and Buczak (2023: 20) notes that social media has established itself as a medium in which people organise and carry out offline actions, many of which are associated with unrest. Understanding these events can help pro-democracy groups. The basic method for detecting these events on Twitter is to aggregate a large number of tweets, many of which are irrelevant to the target. The results of this study provide a multi-

instance learning (MIL) approach that finds relevant tweets while detecting unrest. This study shows that MIL outperforms simple aggregation approaches for detecting unrest. The results show that the model achieves an F1 score of 0.73 on the Global Civil Unrest on Twitter (G-CUT) dataset.

Harlow and Kilgo (2021: 665) discuss how social media users can reconstruct narratives about protests, often challenging mainstream media representations that may delegitimise certain movements. This is particularly relevant in the context of movements for racial equality and social justice, where the framing of protests can significantly influence public opinion and the response of authorities (Ophir *et al.*, 2021: 475). Freelon *et al.* (2016: 990) also quantify the power of social media in shaping narratives, showing that movements such as Black Lives Matter can predict mainstream media coverage and thus influence broader social discourse.

In addition to facilitating communication and shaping narratives, social media has also played a central role in organising and coordinating protests. The #EndSARS protests in Nigeria are a case in point. Uwalaka & Nwala (2023: 175) describe in detail how social media platforms were used to mobilise, coordinate and document the protests, highlighting the role of digital media in socio-political disputes. The thematic analysis of digital media during the #EndSARS commemorative protests in 2021 also illustrates how social media can generate solidarity and collective action among participants (Uwalaka, 2021: 84). The existing literature on the role of social media in civil unrest particularly emphasises its direct influence on mobilisation. In summary, the interplay between social media and civil unrest is complex and involves aspects of communication, mobilisation, narrative construction and public perception. The findings suggest that social media not only facilitate the organisation of protests, but also play a crucial role in shaping the discourse around these movements, ultimately influencing their success and impact on society.

2.7 The role of social media a communication tool

Karamat and Farooq (2020: 381) state that social media as a means of communication serves as a platform that allows users to produce and disseminate a variety of concepts, data and multimedia content. This communication medium fosters interpersonal relationships and teamwork and can influence young people's attitudes and behaviour. By setting up various websites and accounts, organisations can disseminate their agendas and information to raise public awareness. The role of social media in shaping public perceptions, particularly the impact of platforms such as Facebook and Twitter on political activism, is also assessed, as is the level of social media awareness raising.

One of the most important aspects of social media is its ability to facilitate interaction between the public and government agencies. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, social media platforms became essential for governments to effectively communicate health directives and updates. Badr *et al.* (2022: 1) emphasise that social media enables public participation in discussions about government policies and reflects the political thoughts and behaviours of citizens, especially young people in Kuwait. This aligns with the findings of (Huang, 2023: 887), who emphasises that social media is an important channel for governments to disseminate information and engage with citizens in times of crisis, thus playing an important role in early warning and recovery efforts.

Sobaih *et al.* (2022: 1) emphasise that the global COVID-19 pandemic has necessitated a rapid shift from traditional face-to-face teaching to online modalities in higher education institutions worldwide. This transition has revealed significant inequalities, especially in developing countries where public institutions often lack access to formal online learning management systems (LMS) that enable effective communication between students and lecturers. Their study examines the extent to which social media platforms serve as tools for academic communication. Using online questionnaires and in-depth interviews with lecturers and students, the study shows that students' personal use of social media was also utilised for formal teaching and learning purposes.

Wibowo (2020: 189) emphasises how social media has become an indispensable tool in modern marketing strategies, especially through the use of social networking sites (SNS). Companies use SNS to engage directly with customers and build strong relationships. By strategically selecting the right marketing content, organisations can improve their customer relationships. This study examined the relationship between social media marketing activities (SMMA), customer experience (CX) and the quality of customer relationships to understand their impact on customer behaviour such as purchase intent, loyalty and participation. A study of 413 online surveys analysed using SmartPLS 3 found that both SMMA and CX have a significant impact on the quality of customer relationships

Alism (2018:1) highlights that social media played a crucial role in the 2009 Iranian protests, also known as the Green Movement. Activists used platforms such as Twitter and Facebook to disseminate information about the protests, gather supporters and spread awareness internationally. The regime tried to block access to these platforms, but the protesters found ways to circumvent the censorship (Rueters, 2011). In the early days of the Syrian uprising in 2011, social media was a lifeline for activists. Platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, as well as video portals such as YouTube, enabled protesters to coordinate actions, disseminate information and document human rights violations. When the regime cracked down, these platforms became even more important for organising resistance and maintaining international attention.

Ronzhyn (2014: 442) emphasises that the EuroMaidan movement in Ukraine, which led to the overthrow of President Viktor Yanukovich in 2014, was heavily influenced by social media. Platforms such as Facebook and Twitter were used to organise protests, share information and mobilise support both within Ukraine and internationally. The ease of use of these platforms enabled real-time coordination and made the movement more resilient to crackdowns. Dwoskin (2023) reports that social media played an important role in the major protests that shook Brazil in 2016 and challenged the government of President Dilma Rousseff. Platforms such as Facebook and Twitter were used to coordinate the protests, disseminate information and mobilise public opinion. Citizen journalists also emerged, using social media to provide alternative reports to mainstream media

coverage. The protests, which began in response to the corruption scandals, gained momentum through the widespread dissemination of information and calls to action on social media.

Fazil (2024:13) states that social media play a crucial role in improving global communication and promoting social capital and that social media enable various forms of communication that allow for rapid information exchange and collaboration across geographical boundaries. This is particularly important in the educational context, where social media enhances the learning experience through interactive features that support communication and knowledge sharing (Rizki, 2023: 391).

Kaur and Chahal (2018) emphasise that social media has transformed global communication, fostering collaboration and increasing public engagement on critical issues, including environmental awareness. Its role in amplifying discussions about sustainability enables communities to share information and advocate for environmental concerns. Similarly, Waititu (2021: 27) finds that social media promotes localised environmental activism by connecting individuals and organisations in meaningful ways. These findings highlight how digital platforms not only facilitate dialogue, but also drive social change and collective action.

To summarise, social media has established itself as a versatile communication tool that promotes public engagement, professional collaboration and global networking. Its importance is evident in a variety of contexts, from government communication in times of crisis to promoting environmental awareness and community engagement. As social media continues to evolve, its role in shaping communication practices is likely to increase, requiring ongoing research and strategic management to realise its full potential

2.8 The role of social media during the July 2021 unrest in South Africa

Memeburn (2021) reported that South Africans used social media to document and follow the rioting and looting that took place in Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal following the demonstrations against the arrest of former President Jacob Zuma. The hashtags

#ShutdownSA, #ShutdownGauteng and #ShutdownKZN were frequently used on Twitter on 12 July. Social media platforms, especially Twitter and Facebook, have become important tools for political engagement and activism, allowing citizens to express their dissent and organise protests effectively. This phenomenon is not new. Social media has played an important role in various movements in South Africa, such as the #FeesMustFall protests that addressed inequality in education and access to education (Ntombana *et al.*, 2023; 1, Greeff *et al.*, 2021: 1)

During the July 2021 riots, social media was used to mobilise people and disseminate information quickly (Petla, 2023: 23). The study shows that the disruption of information flow on social media played an important role in triggering the riots, as misinformation and disinformation were widespread and influenced public perception and action. The rapid flow of information on platforms such as Twitter enabled the protests to be organised quickly and complaints to be shared. This reflects a broader trend seen in global movements where social media serves as an important communication tool (Gerber, 2022; 15, Bosch *et al.*, 2020: 349). The ability of social media to facilitate real-time communication between users contributed to the scale and intensity of the protests, as people shared their experiences and demanded action against perceived injustices (Naidoo, 2023; 1, Mongale 2022: 1).

Furthermore, the influence of social media on political narratives should not be underestimated. Research has shown that social media platforms have become arenas of political communication where citizens engage with political content and participate in discussions that can lead to collective action (Ong'ong'a, 2022; Sebeelo, 2020). The use of hashtags and online movements has enabled marginalised voices to gain visibility and challenge dominant narratives, which has fostered a sense of agency among users (Sebeelo, 2020; Greeff *et al.*, 2021). In summary, social media played a crucial role in the unrest in South Africa by facilitating mobilisation, disseminating information and shaping public discourse. Its influence is evident in both the organisation of the protests and the ongoing conversations around critical social issues, highlighting its importance as a tool for political engagement and activism in the contemporary South African context.

2.8.1.1 The organisation of looting

Independent online (2021) reports that a panel found that social media played an important role in causing chaos during the riots, as various networks used these platforms to organise and incite violence. Numerous networks used social media to organise themselves to carry out the acts of violence and to organise the violence. It appears that social media played an important role in enabling the violence. Tweets, WhatsApp messages, Facebook posts and other media provided convenient ways to share information about events that had just taken place or were likely to take place. Communities and even businesses organised to defend themselves using the same strategies because they were fast, cheap and effective (Expert Panel into the July 2021 Civil Unrest, 116).

Furthermore, the role of information disruption, particularly through social media, cannot be overlooked. During the unrest, social media platforms were used to mobilise people, disseminate information and coordinate looting. This digital mobilisation played a crucial role in the escalation of the unrest, as misinformation and calls to action spread quickly among communities (Petla, 2023). The combination of political triggers, social media influence and economic desperation culminated in one of the worst cases of civil unrest in post-apartheid South Africa. An analysis by the International Crisis Group highlights how the riots highlighted the ongoing social and political divisions in South Africa and led to polarised reactions from the public, where some condemned the looting with violent and racist statements, while others sympathised with the rioters and blamed the government (International Crisis Group, 2021). In addition BBC (2021) reported that video footage of large crowds participating in the looting was widely circulated online, drawing international attention to the severity of the unrest. The police endeavoured to restore order and warned that anyone caught looting would be prosecuted.

2.8.1.2 Misinformation in communication

ITWEB (2021) reported that some used this to spread misinformation or exacerbate the situation, while videos, photos, texts and voice messages were used to inform and

mobilise people to loot. WhatsApp groups and social media platforms were flooded with news clips, forwarded messages and videos spreading information or misinformation about the looting (ITWEB, 2021). During the looting in KwaZulu-Natal, social media was used to spread misinformation and rumours and to incite panic (Expert Panel on the July 2021 Riots 116). However, images and videos of burning infrastructure, knocked down walls or other examples of civil disobedience many of which are fabricated or taken out of context create a dynamic of their own. It could be argued that they have triggered additional violence and threats of racist and militant counter-attacks. Re-sharing content that is divisive or just plain wrong can fuel the fire among social media users (Institute for Security Studies, 2021)

Following the looting, the South African government declared that SANDF personnel had been deployed to the affected areas. Shortly after, the Presidency announced that President Cyril Ramaphosa would address the nation on Monday evening. In addition, some social media users attempted to exacerbate the situation by spreading false information about the looting. Images and videos of burning infrastructure, knocked down walls or other examples of civil disobedience - many of which are fake or taken out of context create a dynamic of their own. It could be argued that they have triggered additional violence and threats of racist and militant counter attacks (Meme burn, 2021)

2.9 How social media was used in other unrest Arab Spring (2010-2012)

Yang (2013: 709) notes that social media has changed the traditional relationship between state authorities and citizens, providing a creative and effective way for people to coordinate their efforts and express political and social concerns. This change is mainly due to the increasing availability of internet access around the world. Today, social media is considered one of the main causes of civil unrest. Shebahat (2011: 1825) describes how during the revolutions known as the Arab Spring' in late 2010 and early 2011, social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube were described as tools that sparked, mobilised and coordinated the uprisings. The media coined terms such as 'Facebook revolution', 'Twitter revolution' and 'YouTube uprisings' to emphasise the prominent role of social media. The Syrian revolution, which began on 15 March 2011,

was also fuelled by calls for freedom and political reform, highlighting the significant role of social media. However, it is important to point out that social media had already played a key role in accelerating the overthrow of the Ben Ali and Mubarak regimes in Tunisia and Egypt earlier in 2011.

Eaton (2013: 3) analyse the role of internet activism in the Egyptian uprisings of 2011. He assumes that internet activism in Egypt fulfilled two important functions during this period: firstly, it served as a tool for activists to organise, mobilise and inspire Egyptians to participate in the demonstrations of 25 January 2011, and secondly, it served as a platform for documenting events in Egypt outside the control of the authorities. On the other hand, Khamis *et al.* (2017: 3) note that political activists have used various means of communication, especially digital and online social media such as Twitter, Facebook and the video sharing website YouTube, as tools to abuse citizens for citizen journalism, sharing public opinion and mobilising unrest.

In contrast, Gerbaudo (2013: 25) discusses the impact of the internet blackout "imposed by the regime of Mohammed Hosni El Sayed Mubarak in the early days of the 2011 Egyptian revolution, also known as the 'kill switch'". It is argued that despite the regime's hopes that the blockade would halt mobilisation and sabotage coordination among protesters, this measure had a mobilising rather than disruptive effect. Moussa (2013: 45) discusses the limitations of existing collective action theory in Arab countries and proposes new ways of analysing the role of social media in the Arab Spring and cultural and social determinism in relation to Muslim-majority societies. The article proposes several conceptual and analytical perspectives that can help future researchers contextualise the use of social media within the specific cultural and social frameworks of Muslim-majority societies. Moussa suggests that researchers should consider how cultural norms, religious practises and social values shape and are shaped by social media interactions.

Jones (2017: 71) examines how the Bahraini government and its sympathisers used Facebook, Twitter and other social media as a means of surveillance and social control

during the Bahraini uprising. Using a virtual ethnography conducted between February 2011 and December 2011, a typology of methods is created that describes how hegemonic forces and institutions used social media to suppress dissent both online and offline. On the other hand, Clarke and Kocak (2020: 1025) show how the use of Facebook and Twitter contributed to a particular mobilisation outcome. They argue that these two platforms facilitated a large, nationwide protest on 25 January 2011 that gave cautious but benevolent Egyptians hope for an imminent revolution. They analyse three mechanisms that linked these platforms to the success of the 25 January protests: (1) recruitment of protesters, (2) planning and coordination of protests, and (3) live updates of protest logistics.

Aouragh (2012: 133) emphasises that the focus on technology rather than human action does not address the problems that many protested against, such as corruption, neoliberalism and imperialism. In contrast, Byun and Hollander (2015: 102) argue that if social media was the main cause of the Arab Spring, countries with higher levels of internet connectivity and social media use should also have higher levels of unrest. However, in their experimental study, no correlation was found between a country's internet access and the level of unrest. This debate shows how difficult it is to attribute social phenomena to technology alone. However, there is a gap that requires further research into the multi-layered dynamics of political mobilisation in the digital age.

This literature highlights the nuanced ways in which social media interactions translate into real-world mobilisation. Clarke and Kocak (2020: 1026) highlight how platforms such as Facebook and Twitter have facilitated the recruitment, planning and coordination of protests and contributed to the success of significant demonstrations such as the 25 January protests in Egypt. Exploring these mechanisms sheds light on the tactical aspects of digital activism. The argument builds on and refines our understanding of the role of social media in the Arab Spring revolutions. This study argues that social media played an important role in the emergence and success of the movements that led to the Arab Spring protests and the overthrow of several autocratic governments in the region (Brym et al., 2014; Eltantawy and Wiest 2011; Howard and Hussain, 2013).

Similarly, Hübner (2014: 28) argues that social media provided a platform for the promotion of transparency and the development of shared knowledge, creating a common cause and understanding that repeatedly mobilised Tunisian citizens to demand their rights as citizens and eventually overthrow the regime of Ben Ali. A study of the Egyptian Arab Spring in January 2011 was also labelled a Facebook revolution by opinion makers and activists. They point to the inherent influence of social media on social development. The results of the study show that social media undoubtedly had a significant impact on the development of the revolution. However, these results are inextricably linked to the socio-political circumstances. (Baron, 2012: 84)

Furthermore, Lotan *et al.* (2011: 1357) conducted an analysis of the flow of information during the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions, focusing on the role of social media in the dissemination of news and the mobilisation of protesters. They examined how Twitter and other platforms facilitated the spread of information, helped organise the protests and increased the global visibility of the uprisings. This emphasises the importance of digital tools in amplifying voices and connecting activists internationally. On the other hand, Aouragh and Alexander (2011: 1344) look at the challenges of translating social media activism into tangible social change during the Arab Spring. They critically examine the limits and constraints of digital activism and discuss the gap between online activism and mobilisation on the ground and how activists adapted their strategies to overcome these challenges. However, further research could explore innovative strategies used by activists to bridge this gap, such as hybrid forms of activism that combine digital and traditional organising methods.

Howard *et al.* (2013: 1) examines the impact of digital media, particularly social media, on the Arab Spring uprisings. He examines how the use of social media has influenced political participation and collective action during this period of political change in the Arab world. According to Smidi and Shahmin (2017: 1), the role of social media as a means of communication in the Arab Spring is highly contested among scholars. Their study is based on a review of articles published in academic journals since 2011. She argues that

social media mobilised or facilitated the protests by giving a voice to people in societies where traditional media is controlled by the government and helped people to network and broadcast their protests around the world.

Badouras (2014: 3) found that YouTube, Facebook and Twitter were the most popular social networks used recently to mobilise young people for revolutions, riots and civil unrest. In 2011-2013, during the anti-corruption movement and the mass protests against the gang rapes in Delhi, social media mobilised and rallied people to raise their voice against injustice and the flawed system responsible for the high levels of corruption. This study argues that in certain situations, social media is used to spread rumours, false information and propaganda.

2.9.1 Euromaidan protest 2013-2014

It all began on 21 November 2013, when Ukrainian journalist and activist Mustafa Nayem posted something on Facebook, just as more than a billion other people had done before. He invited anyone who felt the same way about Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich's refusal to sign a long-promised association agreement with the European Union to comment on his post. He also suggested that everyone should join the protests on Independence Square if the post received at least 1,000 comments from supporters (Metzger and Tucker, 2017: 169).

Onuch (2015: 217) describes that the protests are referred to as EuroMaidan (European Square). Their main demands, expressed in protest signs, chants and speeches, were political and social progress and the desire for Ukraine to become more European. By 23 November, the protests had grown to between 200,000 and 300,000 people - around half the population of Wyoming in Kyiv and up to tens of thousands in several western Ukrainian cities. Furthermore, Barberá and Metzger (2014: 178) emphasise that the Euromaidan in Ukraine was no exception. Social media undoubtedly played an important role in the rapid dissemination of information, the mobilisation and transport of vital supplies, and the deployment and coordination of protesters, to name but a few examples.

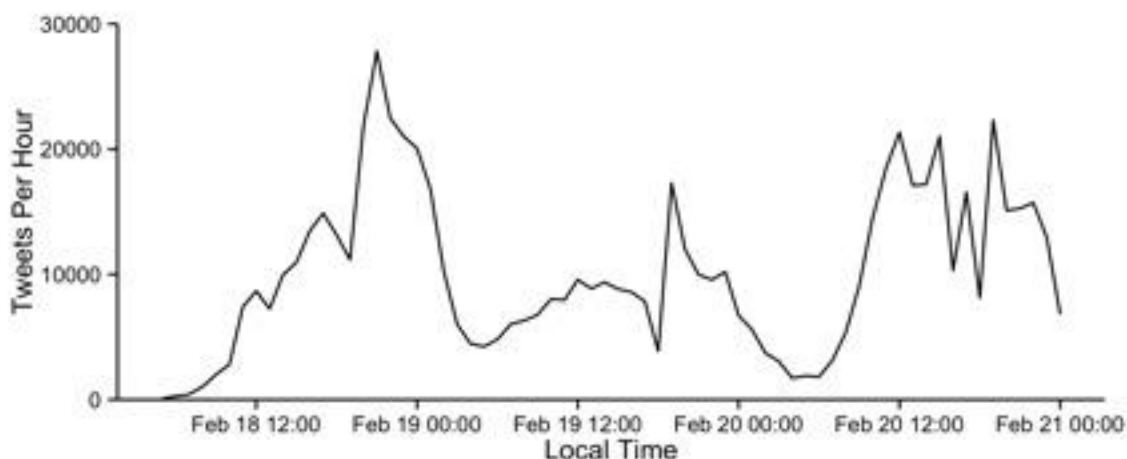
Popular reports on the EuroMaidan protests emphasised the importance of social media, claiming that a Facebook post sparked the protests (BBC Trending, 2013).

However, Facebook was the main forum for political discussion and the main source for Ukrainian visitors to independent media sites (Bohdanova, 2014: 13). Rudenko (2016: 1) shows that Facebook is far more popular than twitter in Ukraine. Compared to the 3 million Ukrainian Facebook users, the estimated number of Twitter users in Ukraine in 2012 was around half a million, although other estimates put the number at less than 300,000. The Broadcasting Council (2014: 1) estimates that internet penetration in Ukraine varies.

The internet penetration in Ukraine has been a subject of various studies, with significant findings reported over the years. A 2013 study by Freedom House, which utilized data from the International Telecommunication Union, indicated that internet penetration in Ukraine was approximately 42% at that time. This figure has shown a consistent upward trend over the preceding decade, reflecting the increasing accessibility of the internet across the country (Högström, 2013: 202). On the other hand, the Gallup survey found that 89% of Ukrainians aged 15-24 and 73.1% of 25-34 year olds use the internet for news at least once a week, indicating the importance of online news, especially for young people. In addition, the survey shows that slightly less than 50% of Ukrainians have visited a social network website in the previous week (Gallup, 2013: 1).

Leshchenko (2014: 52) examines the influence of social media on the organisation and communication strategies of the Euromaidan demonstrators. The study finds that these strategies contributed to the development of civil society during the protests. Similarly, Kozma (2014: 100) focuses on the communication patterns during the Euromaidan protests and emphasises the use of digital communication channels such as Facebook and Twitter for information dissemination, recruitment and organisation. The study emphasises how these platforms helped to maintain the momentum of the protests

Figure 2.6 Hourly average of tweets about the protests in Ukraine in recent days (Data: New York University NYU social media and Political Participation.



Source: (Barbá and Megan Metzger 2014:1)

Figure 2.7 below shows the ongoing monitoring of social media activity related to the protests conducted by the New York University (NYU) Social Media and Political Participation Lab. Since the protests began in November, the Lab has been collecting Facebook and Twitter data, focusing particularly on the most important hashtags related to the protests. The data shown in the graphs illustrates the significant role that social media plays in the organisation and dissemination of information during these events, particularly in Kiev. As with previous protests, social media continues to be the most effective tool for people inside and outside Ukraine to inform themselves and coordinate their actions. The charts show, social media activity is highly responsive to local events, demonstrating its quick adaptability in times of political unrest (Babera and Metzger, 2014: 1)

A major study by Lyebyedyev and Makhortykh (2018: 276) focussed on the quantitative analysis of Twitter data during the Euromaidan protests. Their research utilised the automatic classification of a large dataset of tweets and showed how the framing of the protests evolved. The study showed that the online portrayal of the protests changed from a peaceful movement to a more revolutionary characterisation. This shift is valuable for understanding the dynamics of the subsequent protests in Ukraine, as it illustrates the influence of social media on public perception and the mobilisation of support

2.10 How social media can be used during crisis to mitigate risk

In recent years, it has become common to use social media to disseminate timely information in times of crisis. In particular, the 'one-to-many' style has given stakeholders the opportunity to share crisis-related news and gain access to a wealth of information that might not otherwise be available to them (Olteanu *et al.*, 2015: 1). According to Haataja *et al.* (2016: 1), the study examined how crisis and disaster management organisations use social media and described the key motivators and barriers that experts believe these organisations face when using social media. Crisis and disaster management organisations use social media primarily to inform the public in order to minimise risks, but also to gather information from citizens. Brynielsson *et al.* (2018: 28) illustrate that social media has become an integral part of human communication, as a tool for building and maintaining social relationships and for sharing and co-creating knowledge. Social media offers a wide range of opportunities for people, groups, companies and governments. Social media features such as online sharing and social networks have changed the way information is shared and updated for crisis communication.

There are several ways that social media can be used for risk minimisation and crisis communication. Firstly, you can develop better situational awareness through collaboration and online interactions. Secondly, social media is widely used and available. Emergency services can transmit information and warnings over long distances. Finally, social media contains data that can be tracked geographically or over time. Digitally produced content makes it possible to track the geographic and temporal progression of a problem (Wendling *et al.*, 2013: 11). One of the main advantages of social media in times of crisis is its ability to disseminate information quickly. Social media enables the immediate dissemination of risk messages to a wide audience, which is essential in crisis situations where timely information can significantly impact public safety and response. This immediacy is particularly important in food safety crises, where stakeholders have recognised the need for rapid communication to effectively mitigate risks (Regan *et al.*, 2014: 119).

Table 2.2 List of social media platforms used in risk and crisis management

Types of social media	Examples	Use for risk and crisis communication
social networking	Facebook Myspace Friendster	Enhance coordination among volunteers and emergency services, allow to share information inside a community, provide swift update on emergency situation,
Content sharing	YouTube Flickr Vimeo	Social media enhances situational awareness in real-time by facilitating the exchange of pictures and videos, allowing emergency services to quickly launch viral campaigns about risks. It can also assist in identifying missing individuals, victims, and other critical information during emergencies.
Collaborating knowledge sharing social media	Wikis Forums Message boards Podcasts	Enhance dialogs between victims and emergency services
Blogging and microblogging	Blogger WordPress Tumblr Twitter	Convey Recommendations, warnings, share facts Twitter allows to have immediate information sharing with a wide reach and feedback possibilities

Specialized crisis management platform managed by Volunteer Technology Communities (VTCs)	MAPPING Collaboration Crisis mappers Google map maker Online and Onsite Contribution	Mapping of emergencies, Community Emergency response team facilitator
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The use of social media in crisis communication: Source: Wendling (2013: 13)

Table 2.2 shows five different categories of social media, how social networks like Facebook and Myspace bring people together because they have similar interests. Anyone can contribute images or videos to content sharing sites such as YouTube and Flickr, which can then be shared with a limited community of users or with anyone. Wikis and podcasts are examples of collaborative knowledge sharing platforms where users can ask questions and wait for answers from other users. Social media blogging is used to communicate expectations, feelings and ideals as well as facts. These social media sites or programmes are specifically designed to communicate about risks and crises (Wendling, 2013: 13).

The use of social media platforms has greatly enhanced a community's ability to anticipate and prepare for crises. Mavrodieva and Shaw (2021) emphasise that collaborative projects on social media can provide communities with a comprehensive collection of content to analyse and validate information that provides opportunities to intervene during crises. Similarly, Aslan (2022) highlights the central role of social media during the Egyptian uprisings, noting that it significantly helped Egyptian citizens to achieve substantial victories. In the context of the looting in KwaZulu-Natal in July 2021, Allen (2021) shows how images and videos of burning infrastructure and civil disobedience many of which were faked or taken out of context that created a dynamic that potentially triggered additional violence and threats of racist and militant counter-attacks. The widespread need for knowledge during a crisis emphasises the role of social media communication in helping those affected to feel more comfortable and connected.

Furthermore the blending of reality, experience and fiction on digital platforms has exacerbated racial mistrust and hatred, causing public concern, fear and panic. The number of social media users in South Africa is estimated at around 22 million and is growing rapidly as more and more people own smartphones. During riots, protests or looting, social media can have both positive and negative effects. Platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and WhatsApp can inform the police, military and emergency services in real time about events on the ground (Institute for Security Studies, 2021). Malinga (2021) reports that several internet initiatives have been launched to tackle the aftermath of the riots and looting in KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng. Hashtags such as #LootingMustFall, #SaveSouthAfrica and #Clean-ups gained traction on Twitter as organisations and citizens worked together to restore normalcy in the affected provinces. While social media can be a powerful tool for mobilisation and awareness-raising, tackling complex issues such as post-conflict reconstruction requires sustained offline action, collaboration with local authorities and community-based initiatives.

Furthermore, social media facilitates a participatory approach to risk communication and enables two-way interaction between organisations and the public. This interactive nature allows emergency services to engage with communities, gather real-time feedback and tailor their responses to the needs of the population (Aboagye, 2023: 108). During the COVID-19 pandemic, for example, social media played a crucial role in disseminating health-related information and warnings, thereby increasing public awareness and preparedness.

Furthermore, social media platforms have been used to monitor public sentiment and behaviour during emergencies, which can lead to more effective risk management strategies (Nazaruddin, 2020: 1). To summarise, social media plays a multifaceted role in risk and crisis communication by facilitating the rapid dissemination of information, enabling two-way communication and improving situational awareness. Although there are challenges, the strategic use of social media can significantly minimise risks and improve crisis management outcomes.

2.11 Theoretical Framework: Social Media as the Public Sphere and Agenda setting theory During Civil Unrest

To understand the role of social media in civil unrest, particularly in the context of the 2021 looting in (KZN), this study draws on two important theoretical frameworks: agenda-setting theory and the concept of the public sphere. These theories provide a lens through which to analyse the influence of social media on public discourse, mobilisation and information dissemination.

2.11.1 Agenda-Setting Theory

The agenda-setting theory states that the media influence the importance of topics on the public agenda. With the rise of social media, this influence has evolved, particularly in the context of civil unrest, where the platforms serve as both a catalyst for mobilisation and a medium for shaping public discourse. Trends in social media can set the agenda for traditional media, impacting mainstream coverage and influencing public sentiment (Groshek and Groshek, 2013: 16).

2.11.2 Transformation of the Agenda-Setting Theory through Social Media

Salman et al. (2016) argue that the agenda-setting model needs to be adapted to account for the growing influence of social media on public issues. They emphasise that politicians and policy makers need to engage with social media to keep the public's priorities in mind. Similarly, the Arab Spring has shown how social media platforms facilitate collective action by enabling rapid information dissemination and fostering a sense of community among activists (Wolfsfeld *et al.*, 2013). These events demonstrate how social media can bring issues related to social justice and political reform to the forefront, consistent with agenda-setting theory.

During the 2021 looting in KZN, social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp played a crucial role in setting the public agenda. These platforms amplified narratives about protests, economic grievances and political instability while spreading misinformation (Himelein-Wachowiak *et al.*, 2021; Mathe and Matsathebe, 2022). By prioritising certain issues such as the arrest of former President Jacob Zuma social media shaped public perceptions and influenced behaviour during the unrest (Makonye, 2022;

Petla, 2023). Studies suggest that WhatsApp and Facebook were used extensively to coordinate protests and spread misinformation, leading to widespread violence (Malinga, 2021; Institute for Security Studies, 2021).

2.11.3 Social media's role in Agenda setting theory

During the looting in KZN, social media played a crucial role in disseminating images and videos of the chaos and attracting public attention (Zhong, 2021: 136). Similar patterns have been observed in other movements. For example, research on the Occupy Wall Street movement found that social media helped to influence coverage in the traditional media (Grzywińska and Borden, 2015: 5). Similarly, the Arab Spring protests have shown how social networks have challenged the agenda-setting role of traditional media (Grzywińska and Batorski, 2016:20).

The predictive capabilities of social media further emphasise their importance. Studies show that online activity (tweets, posts and engagement patterns) can indicate early signs of civil unrest (Goode *et al.*, 2015; Agarwal and Sureka, 2016). By analysing social media interactions, researchers can anticipate potential uprisings, highlighting the proactive role of social media in shaping public awareness and response (Islam *et al.*, 2019; Grill, 2020). In the specific context of the looting in KZN, Conflict Trends (2021) highlights how social media not only documented the events but also fuelled tensions. Traditional media reinforced certain narratives, while social media emerged as an independent space for mobilisation, expression and misinformation (Wu and Coleman, 2009: 775). This evolving landscape suggests that the traditional agenda-setting model needs to be expanded to account for the influence of user-generated content and the interactivity of social media (Neuman *et al.*, 2014: 194)

2.12 The Public Sphere

The concept of the public sphere, introduced by Jürgen Habermas, has evolved significantly with new media technologies. Initially based on face-to-face interactions and traditional media, the public sphere now includes digital spaces, altering how public discourse unfolds (Cela, 2015). During the 2021 looting in KZN, social media served as a digital public sphere, allowing citizens to voice grievances, share real-time updates, and

mobilize for collective action (Habermas, 1962; Papacharissi, 2018). Platforms like Twitter and Facebook enabled individuals to challenge official narratives and organize protests (Mathe & Matsaathebe, 2022; Makonye, 2022). However, these digital spaces also facilitated misinformation, incitement to violence, and social divisions (Himelein-Wachowiak et al., 2021; Institute for Security Studies, 2021). This study examines how social media transformed the public sphere during the unrest, enabling both constructive dialogue and destructive behavior (Petla, 2023; Malinga, 2021).

2.12.1 Transformation of the Public Sphere through social media

The emergence of Web 1.0 and Web 2.0, together with modern communication technologies, has reshaped public discourse. Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram play a crucial role in shaping public narratives, particularly during civil unrest. In contrast to the one-to-many communication model of traditional media, social media promotes a many-to-many interaction model in which users actively engage and mobilise (Iosifidis, 2011; Jan-Felix, 2016). While social media can promote inclusivity, it also brings challenges such as filter bubbles, echo chambers, misinformation and polarisation (Fuchs, 2014; Sunstein, 2017; Wardle and Derakhshan, 2017). Research shows that political conversations on social media often take place within like-minded groups, which limits exposure to diverse viewpoints (Brenne, 2016). Furthermore, social media can overshadow traditional media, civil society and political opposition, as seen in the Algerian protests (Benrazek, 2021).

2.12.2 Social Media's role as a public sphere during civil unrest

The dynamics of social media have a significant impact on its function as a public sphere, particularly in times of crisis. Echo chambers and ideological polarisation can exacerbate tensions, while misinformation spreads quickly and undermines trust (Darius, 2022: 1). During the 2021 looting in KZN, social media played a dual role by facilitating community engagement while simultaneously exacerbating societal divisions. Remarkable studies illustrate how social media influences the public sphere in times of crisis. In the Arab Spring, platforms such as Facebook and Twitter facilitated mass mobilisation (Howard & Hussain, 2013). The Egyptian revolution of 2011 also relied on citizen journalism and social media for real-time information sharing (Bruns, Burgess, and Highfield, 2014). In

the US, political polarisation has been linked to the influence of social media, highlighting how these platforms create ideological divides (Boxell, Gentzkow, & Shapiro, 2017).

During the 2021 looting in KZN, social media functioned as a critical public space for communication, mobilisation and the construction of narratives. While it provided important tools for community engagement, challenges such as misinformation and polarisation highlight the complexity of using social media during crises.

Agenda-setting theory and the public sphere provide a solid framework for understanding the role of social media during the 2021 looting in KZN. These theories illustrate how social media influences public discourse, perception and mobilisation. However, they also highlight the risks of misinformation, polarisation and algorithmic bias. By applying these frameworks, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the dual role of social media as a communication tool and as a catalyst for mobilisation and unrest during the looting in KZN.

2.13 Conclusion

The literature review shows that social media played an important role in the looting in KwaZulu-Natal. Studies and articles show how the platforms were used to spread messages, coordinate actions and disseminate false information. The influence of Social media on the mobilisation of individuals and the organisation of looting campaigns was one of the key findings. The speed and reach of these platforms allowed looters to quickly gather in specific locations and create a sense of unity and common purpose. Real-time information sharing enabled the coordination of looting, making it more difficult for law enforcement to respond effectively. The literature also emphasises the potential positive benefits of social media in times of crisis. It shows how platforms can disseminate accurate information, connect communities to support each other and facilitate relief efforts. However, in KwaZulu-Natal, these benefits were overshadowed by the negative consequences of social media misuse for looting when it came to managing its impact.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter provided a comprehensive review of the literature and demonstrated the role of social media in the 2021 looting in KwaZulu-Natal. Building on this foundation, this chapter describes the methodology. It describes the research design, research paradigms, data collection tools and methods of analysis used to achieve the research objectives. A quantitative approach was chosen, using an online questionnaire to ensure systematic and reliable data collection. This is done by describing the methods and procedures used to collect and analyse the data. Mishra and Alok (2017: 1) describe research methodology as an approach used to solve research problems. It is a science that examines how research is systematically conducted.

3.2 Research paradigm

According to Creswell (2023:1), a paradigm is a set of hypotheses, assumptions and principles that characterise a person's view of the world and their interactions with objects or other people. The research paradigm forms the basis of the study and shapes the methods and assumptions used throughout the research process. This foundation significantly influences the choice of data collection and analysis techniques. In addition, each research paradigm rests on four fundamental philosophical pillars: Methodology, Ontology, Axiology and Epistemology. Methodology refers to the systematic plan for conducting research, ontology involves the study of the nature of being and reality, axiology concerns the study of values and ethics, and epistemology deals with the study of knowledge and its acquisition. Rehman and Alharthi (2016: 1) assert that understanding and articulating ideas about the nature of reality, what can be learnt about it and how we can learn it are essential skills for researchers. These elements form the components of research paradigms. A paradigm is a foundational theory and belief system that makes assumptions about ontology, epistemology, methodology, and procedure. In other words, it is our way of understanding and exploring the world as it actually is.

3.2.1 Epistemological paradigm

Babbie (2020:1) describes epistemology as the branch of philosophy concerned with knowledge and belief, focussing on the nature of reality and the methods by which we understand, process and apply relevant information. This paradigm emphasises the dynamic between the knower and the questioner and foregrounds what is accepted as true knowledge. Epistemology is crucial as it reinforces the researcher's confidence in their findings and shapes the methods they use to uncover and solve problems in their investigations.

3.2.2 Ontological Paradigm

According to Heidegger, cited by Junji and Yingxin (2022), ontology is fundamentally concerned with the nature of reality and focuses on understanding the existence of various phenomena. Similarly, Richards (2003), cited in the work of Rehman and Alhartg (2016: 130), defines ontology as the study of our beliefs about the nature of reality, which encompasses both explicit and implicit assumptions made by researchers about how reality works and what we can learn from it. Wahyuni (2012: 69) emphasises the importance of the assumptions that scientists make in order to accept their findings as credible. These assumptions are crucial in defining the research problem, its meaning and the possible approaches to investigate the question under study.

In this study, a constructivist ontological position was adopted, consistent with the idea that social media as a communication platform allows individuals to collectively create and shape their understanding of events such as civil unrest. In the context of civil unrest associated with social media, ontology offers insights into how different events and contributing factors are framed and understood. In the case of the 2021 looting in KZN as represented on social media, ontology refers to the ways in which individuals collectively interpret and represent these events by sharing hashtags, posts, images and personal narratives. This process of collective digital representation plays a crucial role in shaping public perception and influencing the interpretation of events, emphasising the importance of ontology in contemporary research (Zhuravskaya *et al.*, 2020; Petrova and Enikolopov, 2020)

3.2.3 Axiology

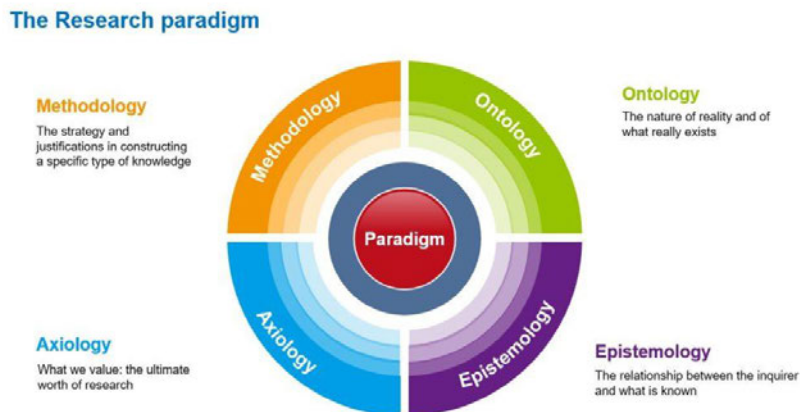
Guba and Lincoln (1994:105), cited in Alele and Adulu (2023: 5), describe axiology as the study of values and how they influence research. It deals with morality, evaluates growth, considers issues of good and evil, and identifies different types of perceptual errors. Axiology helps researchers in their quest for knowledge by explaining the function and meaning of the research process and considering the values they apply in their work. By integrating axiology into their studies, researchers can ensure that their findings are not only valid but also ethical, increasing the overall credibility and impact of their research.

This study adopts a constructivist axiological viewpoint and recognises that values play a crucial role in shaping the research process. The study recognises that values such as the importance of ethical considerations, respect for different perspectives and social responsibility can influence the way findings are interpreted and presented. Integrating axiology into the study will ensure that the results are not only valid but also ethical, which will increase the credibility and impact of the research overall. This approach is consistent with the belief that research should serve the public good and contribute to a more equitable understanding of social issues.

3.2.4 Methodology

Methodology refers to the overarching strategy that guides the choice and use of specific techniques within a defined research framework. This term encompasses the design, methods and procedures used in a rigorously organised investigation to find answers (Wahyuni, 2012: 69). Scholars such as Guba and Lincoln (1994: 105), cited by Alele and Adulu (2023: 5), support this view. Typical elements of methodology include methods of data analysis, data collection instruments, participant selection, and data collection strategies. Researchers evaluating a methodology typically ask questions about these elements to determine their appropriateness for the study at hand.

Figure: 3.1 the Research Paradigm



Source: The Research Paradigm by Bunmi Malau-Aduli and Faith Alele, (2023: 6) used under a CC BY NC 4.0 Licence

3.3 Research design

Akhtar (2016: 68) describes the research design as a blueprint for the planned research, it is the "glue" that holds all the components of a research project together. Pawar (2020: 52) emphasises that the research design can be descriptive, exploratory, experimental or cross-sectional. This study followed a descriptive research design to determine the role of social media in civil unrest in KwaZulu-Natal. Bhasin (2019: 1) argues that a descriptive design provides a broad overview of the research which is beneficial in identifying relevant clues to the variables under investigation.

3.3.1 Types of quantitative research

According to Sukamolson (2007), cited in Apuke (2017: 43), there are different types of quantitative research, which can be categorised as descriptive research, correlational research, experimental research and causal-comparative research.

3.3.1.1 Descriptive research

Walia (2020: 29) states that this design relies on observation to collect data. It makes predictions about what might happen again under the same conditions by trying to explain situations in order to create a norm. The term observation has several different meanings.

Depending on the type of information desired, interviews are conducted, questionnaires are handed out, visual recordings are made and even sounds and odours are recorded.

3.3.1.2 Experimental research

One of the most important types of quantitative research is descriptive research, which aims to provide an overview of the characteristics of a population or phenomenon. This design is often used as a preliminary stage to more complex quantitative studies to gain insights that support subsequent hypothesis testing (Mohajan, 2020: 59). Descriptive research can use various methods, including surveys and observational studies, to collect data that describe the current state of affairs without manipulating variables (Rezigalla, 2020: 1).

The experimental approach examines whether there is a causal relationship between the variables under investigation. To determine how an independent variable affects one or more dependent variables, the researcher controls or changes the independent variable. These studies are often carried out in the scientific disciplines of sociology, psychology, chemistry and physics. Pre-experimental, quasi-experimental and real-experimental studies are examples of experimental class research. These designs often involve controls, including random or non-random assignment, variable and the use of a control group (Williams, 2014: 1).

3.3.1.3 Causal-Comparative Research

Apuke (2017: 45) describes causal-comparative research as an investigation of a fact by examining the factors after the fact. Finding the causes that led to the outcome is the main purpose of this type of research as the dependent variable is immediately apparent. In other words, a causal-comparative study aims to determine the causes and effects of a relationship between two or more groups. The goal of a causal-comparative study is to determine the actual cause or reason for pre-existing discrepancies between groups of people.

3.3.1.4 Correlational Research

Another significant category is correlational research which investigates the relationships between two or more variables without implying causation. This design employs statistical techniques to assess the degree of association, allowing researchers to identify patterns and correlations (Maison *et al.*, 2021; 34 Jufrida *et al.*, 2019:1). For instance, studies may explore how educational interventions impact student performance, revealing important insights into educational effectiveness (Simanjuntak, 2023:1). This approach is used to examine the relationships between variables that are measured and tracked as research variables. This type of analysis is used to find patterns and trends in the data. The variables in a correlational study are not changed, therefore, the results are insufficient to determine the reasons for the patterns and trends found. Both correlational and correlational-predictive designs are possible (Williams, 2014: 1).

This study adopted a descriptive research design to achieve the objective of determining the role of social media in civil unrest in KwaZulu-Natal. As Walia (2020: 29) explains, descriptive research relies on observation to collect data and aims to explain situations in order to create a norm. In this sense, the study used methods such as online questionnaires to observe and describe the patterns of social media use during the riots. These methods allowed the researcher to collect data on how social media platforms were used during the riots to disseminate information, mobilise participants and influence public opinion.

3.4 Research approach

The research approach is described as a strategy and process that leads from general hypotheses to specific techniques of data collection, analysis and interpretation. It is therefore determined by the nature of the problem being studied. There are two main types of research approaches: qualitative and quantitative (Chetty, 2016: 1).

3.4.1 Qualitative research approach

According to Creswell and Creswell (2018: 4), qualitative research is a method of investigating and understanding the meaning that individuals or groups attach to a social or human problem. It is an approach that tests objective theories by examining the

relationships between variables. Qualitative research involves collecting and analysing non-numerical data to gain a deeper understanding of concepts, opinions or experiences. This type of research usually involves in-depth interviews, focus groups or observations to collect data that is rich in detail and context (Bhandari, 2020)

3.4.2 Quantitative research approach

Quantitative research uses statistical methods to collect data that is analysed objectively and has a certain order of magnitude. Unlike qualitative data, which is subjectively analysed, quantitative data is mathematically measured and objectively analysed so that virtually all experts are likely to come to the same conclusions and analyse it in the same way (International Research, 2018: 1). On the other hand, Trochim (2012: 219) defines quantitative research as a type of study design that seeks structured and quantified questionnaire responses.

Another feature that characterises quantitative research is deductive methods in the research process, which are intended to lend validity and reliability to current ideas (Flick 2018: 122). In order to find casual relationships, correlations or patterns, the quantitative research approach involves measuring variables and testing the relationships between them. A quantitative design was used to achieve the aims of the study as it allows the researcher to use numbers to understand data and data can be collected through the use of questionnaires.

Table 3.1 Characteristics of qualitative verses quantitative research

	Qualitative	Quantitative
Focus	Exploring ideas or formulating hypotheses/theories	Testing hypothesis or theories
Analysis	Summarising, Categorizing and interpreting	Maths and statistical analysis
Expressed in	Words	Numbers, graphs, tables fewer words

Sample	Few respondents	Many respondents
Questions	Open minded	Close ended or multiple choice
Characterized	Understanding context, complexity, subjectivity	Testing, measurement, objectivity, replicability

Source: Qualitative vs Quantitative, Streefkerk (2023: 1)

Streefkerk (2023: 1) the table shows how both quantitative and qualitative research involve various data collection and analysis techniques, and they enable you to respond to many types of research questions.

3.4.3 Mixed Research Methodology

A mixed research methodology is a study that integrates both quantitative and qualitative research methods, which is known as mixed methods research. In order to develop a more comprehensive understanding of an object of study, this methodological technique involves collecting and analysing both numerical quantitative and narrative qualitative data (Research Method, 2024: 1). On the other hand, mixed methods research, as defined by Creswell (2014: 32), is a research method in which data is collected using both quantitative and qualitative research techniques and the two types of information are combined for use in a single study. Furthermore, Creswell (2015: 2) claims that the researcher's use of both quantitative and qualitative data is the central idea of this research method. According to Sekaran and Bougie (2016: 106), the main aim of the mixed methods research strategy is to answer research questions that cannot be answered by either a quantitative or qualitative research technique alone.

3.4.4 Rational for selecting Quantitative approach

A quantitative method is used for this study. Allen (2017:1) explains that the advantage of using quantitative methods is to generate knowledge and understanding about the social world or to observe issues that affect people. Quantitative research provides a structured framework for testing hypotheses and ensures the reliability and replicability of results.

3.5 Data analysis

Data analysis is the process of collating facts and figures in order to address a research topic. Answering the research question is crucial, and the interpretation of the data results from the data analysis. (Ashirwadam, 2014:1). The quantitative data was analysed using Microsoft Excel and the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 28.0). The following tools were used: Descriptive statistics were used to summarise the demographic data and participants' responses, then inferential statistics. Chi-square tests were performed to examine the relationships between the demographic variables (gender, age and ethnicity) and perceptions of social media use.

3.5.1 Deductive research approach

Abdulhamid *et al.* (2020: 1) describe the deductive research approach, in which a theory or hypothesis is assumed and then research is conducted to test and confirm or refute it. This research approach consists of descriptive statistics and inferential statistics, which deal with the presentation and description of data. It provides a summary of the most important characteristics of a data set, such as mean, median, mode, range and standard deviation. Deductive research also includes inferential statistics, where data from a sample is used to make inferences or predictions about a larger population. It allows researchers to draw conclusions and make generalisations based on the data collected (Halgamuge and Moses, 2019).

3.5.2 Inductive research approach

An inductive research approach can provide valuable insights and uncover new findings that can contribute to the existing body of knowledge. In addition, by using multiple research methods, researchers can gather more comprehensive data that can lead to a deeper understanding of the research problem and increase the overall applicability of the results to theory or practice. Inductive research methods include thematic analysis, ethnographic analysis, phenomenological analysis and grounded theory (examples of qualitative research methods, 2023).

3.5.3 Reason for choosing a deductive research approach

Deductive research is a systematic method in which existing theories or hypotheses are tested to explore relationships, e.g. between social media and civil unrest (Research Methodology, 2024). It involves drawing logical conclusions from established premises, making it a valuable approach for investigating broader societal phenomena, such as the role of social media in influencing civil unrest (Scispace, 2024). Given the quantitative nature of this study, the deductive approach was deemed appropriate. This approach allows the generalisation of the research findings to broader contexts and provides structured and reliable findings. It is particularly well suited to quantitative research as it emphasises hypothesis testing, systematic methodology and statistical analysis. By starting from established theories and testing hypotheses against a structured framework, the study ensures the reliability and validity of its findings. The results make a significant contribution to the growing body of knowledge on the influence of social media in times of crisis and emphasise the importance of the deductive approach to understanding complex social dynamics.

3.6 Target population

The target population is defined as the group of people or objects that are the focus of the research (Njama, 2020: 1). For this study, the target population comprised adults aged 18 to 60 years residing in KZN during the 2021 looting. Participants had to be active social media users who had witnessed the riots and engaged on the platforms. According to the World Population Report (2023), eThekweni is a town in KZN, South Africa. KwaZulu-Natal has one of the most densely populated urban areas in the country. The population of eThekweni is currently estimated at 3,228,003, an increase of 0.9% in 2022. This substantial population size provides a significant sample for the research and ensures that the findings are representative and reliable. By focusing on adults who actively use social media, the study aims to capture the perspectives of those who are likely to have shared their experiences, opinions and observations about the riots and looting online. This demographic is crucial, as social media platforms have become one of the primary means of information dissemination and community mobilisation in times of crisis.

3.7 Sampling Method

The sample size for this study was determined using the Raosoft Sample Size Calculator, which recommends a minimum sample size of 385 for a population of 3,199,329 (estimated population of KwaZulu-Natal) with a confidence level of 95 and a margin of error of 5. However, due to practical constraints such as time and the voluntary nature of online participation, a sample size of 299 respondents was achieved for the study. While this sample size is smaller than the recommended 385, it is considered sufficient for descriptive research as it allows for meaningful statistical analysis and represents a diverse cross-section of KZN residents who were active social media users during the 2021 riots. The use of stratified random sampling and inferential statistics also ensures the reliability and validity of the findings within the scope of the study.

3.8 Selection of study sample

According to Creswell & Guetterman (2018: 628), a sample size is a subset of the target population that the researcher intends to analyse in order to draw conclusions about the target population as a whole. Sample size justification is a crucial step in the design of an empirical study. The main aim of sample size justification for such studies is to explain how the data obtained provides useful information with regard to the researcher's inferential goals (Lakens, 2022: 1).

3.8.1 Probability Sampling

McCombes (2022: 1) describes probability sampling as a random selection used to draw meaningful statistical conclusions about the whole group and is often used in quantitative studies. Probability sampling methods include simple random sampling, stratified sampling, cluster sampling and systematic sampling. These methods ensure that each member of the target population has an equal chance of being selected, thus reducing sample bias.

3.8.2 Non-probability Sampling

McCombes (2022: 1) emphasises that non-probability sampling is a non-random selection based on convenience criteria or other criteria to facilitate data collection, often used in exploratory and qualitative studies. According to Turner (2020: 10), there are

several methods of non-probability sampling, some of which are commonly used: purposive sampling, quota sampling, maximum variation and snowballing. Gaille (2020: 1) describes the purposive sampling method as a low-cost method of data collection that can be conducted without a large amount of time or labour. This method is currently one of the most cost-effective tools for collecting information.

3.8.3 Rationale for Selecting Probability Sampling

In this study, a probability sample was used to select a representative sample from the target population. A link to the online questionnaire and an invitation to participate were posted on the researcher's Facebook and WhatsApp accounts. According to Kühne & Zindel (2020: 1), social media has gained popularity as a recruitment strategy for surveys, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, when traditional in-person recruitment methods became less feasible. Harfield (2021: 348) notes that participating in online questionnaires via social media is cost-effective and allows researchers to engage with a larger, more diverse audience across borders.

Whilst the questionnaire was shared on social media platforms Facebook and Whatsapp, steps were taken to ensure a random sample. Participants were instructed to click on a specific link to confirm their consent. After confirming that they were from KZN and had witnessed the looting and riots of 2021, they proceeded with the questionnaire. Although the recruitment strategy involved social media, the process aimed to ensure a random selection of participants from the broader population of KZN, thus improving the generalisability of the findings.

3.9 Data collection Method

Data collection is the process of gathering and categorising relevant data that can later be used to evaluate specific situations (Nalukwa, 2022: 1). In this study, an online questionnaire was used as a tool for data collection. To facilitate this process, a web-based, electronic online questionnaire was created using Google Forms. The recruitment process for this study began with a link posted on the researcher's Facebook account. Participants were asked to click on a specific link that took them to the first page of the questionnaire.

This first page contained a consent form in which the participants had to confirm their agreement to participate in the study. They also had to confirm that they reside in KwaZulu-Natal and whether they had witnessed the riots taking place on online platforms in KwaZulu-Natal in 2021. Participants who agreed to these conditions and gave their consent completed the rest of the questionnaire. For those who did not meet these criteria or refused to consent, the survey was cancelled and they could not participate further.

3.10 Instrument for Data Collection

Data collection instruments are research tools used to collect information, such as reading, observing, asking questions and conducting interviews (Munir, 2017: 1). For this study, an online questionnaire was selected as the primary tool for data collection. As Xue *et al.* (2022: 1414) note, online questionnaires offer the advantage of being able to quickly access a diverse group of participants, which makes data collection more efficient and effective. This method is particularly well suited to reaching individuals who witnessed the looting and unrest on social media during the KZN looting in 2021, ensuring that the study captures the perspectives of a relevant and diverse group.

This approach meets the need for quick responses, especially for studies that are time-sensitive or require immediate feedback from participants. In addition, the anonymity offered by online questionnaires can increase participants' honesty and willingness to respond. Gorton *et al.* (2023:1) emphasises that anonymous online surveys often lead to more open responses, as participants feel more comfortable sharing sensitive information without fear of judgement. Therefore, the decision was made to utilise an online questionnaire for this study to ensure both efficiency of data collection and accuracy of responses, while respecting participant's privacy and encouraging genuine feedback. Kamaruzzaman (2016: 29) states that online questionnaires are one of the most commonly used data collection tools. The basic aim of an online questionnaire is to collect important data in the most accurate and valid way possible.

3.10.1 Design of the questionnaire

The online questionnaire was designed to be short and easy to understand. It consisted mainly of closed questions with a Likert scale to encourage participant insight and facilitate the use of statistical analysis tools. The questionnaire began with a first page containing a consent form asking participants to confirm their agreement to participate in the study. They also had to confirm that they were resident of KwaZulu-Natal and had been affected by the riots and looting in KwaZulu-Natal in 2021. Participants who agreed to these conditions completed the questionnaire.

A tabular Likert scale was used with the following values: 1 for strongly disagree, 2 for disagree, 3 for neutral, 4 for agree and 5 for strongly agree. The easy readability and comprehensibility of the Likert scale was the driving force behind this question method. Many participants agreed to take part in the study as the online questionnaire was designed in such a way that it could be completed quickly. In addition, coding and analysing the data from the online questionnaire was simple and allowed for efficient processing of the responses. The questionnaire used in this study consisted of two main sections (Appendix B).

3.10.2 Demographical Information

The first part of the questionnaire collected demographic information about the respondents, ethnic group, age and gender. This section was used to capture the characteristics of the participants to provide context for the results of the study. Gender distribution was analysed by identifying the percentage of men, women and those who preferred to remain anonymous. The study also analysed racial diversity by classifying participants according to their racial or ethnic origin. Finally, age distribution was analysed by classifying individuals into appropriate age groups, which allowed for the identification of patterns or trends.

3.10.3 Second Part of the Questionnaire: Main Research Questions

The second part of the questionnaire consisted of 15 questions divided into three sections, each relating to a specific research objective. The questions were asked on a

5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree) to capture participants' perceptions and experiences of the role of social media during the 2021 KZN looting.

3.10.4 Advantages of using Questionnaire

According to Patten (2011: 1) using questionnaires is a productive technique to obtain information. Questionnaire are useful for gathering data on sensitive issues. By using online questionnaires, researcher was able to reach many geographically dispersed respondents.

Table 3.2 the advantages of a quantitative design are shown in the table

Advantages	Details
Reliability	Ensures consistent measurements, typically measured by Cronbach's Alpha.
Fast	Quick data collection due to self-administered surveys.
Numerical Data	Allows for the use of Likert scales to measure respondent attitudes.
Inexpensive	Low cost, particularly for online surveys.
Efficient	Cost-effective with printed or online questionnaires.
Good statistical significance	Can accept or reject hypotheses with confidence at 95% level.
Representing a large population	Uses inferential statistics to generalize findings.
Sampling methods	Methods like convenience, quota, and purposive sampling are used for efficiency.

Source: The advantages of a quantitative design are shown in the table, Siripipatthanakul (2020: 2), based on Choy (2014) and Zikmund (2003).

Table 3.3: Disadvantages of Quantitative

Disadvantages of a quantitative survey study	Details
Lack of human perception	Limited interaction with respondents.
Lack of resources for large scale research	Limited support for large-scale studies.
No depth description or definitions	No detailed descriptions or context in the survey questions.
Costs of printing questionnaire	Printed surveys incur costs, unlike online ones.
Inflexible design	The questionnaire cannot be altered once testing begins.
Respondents may not be accurate	Respondents may provide inaccurate answers, especially to sensitive questions.
Sampling Issues	Convenience and quota sampling may not be fully representative.

Source: The disadvantages of a quantitative design are shown in the table, Siripipatthanakul (2020: 3), based on Choy (2014) and Zikmund (2003)

3.11 Pilot study

According to Simkus (2023: 1), an exploratory study on a small scale, also known as a pilot study or feasibility study, is conducted prior to large-scale quantitative research. A pilot study is conducted to assess the feasibility of a larger project in the future. In a pilot study, a researcher examines a potential future research protocol to determine if it will work as a whole. The pilot study was an online questionnaire that was conducted to assess the grammar, structure of the instrument, length and clarity of instructions and questions. For this study, 10 participants living in KZN who witnessed 2021 looting on social media were invited via Facebook to participate in the pilot study. The interested participants were then asked to complete an online questionnaire. After responses were collected from all 10 participants, the data was analysed to identify any findings or issues.

3.11.1 Pilot study findings

The pilot test showed that the questionnaire was easy to understand and answer. However, after the initial formulation of the questionnaire, minor changes were made to it. These changes included:

Correction of grammatical errors: the questionnaire underwent a thorough review to correct grammatical errors and ensure the clarity and precision of the questions.

Reducing the length of the questionnaire: The original questionnaire was felt to be too long with 38 questions. As the survey was conducted online and most participants were likely to complete the questionnaire by telephone, it was considered important to reduce the number of questions to minimise participant fatigue. Therefore, the questionnaire was shortened to 15 questions, with five questions allocated to each section. This change was made to improve the user experience and increase the likelihood of the questionnaire being completed.

Based on the findings of the pilot study, significant changes were made prior to conducting the main study to ensure that the questionnaire was both effective and user-friendly. The pilot study enabled an assessment of the clarity and comprehensibility of the questions and the accessibility of the language used by the respondents. Consequently, the researcher was able to improve the quality of the research instruments by adapting, developing and refining the final questionnaire according to the results of the pilot study.

3.12 Validity

Pretesting mimics formal data collection on a small scale to uncover practical problems. This step is crucial to recognise problems related to cross-cultural linguistic relevance and ambiguity of words and to find weaknesses in the survey's measurement variables (Hurst et al., 2015: 4). The pretest, conducted on 9 June 2022, provided valuable insights that were used to refine the questionnaire prior to the main data collection phase. According to Patton and Ferreira (2018: 1), the validity of a research study refers to how accurately the results of the study reflect the actual results of similarly situated individuals outside the study. Researchers should assess the following four forms of validity: internal validity, construct validity, external validity, and statistical significance. To ensure validity, the

online questionnaire was carefully designed based on the research objectives and relevant literature. All questions in the online questionnaire were derived directly from the objectives of the study to ensure that they aligned with the aims of the study. This careful alignment helped to improve the validity and overall reliability of the questionnaire.

3.12.1 Reliability

According to Leshan *et al.* (2020: 2), the repeatability of results is referred to as reliability: Would the results of the study be the same if it were conducted again? If so, then the information is trustworthy. This is important because if more than one person observes a behaviour or event, all observers must agree for the data to be considered credible. There are different types of reliability tests: test-retest, interrater reliability, parallel forms of reliability and internal consistency (Edwin 2019: 5). Test-retest reliability was used for this study. The online questionnaire was tested through an online call for 10 volunteers among KwaZulu-Natal residents who are active social media users and who witnessed the riots and looting. It was published on the researchers' Facebook and WhatsApp accounts. Necessary changes were then made to improve the structure and clarity of the questionnaire before final implementation. Pilot studies and test-retest reliability assessments are also crucial in determining the reliability of online questionnaires (Yava, 2023: 1).

3.13 Ethical Considerations

The participants were informed about the purpose of the study and gave their consent before completing the questionnaire. Anonymity and confidentiality were ensured so that respondents felt safe to provide honest and unbiased feedback. The study adhered to all ethical guidelines for research with human participants. According to (Bhandari 2023: 1), if you intend to collect data from participants, you should frequently describe how your study proposal addresses each item, as outlined below.

Table 3.4 Types of ethical issues

Ethical issue	Definition
Voluntary participation	Your participants are free to opt in or out of the study at any point in time.
Informed consent	Participants know the purpose, benefits, risks, and funding behind the study before they agree or decline to join
Anonymity	You don't know the identities of the participants. Personally identifiable data is not collected.
Confidentiality	You know who the participants are but you keep that information hidden from everyone else. You anonymize personally identifiable data so that it can't be linked to other data by anyone else.
Potential for harm	Physical, social, psychological and all other types of harm are kept to an absolute minimum.
Results communication	You ensure your work is free of plagiarism or research misconduct, and you accurately represent your results

Source: Bhandari, P. (2023, June 22). *Ethical Considerations in Research* |

3.14 Informed Consent

Participation in this study was restricted to people who were at least 18 years old. The online questionnaire was distributed via a link shared through the researcher's Facebook account and WhatsApp. After accessing the link, participants were redirected to the first page of the questionnaire, which included a consent form explaining the purpose of the study, procedures and assurances of confidentiality. Participants had to confirm their consent by confirming that they were at least 18 years old, lived in KZN and had witnessed the looting. The participants who met these criteria and gave their consent were able to

complete the questionnaire. If a participant did not fulfil these requirements or refused to consent, the survey was automatically terminated to ensure that only suitable people took part in the study. This ensured that informed consent was obtained and that the inclusion criteria were strictly adhered to.

3.15 Anonymity and confidentiality

Rana *et al.* (2021: 1) describe the term research ethics as a set of principles that researchers adhere to in order to respect the rights of study participants when formulating research plans and maintaining trusting relationships. In this study, ethical standards were strictly adhered to. No personal data was requested or recorded to ensure the privacy and anonymity of the participants. No one was forced to participate in this study, it was voluntary and participants were free to withdraw at any time.

Furthermore, participants were free to decide whether or not they wanted to take part in the study, without any form of coercion or pressure. The purpose of the study was explained and participants were asked to give their informed consent before proceeding with the questionnaire. The researcher observed and followed all ethical protocols established by the Durban University of Technology. The researcher obtained ethical approval for this research project (see Appendix D) from the Faculty Research Ethics Committee (FREC) of DUT's Faculty of Management Sciences.

In terms of data storage, according to Google (2021), the data collected via Google Forms is stored securely on Google's servers. Google has taken security measures to protect the data from unauthorised access and to ensure its confidentiality. Only the authorised researcher involved in the project has access to the raw data for analysis, and all necessary precautions are taken to protect the privacy and confidentiality of participants during data processing and storage.

3.16 Limitations

Miles and Scott (2019: 11) describe limitations as parameters over which the researcher has control, such as the location of the study. Limitations help researchers to focus on a particular area of interest and prevent them from being distracted by unrelated topics.

The study relied primarily on self-reported data collected via an online survey, which may introduce bias into the responses. Participants may have overemphasised the importance of social media to their own experiences, as it played a prominent role during the crisis. In addition, the study focussed on a specific geographical region, KwaZulu-Natal, and may not fully reflect the experiences of other regions or communities during similar events. Another limitation is the lack of qualitative analysis, as the study used predominantly quantitative methods, which may have missed nuanced perspectives on the impact of social media during the riots. Future studies could address these limitations by including more diverse data sources and utilising qualitative research methods.

3.17 Conclusion

To summarise, this chapter has provided a general overview of the research methods used in this study. In addition to the research design, which includes a content analysis and an online questionnaire, the quantitative technique is also discussed. The methods of data analysis and sample selection were also described. In selecting participants, preference was given to individuals who were active on social media during the relevant period and who witnessed the looting in KwaZulu-Natal Natal.

The purposeful selection of participants with different experiences and perspectives ensured a comprehensive and diverse data set. Ethical issues were prioritised throughout the research process. Informed consent from participants was as important as maintaining anonymity and confidentiality. The ethical integrity of this study was ensured by adhering to the principles of voluntary participation, benevolence and non-harm. The following chapter presents the results of this study and analyses its implications in detail.

CHAPTER 4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter outlined the methodology used in this study, including the use of an online questionnaire for data collection. In this chapter, the results derived from the quantitative research approach are presented and analysed. The primary objective is to answer the research questions and objectives by applying descriptive and inferential statistical methods. The data was analysed using SPSS 28.0 and the results were presented in tables, charts and graphs to enhance clarity and understanding.

The chapter begins with an overview of the demographic profile of the respondents, which provides an important context for the analysis. Key findings reveal statistically significant gender differences in perceptions of the role of social media during the unrest ($p < 0.05$), while race-based differences were not significant ($p > 0.05$). Interestingly, age-related perceptions were consistent, indicating common experiences with social platforms across all age groups. These findings are directly related to the research objectives, which are to investigate the role of social media as a means of communication during civil unrest, explore how social media is used to mitigate risk in situations of civil unrest, and assess the impact of social media during the 2021 looting in KZN.

4.2 Quantitative data analysis

An online questionnaire developed using Google Forms was used to collect data in this study. The questionnaire was specifically designed to investigate the role of social media during the 2021 looting and unrest in KZN. The data collected was analysed and categorised using statistical methods, including pie charts, tables and graphs to facilitate comparisons and interpretations. The response rate for this study was 78%. It was calculated by dividing the number of completed questionnaires (299) by the total number of people invited to participate (383). The link to the questionnaire was distributed via my personal Facebook account and WhatsApp and only those who met the participation

criteria residing in KwaZulu-Natal and witnessing the 2021 looting on social media were allowed to complete the survey. Although this response rate is considered high for online surveys, the reliance on personal networks for distribution may have biased the sample by limiting access to respondents outside of my immediate network. Future studies should consider diversifying the distribution channels to improve the generalisability of the results.

4.3 Reliability Statistics

In quantitative research, reliability is assessed using various statistical methods to ensure the consistency of measurements (Sürücü and Maşlakçı, 2020: 2694). In this study, the test-retest method was used, which assesses the stability of an instrument over time by administering the same test at different intervals (Rosli *et al.*, 2021: 109). The test-retest approach was chosen to determine whether the questionnaire provides consistent results when administered repeatedly.

Although Cronbach’s alpha is commonly used to assess internal consistency, it was not the primary measure in this study. Instead, the focus was on ensuring reliability through the test-retest method, which is consistent with the methodological approach outlined in chapter three. However, in cases where internal consistency needed to be assessed, Cronbach’s alpha was used as an additional measure (Ansari, 2023: 772).

Table 4.1 The Cronbach's alpha ratings for each of the questionnaire's items are shown in the table below:

Items	Mean	Item rest	Alpha if deleted
Social media has become an integral part of human communication and the basic goal is to promote communication	4.027	0.366	0.848
Social media platforms can disseminate accurate information and can influence which issues the public deems important, thereby influencing public perceptions.	3.559	0.513	0.842
Social media is no longer just setting the agenda – it is also becoming a platform for the public to actively shape and redefine the issues that concern them.	3.819	0.577	0.837

Social media offers creative and effective ways for people to coordinate their efforts and express their political and social	3.963	0.415	0.846
During the civil unrest social media's power to mobilise people into action is undeniable	4.037	0.510	0.841
Social media served as a tactical tool in disseminating information before, during and after civil unrest in KZN.	3.997	0.526	0.840
Social media was a crucial source of information for me during the KwaZulu-Natal looting.	3.906	0.354	0.849
Real-time information sharing allowed for the coordination of looting efforts in KZN.	3.953	0.608	0.836
During the July civil unrest social media helped the people to connect and broadcast the KZN 2021 July civil unrest to the world.	3.973	0.552	0.839
The hashtags #ShutdownSA, #ShutdownGauteng and #ShutdownKZN were frequently used during the 2021	4.013	0.504	0.842
Social media played a crucial role in alerting individuals and communities about potential risks and dangers during KZN 2021 looting.	3.993	0.474	0.843
During the civil unrest I found updates on road closure, safety warnings & and alternative routes shared on social media during the KZN looting to be timely and helpful.	3.793	0.459	0.845
Government authorities effectively utilised social media platforms to share official updates and safety information during KZN 2021 looting.	4.017	0.456	0.844
Crisis and disaster management organisations use social media primarily to inform the public to minimise risk and to gather information from citizens	3.957	0.535	0.839
I saw initiatives such as #LootingMustFall, #SaveSouthAfrica and #Cleanups that were launched to deal with the aftermath of the riots and looting in KwaZulu-Natal to restore normalcy.	4.127	0.473	0.843
Overall	3.942	-	0.851
ITEMS DROPPED	Improvement	ItemsMa	OverallAlpha
#N/A	#N/A	tiN/A	#N/A
ITEMS SCALE REVERSED	-	-	-
#N/A	#N/A	#N/A	#N/A

Table 4.1 shows that the Cronbach's alpha is 0.851 overall, which indicates a high reliability of the internal consistency of the scale. A value above 0.8 is generally regarded as good. The values for "alpha if deleted" for all items are close to the overall alpha and range from 0.836 to 0.849. This indicates that all items make a positive contribution to the reliability of the scale and that the deletion of a single item would not significantly improve

the overall reliability. The overall mean score for all items is 3.942 on a 5-point scale, indicating that all questions were rated as acceptable. In addition, the sections for deleted items and reverse scaled items are marked with #N/A, indicating that no items were deleted and that no reverse scaling was applied to negatively worded items.

4.4 Factor analysis

In this study, a factor analysis was conducted to determine the underlying structure of the questionnaire data. As shown in Table 4.2, four different factors were extracted, each representing a key aspect of social media use during the unrest. This result highlights the complexity of the relationships between the variables in the dataset and shows that the underlying structure is more complicated than originally thought. The identification of four factors provides a more nuanced and accurate representation of the latent structure of the data, increasing the clarity of the dataset and providing deeper insights for further analysis and interpretation. These findings emphasise the importance of factor analysis in uncovering hidden patterns and relationships and provide a clearer understanding of the data and its implications for the study. Using Varimax rotation, four key factors were extracted, each corresponding to an aspect of social media use during the unrest. These factors are in line with the aims of the study and provide a deeper understanding of the data.

Table 4.2 Factor Analysis (Varimax Rotation)

Factor Analysis { varimax rotation }					
	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Communality
Social media has become an integral part of human communication and the basic goal is to promote communication.	0.23	0.20	0.08	-0.02	0.10
Social media platforms can disseminate accurate information and can influence which issues the public deems important, thereby influencing public perceptions.	0.02	0.39	-0.07	-0.10	0.17

Social media is no longer just setting the agenda it is also becoming a platform for the public to actively shape and redefine the issues that concern them.	0.03	0.29	0.07	0.40	<i>0.25</i>
Social media offers creative and effective ways for people to coordinate their efforts and express their political and social concerns.	0.09	-0.20	-0.09	0.59	<i>0.40</i>
During the civil unrest social media's power to mobilise people into action is undeniable	0.03	-0.01	0.05	0.52	<i>0.28</i>
Social media served as a tactical tool in disseminating information before, during and after civil unrest in KZN.	0.46	0.12	0.21	-0.06	<i>0.27</i>
Social media was a crucial source of information for me during the KwaZulu-Natal looting.	0.39	0.06	0.00	0.01	<i>0.15</i>
Real-time information sharing allowed for the coordination of looting efforts in KZN.	0.60	-0.04	0.06	0.03	<i>0.36</i>
During the July civil unrest social media helped the people to connect and broadcast the KZN 2021 July civil unrest to the world.	0.63	0.12	0.11	0.11	<i>0.44</i>
The hashtags #ShutdownSA, #ShutdownGauteng and #ShutdownKZN were frequently used during the 2021 unrest.	0.60	0.02	-0.04	0.11	<i>0.37</i>
Social media played a crucial role in alerting individuals and communities about potential risks and dangers during KZN 2021 looting.	0.14	0.50	0.28	0.01	<i>0.35</i>
During the civil unrest I found updates on road closure, safety warnings & and alternative routes shared on social media during the KZN looting to be timely and helpful.	0.11	0.69	0.10	0.09	<i>0.50</i>

Government authorities effectively utilized social media platforms to share official updates and safety information during KZN 2021 looting.	0.07	-0.04	0.61	0.00	0.38
Crisis and disaster management organizations use social media primarily to inform the public to minimise risk and to gather information from citizens.	0.02	0.29	0.43	0.04	0.27
I saw initiatives such as #LootingMustFall, #SaveSouthAfrica and #Cleanups that were launched to deal with the aftermath of the riots and looting in KwaZulu-Natal to restore normalcy.	0.08	0.04	0.47	0.01	0.23
<i>Total Communalities</i>					4.53
<i>Cronbach's α</i>	0.66	0.52	0.50	0.46	

Factor 1: exhibited high loadings on items related to *connectivity and information sharing*, such as "helped people to connect and broadcast to the world" (0.63), "real-time information sharing allowed for coordination" (0.60), and "hashtags like #ShutdownSA and others were frequently used" (0.60). This factor represents to examine the role of social media as a communication tool during civil unrest".

Factor 2: demonstrated high loadings on items associated with safety and risk communication, including "updated on road closure safety warnings and alternative routes" (0.69) and "alerted individuals and communities about potential risks and dangers" (0.50). This factor represents to explore how social media is utilised to mitigate risks in civil unrest situations.

Factor 3: had high loadings on items related to, official communication and crisis management, such as "government authorities effectively shared official updates and safety information" (0.61) and "crisis and disaster management informed the public and gathered information from citizens" (0.43). This factor represents the role of social media in official crisis communication and management.

Factor 4: showed high loadings on items pertaining to public engagement and mobilization, including "offers creative and effective ways for people to coordinate" (0.59) and "the ability to mobilise people into action is undeniable" (0.52). This factor represents to assess the impact of social media during the 2021 looting in KwaZulu-Natal.

Items with higher communalities, such as "updated on road closure safety warnings and alternative routes" (0.50), are better explained by the factor structure compared to items with lower communalities, such as "has become an integral part of human communication" (0.10). These factors highlight the multifaceted role of social media during the unrest and address the research objectives by illustrating how social media platforms were used for communication, coordination, and mobilisation.

4.5 Descriptive statistics

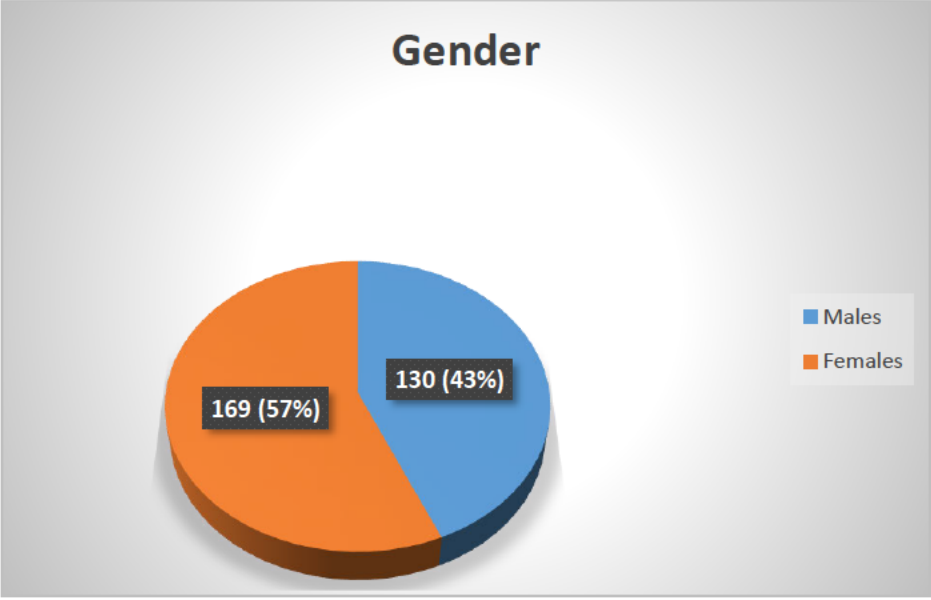
For this study, pie charts and bar graphs were used to visualise the data clearly. Pie charts were used to visualise proportions and percentages to provide an intuitive understanding of categorical data. Bar graphs were used to highlight responses on a Likert scale, such as the level of agreement or disagreement, to illustrate trends and patterns. Tables were also used to compare values between categories to provide detailed numerical insights into the dataset. These visual and tabular aids contributed significantly to the better interpretation and presentation of the results of the study.

4.6 Demographic Data: Section A

The demographic section of the study encompasses data from 299 participants, focusing on gender, race, and age. Gender distribution is analysed by calculating the proportions of male and female participants, providing insights into the gender representation within the sample.

4.6.1 The Gender distribution of respondents

Figure 4.1: the gender distribution of the respondents



As shown in Figure 4.1, the majority of participants were female (57%, 169 respondents) and male (43%, 130 respondents), indicating that more women than men participated in the study. This distribution is significant as research by Pradhan and Singh (2023) suggests that women are more likely to turn to social media for real-time information in times of crisis. The higher proportion of female respondents may have influenced the results of the study, particularly with regard to the perception of social media as an important source of information.

4.6.2 Racial composition

Figure 4.2 illustrates the racial composition of the respondents

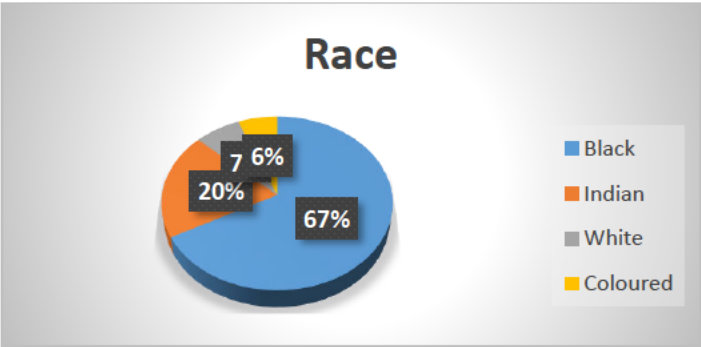


Figure 4.2 above shows a visual representation of the pie chart depicting the racial distribution of participants in the study. It shows that the majority of respondents, 67%,

identify as Black, followed by 20% who identify as Indian. A smaller proportion, 7%, described themselves as white and the remaining 6% as coloured. However, the under-representation of white and coloured respondents limits the generalisability of these results to these groups.

4.6.3 Age of the respondents

Figure 4.3: The age distribution of respondents

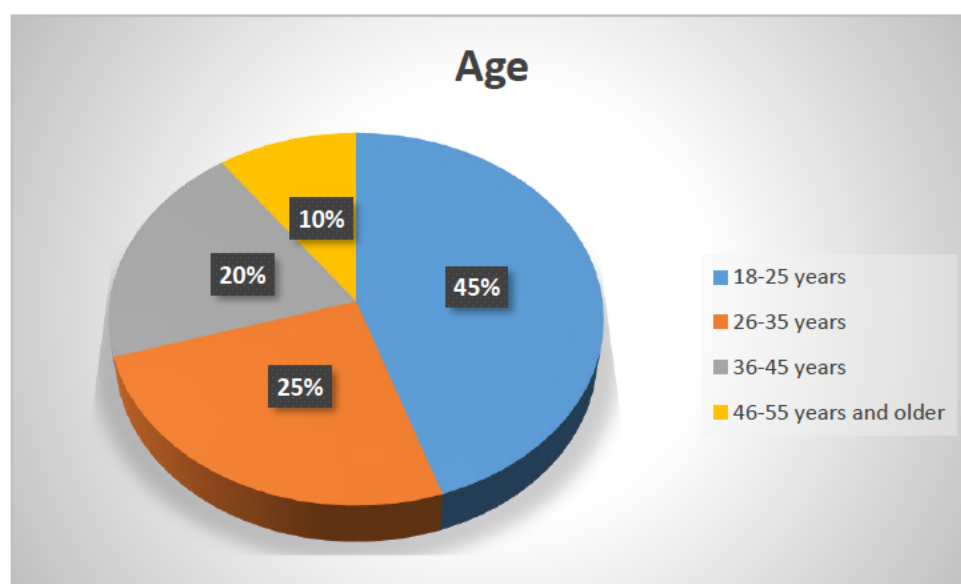


Figure 4.3 shows a pie chart illustrating the age distribution of the participants in the study. The largest group of respondents, 45%, were aged between 18 and 25. This was followed by 25% of participants aged 26-35 years, 20% in the 36-45 years category and the smallest group, accounting for 10%, consisted of people aged 46-55 years and older. This data suggests that the majority of participants in this study were in the 18-25 age group.

4.6.4 Smartphone Ownership among Participants

In response to the question "Do you have a smartphone?" 288 respondents stated that 100% of them own a smartphone. This result shows that smartphone ownership is widespread among the participants. This high rate of smartphone ownership suggests that the population of KwaZulu-Natal is well equipped with modern technology, which can influence their behaviour, access to information and use of digital platforms.

4.7 Data Analysis

This section deals with the analysis and findings in relation to the first objective: to examine the role of social media as a communication tool during civil unrest. It examines the ways in which social media was used by individuals, organisations and government agencies during civil unrest and how it contributed to communication strategies and responses.

4.7.1 Social media an integral part of human communication

Figure 4.4 illustrates how social media has become an integral part of human communication and the basic goal is to promote communication.

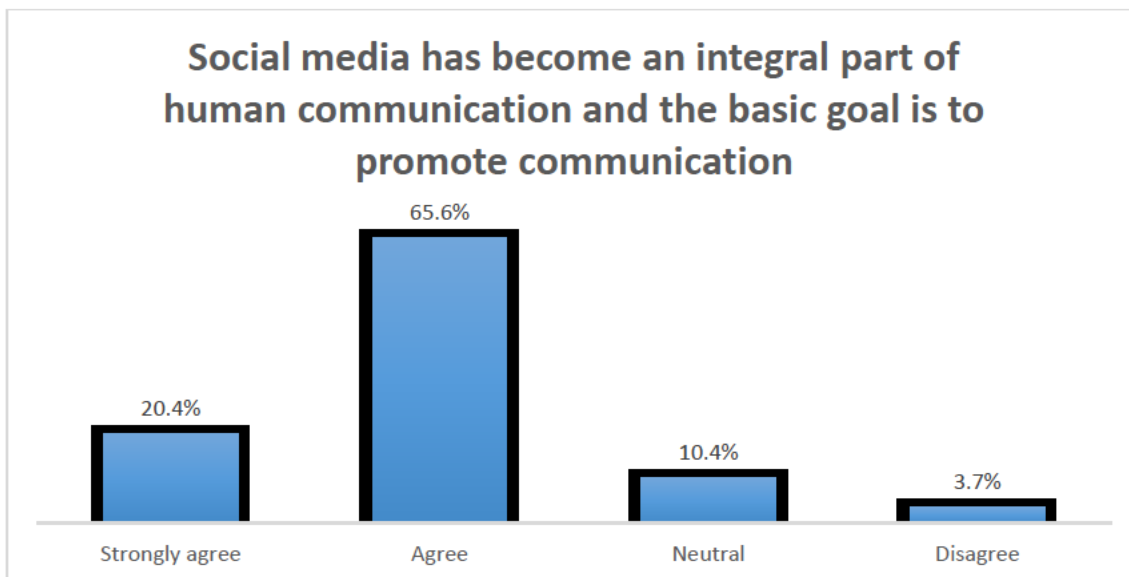


Figure 4.4 shows that 65.6% of respondents agreed with the statement, indicating a widespread consensus that social media has become an integral part of human communication. Furthermore, 20.4% of respondents fully agreed with the statement, reflecting a high level of conviction about the importance of social media as a means of communication. In contrast, 10.4% of respondents were neutral. 3.7% of respondents disagreed with the statement, reflecting a minority who question the effectiveness or relevance of social media in communication. These results show that the majority of respondents agree with the statement that social media is widely recognised as an

integral part of human communication. The findings of this study, supported by the findings of Pradhan and Singh (2023: 1622), emphasise that social media has become an integral part of human communication and meets its fundamental objective of promoting interaction and connection. The democratised and interactive nature of social media encourages the formation of communities of shared interests and enables individuals to actively and collectively engage.

4.7.2 Social media platforms can disseminate accurate information

Figure: 4.5 illustrates how Social media platforms can disseminate accurate information and influence which issues the public deems important, thereby shaping public perception.

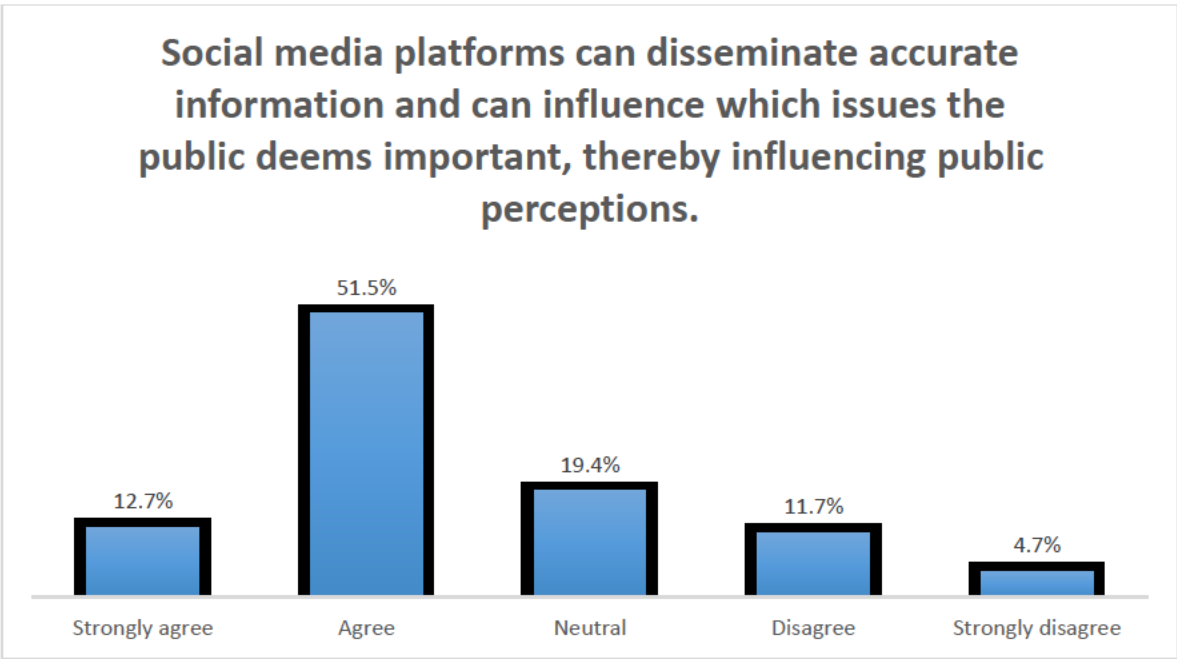


Figure 4.5 shows that the majority of respondents (51.5%) agreed with the statement, followed by 12.7% who strongly agreed, reflecting a strong belief in the significant influence of social media platforms in disseminating accurate information and shaping public priorities. Another 19.4% of respondents remained neutral, indicating ambivalence or uncertainty about the extent of social media's influence. On the other hand, 11.7% of respondents disagreed and 14% strongly disagreed, indicating a notable minority who

are sceptical about social media's ability to disseminate accurate information or influence public opinion.

These results illustrate a spectrum of opinion, with a clear majority recognising the influential role of social platforms in disseminating accurate information and influencing issues that the public deems important. Paillamilla and Pavlic (2023: 1) emphasise that social media platforms serve as important channels for disseminating information in real time, raising public awareness and shaping social narratives. In their analysis of the Chilean social outbreak of 2019, social media was crucial for communicating experiences of human rights violations. Similarly, in the context of the 2021 unrest in KwaZulu-Natal, social media played a crucial role in disseminating accurate information and framing issues that mattered to the public.

4.7.3 Social media is no longer setting the agenda

Figure: 4.6 Social media is no longer setting the agenda to becoming an active platform where the public can shape and redefine issues of concern.

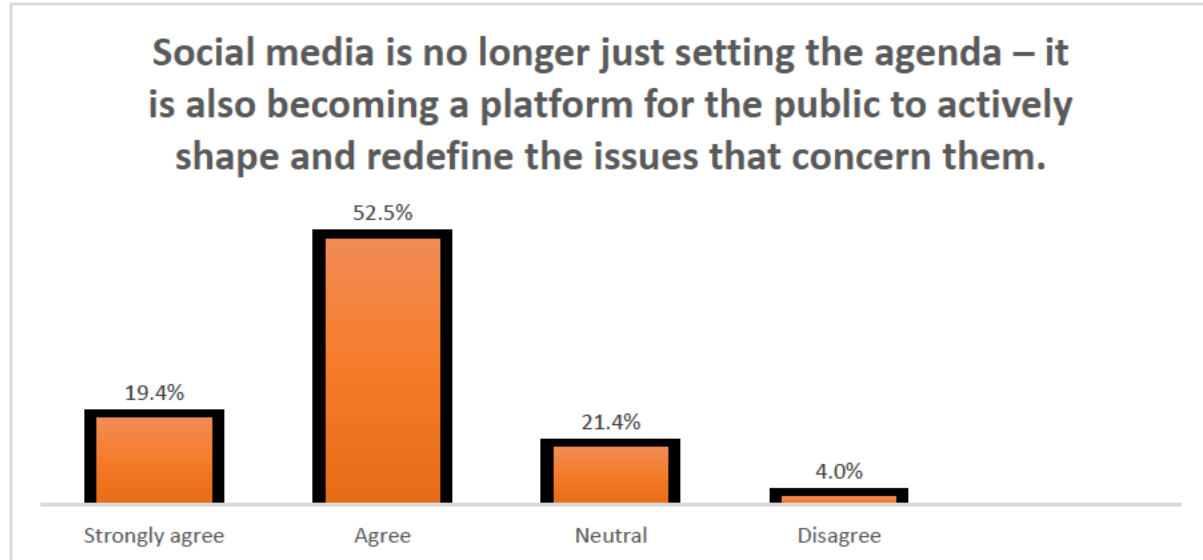


Figure 4.6 illustrates that 52.2% of respondents agreed with the statement, followed by 21.4% who remained neutral, indicating some uncertainty or ambivalence about the evolving role of social media. In addition, 19.4% of respondents strongly agreed,

indicating that a significant minority are convinced of the transformative influence of social media. A smaller proportion, 4.0%, disagreed and an even smaller proportion (2.7%) strongly disagreed, suggesting that scepticism about the role of social media is relatively low.

Overall, these results are consistent with the findings of Ausat (2023: 35), who emphasises that social media plays an important role in shaping public opinion and economic decisions by facilitating the exchange of information and encouraging debate. This suggests that the majority of respondents recognise and agree that social media plays a significant and transformative role in shaping public opinion and redefining issues.

4.7.4 Social media offers creative and effective ways for people to coordinate their efforts

Figure 4.7 illustrates the statement social media offers creative and effective ways for people to coordinate their efforts and express their political and social concerns.

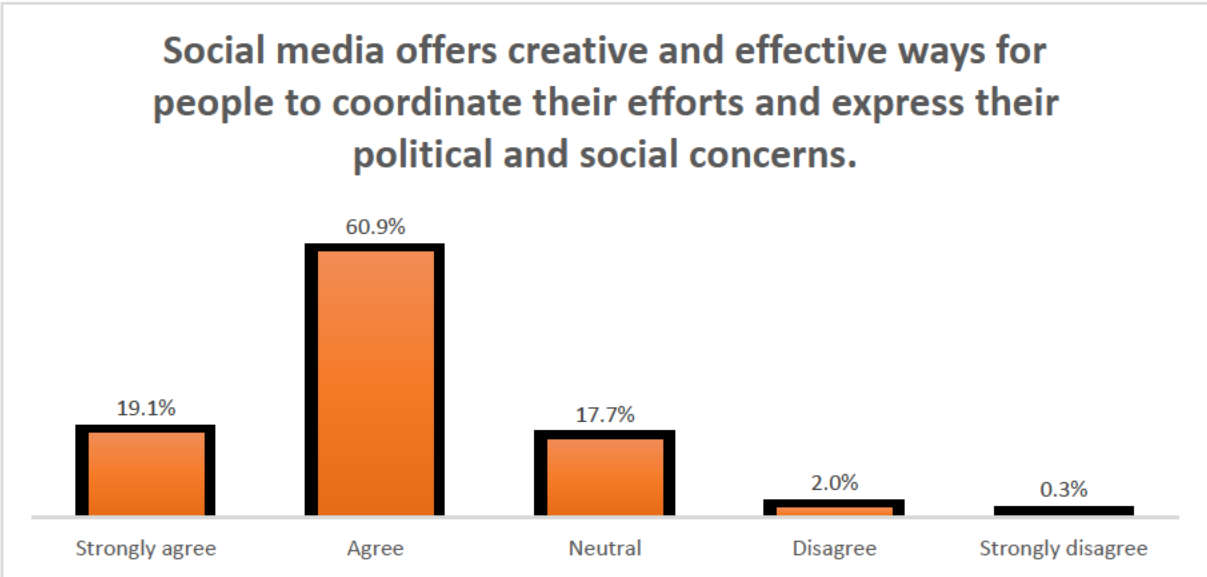


Figure 4.6 shows that the majority of respondents (60.9%) agreed, and 19.1% strongly agreed, that social media provides creative and effective ways for individuals to coordinate their efforts and express political and social concerns. 17.7% of respondents remained neutral, indicating a degree of uncertainty. A small minority (2.0%) disagreed and an even smaller proportion (0.3%) strongly disagreed. These findings are consistent

with Fuadi's (2020: 51) assertion that social media groups and forums facilitate connections and allow people to share information and voice political and social concerns.

4.7.5 Social media's power to mobilise people into action

Figure 4.8 illustrates the statement, during civil unrest social media's power to mobilise people into action is undeniable.

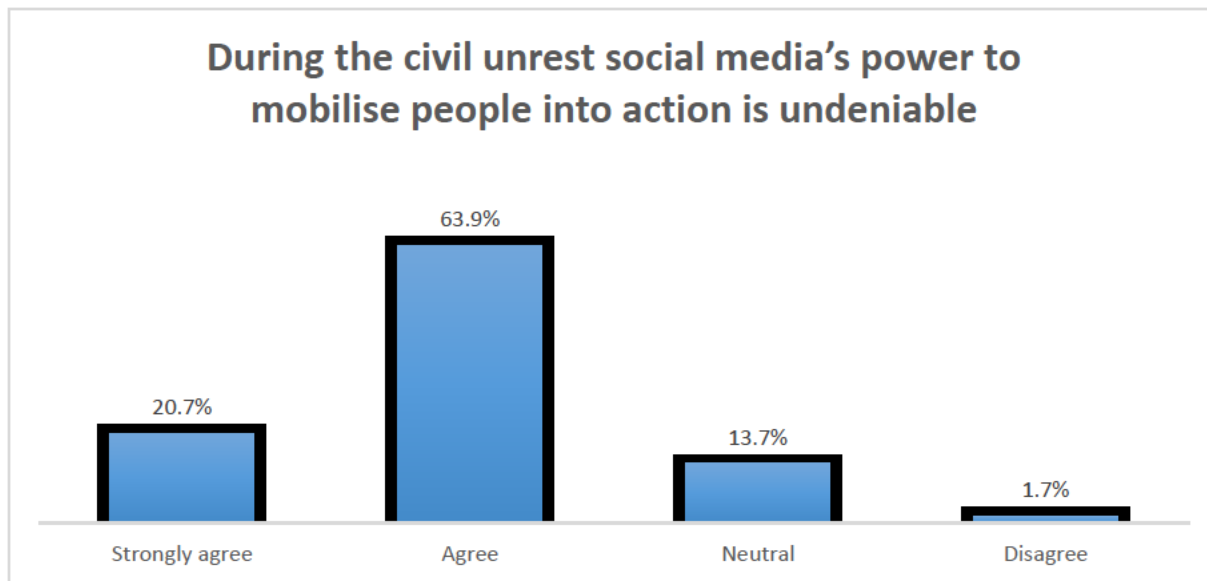


Figure 4.8 illustrates the considerable influence of social media in facilitating collective mobilisation, particularly during civil unrest. The majority of respondents (63.9%) agreed with the statement, indicating that social media is widely recognised as an effective tool for mobilising individuals. Furthermore, 20.7% strongly agreed with this statement, emphasising the perceived power of social media in this context. A smaller proportion (13.7%) were neutral, indicating some uncertainty or ambivalence about the extent of social media's impact on mobilisation.

Only 1.7% of respondents disagreed, reflecting a minimal level of scepticism about the role of social media in fostering collective action. These findings are consistent with the observations of Karduni and Sauda (2020: 1), who claim that social media platforms enable the rapid dissemination of information, facilitating the coordination and mobilisation of individuals. The data supports the view that social media plays a central role in mobilising individuals, especially in contexts of civil unrest.

4.8 The impact of social media during 2021 looting

This section explores the second objective of the study which is to assess the impact of social media during the 2021 looting in KZN. The analysis delves into the strategies and methods employed by individuals and authorities to effectively leverage social media platforms during these scenarios.

4.8.1 Social media served as a tactical tool in disseminating information

Figure 4.9 illustrates how the social media served as a tactical tool in disseminating information before, during and after civil unrest in KZN.

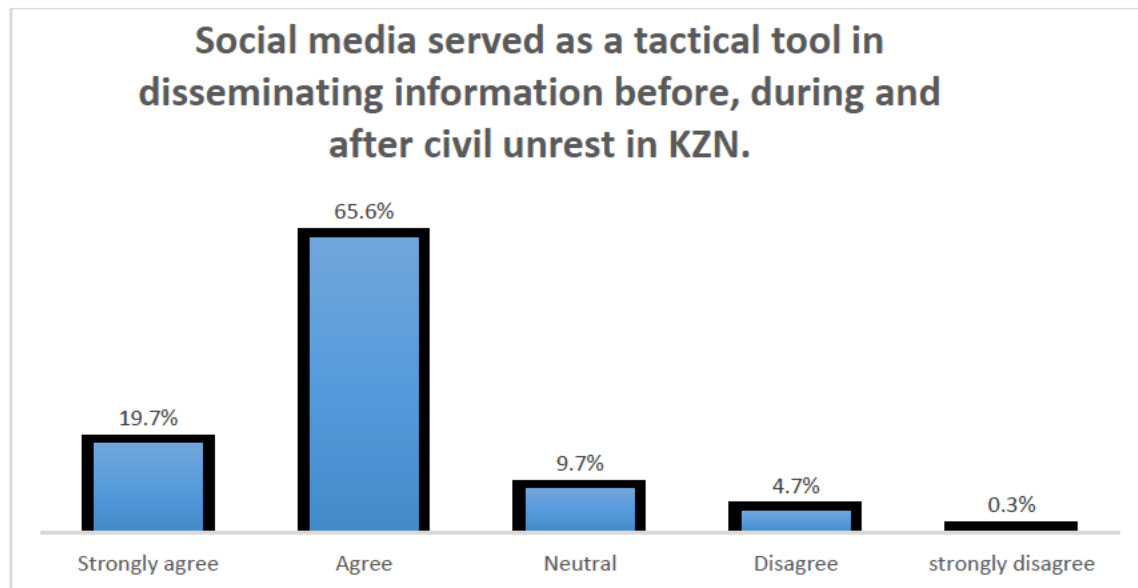
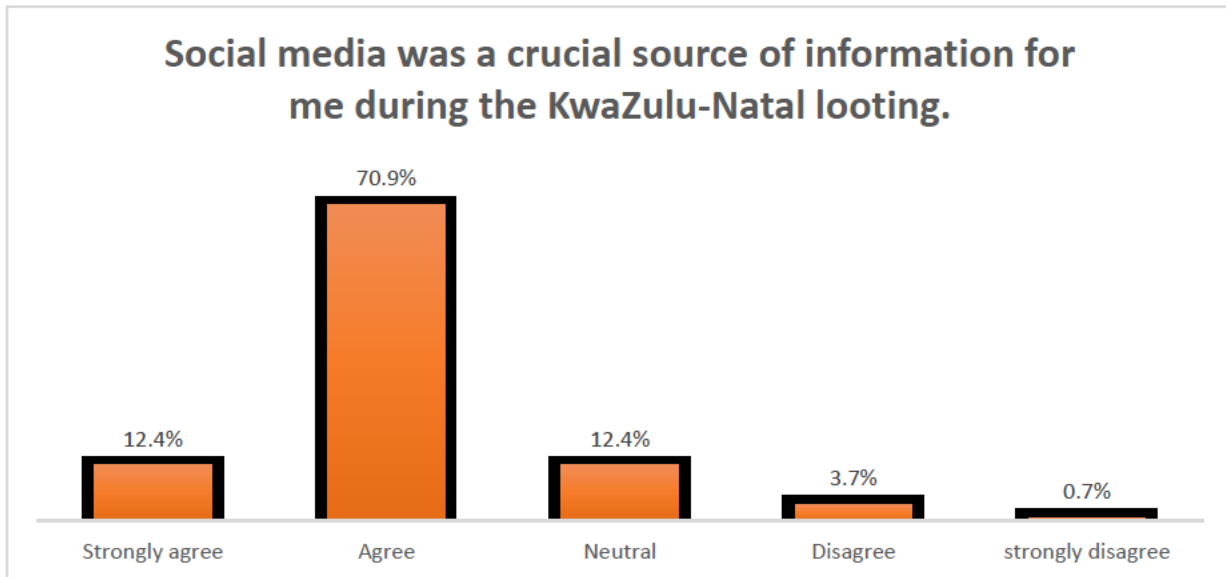


Figure 4.9 shows that 65.6% of respondents agreed with the statement, while 19.7% strongly agreed. In addition, 9.7% of respondents remained neutral, 4.7% disagreed and 0.3% strongly disagreed. These results indicate that a significant majority of respondents recognise the crucial role that social media played in informing and coordinating actions before, during and after the 2021 KZN unrest. This finding is consistent with the work of Mdletshe *et al.* (2023: 1) who emphasise the importance of social media platforms, particularly Facebook, as effective tools for facilitating communication and information sharing before, during and after critical events such as civil unrest. Their study emphasises how social media platforms enable the rapid dissemination of information

and coordination of actions. This aligns with the 65.6% of respondents who agreed and 19.7% who strongly agreed that social media plays an important role in disseminating information before, during and after civil unrest.

4.8.2 Social media was a crucial source of information

Figure 4.10 illustrates the data set of the statement social media was a crucial source of information for me during the KwaZulu-Natal looting.



According to the results of Figure 4.10, the majority of respondents, majority 70.9%, agreed with this statement, while 12.7% of respondents strongly agreed. Followed by 12.4% of respondents who remained neutral, 3.7% disagreed and 0.7 strongly disagreed. These results indicate a strong consensus among respondents. These results show that a significant majority of respondents believe that social media was an important source of information during the looting in KwaZulu-Natal. The findings of the above dataset are strongly supported by the study by Petla (2023: 23), which examines how social media acted as both a crucial source of information and a catalyst for unrest during the July 2021 unrest in Gauteng and KZN. The data shows that the majority of respondents 70.9% agreed and 12.7% strongly agreed believed that social media played an important role in providing information during the looting in KZN.

4.8.3 Real-time information and coordination

Figure 4.11 the graph illustrates the results of the statement: "Real-time information allowed for the coordination of looting efforts in KZN".

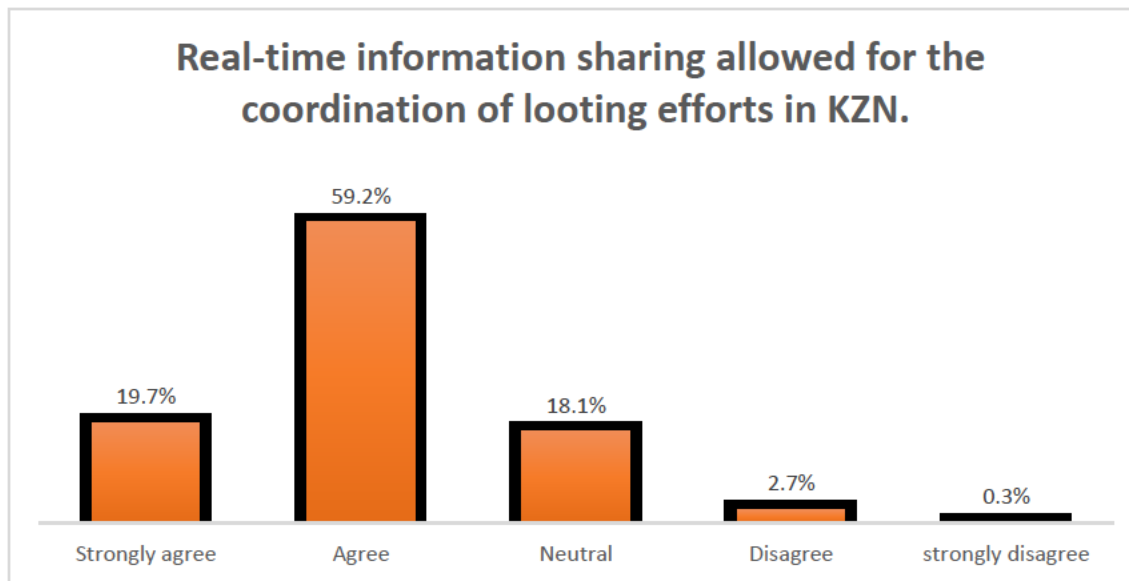


Figure 4.11 above shows that the majority, 59.2%, of respondents agreed with the statement; in addition, 19.7% of respondents strongly agreed with the statement. On the other hand, 18.1% of respondents expressed a neutral attitude, in contrast, 2.7% of respondents disagreed with the statement and 0.3% of respondents strongly disagreed. Overall, these results show that a significant majority of respondents agreed that real-time information was helpful in coordinating looting in KZN. The literature by Aiseng & Gamede (2023: 28) concurs with the data set as they both emphasise the critical role of real-time information shared on social media platforms during the unrest in KZN. They highlight how platforms such as Twitter and Facebook were actively used to disseminate real-time information about the locations of the riots and calls to action. These platforms allowed for instant and easily accessible communication that enabled people to effectively coordinate their actions.

4.8.4 Connect and broadcast the KZN 2021 July civil unrest to the world

Figure 4.12 illustrates the statement during the July civil unrest, specifically in helping people connect and broadcast the KZN 2021 July civil unrest to the world.

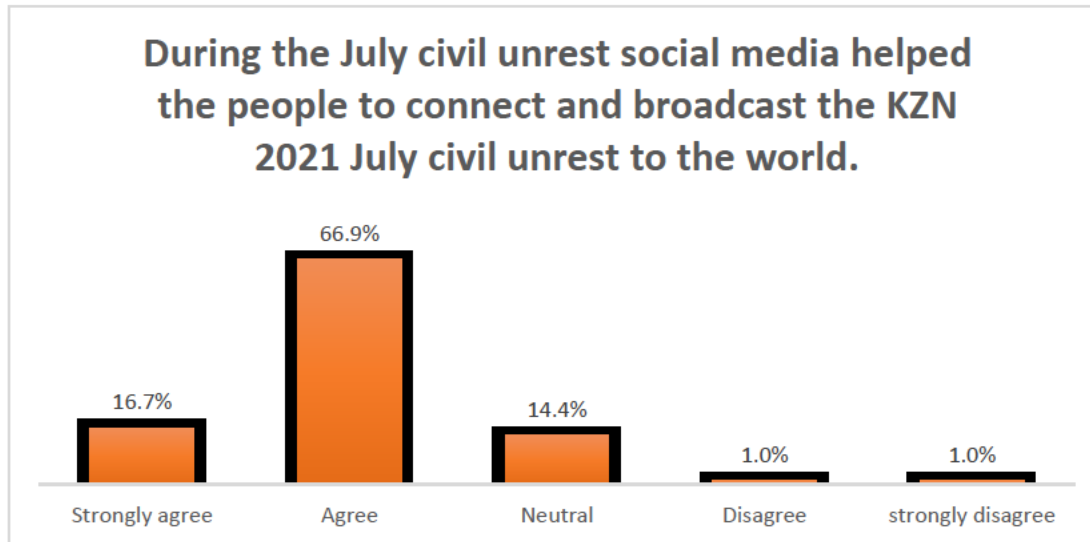
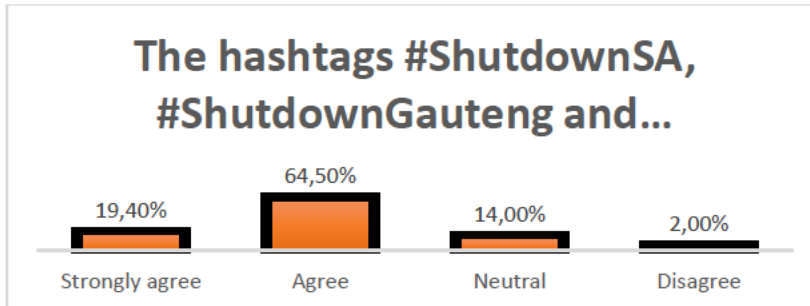


Figure 4.12 shows that 66.9% of respondents agreed with the statement, while 16.7% strongly agreed. In contrast, 14.4% remained neutral and only 1.0% disagreed or strongly disagreed. These results show that a large majority of respondents believe that social media played a crucial role in connecting people during the unrest in KZN and broadcasting the events to the world. This observation is in line with the findings of Aiseng and Gamede (2023) who emphasise that platforms such as Twitter and Facebook are actively used during times of unrest. These platforms enabled instant and easily accessible communication, allowing people to share updates and spread the unrest globally.

4.8.5 Hashtags #ShutdownSA and #ShutdownKZN

Figure 4.13 illustrates the data set of the statement the hashtags #ShutdownSA, #ShutdownGauteng, and #ShutdownKZN during the 2021 unrest.



The data from Figure 4.13 shows that 64.5% of respondents agreed and 19.4% strongly agreed that these hashtags were used frequently during the unrest. In contrast, 14.0% of respondents remained neutral and 2.0% disagreed with the statement. The percentage of respondents who agreed or strongly agreed with the statement shows that hashtags such as #ShutdownSA, #ShutdownGauteng and #ShutdownKZN were indeed used frequently during the 2021 unrest. These findings are consistent with the study by Petla (2023: 23), which also highlights that hashtags such as #ShutdownSA and #ShutdownKZN were frequently used during the 2021 looting in KZN.

4.9 Social media is utilised to mitigate risks in civil unrest

This section explores the third objective of the study which is to explore how social media is utilised to mitigate risks in civil unrest situations. The analysis delves into the strategies and methods employed by individuals and authorities to effectively leverage social media platforms during these scenarios.

4.9.1 Social media used to alerting individuals and communities

Figure 4.14 illustrates the results of the statement: Social media played a crucial role in alerting individuals and communities about potential risks and dangers during KZN 2021 looting.

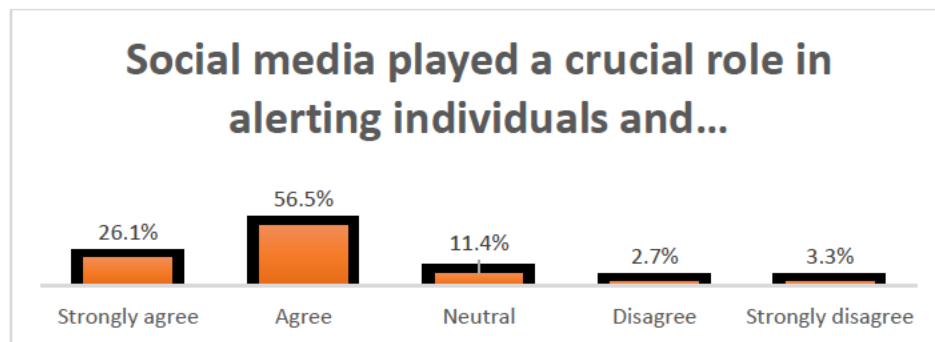


Figure 4.14 shows that a significant proportion of respondents, 56.5%, agreed and 26.1% strongly agreed that social media played an important role in warning individuals and communities of potential risks and dangers during the 2021 unrest in KZN. A smaller percentage of respondents were neutral (11.4%), while 2.7% disagreed and 3.3% strongly disagreed. These results indicate that the majority of respondents recognise the crucial role of social media in disseminating timely and important information in times of crisis.

This analysis aligns with Ndawana's (2023: 53) assertion that social media platforms play a central role in mobilising and coordinating protests as well as disseminating important information about risks and dangers during civil unrest. The data and literature confirm that social media not only facilitated the coordination of actions, but also served as an important mechanism for alerting individuals and communities of potential threats, thus playing a dual role in shaping the events of the 2021 KZN looting.

4.9.2 Updates on road closure and safety warnings

Figure 4.15 illustrate the statement during the civil unrest I found updates on road closure, safety warnings & alternative routes shared on social media during the KZN looting to be timely and helpful.

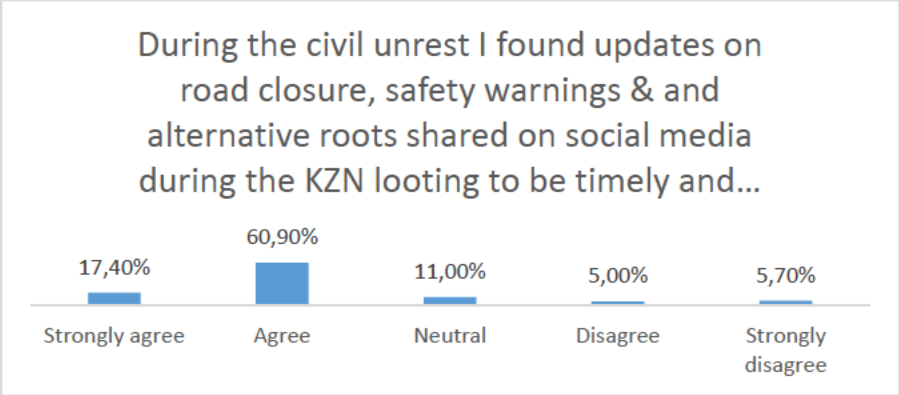
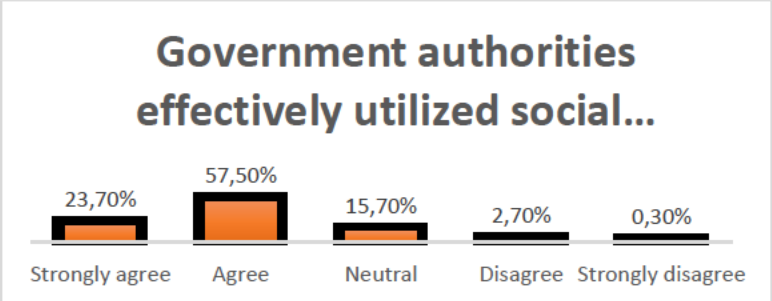


Figure 4.15 shows that a clear majority of respondents, 60.9%, agreed and 17.4% strongly agreed that social media updates during the KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) looting in 2021 were timely and helpful for road closures, safety alerts and identifying alternative routes. Meanwhile, 11.0% of respondents remained neutral, reflecting some level of uncertainty, while 5.7% strongly disagreed and 5.0% disagreed. This analysis aligns with Grill's (2020: 1) assertion that social media platforms facilitate the detection of unrest and the dissemination of important updates. These platforms enable real-time alerts, especially on road closures and safety warnings, and play a crucial role in supporting public safety and informed decision-making during crises. The data results in Figure 4.13 emphasise that the majority of respondents perceived social media as an indispensable tool for accessing timely and actionable information. This emphasises the effectiveness of these platforms in addressing security concerns and managing unrest during the looting in KZN.

4.9.3 Sharing of official updates and safety information

Figure 4.16 illustrate the statement government authorities effectively utilized social media platforms to share official updates and safety information during KZN 2021 looting



The results from Figure 4.16 show that a significant majority of respondents, 57.5%, strongly agreed and 23.7% agreed that the government's use of social media to disseminate official safety updates during a crisis has a positive impact on trust in the government. 15.7% of respondents remained neutral, 2.7% disagreed and 0.3% strongly disagreed. These results suggest that timely and transparent communication via social media plays a crucial role in fostering public trust in times of crisis. This analysis is consistent with Canero *et al.* (2023: 11), who emphasise the positive relationship between government communication on social media and public trust in times of crisis. The literature emphasises that the prompt dissemination of official updates via social media not only increases public awareness, but also strengthens confidence in the government's ability to effectively manage and respond to crises.

4.9.4 Social media primarily to inform the public to minimise risk

Figure 4.17 illustrates responses to the statement: "Crisis and disaster management organizations use social media primarily to inform the public to minimize risk and to gather information from citizens."

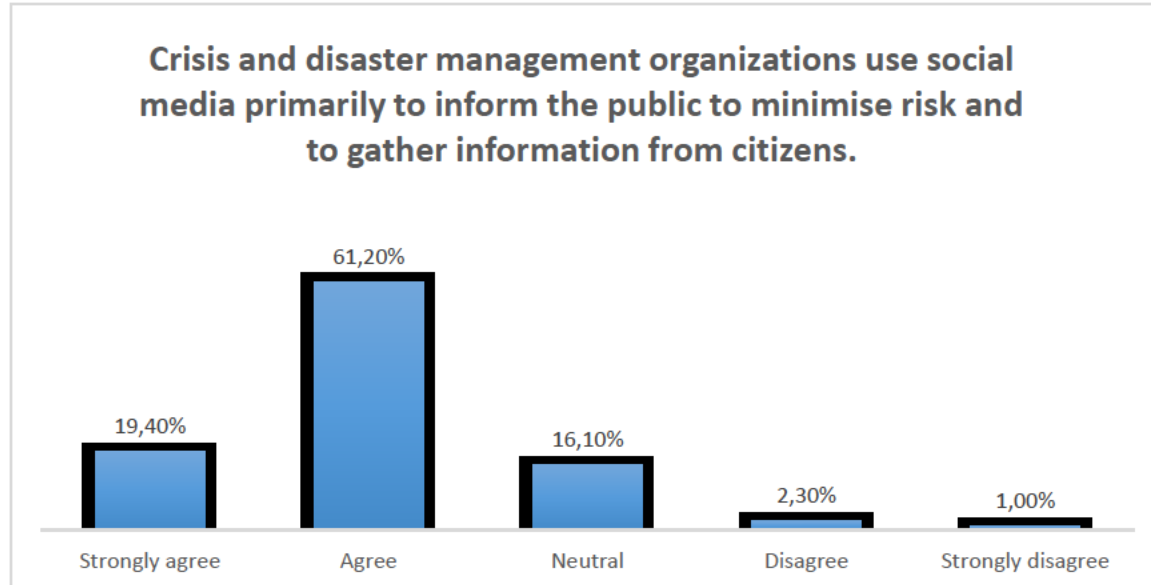


Figure 4.17 shows that a significant majority of respondents, 61.2%, agreed and 19.4% strongly agreed that social media plays a crucial role in facilitating real-time monitoring and situational awareness during crises. 16.1% of respondents remained neutral, 2.3%

disagreed and 1.0% strongly disagreed. These results underline the recognised importance of social media in crisis management. This analysis concurs with Cvetković *et al.* (2023:121), who highlight the crucial role of social media platforms as tools for governments and organisations to monitor public sentiment and collect real-time data on the ground. This capability enables more effective response strategies, reduces risk and ensures better coordination during crises. Similarly, Bukar *et al.* (2020:185482) emphasise that social media has been successfully used during natural disasters and times of social unrest to inform the public, promote situational awareness and mitigate risk.

4.9.5 Social media initiatives after the unrest

Figure 4.19 illustrates responses to the statement: I saw initiatives such as #LootingMustFall, #SaveSouthAfrica, and #Cleanups that were launched to deal with the aftermath of the riots and looting in KwaZulu-Natal to restore normalcy.

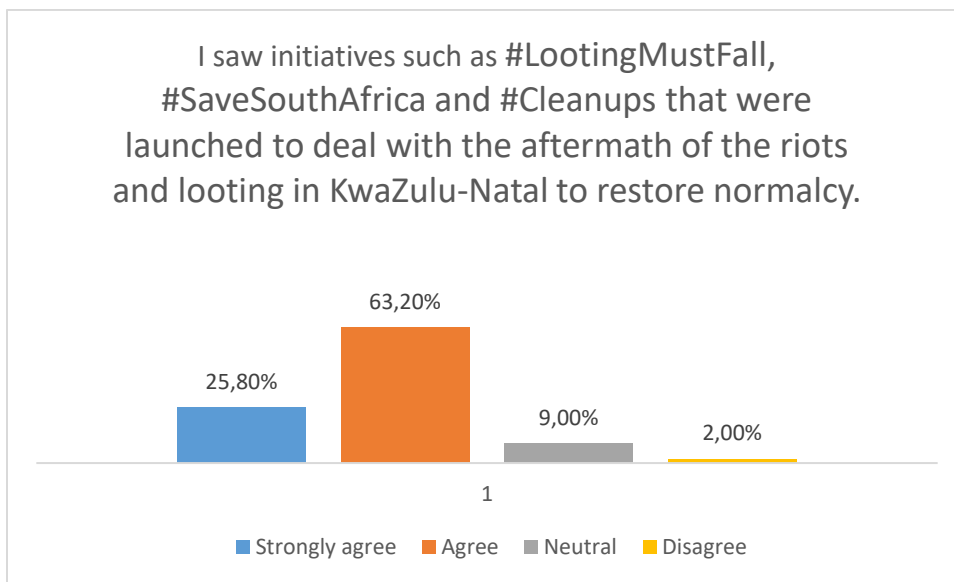


Figure 4.19 shows that a clear majority of respondents support the statement: 63.2% agree with it and a further 28.5% strongly agree. Meanwhile, 9% of respondents were neutral and only 2% disagreed. This level of agreement shows that respondents believe initiatives such as #LootingMustFall, #SaveSouthAfrica and #Cleanups, which were launched to deal with the aftermath of the riots and looting in KZN, are about restoring normality. The results align with findings from ITWeb (2025), which emphasise the central

role of social media campaigns in supporting the cleanup efforts in the KZN province. Hashtags such as #lootingmustfall, #SaveSouthAfrica and #CleanUpSA proved to be effective tools for raising awareness and mobilising the population. These digital campaigns played a crucial role in mobilising public support, fostering collective action and the success of community clean-up initiatives.

4.10 Inferential Statistics

Inferential statistics is a branch of statistics that allows researchers to draw conclusions about a population based on data from a sample. This approach involves estimating population parameters, testing hypotheses and making predictions taking into account the uncertainty associated with the sample (Ibe, 2014; Zhang *et al.*, 2018: 1). The main aim of inferential statistics is to generalise results from a sample to the wider population with a measurable degree of certainty.

For this study, inferential statistics were used to analyse and differentiate the influence of demographic factors such as age, gender and race on participants' perceptions of social media during the KZN 2021 looting. The aim of the analysis was to identify significant differences between these groups in order to gain a deeper understanding of how each population group uses and evaluates social media platforms. By examining these differences, the study provides valuable insights into the different preferences that characterise digital communication trends within different demographic segments.

Originally, the study was organised around three objectives, each corresponding to a section of five questions. However, after conducting a factor analysis, the data showed that a four-section structure would better capture the underlying patterns of responses. Inferential statistics and hypothesis testing were then conducted using these revised sections, which helped to strengthen the study by providing a more accurate and robust assessment of the relationships between the demographic variables and participants' perceptions. This approach not only improved the accuracy of the analysis, but also ensured that the research findings were based on a clearer, more meaningful data structure.

4.10.1 Gender-based analysis: Social media as a communication tool during civil unrest

Table 4.3: Gender base analysis: To examine the role of social media as a communication tool during civil unrest.

Gender	Female (N=169)	Male (N=130)	p- value	Overall (N=299)
Social media has become an integral part of human communication and the basic goal is to promote communication.				
Disagree	22 (13.0%)	18 (13.8%)		40 (13.4%)
Agree	147 (87.0%)	112 (86.2%)	Chisq., p = 0.970	259 (86.6%)
Social media served as a tactical tool in disseminating information before, during and after civil unrest in KZN.				
Disagree	21 (12.4%)	22 (16.9%)		43 (14.4%)
Agree	148 (87.6%)	108 (83.1%)	Chisq., p = 0.351	256 (85.6%)
Social media was a crucial source of information for me during the KwaZulu-Natal looting.				
Disagree	20 (11.8%)	28 (21.5%)		48 (16.1%)
Agree	149 (88.2%)	102 (78.5%)	Chisq., p = 0.035	251 (83.9%)
Real-time information sharing allowed for the coordination of looting efforts in KZN.				
Disagree	24 (14.2%)	39 (30.0%)		63 (21.1%)
Agree	145 (85.8%)	91 (70.%)	Chisq., p<0.00 1	236 (78.9%)

Gender	Female (N=169)	Male (N=130)	p- value	Overall (N=299)
During the July civil unrest social media helped the people to connect and broadcast the KZN 2021 July civil unrest to the world.			Chisq., p = 0.240	
Disagree	24 (14.2%)	26 (20.0%)		50 (16.7%)
Agree	145 (85.8%)	104 (80.0%)		249 (83.3%)
The hashtags #ShutdownSA, #ShutdownGauteng and #ShutdownKZN were frequently used during the 2021 unrest.			Chisq., p = 0.139	
Disagree	23 (13.6%)	26 (20%)		49 (16.4%)
Agree	146 (86.4%)	104 (80. %)		250 (83.6%)

The results of the chi-square (χ^2) test indicate statistically significant gender-based differences in responses to two key statements regarding social media's role during the 2021 KZN looting. First, for the statement, "Social media was a crucial source of information for me during the KwaZulu-Natal looting" ($p = 0.035$), a higher percentage of males (16.19%) disagreed with this statement compared to females (12.4%).

This finding suggests that men may have relied less on social media as a primary source of information during the unrest, highlighting a gender-based difference in the perceived importance of social media for information dissemination during this crisis. The second, the statement, "Real-time information sharing allowed for the coordination of looting efforts in KZN" ($p = 0.001$) revealed a significant difference in perceptions between genders. Males (30.0%) were more likely to disagree with this statement than females (14.2%), indicating that men were less likely to perceive social media as a tool for coordinating looting efforts. In contrast, women were more likely to recognize real-time information sharing as a critical factor in facilitating coordination during the unrest.

This means that gender did not play a role in influencing responses for these particular statements “Social media has become an integral part of human communication” (p = 0.502), “Social media served as a tactical tool in disseminating information before, during, and after civil unrest in KZN” (p = 0.351), “During the July civil unrest, social media helped people to connect and broadcast the KZN 2021 July civil unrest to the world” (p = 0.240), and “The hashtags #ShutdownSA, #ShutdownGauteng, and #ShutdownKZN were frequently used during the 2021 unrest” (p = 0.139). For these items, males and females generally shared similar views on the role and impact of social media during the unrest.

4.10.2 Race-based analysis: Social media as a communication tool during civil unrest

Table 4.4 Race based analysis: To examine the role of social media as a communication tool during civil unrest.

Race	Black (N=201)	Indian (N=59)	White (N=21)	Coloured (N=18)	p-value	Overall (N=299)
Social media has become an integral part of human communication and the basic goal is to promote communication.					<0.001	
Disagree	13 (6.5%)	11 (23.4%)	3 (14.3%)	10 (55.6%)	Fisher's	37 (12.9%)
Agree	188 (93.5%)	36 (76.6%)	18 (85.7%)	8 (44.4%)		250 (87.1%)
Social media served as a tactical tool in disseminating information before, during and after civil unrest in KZN.					0.002	

Race	Black (N=201)	Indian (N=59)	White (N=21)	Coloured (N=18)	p-value	Overall (N=299)
Disagree	19 (9.5%)	12 (25.5%)	7 (33.3%)	3 (16.7%)	Fisher's	41 (14.3%)
Agree	182 (90.5%)	35 (74.5%)	14 (66.7%)	15 (83.3%)		246 (85.7%)
Social media was a crucial source of information for me during the KwaZulu-Natal looting.					0.004	
Disagree	23 (11.4%)	10 (21.3%)	7 (33.3%)	6 (33.3%)	Fisher's	46 (16.0%)
Agree	178 (88.6%)	37 (78.7%)	14 (66.7%)	12 (66.7%)		241 (84.0%)
Real-time information sharing allowed for the coordination of looting efforts in KZN.					0.003	
Disagree	34 (16.9%)	10 (21.3%)	10 (47.6%)	7 (38.9%)	Fisher's	61 (21.3%)
Agree	167 (83.1%)	37 (78.7%)	11 (52.4%)	11 (61.1%)		226 (78.7%)
During the July civil unrest social media helped the people to connect and broadcast the KZN 2021 July civil unrest to the world.					0.014	

Race	Black (N=201)	Indian (N=59)	White (N=21)	Coloured (N=18)	p-value	Overall (N=299)
Disagree	26 (12.9%)	9 (19.1%)	8 (38.1%)	5 (27.8%)	Fisher's	48 (16.7%)
Agree	175 (87.1%)	38 (80.9%)	13 (61.9%)	13 (72.2%)		239 (83.3%)
The hashtags #ShutdownSA, #ShutdownGauteng and #ShutdownKZN were frequently used during the 2021 unrest.						
Disagree	30 (14.9%)	8 (17.0%)	7 (33.3%)	2 (11.1%)	Fisher's	47 (16.4%)
Agree	171 (85.1%)	39 (83.0%)	14 (66.7%)	16 (88.9%)		240 (83.6%)

The results of the chi-square test (χ^2) show that there are no statistically significant race-based differences in the responses to most of the statements on the role of social media during the 2021 looting in KwaZulu-Natal. For the statement "Social media has become an integral part of human communication and the basic goal is to promote communication" ($p < 0.001$), no significant differences were found between races, although the low p-value suggests some association. Similarly, no significant differences were found between races for the statements "Social media served as a tactical tool in disseminating information before, during and after the unrest in KZN" ($p = 0.002$), "Social media was a crucial source of information for me during the looting in KwaZulu-Natal" ($p = 0.004$) and "Real-time information sharing allowed for the coordination of looting in KZN" ($p = 0.003$), although the low p-values suggest possible differences. These results suggest that although there were differences in responses across racial groups, these

were not statistically significant enough to draw clear conclusions about race's influence on perceptions of the role of social media in the unrest.

However, the statement “During the unrest in July, social media helped people to connect and spread to the world about the unrest in KZN 2021 in July” (p = 0.014) showed some statistical significance, although the race- based on ethnicity were still not significant enough to establish a definitive trend.

Finally, the statement regarding “hashtags such as #ShutdownSA, #ShutdownGauteng and #ShutdownKZN during the unrest” (p = 0.197) showed no statistically significant differences, indicating that racial groups did not differ significantly in their perceptions of the use of these hashtags. The results of the chi-square test indicated some differences in the responses of the racial groups. None of the statements showed statistically significant racial differences, suggesting that perceptions of the role of social media during the unrest in KZN were generally similar across racial groups

4.10.3 Age-based analysis: Social media as a communication tool during civil unrest

Table 4.5: Age based analysis: To examine the role of social media as a communication tool during civil unrest.

Age	18-25yrs (N=134)	26-35yrs (N=76)	36-45yrs (N=59)	46-60yrs (N=30)	p-value	Overall (N=299)
Social media has become an integral part of human communication and the basic goal is to promote communication.					0.502	
Disagree	22 (16.4%)	9 (11.8%)	9 (15.3%)	2 (6.7%)	Chisq.	42 (14.0%)

Age	18-25yrs (N=134)	26-35yrs (N=76)	36-45yrs (N=59)	46-60yrs (N=30)	p-value	Overall (N=299)
Agree	112 (83.6%)	67 (88.2%)	50 (84.7%)	28 (93.3%)		257 (86.0%)
Social media served as a tactical tool in disseminating information before, during and after civil unrest in KZN.					0.913	
Disagree	18 (13.4%)	12 (15.8%)	10 (16.9%)	4 (13.3%)	Chisq.	44 (14.7%)
Agree	116 (86.6%)	64 (84.2%)	49 (83.1%)	26 (86.7%)		255 (85.3%)
Social media was a crucial source of information for me during the KwaZulu-Natal looting.					0.829	
Disagree	25 (18.7%)	11 (14.5%)	10 (16.9%)	4 (13.3%)	Chisq.	50 (16.7%)
Agree	109 (81.3%)	65 (85.5%)	49 (83.1%)	26 (86.7%)		249 (83.3%)
Real-time information sharing allowed for the coordination of looting efforts in KZN.					0.597	
Disagree	27 (20.1%)	20 (26.3%)	11 (18.6%)	5 (16.7%)	Chisq.	63 (21.1%)

Age	18-25yrs (N=134)	26-35yrs (N=76)	36-45yrs (N=59)	46-60yrs (N=30)	p-value	Overall (N=299)
Agree	107 (79.9%)	56 (73.7%)	48 (81.4%)	25 (83.3%)		236 (78.9%)
During the July civil unrest social media helped the people to connect and broadcast the KZN 2021 July civil unrest to the world.					0.936	
Disagree	21 (15.7%)	13 (17.1%)	9 (15.3%)	6 (20.0%)	Chisq.	49 (16.4%)
Agree	113 (84.3%)	63 (82.9%)	50 (84.7%)	24 (80.0%)		250 (83.6%)
The hashtags #ShutdownSA, #ShutdownGauteng and #ShutdownKZN were frequently used during the 2021 unrest.					0.851	
Disagree	19 (14.2%)	13 (17.1%)	10 (16.9%)	6 (20.0%)	Chisq. p	48 (16.1%)
Agree	115 (85.8%)	63 (82.9%)	49 (83.1%)	24 (80.0%)	0.851	251 (83.9%)

The results of the chi-square test show that age has no significant effect on the responses to the statements on the role of social media during the 2021 looting in KwaZulu-Natal, as all p-values exceed the threshold of 0.05 ($p > 0.05$). This suggests that respondents perceive the impact of social media similarly regardless of their age.

There were no significant age-related differences in the following statements: “Social media has become an integral part of human communication and the fundamental goal is to promote communication” (p = 0.502), “Social media served as a tactical tool in disseminating information before, during and after civil unrest in KZN” (p = 0.913), “Social media was a crucial source of information for me during the looting in KwaZulu-Natal” (p = 0.829), “Real-time information sharing allowed for the coordination of looting efforts in KZN” (p = 0.597), “During the July unrest, social media helped people to connect and broadcast the 2021 KZN unrest to the world” (p = 0.936) and “The hashtags #ShutdownSA, #ShutdownGauteng and #ShutdownKZN were frequently used during the 2021 unrest” (p = 0.851). The consistency of responses across age groups suggests that people, regardless of their age, perceived the role of social media in relation to the unrest similarly.

4.10.4 Gender-based Analysis: Exploring social media’s role in mitigating risks during civil unrest

Table. 4.6 Gender based analysis: To explore how social media is utilised to mitigate risks in civil unrest situations.

Gender	Female (N=169)	Male (N=130)	p-value	Overall (N=299)
Social media platforms can disseminate accurate information and can influence which issues the public deems important, thereby influencing public perceptions.			Chisq., p = 0.234	
Disagree	53 (31.4%)	50 (38.5%)		103 (34.4%)
Agree	110 (65.1%)	75 (57.7%)		185 (61.9%)
Social media played a crucial role in alerting individuals and communities about potential			Chisq., p = 0.306	

Gender	Female (N=169)	Male (N=130)	p- value	Overall (N=299)
risks and dangers during KZN 2021 looting.				
Disagree	24 (14.2%)	25 (19.2%)		49 (16.4%)
Agree	139 (82.2%)	100 (76.0%)		239 (79.9%)
During the civil unrest I found updates on road closure, safety warnings & and alternative routes shared on social media during the KZN looting to be timely and helpful.			Chisq., p = 0.808	
Disagree	37 (21.9%)	26 (20.0%)		63 (21.1%)
Agree	126 (74.6%)	99 (76.2%)		225 (75.3%)

The results of the chi-square test show that there is no significant relationship between gender and all statements, as all p-values exceed the 0.05 threshold ($p > 0.05$). In particular, for the statement “Social media platforms can disseminate accurate information and influence which issues the public deems important, thus influencing public perception. ($p = 0.234$), “Social media played a crucial role in alerting individuals and communities of potential risks and dangers during the 2021 looting” in KZN” ($p = 0.306$) and “During the civil unrest in KZN, I found the updates on road closure, safety warnings & and alternative routes shared on social media, during the KZN looting to be timely and helpful” ($p = 0.808$), the analysis suggests that gender has no significant influence on the perception of the role of social media during the unrest in KZN. The agreement rates for all statements are consistently high for both male and female respondents, indicating that both genders generally have similar views on the impact and usefulness of social media during the unrest.

4.10.5 Age-based Analysis: Exploring social media's role in mitigating risks during civil unrest

Table 4.7 Age base analysis: To explore how social media is utilised to mitigate risks in civil unrest situations.

Age	18-25yrs (N=134)	26-35yrs (N=76)	36-45yrs (N=59)	46-60yrs (N=30)	p-value	Overall (N=299)
Social media platforms can disseminate accurate information and can influence which issues the public deems important, thereby influencing public perceptions.					0.750	
Disagree	45 (33.6%)	31 (40.8%)	20 (33.9%)	11 (36.7%)	Chisq.	107 (35.8%)
Agree	89 (66.4%)	45 (59.2%)	39 (66.1%)	19 (63.3%)		192 (64.2%)
Social media played a crucial role in alerting individuals and communities about potential risks and dangers during KZN 2021 looting.					0.515	
Disagree	23 (17.2%)	15 (19.7%)	7 (11.9%)	7 (23.3%)	Chisq.	52 (17.4%)
Agree	111 (82.8%)	61 (80.3%)	52 (88.1%)	23 (76.7%)		247 (82.6%)

Age	18-25yrs (N=134)	26-35yrs (N=76)	36-45yrs (N=59)	46-60yrs (N=30)	p-value	Overall (N=299)
During the civil unrest I found updates on road closure, safety warnings & and alternative roots shared on social media during the KZN looting to be timely and helpful.					0.359	
Disagree	25 (18.7%)	20 (26.3%)	11 (18.6%)	9 (30.0%)	Chisq.	65 (21.7%)
Agree	109 (81.3%)	56 (73.7%)	48 (81.4%)	21 (70.0%)		234 (78.3%)

The results of the chi-square test indicate that there are no statistically significant differences between the age groups for the three statements tested Social media platforms can disseminate accurate information and influence which issues the public deems important, thereby influencing public perception. ($p = 0.750$). The p-value is greater than 0.05, indicating that age has no significant impact on how different age groups view the role of social media in disseminating accurate information and influencing public perception.

Social media played a crucial role in alerting individuals and communities of potential risks and dangers during the 2021 looting in KZN ($p = 0.515$). 0.515 also suggests that there are no significant differences between age groups in the perception of the role of social media in alerting individuals and communities of potential risks. During the civil unrest in KZN, I found the updates on road closures, safety warnings and alternative roots shared on social media to be timely and helpful ($p = 0.359$): The p-value of 0.359 supports the conclusion that age has no significant effect on perceptions of the role of social media in

providing updates on road closures and safety alerts. The agreement rates are high, ranging from 70.0% to 81.4%.

4.10.6 Race-based Analysis: Exploring social media's role in mitigating risks during civil unrest

Table 4.8 Race base analysis: To explore how social media is utilised to mitigate risks in civil unrest situations

Race	Black (N=201)	Indian (N=59)	White (N=21)	Coloured (N=18)	p-value	Overall (N=299)
Social media platforms can disseminate accurate information and can influence which issues the public deems important, thereby influencing public perceptions.					0.010	
Disagree	66 (32.8%)	16 (27.1%)	7 (33.3%)	13 (72.2%)	Chisq.	102 (34.1%)
Agree	135 (67.2%)	31 (79.9%)	14 (66.7%)	5 (27.8%)		185 (61.9%)
Social media played a crucial role in alerting individuals and communities about potential risks and dangers during KZN 2021 looting					0.461	
Disagree	37 (18.4%)	9 (15...3%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (5.6%)	Fisher's	47 (15.7%)

Race	Black (N=201)	Indian (N=59)	White (N=21)	Coloured (N=18)	p-value	Overall (N=299)
Agree	164 (81.6%)	38 (84.7%)	21 (100.0%)	17 (94.4%)		240 (83.3%)
During the civil unrest I found updates on road closure, safety warnings & and alternative roots shared on social media during the KZN looting to be timely and helpful.					0.55	
Disagree	42 (20.9%)	12 (20.3%)	2 (9.5%)	5 (27.8%)	Fisher's	61 (20.4%)
Agree	159 (79.1%)	35 (79.7%)	19 (90.5%)	13 (72.2%)		226 (75.6%)

The chi-square test and Fisher tests show a statistically significant difference in perceptions between the racial groups only for the statement about the role of social media in disseminating accurate information and influencing public perception, with a p-value of 0.010. This significance is primarily due to the significantly lower approval rate in the coloured group (27.8%) compared to the other racial groups. 67.2 % of blacks, 79.9 % of Indians and 66.7 % of white respondents agreed.

For the other two statements, “Social media played a crucial role in alerting individuals and communities about potential risks and dangers during the 2021 KZN looting” (p = 0.461) and “During the civil unrest I found the updates on road closures, safety warnings & and alternative roots shared on social media during the looting in KZN were timely and helpful” (p = 0.55) — the p-values are greater than 0.05, indicating that there are no statistically significant differences in perceptions by race. In both cases, high levels of

agreement were observed across all ethnic groups, indicating a general consensus on these aspects of the role of social media during the unrest in KZN.

4.10.7 Age-based analysis of crisis communication during the KZN looting

Table 4.9 Age base analysis: To explore the role of crisis communication during KZN looting.

Age	18-25yrs (N=134)	26-35yrs (N=76)	36-45yrs (N=59)	46-60yrs (N=30)	p-value	Overall (N=299)
Government authorities effectively shared official updates and safety information.					0.007	
Disagree	21 (15.7%)	20 (26.3%)	5 (8.5%)	10 (33.3%)	Chi sq.	56 (18.7%)
Agree	113 (84.3%)	56 (73.7%)	54 (91.5%)	20 (66.7%)		243 (81.3%)
Crisis and disaster management informed public and gathered information from citizens.					0.131	
Disagree	24 (17.9%)	21 (27.6%)	7 (11.9%)	6 (20.0%)	Chi sq.	58 (19.4%)
Agree	110 (82.1%)	55 (72.4%)	52 (88.1%)	24 (80.0%)		241 (80.6%)
Shared hashtags initiatives such as LootingMustFall and more to restore normalcy.					0.303	
Disagree	14 (10.4%)	9 (11.8%)	4 (6.8%)	6 (20.0%)	Chi sq.	33 (11.0%)
Agree	120 (89.6%)	67 (88.2%)	55 (93.2%)	24 (80.0%)		266 (89.0%)

The results of the chi-square test indicate that there is a statistically significant relationship between the age groups and the level of agreement with the statement “Government

authorities effectively used social media platforms to disseminate official updates and safety information during the 2021 looting” in KZN” (p-value: 0.007). This suggests that perceptions of the effectiveness of the government's use of social media varied significantly across age groups. Some age groups may have viewed the government's efforts in providing real-time updates and safety information as more effective, while others were more critical.

In contrast, there was no statistically significant relationship between age groups and the perception that “crisis and disaster management organisations use social media primarily to inform the public to minimise risks and gather information from citizens” (p-value: 0.131) or recognition of initiatives such as #LootingMustFall, #SaveSouthAfrica and #Cleanups launched to manage the aftermath of the unrest and looting in KwaZulu-Natal (p-value: 0.303). These results suggest that responses to these statements were consistent across all age groups and reflect a general consensus or similar level of agreement, regardless of age.

4.10.8 Gender -based analysis of crisis communication during the KZN looting

4.10 Gender based Analysis: to explore the role of crisis communication during KZN looting.

Gender	Female (N=169)	Male (N=130)	p-value	Overall (N=299)
Government authorities effectively shared official updates and safety information.			Chisq., p = 0.045	
Disagree	24 (14.7%)	31 (24.8%)		55 (19.1%)
Agree	139 (85.3%)	94 (75.2%)		233 (80.9%)
Crisis and disaster management informed public and gathered information from citizens.			Chisq., p = 0.000	

Gender	Female (N=169)	Male (N=130)	p-value	Overall (N=299)
Disagree	23 (14.1%)	34 (27.2%)		57 (19.8%)
Agree	140 (85.9%)	91 (72.8%)		231 (80.2%)
Shared hashtags initiatives such as LootingMustFall and more to restore normalcy.			Chisq., p = 0.172	
Disagree	14 (8.6%)	18 (14.4%)		32 (11.1%)
Agree	149 (91.4%)	107 (85.6%)		256 (88.9%)

The results of the chi-square test show that there is a statistically significant correlation between the age groups and the two statements. "Government authorities effectively used social media platforms to disseminate official updates and safety information during the 2021 looting" in KZN" (p-value: 0.045). This suggests that people in different age groups perceive the effectiveness of the government's use of social media differently. Similarly, a statistically significant association was found for the statement "Crisis and disaster management organisations use social media primarily to inform the public, to minimise risk and to gather information from citizens" (p-value: 0.00), highlighting age-related differences in people's views on the role of such organisations in crisis management via social media.

However, no statistically significant relationship was found with regard to recognising initiatives such as #LootingMustFall, #SaveSouthAfrica and #Cleanups, which were set up to manage the aftermath of the riots and looting in KwaZulu-Natal (p-value: 0.172).

This indicates that responses to this statement were generally consistent across all age groups, suggesting that awareness or agreement is similar regardless of age.

4.10.9 Race-based analysis of crisis communication during the KZN looting

4.11 Race base analysis: to explore the role of crisis communication during KZN looting.

Race	Black (N=201)	Indian (N=59)	White (N=21)	Coloured (N=18)	p-value	Overall (N=299)
Government authorities effectively utilized social media platforms to share official updates and safety information during KZN 2021 looting.					0.811	
Disagree	39 (19.4%)	7 (14.9%)	5 (23.8%)	3 (16.7%)	Fisher's	54 (18.8%)
Agree	162 (80.6%)	40 (85.1%)	16 (76.2%)	15 (83.3%)		233 (81.2%)
Crisis and disaster management organizations use social media primarily to inform the public to minimise risk and to gather information from citizens.					0.034	
Disagree	32 (15.9%)	10 (21.3%)	8 (38.1%)	6 (33.3%)	Fisher's	56 (19.5%)
Agree	169 (84.1%)	37 (78.7%)	13 (61.9%)	12 (66.7%)		231 (80.5%)
I saw initiatives such as #LootingMustFall, #SaveSouthAfrica and #Cleanups that were launched to deal with the aftermath of the riots and looting in KwaZulu-Natal to restore normalcy.					0.239	
Disagree	21 (10.4%)	6 (12.8%)	4 (19.0%)	0 (0.0%)	Fisher's	31 (10.8%)

Race	Black (N=201)	Indian (N=59)	White (N=21)	Coloured (N=18)	p-value	Overall (N=299)
Agree	180 (89.6%)	41 (87.2%)	17 (81.0%)	18 (100.0%)		256 (89.2%)

The results of the Fisher test show that there is no statistically significant difference for two statements: “Government authorities have effectively used social media platforms to disseminate official updates and safety information”. The p-value of 0.811 shows that there is no statistically significant difference in the opinions of the black, Indian, white and coloured groups. This suggests that race has no influence on the perception of the effectiveness of government authorities’ social media communication.

Similarly, for the statement “I saw initiatives such as #LootingMustFall, #SaveSouthAfrica and #Cleanups launched to deal with the aftermath of the riots and looting in KwaZulu-Natal and restore normalcy,” the p-value of 0.239 suggests that there is no significant difference between racial groups. This means that all racial groups feel similarly about the impact of these initiatives on restoring normalcy. A statistically significant difference with a p-value of 0.034 was found for the statement “Crisis and disaster management organisations use social media primarily to inform the public to minimise risk and gather information from citizens”. This indicates that different racial groups perceive the effectiveness of social media use by crisis management organisations differently.

4.10.9 Age-Based Analysis: Assessing the Impact of social media during the 2021 looting in KZN

Table 4.12 Age based analysis: To assess the impact of social media during the 2021 looting in KwaZulu-Natal.

Age	18-25yrs (N=134)	26-35yrs (N=76)	36-45yrs (N=59)	46-60yrs (N=30)	p-value	Overall (N=299)
Social media is no longer just setting the agenda it is also becoming a platform for the public to actively shape and redefine the issues that concern them.					0.393	
Disagree	31 (23.1%)	24 (31.6%)	19 (32.2%)	10 (33.3%)	Chisq.	84 (28.1%)
Agree	103 (76.9%)	52 (68.4%)	40 (67.8%)	20 (66.7%)		215 (71.9%)
Social media offers creative and effective ways for people to coordinate their efforts and express their political and social concerns.					0.378	
Disagree	24 (17.9%)	20 (26.3%)	12 (20.3%)	4 (13.3%)	Chisq.	60 (20.1%)
Agree	110 (82.1%)	56 (73.7%)	47 (79.7%)	26 (86.7%)		239 (79.9%)
During the civil unrest social media's power to mobilise people into action is undeniable.					0.763	
Disagree	20 (14.9%)	14 (18.4%)	7 (11.9%)	5 (16.7%)	Chisq.	46 (15.4%)

Age	18-25yrs (N=134)	26-35yrs (N=76)	36-45yrs (N=59)	46-60yrs (N=30)	p-value	Overall (N=299)
Agree	114 (85.1%)	62 (81.6%)	52 (88.1%)	25 (83.3%)		253 (84.6%)

The chi-square results show that all p-values are greater than 0.05, which means that there is no statistically significant difference between the age groups in their responses to the following statements: For the statement “Social media is no longer just setting the agenda, but also becoming a platform for the public to actively shape and redefine the issues that affect them”, the p-value is 0.393. Although there are differences in the percentages between the age groups, these differences are not significant enough to be attributed to age. Overall, 71.9% of participants agreed with this statement.

For the statement, “Social media provide creative and effective ways for people to coordinate their efforts and express their political and social concerns,” the p-value is 0.378. While there are differences in agreement rates (from 66.7% to 86.7%), the differences are not statistically significant. A total of 79.9% of respondents agreed with the statement. For the statement “During the civil unrest, social media’s power to mobilise people into action is undeniable,” the p-value is 0.763, which shows that there is no statistically significant difference between age groups in terms of the perception of the role of social media in mobilisation during the looting. Despite small differences in approval rates (from 81.6% to 88.1%), there are no significant differences between age groups. A large number of 84.6% of participants agreed with this statement.

4.10.10 Gender-Based Analysis: Assessing the Impact of social media during the 2021 looting in KZN

Table 4.13: Gender based analysis: To assess the impact of social media during the 2021 looting in KwaZulu-Natal.

Gender	Female (N=169)	Male (N=130)	p-value	Overall (N=299)
Social media is no longer just setting the agenda it is also becoming a platform for the public to actively shape and redefine the issues that concern them.			Chisq., p = 0.290	
Disagree	43 (26.4%)	41 (32.8%)		84 (29.2%)
Agree	120 (73.6%)	84 (29.2%)		204 (70.8%)
Social media offers creative and effective ways for people to coordinate their efforts and express their political and social concerns.			Chisq., p = 0.793	
Disagree	32 (19.6%)	27 (21.6%)		59 (20.5%)
Agree	131 (80.4%)	98 (78.4%)		229 (79.5%)
During the civil unrest social media's power to mobilize people into action is undeniable.			Chisq., p = 0.419	
Disagree	23 (14.1%)	22 (17.6%)		45 (15.6%)
Agree	140 (85.9%)	103 (82.4%)		243 (84.4%)

The chi-square results indicate that all p-values are greater than 0.05, suggesting no statistically significant difference between males and females in their responses to the following statements. For the statement “Social media is no longer just setting the agenda it is also becoming a platform for the public to actively shape and redefine the issues that concern them,” the p-value of 0.290 suggests that there is no statistically significant difference in perceptions between males and females.

For the statement “Social media offers creative and effective ways for people to coordinate their efforts and express their political and social concerns,” the p-value of 0.793 indicates that there is no significant difference between genders and for the statement “During the civil unrest, social media’s power to mobilise people into action is undeniable,” the p-value of 0.419 shows no statistically significant difference between male and female.

4.10.11 Race-based analysis: Assessing the Impact of social media during the 2021 looting in KZN

Table 4.14: Race based analysis: To assess the impact of social media during the 2021 looting in KwaZulu-Natal

Race	Black (N=201)	Indian (N=59)	White (N=21)	Coloured (N=18)	p-value	Overall (N=299)
Social media is no longer just setting the agenda – it is also becoming a platform for the public to actively shape and redefine the issues that concern them.					0.117	
Disagree	54 (26.9%)	16 (34.0%)	4 (19.0%)	9 (50.0%)	Chi sq.	83 (28.9%)
Agree	147 (73.1%)	31 (66.0%)	17 (81.0%)	9 (50.0%)		204 (71.1%)
Social media offers creative and effective ways for people to coordinate their efforts and express their political and social concerns.					0.169	

Race	Black (N=201)	Indian (N=59)	White (N=21)	Coloured (N=18)	p-value	Overall (N=299)
Disagree	39 (19.4%)	12 (25.5%)	1 (4.8%)	5 (27.8%)	Fisher's	57 (19.9%)
Agree	162 (80.6%)	35 (74.5%)	20 (95.2%)	13 (72.2%)		230 (80.1%)
During the civil unrest social media's power to mobilise people into action is undeniable.					0.472	
Disagree	31 (15.4%)	7 (14.9%)	1 (4.8%)	4 (22.2%)	Fisher's	43 (15.0%)
Agree	170 (84.6%)	40 (85.1%)	20 (95.2%)	14 (77.8%)		244 (85.0%)

The chi-square results show that for the statement "Social media is no longer just setting the agenda, but is also becoming a platform for the public to actively shape and redefine the issues that concern them", the chi-square result with a p-value of 0.117 suggests that there is no statistically significant difference between the racial groups in terms of agreement or disagreement. Despite some differences in the responses between the groups, the differences are not statistically significant.

For the statement "Social media provides creative and effective ways for people to coordinate their efforts and express their political and social concerns," the Fisher exact test result with a p-value of 0.169 suggests that there is no statistically significant difference between racial groups. Although the answers between the racial groups show a certain variation, they are not significantly different. For the statement "During the civil unrest, the power of social media to mobilise people is undeniable," the result of the Fisher exact test with a p-value of 0.472 also suggests that there is no significant difference between the racial groups in terms of their views on the power of social media to mobilise people.

4.11 Hypothesis testing

Hypothesis testing is a statistical method used to draw conclusions about population parameters on the basis of sample data. Two competing hypotheses are formulated: the null hypothesis (H_0), which states that there is no effect or difference, and the alternative hypothesis (H_1), which asserts the existence of an effect or difference. The aim is to determine whether the sample data provide sufficient statistical evidence to reject the null hypothesis in favour of the alternative hypothesis. To assess this relationship, a Chi-square test was performed. The p-value resulting from the test statistic is used to indicate the significance of the result, with a p-value of 0.05 indicating a significant result. A second Chi-square test was performed to test whether there was a statistically significant relationship between the variables. The hypothesis states that there is no relationship between the variables, while the alternative hypothesis suggests a relationship. Any result without a symbol or with a p-value of more than 0.05 means that there is no significant relationship.

4.11.1 Chi-Square and Fisher's Exact Test results

Gender-Based Differences

The Chi-square results showed significant gender differences in the perception of the role of social media during the 2021 looting in KwaZulu-Natal. Two key statements showed statistical significance: "Social media was a crucial source of information for me during the looting in KwaZulu-Natal" ($p = 0.035$). Women were more likely to rely on social media for safety updates, emotional support and real-time information, while men appeared to use more diverse sources, focussing on logistical updates or monitoring events. "Real-time information sharing allowed for the coordination of looting efforts in KZN" ($p < 0.001$). Women saw the sharing of real-time information as a key factor in exacerbating insecurity, while men were less likely to associate this with the coordination of looting.

Race-Based Differences

The Fisher's exact test revealed significant racial differences for several statements: "Social media has become an integral part of human communication" ($p < 0.001$). Racial groups differed in their perceptions of social media's role as a communication tool,

possibly due to differences in digital access or prior experiences. "Social media served as a tactical tool in disseminating information before, during, and after civil unrest in KZN" ($p = 0.002$). Racial groups showed varying perceptions regarding social media's role in disseminating information before, during, and after the unrest. This likely reflects differences in how much they trusted online information or the extent to which they had reliable access to social media.

"Real-time information sharing allowed for the coordination of looting efforts in KZN" ($p < 0.001$). These differences may result from community-specific participation in activities like safety planning or coordination efforts. During the July civil unrest, social media helped people connect and broadcast the KZN events to the world" ($p = 0.014$). This finding indicates that racial groups used social media in distinct ways to connect with others and share their experiences of the unrest. Some may have relied heavily on social platforms for advocacy, while others may have focused on receiving rather than sharing information.

Age-Based Differences

Chi-square tests showed statistically significant age-related differences in the perception of the use of social media by government and crisis management organisations: "Government authorities effectively used social media to share official updates and safety information during the looting in KZN 2021" ($p = 0.045$). The different age groups differ in their perceptions of the effectiveness of these efforts. "Crisis and disaster management organisations use social media to inform the public and minimise risks" ($p = 0.034$). Perceptions of the effectiveness of these organisations varied between age groups, which may be influenced by generational trust and commitment to such institutions.

4.12 Conclusion

This chapter presents the data analysis of the study, for which an online questionnaire with 299 respondents was used. The analysis included reliability statistics and factor analysis to ensure the validity and consistency of the data. Descriptive statistics as well as tables, graphs, and pie charts were used to summarise and visualise the results. Chi-

square tests and Fishers test were conducted to examine the relationships between key demographic variables such as gender, race and age and perceptions of the role of social media during the 2021 looting. Significant gender and race-related differences were found for selected statements, while age had a minimal impact on perceptions. The analysis provided valuable insights into the demographic differences in social media use and perceptions. The next chapter provides conclusions and recommendations for future research and practise.

CHAPTER FIVE CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the conclusion of the study and draws a comprehensive conclusion and valuable recommendations from the results. This chapter serves as the culmination of the research journey and offers insights that contribute to the existing body of knowledge in this area and suggest practical applications for the findings.

5.2 Findings from the Study

This section presents the key findings derived from the research results, providing insights aligned with the objectives of the study and supported by existing literature.

5.2.1 Objective One

- To examine the role of social media as a communication tool during civil unrest.

The literature review in chapter two revealed that social media platforms played a central role in communication, information dissemination and mobilisation for events during this period of widespread violence and unrest. The existing literature emphasises the importance of social media in promoting civic movements in different contexts. Alism (2018: 1) highlights how platforms such as Twitter and Facebook have helped activists disseminate information, mobilise supporters and raise international awareness. Similarly, Reuters (2011) illustrates that the role of platforms such as Facebook, Twitter

and YouTube in the early stages of the Syrian uprising was to coordinate protests, share information and document human rights violations amid increasing state repression.

The research findings are consistent with these observations and show that during the unrest in KwaZulu-Natal, social media was used extensively to coordinate gatherings, disseminate information and mobilise people. Platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook and Twitter played a central role in sharing videos, images, text messages and voice notes that encouraged the public to participate in the looting (Malinga, 2021). Karambo (2021) also highlighted the role of social media in escalating tensions and enabling destructive behaviour during this time. Furthermore, the results of the primary study showed that 63.9% of respondents recognised social media as an effective communication tool to mobilise people. This is in line with the studies by Mathe and Matsathebe (2022) and Makonye (2022), which indicate that social media not only influenced public perception but also contributed to the intensification of unrest.

The findings of the primary study are consistent with existing research and show that the majority of respondents believe that social media is widely recognised as an integral part of human communication. The findings of Pradhan and Singh (2023: 1622) also emphasise that social media has become an essential element of modern communication and is consistent with its fundamental purpose of promoting interaction and connection. The democratised and interactive nature of social media encourages the formation of communities based on shared interests, allowing individuals to actively and collectively engage. The study concluded that social media served as an important communication tool during the looting in KZN, thus achieving the first research objective.

5.2.2 Objective Two

- To explore how social media is utilised to mitigate risks in civil unrest situations.

The collected research results clearly show that social media serve as an important tool for risk minimisation. The relevant literature by Haataja et al. (2016: 1) shows how crisis and disaster management organisations use social media and outlines the key motivators and barriers that experts believe these organisations face when using social media. Crisis

and disaster management organisations use social media primarily to inform the public to minimise risk, but also to gather information from citizens. One of the main advantages of social media in times of crisis is its ability to disseminate information quickly. Social media enables the immediate dissemination of risk messages to a wide audience, which is essential in crisis situations where timely information can significantly impact public safety and response. This immediacy is particularly important in food safety crises, where stakeholders have recognised the need for rapid communication to effectively mitigate risks (Regan *et al.*, 2014: 119).

The findings of the primary study are consistent with this, as can be seen in Figure 4.14, which shows that a significant proportion of respondents 56.5% agreed and 26.1% strongly agreed felt that social media played an important role in alerting individuals and communities to potential risks and hazards during the 2021 KZN unrest. Furthermore, a significant majority of respondents - 60.9% - agreed and 17.4% strongly agreed that social media updates during the 2021 unrest in KwaZulu-Natal were timely and helpful for road closures, safety warnings and highlighting alternative routes. Therefore, this objective was successfully achieved.

5.2.3 Objective Three

- To assess the impact of social media during the 2021 looting in KwaZulu-Natal.

This objective aimed to assess the role of social media during the looting in KwaZulu-Natal, a critical event in the history of the region. The literature reviewed in chapter two and the findings presented in chapter four provide a comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon. The research findings show that during the looting in KwaZulu-Natal, social media was the primary source of news and updates for many people as the situation unfolded.

The literature highlights the significant role that social media played in the July 2021 looting in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, an event characterised by widespread violence, property destruction and looting. Research suggests that social media not only facilitated the looting, but also influenced the reporting and public perception of the event. Certain

posts and discussions on these platforms may have exacerbated tensions surrounding the riots and possibly contributed to the intensification of violence (Mathe & Matsaathebe, 2022; Makonye, 2022).

The primary findings of this study are consistent with the literature and show that the majority of respondents (70.9%) agreed that social media was an important source of information during the looting in KwaZulu-Natal. Furthermore, 66.9% of respondents agreed that social media played an important role in connecting people and broadcasting the events of the July 2021 riots to the world, with 16.7% strongly agreeing with this opinion. In contrast, 14.4% of respondents were neutral and only 1.0% disagreed or strongly disagreed. These results show that a clear majority of respondents recognised the importance of social media for communication and dissemination of information during the looting.

This emphasises the double-edged role of social media during the civil unrest: While they facilitated the organisation of unrest, they also influenced public discourse and perceptions of the event. Despite its controversial role in inciting violence, social media had a positive impact as it enabled the rapid dissemination of critical information. This allowed people to inform themselves about the looting and make more informed decisions. This objective was successfully achieved as the research confirms the crucial role of social media in organising and shaping the narrative during the looting in KwaZulu-Natal.

5.3 Recommendations

5.3.1 Strengthen communication and online monitoring

Local governments in KZN should establish a dedicated team within law enforcement agencies or work with social media platforms to actively monitor and address potential threats and misinformation. This will help to detect and combat the spread of fake news and criminal activities organised through social media.

5.3.2 Develop a crisis management plan

The local government in KZN should create an effective crisis management plan that includes specific protocols and guidelines for dealing with incidents of large-scale looting and unrest. This plan should outline procedures for coordinating with law enforcement agencies, emergency services, and social media platforms to ensure a swift and coordinated response.

5.3.3 Enhance collaboration with social media companies

Foster closer collaboration and information sharing between the local government and social media companies. Establishing direct channels of communication with these platforms will allow for quicker removal of harmful content and the identification of individuals or groups inciting violence or criminal activities.

5.3.4 Public awareness campaigns

The local government should also assist in launching public awareness campaigns to educate citizens about the responsible use of social media and the potential dangers of misinformation. Empower communities in KwaZulu-Natal to identify and report suspicious or harmful content that could contribute to illegal activities. Citizens should also be educated on the consequences of participating in or supporting looting or any other criminal activity.

5.3.5 Invest in technology and training

Local government should allocate resources to acquire technology and provide training to law enforcement agencies to effectively monitor, analyse, and respond to social media activities. This includes leveraging data analytics and artificial intelligence tools to identify patterns, detect potential threats, and prevent future incidents.

5.3.6 Strengthen legislation and penalties

Review and update existing legislation to address the misuse of social media platforms for coordinating criminal activities. Introduce stricter penalties for individuals involved in organizing or participating in looting events facilitated through social media channels.

5.3.7 Encourage community policing

Foster a sense of ownership and responsibility within communities by promoting community policing initiatives. Encourage citizens to work closely with law enforcement agencies to report any suspicious activities observed online or offline, promoting a safer and more secure environment.

5.4 Limitations

A major limitation of this study is its geographical focus, as it was conducted exclusively in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Consequently, the findings may not be transferable to other regions or countries with different socio-political contexts or levels of social media penetration. Additionally, the study relied on self-reported data collected through an online questionnaire using Google Forms. The online nature of the study could have excluded individuals with limited internet access, potentially affecting the representativeness of the results.

5.5 Future Research

5.5.1. Investigate how social media users interacted during the looting

Future research should explore the dynamics of social media interactions during the 2021 looting in KwaZulu-Natal. This could include analysing how users shared real-time information, coordinated activities, or expressed opinions about the events. For example, studies could examine the role of hashtags, live videos, and community groups in mobilising support, spreading awareness, or even inciting violence. Qualitative methods such as content analysis of social media posts, interviews with active users, and sentiment analysis could provide deeper insights into how these interactions shaped public perception and behavior during the unrest. Understanding these patterns could help identify both the positive and negative impacts of social media in crisis situations.

5.5.2. Examine social media platforms' responsibilities in monitoring and regulating content

Another critical area for future research is the role and responsibility of social media platforms in monitoring and regulating content related to looting and civil unrest. Studies could investigate how platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp handled harmful or inflammatory content during the 2021 riots. This could involve analysing the effectiveness of their content moderation policies, algorithms, and reporting mechanisms. Additionally, researchers could propose policy recommendations to improve platform accountability, such as stricter content guidelines, faster response times to flagged content, and greater transparency in decision-making processes. Collaborating with platform representatives and policymakers could ensure that these recommendations are practical and actionable.

5.5 3. Explore the intersection of socioeconomic factors and social media in the context of looting

Future studies should also investigate how socioeconomic factors such as unemployment, inequality, and historical grievances intersected with social media activity during the looting. For instance, researchers could examine whether social media amplified existing frustrations or provided a platform for marginalized groups to voice their concerns. Mixed-methods approaches, including surveys, focus groups, and data mining of social media posts, could help uncover the underlying causes of the unrest and the role of social media in exacerbating or alleviating tensions. This research could inform targeted interventions to address root causes of civil unrest and promote more constructive uses of social media in similar contexts.

5.5.4 Investigating social media interactions during unrest

Future research could delve deeper into how social media users interacted during the 2021 KZN looting, exploring how users shared real-time information, coordinated activities, or expressed opinions about the events. This could involve analysing the use of hashtags, live videos, and community groups, which played a significant role in mobilising support, spreading awareness, and in some cases, inciting violence. Qualitative research methods such as content analysis, interviews with active users, and sentiment analysis could help uncover the specific dynamics of these interactions and

their effects on public perception and behaviour. Gaining insights into both the positive and negative impacts of social media in such crisis situations could inform better management strategies for future crises.

5.5.5 Role of Social Media in Crisis Communication

Further research should examine the role of social media in crisis communication from the perspective of different stakeholders, including government agencies, social media companies, and the general public. Studies could focus on how these stakeholders use social media to communicate during crises, how they perceive the effectiveness of these tools, and the challenges they face. Research could also investigate the evolution of crisis communication strategies in response to the growing influence of social media.

5.5. 6. Long-Term Effects of Social Media on Public Perception

Another avenue for future research could explore the long-term effects of social media on public perceptions of government response and safety in the aftermath of unrest. Understanding how social media influences trust in authorities, public sentiment, and long-term behaviour changes could offer insights into the potential benefits and risks of relying on social media platforms for crisis management. By addressing these future research questions, scholars can gain a deeper understanding of the role social media plays in crisis management and how its use can be optimised for better risk mitigation in future civil unrest scenarios.

5.6 Conclusion

This study highlights the profound role of social media during the 2021 looting and civil unrest in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. The analysis shows that platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and WhatsApp were not only crucial in mobilising individuals, but also in amplifying the unrest. Social media facilitated the rapid dissemination of information, organised actions and influenced public perception, which contributed to the intensity of the event. By sharing videos, images and messages, participants were channelled to gathering points, which further escalated the situation.

While social media proved effective in mobilising people and disseminating information in real time, it also played a dual role in exacerbating violence and looting. The platforms enabled the spread of misinformation, exacerbated tensions and hampered the authorities' efforts to manage the crisis. This research highlights the wider societal impact of social media in times of unrest and shows that these social media platforms are not only powerful as a means of communication, but also shape the course of unrest. In summary, during the looting in KZN, social media contributed to both the mobilisation of participants and the intensification of violence. Future crisis management strategies must therefore take into account the significant influence of social media and emphasise the need to regulate harmful content, while also using these platforms for constructive and responsible communication during crises.

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(Supervisor and details) Please contact the researcher (tel no.), my supervisor (tel no.) or the Institutional Research Ethics administrator on 031 373 2900. Complaints can be reported to the DVC: TIP, Prof F. Otieno on 031 373 2382 or dvctip@dut.ac.za.

General:

Potential participants must be assured that participation is voluntary and the approximate number of participants to be included should be disclosed. A copy of the information letter should be issued to participants. The information letter and consent form must be translated and provided in the primary spoken language of the research population e.g. isiZulu.

Appendix A

TOPIC: THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN CIVIL UNREST: A CASE OF THE 2021 LOOTING IN KWAZULU-NATAL

Section 1

Demographics questions

1.1 Please indicate your gender

<input type="checkbox"/>	Female
<input type="checkbox"/>	Male

1.2 What race are you?

<input type="checkbox"/>	Black
<input type="checkbox"/>	Indian
<input type="checkbox"/>	White
<input type="checkbox"/>	Coloured

1.3 How old are you?

<input type="checkbox"/>	18- 25 years
<input type="checkbox"/>	26-35 years
<input type="checkbox"/>	36-44 years
<input type="checkbox"/>	46-60 years & older

1.4 Do you have a smart phone?

<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes
<input type="checkbox"/>	No

Section 2. Examine the role of social media as a communication tool

	Please 'X' the most appropriate	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Strongly Agree	Agree
2.1	Social media has become an integral part of human communication and the basic goal is to promote communication.					
2.2	Social media platforms can disseminate accurate information and can influence which issues the public deems important, thereby influencing public perceptions					
2.3	Social media is no longer just setting the agenda it is also becoming a platform for the public to actively shape and redefine the issues that concern them					
2.4	Social media offers creative and effective ways for people to coordinate their efforts and express their political and social concerns					
2.5	During the civil unrest social media's power to mobilise people into action is undeniable					

3. To assess the role of social media during the KwaZulu-Natal looting

	Please 'X' the most appropriate	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Strongly Agree	Agree
3.1	Social media served as a tactical tool in disseminating information before, during and after civil unrest in KZN.					
3.2	Social media was a crucial source of information for me during the KwaZulu-Natal looting					
3.3	Real-time information sharing allowed for the coordination of looting efforts in KZN					
3.4	During the July civil unrest social media helped the people to					

	connect and broadcast the KZN 2021 July civil unrest to the world.					
3.5	The hashtags #ShutdownSA, #ShutdownGauteng and #ShutdownKZN were frequently used during the 2021 unrest.					

4. Explore how social media is used during civil unrest situations to minimise risk

	Please 'X' the most appropriate	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Strongly Agree	Agree
4.1	Social media played a crucial role in alerting individuals and communities about potential risks and dangers during KZN 2021 looting.					
4.2	During the civil unrest I found updates on road closure, safety warnings & and alternative routes shared on social media during the KZN looting to be timely and helpful.					
4.3	Government authorities effectively utilised social media platforms to share official updates and safety information during KZN 2021 looting.					
4.4	Crisis and disaster management organizations use social media primarily to inform the public to minimise risk and to gather information from citizens.					
4.5	I saw initiatives such as #LootingMustFall, #SaveSouthAfrica and #Cleanups that were launched to deal with the aftermath of the riots and looting in KwaZulu-Natal to restore normalcy					

Appendix B



LETTER OF INFORMATION

Title of the Research Study: The role of social media during civil unrest: A case of the 2021 looting in KwaZulu-Natal

Principal Investigator/s/researcher: Luthando Valencia Ngubane (BTECH: Public Relations).

Co-Investigator/s/supervisor/s: Dr Elvis Madondo (PhD: Management sciences marketing)

Brief Introduction and Purpose of the Study: the role of social media during civil unrest: A case of the 2021 looting in KwaZulu-Natal. 1.4 The objectives of the study are to: To examine the role of social media as a communication tool during civil unrest, to explore how social media is utilised to mitigate risks in civil unrest situations and to assess the impact of social media during the 2021 looting in KZN.

Outline of the Procedures: A google forms online questionnaire will take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete. Respondents are requested to answer questionnaires completely and in order for the researcher to be able to analyse and interpret all data accurately.

Risks or Discomforts to the Participant: The study poses no danger to participants' health and well-being.

Benefits: The study has the potential to contribute to existing research on the role of social media in the 2021 KwaZulu-Natal looting and civil unrest. It may serve as a valuable resource for other researchers exploring similar topics. Participation in this study is voluntary, and no financial compensation will be provided to respondents. The findings will be utilised for academic purposes, including the publication of a journal article.

Reason/s why the Participant May Be Withdrawn from the Study: Respondents will take part on study on their own free will and may withdraw at any time they wish.

Remuneration: There will be no remuneration received by respondents for participating in the study.

Costs of the Study: Respondents are not expected make any form of monetary contribution towards the study.

Confidentiality: The identity of respondents will not be revealed in the research report or publication.

Research-related Injury: No injuries should be expected from this study.

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

(Please contact the researcher, Miss Luthando Ngubane at 073 573 9235 or the supervisor, Dr. E. Madondo on 063 350 8280 or the Institutional Research Ethics administrator on 031 373 2900. Complaints can be reported to the DVC: TIP, Prof F. Otieno on 031 373 2382 or dvctip@dut.ac.za).

Appendix C



CONSENT

Statement of Agreement to Participate in the Research Study:

- I hereby confirm that I have been informed by the researcher, _____ (name of researcher), about the nature, conduct, benefits and risks of this study - Research Ethics Clearance Number: _____,
- I have also received, read and understood the above written information (Participant Letter of Information) regarding the study.
- I am aware that the results of the study, including personal details regarding my sex, age, date of birth, initials and diagnosis will be anonymously processed into a study report. • In view of the requirements of research, I agree that the data collected during this study can be processed in a computerised system by the researcher.

Full Name of Researcher

Date

Signature

Full Name of Witness (If applicable) Date Signature

•
•

Full Name of Legal Guardian (If applicable) Date Signature

I may, at any stage, without prejudice, withdraw my consent and participation in the study. I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and (of my own free will) declare myself prepared to participate in the study.

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

Full Name of Participant Date Time Signature / Right Thumbprint

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

Please note the following:

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

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

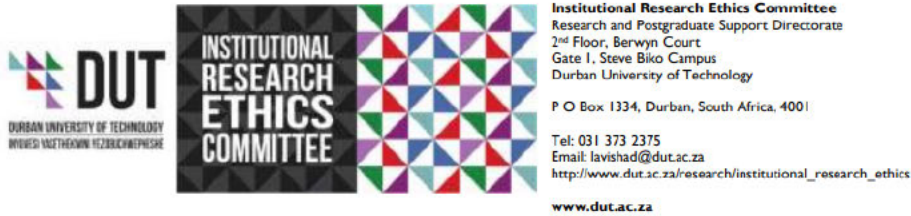
If anyone makes a mistake completing this document e.g. wrong date or spelling mistake a new document has to be completed. The incomplete original document has to be kept in the participant file and not thrown away and copies thereof must be issued to the participant.

References:

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

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

Appendix C ETHICS CLEARANCE



28 March 2024

Ms L V Ngubane
M1362 Umlazi,
Nozungeza Crescent Road

Dear Ms Ngubane

The role of social media during civil unrest: A case of 2021 looting in KwaZulu-Natal
Ethics Clearance Number: IREC 213/23

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

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

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

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

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

It is compulsory for a student or researcher to apply for recertification on an annual basis. The failure to do so will result in withdrawal of ethics clearance. It is the responsibility of the researcher and the supervisor to apply for recertification.

Please note that you are required to submit a Notification of Completion of Study form together with an abstract to the DUT-IREC office on completion of your study.

Yours Sincerely

Prof J K Adam
Chairperson: DUT-IREC

TheDissertationDesignMaster



Phone:+27780248617

Email:mketiwae@yahoo.com

Email:saniphetinvestments@gmail.com

Web:<https://theis-reports-proof-reading-and-editing.business.site>



2

Date: 20 March 2025

Dear Sir / Madam

This is to confirm that this thesis entitled:

**THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA DURING CIVIL UNREST: A CASE OF THE 2021
LOOTING IN KWAZULU-NATAL**

Has been edited according to the agreement with Durban University of
Technology.

Authored by

Luthando Valencia Ngubane

Student Number: 21423123

Elizabeth Mnyandu

Signature over printed name

Phone: +27780248617

Email: mketiwae@yahoo.com



TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

REFERENCE

COMPANY Durban University of Technology
PROJECT Masters
ATTENTION The Chairperson

CLEARANCE N° 25 0324 1949
DATE ISSUED Mon, 24-Mar-2025

COUNTRY South Africa

RESEARCHER Ngubane Luthando +27 67 205 1769
luthandongubane1@gmail.com
South Africa

TOTAL CLEARED: 2 of 2

ITEM	SERVICE	CLEARED	IN PROGRESS	PENDING	N/A
1	Sample Size (n) - Power Analysis Calculations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
2	Data Collection Instrument(s) Review (Not Design)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
3	Statistical Analysis Plan (Statistical Methods)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	Statistical Data Analysis Results	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

LETTER OF STATISTICAL SUPPORT

Ngubane, Luthando

Project Title

Should you require any further details, please do not hesitate to contact us.

SINCERELY YOURS

SUMMARY

The Analytics Team

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IN PROGRESS 0
PENDING



_____ 2

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NOTES

CLEARED	- Declared as either statistically sound or the appropriate advise has been given.
PENDING	- The service will be required at a later stage.
N/A	- Not applicable. It is either the service was sourced elsewhere or not required

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Luthando Ngubane : 21423123

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