THE MENTAL HEALTH EFFECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON YOUNG ADULT SOUTH AFRICANS IN THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: A THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS BY RHODES UNIVERSITY STUDENTS.

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

MASTER OF ARTS IN SOCIOLOGY

of

RHODES UNIVERSITY

by

HLUMELO JUBASE

18J0258

SUPERVISED BY

Dr John Reynolds

Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic in South Africa has been mainly discussed in terms of its socioeconomic effects and loss of life. While these are important, its mental health effects are given attention in this dissertation. In particular, this is explored through social media platforms, which saw increased usage as a result of regulations on movement to slow the Virus' spread. This is explored during the hard lockdown (or 'Alert Level 5') and further, focuses on young adults, key users of social media platforms.

Max Weber's 'social action theory' and Michel de Certeau's 'theory of everyday life' are drawn on, which help to analyse social relations from an individual level; and are used to explore the kinds of expressions made on a social media platform, and what can be said in mental health terms. These theoretical frameworks are applied to a university "Confessions" page, used mostly by young adults, where submissions were made anonymously.

Findings indicate a great deal of trauma associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, but also evidence of the emergence of collective responsibility. They show the immense sacrifices made by participants for the opportunity of an education, and provide a window into the kinds of subjectivities experienced by South African young adults. Further, they show the importance of having more substantive mental health discussions in South Africa, a country familiar with traumatic experiences.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements

Thank you to everyone that has helped me along this journey - family, friends, lecturers and inspiring thinkers. Thank you, especially, to those who are no longer with us and are hopefully watching from Above.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Context of Research

This dissertation provides an analysis of the mental health effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in South Africa, which has been mainly discussed in terms of its socioeconomic effects and loss of life (Duby et al, 2022; Posel et al, 2021). While these are important, the mental health effects of the COVID-19 pandemic also require attention, as they are likely to outlast the pandemic itself and continue to resonate in less noticeable ways (Nguse & Wassenaar, 2021: 306). The pandemic's mental health effects are explored through the increase of online socialisation on social media platforms as a result of regulations on movement to slow the Virus' spread (Dow et al, 2021: 2). This is analysed in the initial stages of the pandemic (or the hard lockdown) and further, focuses on young adults, a key demographic on social media platforms (Burdee et al, 2019: 315).

As a young adult, I spend a considerable amount of my spare time on social media, whether for news or entertainment. In the emergence of COVID-19 - in particular, the hard lockdown - social media became my primary source of information and socialisation, as it did for much of South Africa and the world. It brought individuals further onto social media platforms to navigate an unprecedented experience in the (online) community of others (Dow et al, 2021: 2).

My University community was an example, as an unofficial Facebook forum (or "Confessions" page) became a space for queries, grievances, concern and worry, humour, debate, misinformation, conspiracies and hateful speech. It reflected our experiences as students adapting to online learning, a difficult adjustment for many due to our country's socioeconomic conditions. With moments of hope and solidarity, it reflected anxiety, anger and frustration, fear and mourning. It was a both positive and negative outlet. My experience on the forum had negative effects on my mental health, which I have not participated in since.

I am not alone in my experience of mental health difficulties in South Africa, as prior to COVID-19, mild to moderate mental illnesses (including chronic stress, anxiety and depression) affected one in six South Africans, and one in three South Africans endured a mental illness in their lifetime (Nguse & Wassenaar, 2021: 306; Jack et al, 2014: 1). These are tied to South Africa's socioeconomic conditions, as socioeconomics have been linked

to levels of stress, anxiety and depression. South Africa has a deep-rooted colonial and apartheid history, and continues to grapple with structural inequality, poverty and unemployment. It also has high rates of HIV/AIDS and Gender-Based Violence (Duby et al, 2022: 2). In analyses of South Africa's social environment, one can argue that mental health has received less attention, and this has also become true with COVID-19, the cause of significant socioeconomic decline and loss of life (Nguse & Wassenaar, 2021: 305).

In exploring the social implications of COVID-19, the focus has been on the loss of physical socialisation due to restrictions on movement, and while important, the effects of increased online socialisation as a consequence of COVID-19 have been relatively neglected. This is worth exploration as online socialisation, in particular on social media platforms, was a central means of communication and information in the early stages of COVID-19 and subsequent hard lockdown (Dow et al, 2021: 2). Social media platforms are also a prominent feature in South Africa and Global South with globalisation, with most users being young adults (Burdee et al, 2019: 318).

My analysis draws on Max Weber's 'social action theory' and Michel de Certeau's 'theory of everyday life'. They both analyse how individuals understand and respond to social relations, and their analyses can be gainfully applied to social relations on a social media platform in the emergence of COVID-19, the kinds of expressions made, and what can be said in mental health terms. Weber and de Certeau's constructionist approaches are also useful in providing a sociological view on mental health in South Africa, or a psychosocial interpretation (Blaiklie & Priest, 2017: 130).

Goals of Research

There are three objectives to the analysis. The first is to explore how social media platforms were used in South Africa to express experiences of the initial stages of the pandemic and hard lockdown restrictions, particularly through analysis of social media posts by young adult South Africans, a key demographic on social media platforms.

Second, to explore whether and in which ways their expressions were framed psychosocially, as manifested in terms of mental health indicators such as stress, anxiety and depression.

Third, to explore the kinds of changes associated with the COVID-19 pandemic in terms of mental health and social media usage through analysing findings in the context of those terms prior to COVID-19 in South Africa.

Research Methods & Methodology

The research followed a qualitative or interpretivist methodology, as it involved a thematic analysis of social media texts (or "posts") to interpret the kinds of human expressions made, and whether and in which ways they could be framed in psychosocial terms.

Why a qualitative approach

A qualitative/interpretivist approach was utilised, as the focus of this research was on textual representations of psychosocial processes. This also sought to complement quantitative trends on "mental health" and "mental well-being" in South Africa (Nguse & Wassenaar, 2021; Duby et al, 2022; Jack et al, 2014) through gathering further insight on why these trends were present, and what had caused them to be.

While some social research has sought to provide deeper explanations (such as the contributions of socioeconomic conditions) in their analyses, they have mostly relied on observation and measurements (Nguse & Wassenaar, 2021). Some accounts, such as Duby et al (2022), have utilised mixed methodologies, but their incorporation of qualitative analyses has yet to be more widely practised.

In case studies of the COVID-19 pandemic, quantitative methods have been dominant, with short to medium-form questionnaires used in limited cases. This was a result of the methodological constraints of conducting research under heavier COVID-19 restrictions, which have since been eased as case counts have lowered (Posel et al, 2021; Duby et al, 2022; van Niekerk & van Gant, 2021; Dawood et al, 2022; Visser & Law-van Wyk, 2021). Further probing the pandemic's mental health effects has become more tenable, as COVID-19 has been incorporated into a collective sense of normalcy and is less associated with panic and fear. Although my analysis focused on texts rather than direct engagement with individuals, the texts still grappled with a highly complex social phenomenon, from which critical distance was obtained.

Why a thematic analysis

Thematic analyses entail detailed searches for patterned responses (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 79), and can occur inductively, where analysis is undertaken without "pre-existing coding frames"; and theoretically, where analysis is driven by more specific objectives (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 82, 84). A combination of these approaches was used in this research. First, expressions made in the lead-up to, during and after South Africa's COVID-19 hard lockdown were each analysed in their own terms, relying on forms of expression by participants (an inductive approach). Second, their expressions were then related to psychological categories such as stress, anxiety, panic, and/or depression (a theoretical approach).

The reasoning is as follows. The research was motivated by specific interests, namely, a sociological view on the psychological processes surrounding social media usage and engagement among South African young adults during the COVID-19 lockdown. Prior analyses of the psychological implications of the COVID-19 pandemic have flagged presences of stress, anxiety and/or depression, which were of interest in this dissertation (Nguse & Wassenaar, 2021).

That said, themes of different kinds were also sought, including those miscellaneous, humorous, or positive and uplifting. While experiences of the pandemic were expected to be generally negative, a nuanced view was sought. Discussions on COVID-19 in South Africa have rightfully addressed its negative impact (Duby et al, 2022; Posel et al, 2021), but it was also important, where possible, to include different stories. Part of the research's wider objectives was to contribute to more substantive psychosocial analyses in South Africa. Highlighting only negative experiences, while there may be many, would undermine this effort. With its history, South Africa has also shown itself to be a dynamic social space, having dealt with significant trauma, and this was also the expectation in this analysis.

Research techniques & procedures

Fieldwork was undertaken over a one-month period, from 23 September to 21 October 2022. Posts on an unofficial Rhodes University Facebook forum (or "Confessions" page) during South Africa's hard lockdown, or 'Alert Level 5', from 26 March 2020 to 30 April 2020 were analysed. The forum was frequented by young adults at Rhodes University both prior to and during the pandemic for information and socialisation (Rhodes Confessions 2017-2020 Team,

2020d: 3). Confessions pages are also of frequent participation by South African young adults and in areas across the world (Sacks et al, 2021: 551; Yeo & Chu, 2017: 753).

While the forum has not been operational since 31 December 2020, its posts were archived by its moderators (those who conducted its everyday running), and ethics approval was obtained for the material to be used for research purposes. Posts included in the archive were submitted anonymously through the use of third-party software[1]. Posts with information on private citizens or with identifying information were excluded by the forum's moderators. Posts promoting bigotry, violence or private interests (such as business promotion) were also excluded (Rhodes Confessions 2017-2020 Team, 2020d: 4)[2].

The forum's moderators closed the page as its operations became "enormously difficult" and with "immense pain". They processed over 40 000 posts over the forum's four-year period, where they contended with "an assortment of people's worst traumas [they] cannot disclose" (Rhodes Confessions 2017-2020 Team, 2020a: 1). Their comments emphasise the real-life implications beyond the forum and show the weight its words can hold.

While the research did not directly engage with participants of the forum or its moderators, a select period of posts were analysed, and there was an awareness that the posts were more than words on a page or on a screen. They were utterances made within a social context, which in terms of this analysis, was associated with immense social disruption.

The analysis was organised in accordance with significant dates or events during the hard lockdown. While focusing on the 26 March - 30 April period, the journey towards the lockdown was first examined. This included 5 March (when the first case of COVID-19 was detected in South Africa); 15 March (when the state of national disaster was announced); 18 March (when schools and universities were closed); and 23 March (when the hard lockdown was announced). These preceding events were foundational to analysing the lockdown period.

Within the lockdown, there was cognisance of occurrences such as increasing case counts, fatalities and hospital strain; SAPS (South African Police Services) and SANDF (South African

[1] The software in question, *CrushNinja*, anonymises submitter information (such as one's Facebook profile and details). Posts are then given a chronological number with which to be identified, before sent to moderators to be uploaded (Rhodes Confessions 2017-2020 Team, 2020d: 1).

[2] These rules were made by the forum's moderators in conjunction with Facebook Community Standards, which do not allow for violence or harm on the platform (Meta, 2022).

National Defence Force) brutality; reactions to COVID-19 restrictions (such as those on travel and lifestyle); corruption in the provision of COVID-19 relief measures; as well as increasing socioeconomic poverty. While these occurrences were necessarily be emergent in the data, they were worth mentioning as significant events during the lockdown period.

Also included, were the first weeks of "Alert Level 4" from 1 May - 14 May, as the country transitioned out of the hard lockdown. Here, initial insights into the lockdown's implications were examined.

In total, approximately 11 weeks of posts were analysed, combining both South Africa's milestones in the COVID-19 hard lockdown, as well as the University community's engagement with these events. The analysis then related its findings to published research prior to COVID-19, in order to contrast patterns of engagement encountered in the field to those before the pandemic.

Overview of Chapters

A review of the literature on mental health and mental wellbeing in South Africa is first provided (Chapter 2). A social constructionist approach is adopted in pursuit of a more holistic view of the psychological impact of South Africa's social environment. Research on mental health in South Africa is considered, including psychological processes associated from the country's transition to democracy to COVID-19.

Social media platforms and social media usage in South Africa are then explored to introduce their role in public discourse, where they significantly facilitate discursive activity. The centrality of young people in South Africa's public discourse is also highlighted, in the ways in which they are contributing to the 'rainbow nation'. An African continental perspective helps to close the chapter, where social media platforms and their role in youth subjectivities in other African countries is discussed, both prior to and since COVID-19's emergence.

The next chapter (Chapter 3) provides a theoretical perspective and discusses the theoretical reasoning behind the research. Weber and de Certeau's theories are introduced and each applied to the issues raised in the literature. Particularly, they are each used to frame discursive activities in South Africa as ties between its social environment and psychological processes. They are also used to reflect on South Africa's experience of COVID-19, as well as to provide some insight on the experiences of some of its African neighbours.

A thematic analysis of the case study is then provided, and tied to the research's objectives and theoretical and literary foundations (Chapter 4). Here, the discursive journey of expressions made by young adults on a Confessions page in the COVID-19 lockdown are explored and analysed within a psychosocial frame. Pertinent themes emerge, such as the ways in which South Africa's social environment has a psychological impact; COVID-19's threat to the country's social progress; and youth subjectivities in South Africa.

The discussion is concluded (Chapter 5). A summary of the main discussion points is provided, which include the ties between South Africa's social environment and the psychological processes of its citizens, as well as theoretical explanations from Weber and de Certeau. A summary of the analysis' findings is provided and their significance. These include the importance of having more substantive mental health discussions in South Africa. Continentally, that Africa is an area of considerable discursive activity on social media platforms, where psychological processes are displayed, and there are interesting stories to be told, particularly involving young people.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

In his work on consciousness, Steve Biko reflected on the psychological processes behind attaining political liberation. His analysis was psychosocial, and tied South Africa's social environment (its racial State) to its psychological impact, in the ways it also sought to confine Black South Africans psychologically through them undervaluing their own selves (Hook, 2004: 105). The discussion in this chapter draws on Biko to analyse the broader psychological implications of COVID-19, in terms of the changes it has brought to South Africa's social environment.

A psychosocial perspective is first applied to discussions on mental well-being in South Africa and an argument is made for deepening those discussions. Here, Biko is used to show psychological processes as familiar to South Africa's journey to democracy and, based on this, how present discussions ought to be deepened. Building on discussions which have occurred in the past decade, COVID-19 is shown to present South Africa with an overdue opportunity to reflect more deeply on the current framing of mental well-being, and to look more closely into the ties between its social environment and broader psychological influences.

An argument is then made for why analyses on South Africa's experience of COVID-19 ought to be further explored through increased social engagement on social media platforms. Discussions thus far have remained focused on the pandemic's restrictions on physical movement, yet as a significant means of communication and socialisation, especially in the hard lockdown of the pandemic, social media platforms require attention.

This is then tied to an analysis of social media platforms being avenues for "discursive activity" in South Africa, both prior to the pandemic and as a further result of it. Under a constructionist lens, social engagement on social media platforms represents a view into psychological processes. This is evident in the range of discursive activities which have been engaged in by South Africans for various outcomes, including conscientisation during apartheid and reconciliation in the post-apartheid period. While used progressively in these instances, discursive activities are open to different outcomes, including negative. This also applies to discursive activities on social media platforms, including everyday discussions, some of which are honest, transparent and sensitive, providing some insight on the daily activities and reflections of users.

A further African continental perspective is given of notable social media activities that have occurred through social media platforms on the continent. The aim to show social media platforms in Africa as areas of considerable discursive activity, both before and since COVID-19. Yet, despite this, Africa has been paid less attention due to its socioeconomic conditions and rates of technologisation. While global discussions in the past decade have leaned towards focusing on the Global North, social media activities have continued to grow in the Global South, in general, and in Africa, in particular, creating an imbalance in the global framing of social media platform activities. During the emergence of COVID-19, some attention was drawn to activities in Africa, however despite this, systematic discrepancies in representation have continued.

Social media platforms are then discussed in terms of their ability to inform public discourse while also themselves being informed by occurring social activities. Much of their influence in society has been socially manufactured for communication and socialisation. In the many events that have structurally shaped South Africa's social environment, the influence of discursive actions by its citizens (including through social media platforms) have also been important. Discursive actions have shown significant ability to help to inform the social environments in which South Africans live. While discussions on the country's living experiences may bring senses of panic, the agency of South Africans in their daily social engagements (whether in-person or on communicative platforms) is important to remember.

The importance of having more substantive mental health discussions in South Africa in order to reflect on the well-being of its citizens

COVID-19 is not the first major crisis South Africa has faced. Arguably, the country is familiar with trauma from its colonial history and having emerged from apartheid 29 years ago. In establishing its democratic settlement, the importance of reckoning with the country's trauma was recognised. Deputy Chairperson of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), Alex Boraine, spoke of the Commission as an opportunity for both political reconciliation and psychological healing, as he recognised its importance in restoring the country's political and racial divides, as well as healing its damaged collective psyche (Stein, 2001: 455).

Similarly, Steve Biko wrote of "psychological liberation as a prerequisite to political liberation". In the struggle for a democratic South Africa, Black South Africans' political identities intertwined with their day-to-day lived experiences. Biko understood that the personal (as it related to Black South Africans' subjective experiences) was the political in this

regard and extended to their minds or consciousness, such that it was only through psychological independence that Black South Africans would garner political independence (quoted in Hook, 2004: 105). Biko and Boraine are referenced to show psychological activities as familiar topics of social analysis in South Africa, which they both saw as important to engage with.

South African legislation codifies the responsibilities of the State in tendering to its citizens' mental well-being. The Mental Health Care Act of 2002 seeks to guarantee mental health services as a human right by providing "the best possible mental health care, treatment and rehabilitation services available", with set out procedures and Review Boards for every mental health facility to protect human rights (Mental Health Care Act, 2002: 14). Alongside South Africa's broader constitutional framework, the Mental Health Care Act was hailed as one of the most "progressive pieces of legislation in the world", and in keeping with the country's nation-building effort (Burns, 2011: 100; Nguse & Wassenaar, 2021: 305). While an effective mental health care system is crucially important, the framing of mental health discussions in South Africa has remained focused on service provision, in particular the treatment of diagnosed illnesses. Notably absent from public discussions have been more introspective and personal reflections on the country's social environment (Hook, 2004: 85).

Critiques of the approach to mental well-being in South Africa have mostly focused on the State's inability to provide the health services required by law, and have focused quantitatively on the ratios of facilities, doctors, healthcare and social workers in the country compared to global standards or similar-sized countries in population or gross domestic product (Lund et al, 2010: 397; Nguse & Wassenaar, 2021: 305; Jack et al, 2014: 1; Burns, 2011: 105)[3]. While also important, these critiques too have confined discussions of psychological processes to the provision of healthcare services. Further, a focus on quantitative accounts has excluded substantial social analysis in exploring their implications within the lived-in realities of citizens.

In the past decade, discussions on psychological processes in South Africa have broadened to include stress, anxiety, depression and substance abuse (Nguse & Wassenaar, 2021; Jack et al, 2014; Duby et al, 2022). This shift coincides with the socioeconomic fallout from the 2008 Financial Crisis, which was associated with a growing recognition of the ties between

[3] The WHO's recommendation for the ratio of healthcare workers per 1 000 people is 4.45. As of 2019, the ratio in South Africa is 5.03 (WHO, 2021; Cleary & Low, 2022).

socioeconomic conditions and levels of stress, anxiety and depression (Duby et al, 2022: 2). With its high rates of socioeconomic inequality, rising poverty and unemployment, combined with high rates of HIV/AIDS and gender-based violence, the South African social environment remains highly complicated by its history (Duby et al, 2022: 2). It is not surprising that prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, one in six South Africans lived with anxiety, depression or substance abuse, and that one in three South Africans endured a mental illness in their lifetime (Nguse & Wassenaar, 2021: 306; Jack et al, 2014: 1).

The past decade has also seen increased public engagements on the lived experiences of the country's citizens, as serious questions have been posed. Notable examples include the Rhodes Must Fall and Fees Must Fall protests as well as mobilisation around the Land Question (Bosch, 2017: 221; Ntsebeza & Hall, 2007: 1). These are significant social movements that provide insight into the subjective experiences of a significant number of people in the country. Their analyses have sought to further discuss the implications of the South Africa's social environment, and they have shown its contributions to the mobilisation of mass actions (Nguse & Wassenaar, 2021; 306; Lund et al, 2010: 403).

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a cause of significant socioeconomic disruption and a large mental health toll. The latter has received less attention than the pandemic's socioeconomic effects and its loss of life, which too have yet to be more closely connected to psychological implications (Duby et al, 2022; Posel et al, 2021). Studies thus far have remained mainly quantitative and questionnaire-based, possibly due to the methodological constraints on conducting research during a pandemic (Posel et al, 2021: 3; Duby et al, 2022: 4; van Niekerk & van Gant, 2021: 2; Dawood et al, 2022: 4). Despite these constraints, these studies show evidence that the COVID-19 pandemic's mental health toll requires further attention.

For example, a study of public sector healthcare workers in KwaZulu-Natal in 2020 found they experienced high levels of depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress (Dawood et al, 2022: 13). Notably, two-thirds reported feeling that they were not "psychologically supported" or "cared for". This is significant coming from frontline workers, whose occupations heroically placed them head-on with the pandemic, where their work was of great social importance (Dawood et al, 2022: 12).

Another illustrative study focused on young adult women, who faced an increase in gender-based violence particularly in the hard lockdown of COVID-19, and are disproportionately affected by HIV/AIDS. In that study, young women reported experiencing a great deal of fear,

loneliness and depression (Duby et al, 2022: 11), and these sorts of findings are corroborated by other studies that assess the psychological impact of COVID-19 through lenses such as job loss, youth unemployment and pressure on teaching staff (Posel et al, 2021: 12; Garman et al, 2022: 8; van Niekerk & van Gant, 2021: 6).

The pandemic has also been linked to other social phenomena such as increases in misinformation, conspiracy theories and hate speech (Dow et al, 2021: 4; Menzies el al, 2020: 111). These phenomena raise questions not only about the ways the pandemic has influenced actions, but also the psychological dynamics behind them. They show the different ways - beyond the manifestation of mental conditions - that the pandemic has had psychological effects.

In addition, recent social analyses of COVID-19 in South Africa have considered its ties to the July Unrest in 2021, a series of events which brought further questions about the pandemic's social and psychological impacts. These events involved people resorting to crime for subsistence, as well as others seeing an opportunity to instigate violence and chaos (Chetty, 2021: 87). Engaging with such analyses, however, does not imply a sense of panic about the state of South Africa's social environment. Rather, such engagement recognises an overdue opportunity to look more deeply at the current framing of discursive actions in the country and its social dynamics. Returning to Boraine and Biko, introspective reflections are seen as necessary for the collective building of social inclusion and healing (Stein, 2001: 455; Hook, 2004: 106).

<u>An analysis of psychological influences tied to the COVID-19 pandemic through increased social media platform usage</u>

Social analyses of COVID-19 in South Africa continue to emerge, yet thus far, their focus has been on its restrictions on movement and activity, and the effects these have had, for instance socioeconomically (Duby et al, 2022; Posel et al, 2021). Many analysts centre their analyses on or make significant mention of the hard lockdown, as the country transitioned into its pandemic reality (van Niekerk & van Gant, 2021: 2; Dawood et al, 2022: 3). This experience, however, is assumed to have occurred only physically and little mention is made of its online dimension. This is also interesting as most studies were conducted via online questionnaires due to pandemic restrictions on movement and gatherings (Posel et al, 2021: 3; Duby et al, 2022: 4; van Niekerk & van Gant, 2021: 2; Dawood et al, 2022: 4).

The pandemic's online experience is worth exploring, as the internet, in particular social media platforms, became central means of communication, socialisation and research, especially during the hard lockdown (Dow et al, 2021: 2). Reflections on COVID-19's effects ought to include its online component.

Before undertaking this task, the significant role of social media platforms in South African public discourse is explored. This provides a foundation for a discussion on COVID-19, by illustrating the environment the pandemic entered into, and the kinds of changes it is associated with. The discussion that follows shows that social media platforms already played a significant role in South African public discourse, and their role grew during the COVID-19 pandemic.

A foundational discussion on the role of social media platforms in South African public discourse

Social media platforms, which are widely used as an everyday means of socialisation, are a prominent feature in South Africa and the broader Global South, particularly in the context of globalisation (Budree et al, 2019: 318). South Africa has the third largest share of internet users in Africa, with 41 million users, behind Egypt and Nigeria, which also exceed South Africa in population size (Kamer, 2022).

Social media platforms have been linked to increases in misinformation or "fake news" in the country, as well as acts of xenophobia. Xenophobic violence in 2015 and 2019 was partly traced to the circulation of misinformation through social media platforms, including doctored videos and images of supposed foreign nationals committing crimes or posing some sort of danger (Chenzi, 2020: 12). As a spokesperson for the South African Police Service (SAPS) noted in response to the 2019 attacks, "Ninety-nine percent of (xenophobic social media platform content) is either old, fake or not from this country" (quoted in Chenzi, 2020: 11).

South Africa has substantial press freedom, which is both enshrined in its Constitution and also in practice as it ranks 35th out of 180 countries (down from 32nd) in the Press Freedom Index of 2022 (Reporters Without Borders, 2022). It ranks highly in the continent as the third highest African country on the Index, below Namibia at 18th and the Seychelles at 13th. Critiques of South Africa's press freedom mainly centre on its corporate concentration, which has created structural barriers for smaller, more local outlets. Further, South Africa's socioeconomic conditions have made reporting less safe for journalists, who have increasingly become victims

of crime (Reporters Without Borders, 2022). Phenomena such as misinformation, which escape the country's press freedom, are significant.

Sadly, the attacks in 2015 and 2019 were responsible for seven and twelve deaths respectively, of both South African and foreign nationals (Chenzi, 2020: 12). They were also linked to reprisal attacks on South African businesses on the continent and strains on some of its diplomatic relations. The Nigerian Government notably paused some of its diplomatic engagements with South Africa following the 2019 attacks, resulting in the South African President offering an official apology to his Nigerian counterpart (Chenzi, 2020: 15; Omale, 2019).

Also in South Africa, were the already mentioned Rhodes Must Fall and Fees Must Fall protests, which were notable manifestations of mass mobilisation through social media platforms. These social media movements largely mobilised and displayed their actions on social media platforms, and started vigorous public discussions that moved to other social spaces (Bosch, 2017; Bosch & Mutsvairo, 2017; Chetty, 2021).

The Rhodes Must Fall protests in 2015 began at the University of Cape Town to protest the presence of a statue of Cecil John Rhodes on its campus. They, however, grew to a larger call for inclusivity and transformation within higher education institutions across the country and world (Bosch, 2017: 221). Also in 2015 to 2016, the Fees Must Fall protests began at the University of the Witwatersrand in response to proposed fee increases and spread to other institutions across the country (Bosch & Mutsvairo, 2017: 72). Notably, a central means by which the protests garnered their attention was through social media platforms, in particular Twitter, which is the third most used social media platform in the country, resonating especially with young adults (Bosch, 2017: 224). Hashtags (#) are used on the platform to organise and communicate topics, and the social media origin of these campaigns was emphasised by the retention of hashtags in reporting in the mainstream press, for example in references to the #RhodesMustFall protests (more simply, the #RMF protests) and the #FeesMustFall protests (or, the #FMF protests) (Bosch, 2017: 222-226).

More particularly, Bosch (2017: 227) notes a great deal of movement between the platform and public discourse in news and politics during the #RMF protests, as discussions on the platform informed discussions in news and politics and vice versa. This is echoed by Bosch & Mutsvairo (2017: 78) in their discussion of the #FMF protests, where images used on news platforms

derived from trending online images of events on the ground. These images went to define the protests and speak to an increasing connection between South Africa's online social environment and its physical environment.

This is referred to by Bosch (2017: 225) as "subactivism", where online avenues are increasingly functioning as hubs for public participation especially among young adults in South Africa and globally. Bosch also describes it as a "new form of citizenship", where opinions are more accessible and easily transmissible. It arguably shows a great deal of personalisation in political activity, as social media platforms are not specifically designed for political activism but rather to facilitate discussions of all kinds. Such analysis links back to Steve Biko's view of consciousness, where one's environment presents opportunities for subjective reflection (Hook, 2004: 105). Here, young people, who, in proportional terms, participate less in elections that older generations, have chosen social media platforms to express their political activism (Bosch, 2017: 223).

The above examples, from xenophobic violence to the #RMF and #FMF protests, demonstrate both destructive and progressive impulses and confirm social media platforms as significant in public discourse, in ways that also translate to action. They are also international hot button issues (from immigration and higher education reform) and show South Africa's links to discussions around the world. "Fake news" is an expression made famous in the United States; the positioning of immigration is contentious globally; and the expansion of the #RMF protests created a global discussion on processes of decolonisation in institutions of higher learning (Chenzi, 2020: 2; Bosch, 2017: 228). This is no less the case for the role of social media platforms during the COVID-19 pandemic, which was a global experience.

"Born free": the burden of being a young person in South Africa

Before paying closer attention to the COVID-19 pandemic, further consideration is required of the centrality of young people in South Africa's public discourse. Of particular interest is the 'born free' generation (emerging after 1994) and the introduction of a "new form of citizenship" (Bosch, 2017: 225).

Oyedemi (2021: 222) argues that South African youth are engaged in a process of decolonisation, whereby the unfinished work after 1994 is contested. She argues, on the one hand, that South African youth face the "utopia" of a rainbow nation (a politically free society), while, on the other, colonial and apartheid legacies continue to be widely apparent (Oyedemi,

2021: 221). She continues that their contestation has manifested in themes of identity, belonging, socioeconomics, and culture; including some of the mass movements mentioned. For instance, she argues that xenophobic attitudes expressed by South Africans, in part, reflect an economy yet to be fully liberated. This extends to the #FMF protests, as well as the #RMF protests (which more specifically called for cultural liberation) (Oyedemi, 2021: 220).

Also discussing xenophobic attitudes in South Africa, Beetar (2019: 122) argues that they reflect the reality of being South African: where one is born an equal citizen, yet inherits pain and exclusion. He continues that South Africa's nation-building process has been contentious, as the country continues to have unresolved scars surrounding its colonial and apartheid experiences (Beetar, 2019: 127). For South African youth, the reality is having to build a future while also healing the past - a heavy weight to carry - and its mental health toll can be seen.

For instance, Mutinta (2022: 1) notes that mental distress is more apparent among university students (the majority of which are young people) than the general population. This can, of course, be attributed to academic pressures, but Mutinta (2022: 4) links this more closely to South Africa's socioeconomic conditions, as mental distress was found to be more prevalent among female students and those from rural backgrounds. With the emergence of COVID-19, the burden on young people has increased, as its socioeconomic impact has widened the gaps they have been tasked to fill (Duby et al, 2022; Posel et al, 2021).

Visser & Law-van Wyk (2021: 239) report a significant increase in anxiety and depression among students during the hard lockdown. They found that youth experienced a great deal of fear during this time: fear of catching COVID-19, fear of losing a loved one, and fear of losing income. Through the discursive activities of South African youth, certain subjectivities can be seen, ones that reflect certain realities and frames of mind. These subjectivities are psychological processes, as they entail manoeuvring in certain matrixes, that are without a rule book or precedent. Young people may be born free, however they carry the heavy burden of building the rainbow nation (Oyedemi, 2021: 226).

COVID-19's social media movements

South Africa currently finds itself in its "new normal", where the pandemic continues to remain part of its frame of mind, even though incorporated with a sense of pre-pandemic living. Its case counts remain low, and the compulsory wearing of face masks in public places has been lifted, a long departure from 2021 (with COVID-19 variants) and in 2020 (with the pandemic's

emergence) [Government of South Africa, 2022]. Yet, arguably, the social effects of COVID-19 continue to strongly remain and will do so for some time.

For instance, it has been projected that the world (including South Africa) will be in a recession in 2023, which will carry socioeconomic implications of its own. This recession will be as a result of efforts to lower record inflation, a consequence of COVID-19 (du Preez, 2022). What this means is that while South Africa currently finds itself "freer" from COVID-19 in terms of case counts and hospitalisations, it remains socially haunted, and evidence can be seen on social media platforms.

The most notable example is the aforementioned July Unrest in 2021, a series of widespread rioting and looting events in KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng, which resulted in billions of rands in damaged property and the loss of 300 lives (Chetty, 2021: 86). These events constituted a mass movement in South Africa after the emergence of COVID-19; and one that was driven through social media platforms. A Presidential-appointed expert panel on the events dedicated a subsection of its report to the role of social media platforms and wrote, "the use of social media to instigate violence and to organise to carry out violence was extensive", and that while social media platforms presented a "clear trail of evidence [based on which] several instigators could be apprehended and charged, [they] seemed to confound security services" (Expert Panel into the July 2021 Civil Unrest, 2021: 116). More worryingly, they note that instigators (including through the use of social media platforms) potentially committed acts of terror (Expert Panel into the July 2021 Civil Unrest, 2021: 118).

The significance is three-fold. First, it presents the possibility that social media platforms are being used in South Africa to perform or foment acts of terror, and the implications are serious. Second, it is an added admission at an Executive level that social media platforms play a key role in acts of mobilisation in South Africa (Chenzi, 2020: 15). Third, social media platforms were again used to go outside the country's standard sources of information, as its security services were unfamiliar with the space. This had been seen before during the 2015 and 2019 xenophobic attacks, where misinformation broke through South Africa's mainstream media (Chenzi, 2020: 12).

Another example is Operation Dudula, which emerged in June 2021 in Johannesburg. It is a movement that seeks to "drive out" (or *dudula*) foreign nationals and has been described by the Institute for Security Studies as part of an "emerging threat of digital vigilantism" for being propelled through social media platforms (Allen et al, 2022). Operation Dudula and other

xenophobic movements seek to scapegoat foreign nationals for ills in South Africa such as poverty and unemployment. Their use of social media platforms is notable, and shows the power of social media to ignite public discourse in the country (Allen et al, 2022; Chenzi, 2020: 2).

Social media platforms as avenues for discursive activities

The above has sought to demonstrate the influence of social media platforms on South African public discourse, both prior to and following the pandemic's emergence. They are able to create large public discussions that spill over to traditional information avenues such as news outlets (Bosch, 2017: 222). They are also able to circumvent those avenues to distribute misinformation and inflammatory rhetoric (Chenzi, 2020: 11; Expert Panel into the July 2021 Civil Unrest, 2021: 116). Further, they are able to help to inspire mass movements, ranging from calls for transformation in higher education institutions to xenophobic attacks and civil unrest (Bosch, 2017: 221; Chenzi, 2020: 12; Chetty, 2021: 86).

With this foundation, one can examine the use of social media platforms as avenues for discursive activity in the country. Using a constructionist lens, such discursive activities represent a view into psychological processes, and this builds on prior discussions on South Africa's dealings with trauma during the establishment of its democratic settlement, most notably in the form of the TRC. Stein (1998: 455) points to the "therapeutic value" provided by the TRC. Through the Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act (1995: 4), the Commission sought to "promote national unity and reconciliation by establishing as complete a picture of the gross violations of human rights committed; to facilitate the granting of amnesty to persons who make full disclosure; and restore the human and civil dignity of victims by granting them an opportunity to relate their own accounts". Of significance was the TRC's use of its political objectives to also bring a sense of catharsis to South Africa's social space. Its work not only sought to reveal previously unknown events for purposes of accountability and the historical record, but through this, to also facilitate a sense of release and to start the process to de-traumatise a society that had endured many years of abuse and harm (Stein, 1998: 455).

South Africa's journey to democracy shows linkages between discursive activities, psychological processes and dynamics in its social environment. From processes of conscientisation ("psychological liberation") for its democracy (its political liberation), to processes of catharsis in its reconciliation, discursive activities have been engaged in by South Africans to bring changes to their society and collective mentality (Hook, 2004: 105; Stein,

1998: 455). While used progressively here, discursive activities (and accompanying frames of mind) have also brought different outcomes. For instance, the discursive promotion of xenophobic acts in the past decade have led to the physical harm and intimidation of those labelled as foreign nationals (Chenzi, 2020: 12; Allen et al, 2022). The Rhodes Must Fall and Fees Must Fall protests were large-scale discursive and physical engagements for immediate changes within higher education institutions (Bosch, 2017: 221). This also applies to the July Unrest and its discursive activities to propagate violence (Chetty, 2021: 86). In all of these cases, discursive activities on social media platforms have driven participation in social action and each represent a view of psychological processes (Bosch, 2017: 221; Chenzi, 2020: 12; Chetty, 2021: 86).

An avenue for everyday discursive activity: the role of "Confessions pages"

Not all activity on social media platforms is intended to spark significant public discourse or public action. Social media platforms allow for a variety of uses, at a variety of scales. Thus far, their more significant social uses have been highlighted, yet for most, social media platforms form part of day-to-day living in various ways (Burdee et al, 2019: 316). They, in essence, are online forums through which individuals and larger communities engage. This occurs on a continuous basis, as does normal life, with a current total of 41 million South Africans participating on the internet (Kamer, 2022).

An example are "Confessions pages", which are commonly found on Facebook, where users (mostly young adults) are able to anonymously submit posts discussing various topics within page rules (Yeo & Chu, 2017; Sacks et al, 2021). Sacks et al (2021: 551) discuss their use by university students to discuss topics ranging from academic pressures to daily events on campuses. Yeo & Chu (2017: 753) also discuss their use by young adults to share sexual health information, some of which may be stigmatised or taboo. They note substantive, constructive yet sensitive discussions, which they believe were eased by the safety provided by anonymity. They also note equal participation among genders, with Sacks et al (2021: 555) also noting demographic variety (Yeo & Chu, 2017: 759).

The value of these pages are their honest, transparent and unscripted discussions. This is shown on a Confessions page at Rhodes University, whose moderators (those responsible for its everyday running) noted mostly everyday discussions, some of which were highly sensitive. They reported an overall feeling of safety in sharing, based on processing thousands of posts a month, and approximately 40 000 posts throughout the page's active time period from 2017 to

December 2020 (Rhodes Confessions 2017-2020 Team, 2020: 2). Sensitive topics discussed included thoughts of suicide, self-harm and other mental distress; disclosure of sexual assault, as well as other forms of trauma such as grief (Rhodes Confessions 2017-2020 Team, 2020: 4). These provide some insight into activities engaged in by users and represent a view into their psychological processes.

Africa: an area of considerable discursive activity on social media platforms

The increasing prominence of social media platforms in South African public discourse and activity appears to be part of a broader trend in Africa, where social media platforms have shown recognisable prominence in the continent's discourse. This includes the "End SARS" protests in Nigeria in October 2020, and goes back to the Arab Spring protests in North Africa and the Middle East from 2010 - 2012/3, which are widely recognised as the world's first social movement linked to social media platforms (Adegbilero-Iwari et al, 2021; Howard et al, 2011). These showcase Africa as an area of considerable discursive activity on social media platforms, both prior to and since COVID-19's emergence.

There are similarities between social media platforms activities in South Africa and those on the larger African continent. For instance, the "End SARS" (or "#EndSARS") protests were a social movement against police brutality in Nigeria, where users displayed police abuses on social media platforms, notably on Twitter, garnering large attention and inspiring wide-scale protests (Adegbilero-Iwari et al, 2021: 6). Contributing were also the socioeconomic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria, which brought considerable social stress (Adegbilero-Iwari et al, 2021: 14). Like South Africa, young adults were the most active, and used social media platforms to inform public discourse in Nigeria and globally. The protests garnered international attention in the context of the murder of George Floyd in the United States in May 2020, and also as Nigeria has the most internet users in Africa, with 109 million users (Adegbilero-Iwari et al, 2021: 4; Kamer, 2022). Through actions by its young adults, the protests built a significant online presence, which was used to gain broader societal attention.

Just like South Africa and elsewhere in the world, the "End SARS" protests used the hashtag (#) symbol to identify the movement as social media platform-driven. In addition, trending social media images from events on the ground became part of the defining imagery of the protests (Adegbilero-Iwari et al, 2021: 13). The protests displayed an effort not only to mobilise against State violence, but to also identify and utilise social media platforms for that outcome.

They provide insight into the experiences of Nigerian young adults during this time (Adegbilero-Iwari et al, 2021: 18).

A decade prior to the #EndSARS protests, the Arab Spring protests sought to bring significant social change to North Africa and the Middle East. They were waves of mass protest which began in Tunisia in December 2010, and subsequently spread to neighbouring Egypt, Libya, Syria, and Yemen among others (Howard et al, 2011: 2). The movement notably spread through social media platforms, in particular Twitter, although in early emergence at this time. In addition to being a movement that brought about regime changes, the Arab Spring was also significant as arguably the first movement globally to be organised and popularised through social media platforms (Howard et al, 2011: 2).

Further notable characteristics of the Arab Spring continue to be part of social media platform engagement, as have been identified in South Africa and Nigeria. The protests were driven by a younger, more technologically equipped demographic (Howard et al, 2011: 3). They not only engaged more frequently on social media platforms, but also had the skills to out-manoeuvre government-imposed internet blockages, which sought to contain the spread of the protests. They did so through innovative but now commonly-used means such as Virtual Private Networks (VPNs), where social media platform engagement continued through bypass internet servers in neighbouring Europe. Government internet blockages were also bypassed by extensive global news coverage, whose attention had been drawn by a social media platform movement that was first of its kind (Howard et al, 2011: 3). Similar to present-day South Africa, a significant presence of subactivism was seen among young adults in the Arab Spring. Although social media platforms were relatively new at this time, they were already identified as avenues through which social messages could be sent (Howard et al, 2011: 6).

Yet discursive activities on social media platforms in Africa are given less attention due to global differences in socioeconomics and rates of technologisation

From discussions on activities in South Africa, Nigeria, North Africa and the Middle East, significant social media presences can be seen in Africa, before and following COVID-19. Yet despite this, analyses of social media platform activities have leaned towards a focus on the Global North. This is due to its larger economies and higher rates of technologisation, as for instance social media platforms are companies operated from the Global North (Burdee et al, 2019: 315; Adegbilero-Iwari et al, 2021: 4).

Global discussions on social media platforms in the past decade have included the "#MeToo Movement" and "#BlackLivesMatter", with increases in misinformation and hate speech also attributed to trends in the United States following Donald Trump's 2016 election and in the United Kingdom after its 2016 Referendum to leave the European Union (Burdee et al, 2019: 319; Chenzi, 2020: 2). While these events were significant and the Global North is indeed more economically and technologically advanced, these global discussions have contributed to an imbalance in the framing of social media platform activities. Considerably less attention has been given to Africa and the Global South, attributed to its socioeconomic conditions and rates of technology, although significant activities have continued to occur (Burdee et al, 2019: 315).

For instance, Ndlela & Mano (2020: 3) note that although Africa's internet saturation (its percentage of users to population) remains lower than Western nations, it has seen considerable growth post-independence. They then link this to the increasing prominence of social media platform activities in African election campaigns, where social media platforms have made significant contributions in election campaigns in notably Kenya, Uganda and Zimbabwe (Ndlela & Mano, 2020: 7).

A notable recent example is Bobi Wine's 2021 Presidential campaign in Uganda. Wine is a successful Ugandan musician, who used his platform to challenge the incumbent Government[4]. While ultimately losing his presidential bid, he managed to build a significant social media presence in Uganda and globally (Al Jazeera, 2021; Muzee & Enaifoghe, 2020: 195). More importantly, he managed to do so despite being an adversary of the Ugandan Government, having been arrested numerous times, beaten and placed on house arrest during the 2021 election (Ephraim, 2018), and the Ugandan Government's restriction of access to social media platforms shortly before the election. Wine's success in building a vibrant social media presence is also significant given Uganda's comparatively low social media usage. Kenya, for example, has a similar population size to Uganda but nearly 10 million more users – showing Wine's success in leveraging social media to inform Ugandan discourse and public activity (Kamer, 2022).

Of concern are the different forms of violence and human suffering that have been linked to social media platforms in Africa and the broader Global South. In October 2021, Facebook was

[4] Wine's rise to political prominence began in 2017, when he was elected as an MP in his local constituency, defeating the incumbent Government's candidate (Muzee & Enaifoghe, 2020: 196). He then went on to challenge the Presidential Election in 2021.

accused of a serious lack of investment in content oversight in the Global South, resulting in a variety of tragic outcomes. These included inflaming ethnic violence in Ethiopia's civil war by allowing misinformation and hate speech; propagating anti-Muslim and nationalist violence in India; as well as being complicit in human trafficking and servitude in the Philippines (Perrigo, 2021; Zakrzewski et al, 2021). In Kenya, the platform was also accused of severely overworking and underpaying its employees, as many former employees are said to have suffered psychological trauma from having had to moderate violent and disturbing content from hundreds of millions of users across Sub-Saharan Africa. Statistically, only 16% of Facebook's resources for content moderation were allocated to the Global South in 2020 (Perrigo, 2021).

Notably, these allegations were not revealed in the Global South, but rather in the United States by a former platform executive. There, they added to previous allegations lodged against Facebook, such as the accusations in 2018 that it failed to protect personal user information in the United States (US) and the United Kingdom (UK), resulting in its use by third-parties to coerce voters through personalised and targeted advertisements in the 2016 US Presidential Election and the UK's 2016 Brexit Referendum (Cadwalladr & Graham-Harrison, 2018).

The severity of the allegations brought significant attention to social media platform activities in the Global North, skewing the discussion away from activities in Africa and the broader Global South. The allegations revealed in 2021 were suspected in Africa, with some attention also given to the role of social media platforms on the continent, yet did not receive public attention until revealed in the US (Elliot et al, 2021). This can also be taken to reflect an imbalance in the framing of discursive activities between the Global North and South, in that discussions in the Global North are given more prominence; or perhaps that certain activities in the Global South (such as protests and violence) may be perceived as a norm.

Part of the framing of the allegations against Facebook included their emergence during the COVID-19 pandemic and the possible ties between those concerns and the pandemic (Perrigo, 2022). While my discussion also argues from a similar lens (on the links between social media usage and physical activities), it however offers that potential harm was exacerbated by the pandemic rather than originating from it. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic's unique presence (as a once-in-a-century phenomenon), such allegations speak to more systemic matters (Perrigo, 2021; Elliot et al, 2021). While in the past decade, it would seem the Global North has had a higher profile in social media platform activities, it may be more accurate to say that

the discussion of such activities has been framed in the Global North, as activities have continued in Africa even though reflected less prominently in global discussions.

Concluding remarks: The permeance of social reality and of social structures

In this chapter, an attempt has been made to present a social constructionist view on discursive engagements in South Africa that pertain to mental health and mental well-being, with particular emphasis on social media usage and the COVID-19 pandemic. This has included demonstration of the ways personal aspects of reality (such as those pertaining to the psychological) are socially informed (O'Reilly & Lester, 2017: 22).

In seeking to broaden discussions on South Africa's social environment to include the use of social media platforms, difficult truths have perhaps been presented, yet the intention has not been to imply any sense of social or moral panic. As South Africans, we are confronted on a daily basis by the conditions of our social environment, and its living experience is visible and articulated (Khumalo, 2022; Mthethwa, 2022).

Social media platforms in South Africa reflect the dynamic linkages between occurrences in its social environment and discursive actions, demonstrating the ability of social media platforms to both influence public discourse and also be sites for action. While social media platforms have physical presences in the form of buildings and corporations, much of their influence has been socially imagined. In the ways that they are able to inform, and in the ways that they are sites for action, these have been created for social purposes of communication and socialisation (Couldry, 2014: 882).

In discussing discursive actions and psychological processes in South Africa - including their ties to its social environment - significant events have been flagged (ranging from the country's history, events in the past decade, as well as the COVID-19 pandemic). These have been of great influence and have importantly been mediated by the actions of ordinary South Africans. While much has structurally informed South Africa, the influence of its citizens is also important to remember.

The next chapter continues the discussion and provides a theoretical explanation to the issues raised.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

Introduction

Psychosocial findings in South Africa draw attention to the makeup of its social relations, as dynamic engagements can be seen between the country's socio-economic environment and citizens. To explore their theoretical meaning, Max Weber's "social action theory" and Michel de Certeau's "theory of everyday life" are utilised. They make useful contributions that unpack the mechanisms behind social arrangements. Weber and de Certeau are also important interpretivist scholars, whose theories aim to formulate explanations of lived-in reality (Runciman & Matthews, 2007: 7; de Certeau, 1980: 5). They are relevant to help to further explain "discursive activity", which has sought to connect South Africa's social environment with psychological processes of its people.

An overview of Weber's theory is first provided. Its ideas on "social actions" are used to explore public discourse during notable activities such as #RMF, xenophobic violence, and the July Unrest. Particularly, Weber is used to show the significance of these activities being the social meaning that they were given by their participants. Weber is also be used to show the social meaning given to social media platforms as created structures for communication and socialisation. In the many ways that they provide utility, their inventions have been to serve social purposes. Finally, Weber is used to reflect on South Africa's experience of COVID-19. The pandemic has been socially devastating, however its meaning in the future has yet to be fully decided and will be determined by the meaning that it is given by South Africans.

This is introduced to de Certeau, whose ideas on "everyday practices" are also applied by first considering the use of social media platforms in South Africa as a "tactic". Social media platforms have been personalised and used dexterously to fulfil particular outcomes, whether for better or for worse. Mass movements linked to social media platforms have increased in the past decade. This is due to evolving technology, however also skills shown (or tactics used), as social media platforms have become more prominent.

De Certeau is also applied in a broader African context and used to explore activities in Zimbabwe and other African countries. A common thread that emerges is the centrality of the tactics adopted by young people, as the "born free" generation centres itself in public discourses.

An overview of 'social action theory' and an application to discursive activity in South Africa

Weber's theory seeks to interpret the meaning behind human behaviour, or "social actions". These are actions deemed subjectively meaningful by the individuals or groups that perform them. They are *social* actions as their meaning relates to other individuals, who help to determine how they proceed (Runciman & Matthews, 2007: 7). Weber saw sociology as a science that interprets social actions in order to help to explain the ways in which they proceed and also their effects (Weber, 1968: 4).

While providing a "scientific" viewpoint, he saw interpretations as hypotheses and not facts. In his view, the aim of interpretation is to achieve certainty, yet not to claim objective truth. He followed a constructionist epistemology, which aims to acquire the best possible understanding, as opposed to an unlikely complete or ultimate understanding (Runciman & Matthews, 2007: 8; Blaiklie & Priest, 2017: 130). This is relevant to research that deals with human experiences (including some of a potentially sensitive nature), and aims to provide a convincing interpretation without making claims about the experiences of others. Weber's analysis is useful as it is a framework for accurate causal explanations, yet also is able to maintain a critical distance from its area under study (Runciman & Matthews, 2007: 8).

Links can be made between Weber and discursive activity in South Africa. As argued previously, social media platforms are avenues for discursive activity among South Africans, and analyses of these discursive practices provide insight on individuals' psychological processes (Bosch, 2017: 221; Chenzi, 2020: 12; Chetty, 2021: 86). In discussing these activities, their significance has been their social component. Whether progressively in the country's journey to democracy, or destructively in xenophobic attacks and Unrest, these activities have been shaped by the social contexts within which they have been performed. In Weber's terms, they were *meaningful*, purposive acts by their participants. Regardless of their particular meaning (whether democratic or xenophobic), they were meaningful (Runciman & Matthews, 2007: 7).

Social media platforms are also interesting as created structures, as their ability to inform discourse or be utilised by users are largely social constructions, created for communication and socialisation (Couldry, 2014: 882). Weber provides further links as social media platforms have been made socially meaningful. They have been created to serve social purposes, and they would not have the extent of their success had it not been for wide social recognition, where society accepts their utility (Runciman & Matthews, 2007: 21; Burdee et al, 2019: 315).

In Africa, this was shown with the Arab Spring protests, which utilised social media platforms in their early emergence, and significant social media presences continue to remain on the continent, despite counter actions by some governments (Ndlela & Mano, 2020: 4). While these platforms, on one hand, may be central to day-to-day living and some of the largest companies in the world, their influence has also been socially chosen. In the many ways that South Africa's social environment has been structurally informed, through numerous events including COVID-19, the role of social media platforms in the country is interesting in their manufactured meaning.

Weber and South Africa's experience of COVID-19

In addition to analysing psychological processes in South Africa, this dissertation also argues that the COVID-19 pandemic presents an opportunity for reflection on the ways in which the country's social environment has a psychological impact (Stein, 2001: 455; Hook, 2004: 106). This was previously argued referencing Biko, and linkages can be made between him and Weber. Biko and Weber both understood social arrangements as negotiated phenomena, such that while structural forces play a great deal of significance, there is also opportunity for agency (Runciman & Matthews, 2007: 7; Hook, 2004: 105).

The COVID-19 pandemic has been devastating socially, economically, in loss of life, and in its mental health toll (Duby et al, 2022; Posel et al, 2021; Nguse & Wassenaar, 2021). Much of the ways in which it has unfolded has been beyond society's control, and its devastation is apparent when one analyses the social events and movements that have occurred following the pandemic's emergence. The Unrest witnessed in July 2021 is an example of such devastation, revealing in its social chaos, the kinds of feelings felt by those involved.

As a structural force, the COVID-19 pandemic has had immense influence, yet agency has also been available, where the resilience and fortitude of South Africa's people has been demonstrated. This means that the COVID-19 pandemic can also be a story of hope after devastation, of pain and resolve. Its social meaning is not fixed, as South Africa's history also contains immense trauma, yet the country continues to survive (Weber, 1968: 4; Stein, 2001: 455).

An overview of de Certeau's 'theory of everyday life'

Likewise, de Certeau analyses human actions. His theory of everyday life or "everyday practices" argues that societies are built by ordinary and day-to-day behaviour (de Certeau,

1980: 3). These are familiar, repetitive and almost mundane individual actions which analytically seem very simple, yet separate society from a state of nature. For instance, free movement was an everyday and ordinary practice until the emergence of COVID-19.

De Certeau holds that these individual actions collectively shape society and give it its form. However, society also exerts its control through ideas, institutions, commodities, and norms and values. These each serve various functions but are primarily structural forces for influence. De Certeau saw social arrangements as negotiated processes, such that individuals, through their daily behaviour, maintained social order; or in his terms, they were *non-oppositional*. However, they also contended with acts of control and influence, which they had opportunities to resist, or to be *oppositional* (de Certeau, 1980: 5).

His analysis is useful as it views social arrangements as *total* yet not *totalising*. They have finished, clear and visible contours, however manoeuvring still occurs. While acts of control (or "strategies") may be employed, they are "consumed" with degrees of agency (de Certeau, 1980: 7). Examples of strategies include the rule of law, the free market, education, family values, the media and print press, as well as in the present age, social media platforms. Strategies are also not neutral, but operate along social markers such as race, class, gender and sexual orientation. While they may help to regulate social behaviour (and some being enforced by the State), they equally rely on everyday compliance and acceptance (de Certeau, 1980: 7).

De Certeau broadly held a Marxist view of strategies and dominant social forces, as his stance was that they are inherently exploitative (being in positions of power), and individuals respond to either affirm or resist. Where individuals do affirm social relations, that may be because they have either chosen not to resist or are unable to, as opposed to being in favour (de Certeau, 1980: 4).

A constructionist perspective is provided, which seeks to understand and interpret social life from a similar view of a bystander (Blaiklie & Priest, 2017: 130). Its intentions are to accurately display 'what is going on', as opposed to providing a particular posture; that is for the reader to decide. Agreeably, while social forces indeed hold a great deal of influence, as can be seen through social media platforms, they also hold significantly socially informed aspects (Couldry, 2014: 881).

An application of de Certeau to discursive activity in South Africa

Links can be made between de Certeau and discursive activity on social media platforms in South Africa. Social media platforms are a prominent and everyday feature of social life and are utilised for daily discussions, as well as more significant activities such as the mobilisation of mass movements (Burdee et al, 2019: 318). Through their prominence, they are able to be used to leverage public discourse (and thus to employ strategies), but can also be "resisted" and used for purposes such as misinformation and social unrest (Bosch, 2017: 222; Chenzi, 2020: 12; Chetty, 2021: 86).

De Certeau introduces "tactics" as openings found by individual actors to counter strategies and to express agency. As he describes, "where dominant powers exploit, [...] tactics fool this order and make the field of their art" (de Certeau, 1980: 4). Tactics are acts of self-determination, in response to strategies that seek to create disparity and position individual actors as "other" (de Certeau, 1980: 4). They are applied as acts of social skill, where social media platforms are significantly used to express subjectivity and to fulfil particular outcomes.

For better or for worse, a great deal of personalisation can be seen in the uses of social media platforms in South Africa. Social media platforms are managed by entities with their own interests, but who seek to serve the everyday purpose of communication and socialisation. They have been used for a variety of outcomes, from calls for higher education transformation to xenophobia and unrest (Bosch, 2017: 221; Chenzi, 2020: 12; Chetty, 2021: 86). In these instances, regardless of their outcome, they have been used tactically, thoughtfully and have been wielded successfully. Regardless of intent, these events and movements each identified social media platforms as avenues for their cause.

Reflecting on activities in the past decade, in 2015, with #RMF and xenophobic attacks, there seemed to be a sense of novelty and realisation of the influence of social media platforms in South African discourse (Chenzi, 2020: 6). More scholarly attention has followed since (Burdee et al, 2019: 318; Chenzi, 2020), with Bosch (2017: 225) introducing "subactivism" after #FMF in 2016. In 2021, with the July Unrest, the more targeted uses of social media platforms could be seen (Expert Panel into the July 2021 Civil Unrest, 2021: 116).

The central message with #RMF was higher education transformation, and social media platforms were part of the avenues for that message (Bosch, 2017: 221). With xenophobic attacks in 2015, a great sense of ill-will could be seen against foreign nationals, yet social media

platforms were used in a less coordinated fashion. The intent was the spewing outrage against those labelled as foreign nationals, yet the capacity of social media platforms as avenues for that outcome had yet to be fully realised (Chenzi, 2020: 15; Beetar, 2019: 134). The events in 2015 provided that realisation, such that by 2019, social media platforms were used in a more coordinated manner to promote such views (Chenzi, 2020: 11). Following de Certeau, the point argued is that increased use of social media platforms in tactical ways can be seen, as in the past decade they have been more significantly and successfully used to fulfil outcomes with their capacity becoming more realised.

De Certeau applied to other African countries

Scholars such as Jones (2010: 287) and Helliker et al (2021: 5) have usefully applied de Certeau to other African contexts, such as the rise of informalisation in Zimbabwe. Here, they describe informalisation as a tactic of resistance against the country's unyielding social space post-2000. Since 2000, Zimbabwe has experienced severe economic decline, which has decayed its public services, and has led to extreme inflation, poverty and hunger. The country also has some of the highest rates of HIV/AIDS in the world, incessant corruption and growing authoritarianism. These have left everyday life a perpetual state of chaos, with Jones describing "nothing [being] *straight* in Zimbabwe"; or more simply, nothing being moral, proper or acceptable about everyday life in the country (Jones, 2010: 286).

Like de Certeau, Jones (2010: 290) and Helliker et al (2021: 3) apply the idea of tactics to portray Zimbabwe's informal economy on the margins of its society, although it represents the country's majority. Analyses of tactics can apply to all, as all individuals are subject to some degree of control and influence, yet de Certeau chose to primarily focus on those some may deem as "other". These include the homeless, migrants, the Jewish, queer people and other minorities (Yilmaz, 2013: 66). Jones and Helliker et al's analyses are notable as they seek to represent a left-behind majority in Zimbabwe, and they focus their analyses on the acts of survival undertaken by Zimbabweans.

Jones (2010: 286) introduces the Shona term 'kukiya-kiya' (or "making do") to describe these actions. Kukiya-kiya are loose economic activities undertaken by Zimbabweans for livelihood, ranging from informal trading, crime, bribery, and illegal mining to sex work. Kukiya-kiya is all that is able to provide a living, whether illegal or life-threatening, as everyday life involves the use of tactics (Jones, 2010: 290; Helliker et al, 2021: 3). Of interest is its established practice, its devise by everyday citizens as an alternative pathway towards subsistence. In their

exclusion from the formal economy, Zimbabweans have sought to renegotiate and introduce new social norms. For instance, like many African nations, Zimbabwe leans more socially conservative in its views on gender roles and sexuality. Yet, since 2000, these have faced challenge as survival is ensured by any means (Jones, 2010: 294).

Also similar to its African neighbours, is that this effort has been pioneered by its young people, those who have had to build a livelihood after 2000 (Jones, 2010: 286). A common thread through social movements in African countries is the centrality of young people in their public discourses and their manoeuvring to their particular outcomes. Returning to the Arab Spring, it too was pioneered by young people in North Africa and the Middle East. Its significance was not only its reach, but also the skills and ingenuity shown by younger citizens in these regions, who used tools such as social media platforms and VPNs - which were familiar to them but new to social organisation in their countries - to send a wider message (Howard et al, 2011: 3). They successfully outmanoeuvred government strategies such as internet blockages, restrictions on speech, as well as the general sense of ignorance of dominant global powers on the plight and outcry of voices in the Global South. The novelty of this kind of movement sent a significant message, and also introduced to the world a new front for public activism (Howard et al, 2011: 6). This is also seen in the #EndSARS protests in Nigeria and election participation in Kenya, Uganda and others, as the generation born after national liberation centres itself in public discourses.

Concluding remarks

In this chapter, psychosocial relations in South Africa were given theoretical meaning, using Max Weber's "social action theory" and Michel de Certeau's "theory of everyday life". The work of these theorists assisted to further explain "discursive activity".

Weber's social action theory interprets that which is subjectively meaningful to individuals and groups. In analysing discursive activities in South Africa, they were each significant as they held meaning to their participants, regardless of the contents of their message (whether democratic, progressive or xenophobic). Weber was also used to analyse social media platforms as created structures for communication and socialisation. Social media platforms have been invented to serve social purposes and would not have their success without society's acceptance. Lastly, Weber was used to analyse South Africa's experience of COVID-19. While socially devastating, the COVID-19 pandemic can also be a story of hope and resilience after

pain and devastation. South Africa's history contains immense trauma, yet the country continues to survive.

The discussion then moved to de Certeau, whose theory focuses on the shaping of society by ordinary and day-to-day behaviour. Linkages were found between de Certeau and discursive activity in South Africa, as social media platforms are prominent and everyday features of social life in the country. They are used for daily discussions as well as for mass mobilisation. Within mass movements, social media platforms have been used tactically to achieve particular outcomes, and this has increased in the past decade.

De Certeau was also applied to other African countries, using additional viewpoints from Jones (2010) and Helliker et al (2021). Here, the tactical use of social media platforms was demonstrated beyond South Africa, with young people centrally positioned. The generation born after national liberation is centering itself in public discourses.

The next chapter provides a thematic analysis and linkages to the theory and literature are discussed.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis

Introduction

We now move to the case study at the heart of this dissertation. The first part provides a descriptive account of the discourse on the selected social media platform in order to gain an understanding of "what happened" within the lockdown period, the kinds of expressions that were made, and how they were made. The time period of focus is the COVID-19 hard lockdown, but discourse prior to and after are also engaged with for a comparative analysis. A psychosocial perspective is then applied to examine the linkages between individual psychological processes and societal events.

Before this, a description of the analytical procedure used is provided, inspired by Braun & Clarke's (2006: 87) phases of thematic analysis.

Procedures and techniques used

A social media post archive was used for the case study and was made available to the public on 10 March 2021. Information on private citizens was removed before the archive was made available (Rhodes Confessions 2017-2020 Team, 2020a: 2). The archive was attached with supporting documents, such as the archival procedure used, information on its contents for researchers, as well as consent for the material to be used for research purposes.

Relevant posts were printed for analysis, and over a four-day period in mid-September 2022, they were read and re-read numerous times[5]. This was done to not only become familiar with the data, but to also generate initial codes and impressions (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 87). For subjects or topics to be deemed as codes, they had to be mentioned three or more times within a single-week period. From this, to be deemed as thematic, they had to be mentioned consistently for a number of weeks.

In the overall 11-week period, the following four sub-periods were created: "Life before COVID-19" (from 5 March - 15 March); "Life in the emergence of COVID-19" (from 15 March - 26 March); "Life in COVID-19 lockdown" (from 26 March - 30 April); and "Life after COVID-19 lockdown" (from 1 May - 14 May). These sub-periods reflect the stages of the

[5] Some posts were not in English and were in isiXhosa, IsiZulu, Sesotho, and Afrikaans, mainly. For their overall meaning, those in Sesotho were translated through a dictionary. I am a native isiXhosa speaker, and IsiZulu is similar to isiXhosa. I also have elementary proficiency in Afrikaans.

COVID-19 lockdown (before, during and after), and were also characterised by different social changes with COVID-19 regulations.

The COVID-19 pandemic was still emerging in "life before COVID-19" and thus, its mental health effects would not yet be present. In "life in the emergence of COVID-19", the transition into lockdown was underway, and COVID-19's effects would be expected to begin to make an appearance. The pandemic's effects were expected to be present in "life in COVID-19 lockdown", and similarly in "life after COVID-19 lockdown", as the lockdown's implications would still be unfolding, with the Virus continuing to spread in high frequency.

For each of the sub-periods, an overview of their findings is provided, with extracts and direct quotations used for further illustration. From this, each period's significance is discussed, in line with the research's objectives and its theoretical and literary underpinnings.

Contents of chapter

"Life before COVID-19" is discussed first, and it follows the roughly 10-day period from the detection of the first case of COVID-19 in South Africa to the announcement of the national state of disaster. While COVID-19 was now present in South Africa and had spread rampantly across the world already, participants were not yet panicked, as their focus remained on their end-of-term academic commitments and "normal" talk, such as discussions on relationships and sex, as well as nights out and partying.

Where COVID-19 was mentioned, it was mostly with humour, as participants made light jokes of its presence. Participants understood the virus was airborne and contagious, however (innocently) were not panicked, and this would begin to change with the declaration of the national state of disaster with its sweeping regulations.

Using Weber's terminology, these conversations were meaningful acts, as participants focused on their proximal concerns such as assessments and graduation. Likewise, with de Certeau, ordinary and often miscellaneous behaviour was observed, with the forum being used prominently for daily discussions, protected by the anonymity guaranteed.

"Life in the emergence of COVID-19" is discussed next, which continues from the announcement of the national state of disaster to the start of the hard lockdown. Compared with more casual responses "before COVID-19", participants began to express significant concern and worry. COVID-19 had begun to affect their proximal surroundings, as participants now

had to promptly vacate the University and return home. Many struggled to vacate on short notice, due to finances and a lack of availability of travel. Immense frustration ensued.

However, themes were emerging that would become more pronounced in the lockdown period. Participants felt lonely and in despair. They also felt unsupported by the University. That said, many equally cherished the University as their safe space, shielding them from their realities at home and in the outside world. Together, the subjectivities of young people in South Africa in COVID-19 would begin to emerge on the forum, where a group of dynamic and resilient individuals is seen.

Theoretically, COVID-19's meaning to participants began to drastically change. It rapidly took away a safe space for many; yet interestingly much frustration was channelled at the University *because* of its safety, the loss of which participants grieved. In Weber's terms, with changes in their environment, proportionate changes in action occurred within the University space. Participants felt concern and channelled these feelings. Their sense of community was also seen in their expression of concern for others, as the pandemic began to establish personal and collective meaning.

Similarly, with de Certeau, everyday life shifted. Participants lost their sense of familiarity and repetitiveness, yet adapted to these changes in their social environments. They displayed a wide-ranging use of tactics, as they negotiated and manoeuvred into their new reality. They were also able to tie their experiences with those of others, as they realised that they were stronger together, and a collective response began to emerge. While frustrated (and distraught), they were willing to adjust and to continue their commitments in new ways.

"Life in COVID-19 lockdown" is then discussed. Participants had health and socioeconomic concerns, however, particularly the fear of the loss of social progress. Many had sacrificed immensely for the opportunity of an education, which the pandemic threatened. It eroded some of South Africa's democratic gains, which many had used to elevate themselves socially. COVID-19 also exposed participants' different positionalities and created divides. Participants sought normalcy, yet from different realities which often clashed. Earnestly, they were just trying to "figure it out", and as the lockdown progressed, more and more began to feel burnt out and fatigued. Participants also dealt with serious events in South Africa's environment, such as huge increases in Gender-Based Violence. The lockdown took its toll, as many continued to feel alone and were less willing to voice their concerns. Participants simply sought peace, and some even sought to deregister from the University.

Theoretically, as participants adjusted to their new world, with these immense changes in their environment, their actions demonstrated the pandemic's severity. The COVID-19 pandemic triggered a sense of social chaos and violence which had not been seen in the country for many years and built on its prior social trauma. Participants fought for their social progress, threatened by the pandemic, and fought for their struggle. It highlighted the burden carried by South Africa's youth, the born free generation already with immense responsibility, now with their whole world on their shoulders. It is no surprise many felt burnt out, as they fought for their survival.

Similarly, the familiarity, repetition and mundane life before the pandemic were replaced by constant anxiety and fear. Participants had to manoeuvre in further throes of poverty, in unsafe households and with immense health risks. Yet they still made efforts to do so, and continued to emphasise that they were in it together. They continued to still try to build a "rainbow nation", even with worsened divides.

Lastly, "life after COVID-19 lockdown" is discussed. The country entered "Level 4" lockdown, and its first fortnight is analysed. Themes from the hard lockdown continued to occur, as participants continued to cherish the University as their safe space. Burnout continued and more self-harm ideations were expressed. In-fighting among participants also seemed to escalate, taking its toll. The state of South Africa's environment in the pandemic reflected onto the forum, as participants continued to channel their pain.

Overall, a great deal of trauma can be seen due to COVID-19, which will not simply "go away" and must be dealt with. Young people, in particular, have shown a great deal of courage, and this should not be taken for granted. If South Africa's democratic history has provided any lessons, it is that trauma continues to reverberate in our society. Should trauma due to the pandemic go unrecognised, it will too. While the pandemic has been a most unfortunate experience, it is also an opportunity for South Africa to reflect on the totality of its traumatic experiences, which span generations, and will hopefully lead the country closer to inclusion and healing.

Life before COVID-19

Data were analysed from 5 March 2020, after the detection of the first case of COVID-19 in South Africa among travellers returning home from Europe on 1 March 2020. COVID-19 had already been spreading rapidly in Asia, Europe and North America from January 2020, and

was declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern[6] by the World Health Organisation (WHO) on 30 January 2020 (Giandhari et al, 2020: 4). Posts on the Confessions page show a recognition of COVID-19's presence (as it was already significantly part of global discourse), however as life was still 'normal' in South Africa, panic had yet to emerge.

On 5 March, responses to the first detected case of COVID-19 in South Africa were characterised by banter and humour. For instance, as a participant wrote, "Don't touch my f***** pipe, don't want Corona virus"[7]. Here, the participant recognised COVID-19 not only being present, however also spreading through bodily fluids. The participant had basic information on COVID-19, however as it had yet to affect their proximal surroundings, they responded with humour.

Another participant on 5 March wrote, "WHO and Bill Gates are chilling now. Hulle werk is nou klaar (*their work is now done*)". Again, there was recognition of COVID-19 and also of the WHO's presence and role. Conspiracy theories on COVID-19 had yet to become more prominent, and so in this case, the post can be read as humorous (although dangerous), as there was yet to be panic with COVID-19 further spreading in South Africa (Dow et al, 2021: 2).

Posts on 5 March on COVID-19 were limited to those submissions. The vast majority of submissions on 5 March contained 'normal' (or expected) talk by university students, such as academic concerns and queries, as well as submissions on relationships and sex. For instance, a participant asked, "Anyone that can assist with legal theory 2 notes/past test papers/past exam papers?" Another asked, "Is there anybody renting out their digs for March Vac?" On the other hand, one participant expressed that, "[they] have a crush on a sub warden from up the hill", while another asked for advice on disliking their boyfriend's cooking.

COVID-19 had yet to dominate discourse on the forum, as a significant share of submissions focused on end-of-term activities such as assessments[8]; graduation (which was expected to occur in the vacation period), while others were on relationships and sex or nights out. COVID-19 was mentioned twice on 6 March, as one participant made a similar conspiracy theory joke

[6] A declaration of a Public Health Emergency of International Concern is a formal, legal classification made by the WHO that allows it to mobilise its resources. While it later declared COVID-19 as a 'pandemic' (to denote its rampant international spread), it is not a legal or formal term used by the WHO (Clift, 2020).

[7] Expletives were edited and emojis were removed.

[8] Before growing local transmission, the end of the first academic term was scheduled for 27 March.

as one made on 5 March, while another critiqued the unavailability of water in Makhanda with which to wash their hands.

On March 6, a user asked when graduation tickets could be collected, while another asked whether application responses from the University for vacation sub-warden work had been sent. On March 8, COVID-19 was mentioned once more, as another participant critiqued the unavailability of water in Makhanda with which to maintain hygiene.

Overall, discourse continued to be "normal" as participants asked for "study buddies", spoke of clubbing and drinking or relationships and sex. COVID-19 was mentioned twice more on March 9, the first submission being another critique of a lack of sanitation in Makhanda, the second being another joke.

One mention of COVID-19 was made on March 10, as the participant wrote, "So a boy told me in class today that the corona virus isn't real. Mind you, he's from KZN. He better not come near me when he gets home from vac cause clearly he doesn't plan on taking precautions to protect himself." Here, the participant not only recognised the presence of COVID-19 in South Africa, but also comprehended its infectiousness. Yet, they believed (innocently) that the second academic term would still be normal.

On 11 March, the WHO declared COVID-19 as a global pandemic, citing rapidly rising case counts (WHO, 2022). However, COVID-19 would not be mentioned again on the forum until March 12/13, when local transmission was detected. Participants continued to speak normally, mostly discussing relationships and sex. As a participant wrote on March 10, "It's so unfair to be angry at me while your boyfriend lied and said he was single. If anything we should both be mad at him for making me his side for so long and basically cheating on you. Anyway you can have him, I don't wanna deal with your situation. I'm glad he's out of my life." COVID-19 had yet to emerge as central in participants' preoccupations.

This would begin to change on March 13, when local transmission was detected in KwaZulu-Natal (Giandhari et al, 2020: 4). In response, the forum's moderators published an administrative note, stating that misinformation on COVID-19 would be strictly prohibited, as well as xenophobia, prejudice or any expressed ill-intent. The post before had asked where face masks were available in Makhanda, as the participant was flying home for the vacation period and worried about being in an airport or a bus station, especially with a suspected COVID-19 case at the University of the Witwatersrand.

On 14 March, Rhodes University indefinitely postponed its Graduation Ceremony, as well as other in-person events (Rhodes University, 2022). Some participants were confused, writing "Vele iya popa le grad or what? *(is graduation happening or not)*" Some were sad. Others joked. Some continued with 'normal' conversation.

The state of national disaster would be declared by the President on March 15, with 61 detected cases in the country, and things would never be the same.

Life before COVID-19: Theoretical and literary inferences

In the analysed 10-day period, some of day-to-day life at Rhodes University could be seen in the posts. Through Weber's gaze, that which was *meaningful* among participants could be seen. While COVID-19 had been detected in South Africa on 5 March (and already spreading across the world), participants were focused on their more proximal concerns. As end-of-term approached, participants focused on their academic commitments. The end of the first academic term was also an exciting time for many as they prepared to graduate.

Likewise, with de Certeau, ordinary and familiar behaviour was seen, with the forum being of prominent use among participants. Many responses were mundane and miscellaneous, however participants, being in a younger demographic, were significantly focused on relationships, dating and sex (Rhodes Confessions 2017-2020 Team, 2020d: 3). They also spoke enthusiastically (expectedly) about nights out and clubbing.

These findings are supported by Yeo & Chu (2017) and Sacks et al's (2021) discussions on Confessions pages facilitating a range of conversations among young adults at universities, from academic pressures and concerns to sexual health information. Also corroborating Yeo & Chu and Sacks et al is the social safety and freedom provided by anonymity, as participants felt free to express their thoughts (within page rules) without stigma or shame (Lester & O'Reilly, 2021: 55). Honest responses were made, some of which were often too expletive-ridden to be reproduced here.

Life in the emergence of COVID-19

On March 15 2020, President Cyril Ramaphosa, for the first time in South Africa's democracy, declared a national state of disaster. This was in response to escalating local transmission of COVID-19 and in anticipation of much further spread (Government of South Africa, 2020).

The Statute allows Government "integrated and coordinated"[9] powers to act in response to or in the prevention of national disasters which threaten or seek to cause widespread "death, injury or disease"; "damage to property, infrastructure or the environment"; or the "disruption of the life of a community" to an exceeding magnitude (Disaster Management Act, 2002: 3,7).

It allowed Government to impose its initial tranche of restrictions, such as banning and restricting international travel; closing land and sea ports of entry; closing schools and universities, and prohibiting gatherings of more than a hundred (100) people (Government of South Africa, 2020). On 23 March, it would also allow Government to impose a hard lockdown.

Compared to earlier, more cavalier responses after the detection of COVID-19 in South Africa, responses after the President's announcement were of significant concern and worry. As a participant wrote, "[...] Most of us live on campus, some residences may have more than 100 people in them. We share a lot of facilities, should one student contract the virus, it will spread very rapidly." They continued that they were "scared for [their] life".

One participant expressed, "Please, please, please be safe, guys", while another simply said, "I am not ok guys".

Many participants continued to criticise the unavailability of water in Makhanda with which to maintain hygiene, and much frustration was channelled at the University and Student Representative Council (SRC), as participants awaited their responses. As a participant wrote, "Rhodes University's response to this entire crisis is bizarre. The lack of communication and information is just making me more anxious."

Another asked, "Can Rhodes University confirm/deny the news about a student contracting the virus already. We need to know so that we can relax/self-quarantine. Personally I want to go home but I cannot if the virus is here already because I'll be a risk to my family/community. So I need to know before I make a decision."

Some were less kind, calling the SRC "captured" and "friends of management".

Frustration at a lack of communication continued on March 17, as increasingly frustrated participants expressed that "[they had] received NO COMMUNICATION WHATSOEVER" from the University, while larger universities across the country had sent communiques closing

[9] 'Integrated' in the additional legal powers given to Cabinet; 'Coordinated' as Government is mandated by the legislation to form a response committee.

their campuses from the public. Where the University did communicate, frustration continued to be expressed at “DAMN EMAILS WHICH BASICALLY SAY NOTHING!”

On the afternoon of March 17, the University announced the closure of its campus (or an early recess period beginning on 18 March[10]), with students living in University residences expected to leave by March 20 (Rhodes University, 2020). While the University too was dealing with the emergence of a once-in-a-century pandemic, and had to immediately make arrangements for its students and staff, their announcement on March 17 appeared to worsen panic and fuel further frustration with the institution.

As a participant wrote, “It hurts so bad that the University didn't even give us time, but wants us out by Friday. That time my family doesn't even have money for me to go home. Where will they even start to look for money? I really wonder who voted for SRC.” Here, the participant understood the urgency to evacuate however felt despondent at the University’s announcement, which had seen the evacuation process become more of a scramble.

One participant asked, “Dear Rhodents. Please can someone borrow me R180? I will then pay you back when I come back from home. Andinamali *(I do not have money)* and I want to go home so bad. Please guys, I promise to keep my word and pay when I come back.”

Another expressed, “That time buses are even full, where would I even get money for a plane ticket. Money to go to PE and also another R1500 for plane ticket. I just feel like SRC could've spoken for us so at least we given enough time to gather all the money because we not all privileged.” This participant also understood the urgency to evaluate, however simply wished they had been given more notice.

One participant simply said, “This uni is so anti-poor.”

At the time, I was also living in University residence and had to promptly evacuate. Luckily for me, my travel arrangements had been made before the announcement. While originally scheduled for 27 March (the expected end-of-term), I was able to bring my travel forward. I remember going into town on March 17 to purchase sanitiser or handwash (which were already sold out), and witnessing exceptionally long queues, as students scrambled to find seats on buses. Prices to travel were also increasing with demand. Notably, the queue at our local

[10] The University brought forward the end of the first academic term, while the start of the second term remained scheduled for 14 April. This was before Government’s announcement of a hard lockdown on 23 March.

Checkers extended outside of the store and into the parking space. It is an image I continue to remember, one which symbolised to me (beyond my own panic) that things were changing very rapidly.

In response to their announcement, the University released further communication[11], addressing the criticism it had received and outlining additional measures. It announced that students requesting to stay in residences had to do so in writing by 15h00 on March 18, the following day; that NSFAS students (Oppidan and University residence) would receive their allowances also on March 18[12]; and that assessments were suspended during the recess period.

COVID-19 had now begun to affect participants' proximal surroundings, their ways-of-life, and themes were emerging that would become more pronounced in the lockdown period. First, feelings of despair and loneliness would significantly increase, with the University being seen as more of an adversary than a companion. This would reflect COVID-19's changes to the social environment, as its chaos was emulated in interpersonal relations.

Second, the pandemic threatened to take away a safe space for many; a space to safely develop and learn as a young person in South Africa. For many, the University shielded them from their realities at home and in the outside world. Together, these would begin to express some of the subjectivities of young people in South Africa, showcasing a variety of their discursive postures, including their dynamism, resilience, silliness (and their often rude words).

As the reality of the pandemic sank in, including that of indefinitely vacating the University, one participant expressed that school had always been one of their "favourite places", as "home was not always peaceful". Another participant described home being "the most toxic environment ever", and that the thought of home gave them "anxiety and panic attacks".

A sensitive submission on March 20 (containing suicidal ideations) read, "I think I should take advantage of this virus situation and fake my death and disappear, or even better die for real

[11] The SRC also released communication, asking the University to allow students to remain in residences until 27 March, if they are unable to promptly evacuate. They asked the University to process requests quickly and to communicate more effectively. They further asked for the suspension of assessments during recess (which the University outlined it would do in its communique). Finally, they called for calm and cooperation (Rhodes University, 2020).

[12] These were advance payments for allowances due in April, however also in seeming response to financial concerns expressed by students.

since no one will notice I'm gone." Compared to just two weeks prior, on 5 March, the situation had changed drastically and continued to do so.

Some themes remained consistent, however, such as banter and discussions on relationships and sex (as can be expected from young people). One participant on March 21 wrote that they hoped their "future husband" survives COVID-19, as they cannot wait to fall in love with them. That said, these themes were far less prominent than they were two weeks prior, as discourse was now dominated by COVID-19, whether it be the scramble to return home; widening socioeconomic differences; the fear of getting sick; or the adjustment to 'online learning'.

On March 23, President Ramaphosa announced (an initial) 21-day hard lockdown, set to commence on March 26, citing the need to act "swiftly" and drastically in order to save "hundreds of thousands" of lives[13].

Individuals were not allowed to leave their homes, except to purchase food, medicine, seek medical care or collect a social grant. All businesses were closed, except for supermarkets, fuel stations, pharmacies and laboratories, and essential financial services. The National Defence Force was also deployed to assist the Police Service in implementing these measures (The Presidency, Republic of South Africa, 2020).

For non-essential workers, this meant anxiously sheltering at home while COVID-19 made its advance, unsure of what it would leave behind, who it would take, and what would never be the same. For essential workers, this meant being on the frontline, fighting an invisible, omnipresent enemy, which (literally) encompassed the air one breathes.

As a participant, whose father was a deployed SANDF soldier, wrote, "[...] Everyday you just thank God that he is back being himself, because basically he's just sacrificing his own health helping other people." Another simply hoped their parent would "come back healthy", and asked fellow users to "please stay home".

Participants understood the necessity of the measures, as they recognised the danger that the pandemic presented, and that measures would ensure they returned to the University sooner. However, as they sheltered and waited, the stark socioeconomic reality now facing many

[13] The University responded in support of the President's announcement, emphasising the need for students and staff to abide by restrictions to slow the spread of COVID-19. The University also emphasised that the lockdown period was not a "holiday" for students, and that academic activities would continue after the recess period (Rhodes University, 2020).

became more real. Many participants did not have adequate internet access or personal computers with which to continue their academic commitments.

For international students, they faced the additional burden of also navigating South Africa's immigration system (which now faced significant strain as the country's borders closed), as well as navigating the immigration systems of their home countries.

As one participant wrote, "Some students come from remote or isolated villages. Some students come from squatter camps. Some students come from households with no electricity or water or resources or adequate food. Some students come from towns with one grocery store and internet cafés. Some students come from dangerous areas (so walking to internet cafés is out of question). Some students are not as fortunate to have laptops or computers or smartphones to access whatever material may be provided."

They continued, "I'm not attacking people with resources. We ALL want to finish this year [but] please be F****** CONSIDERATE"; and further that "at the end of the day, we were all f*****" by COVID-19. Immensely frustrated by the prospect of online learning, users had begun to vent their frustrations. True to the anxiety felt by all, in-fighting began between "privileged" students (with adequate online learning resources and able to commence with online learning) and "underprivileged" students without access, who felt unconsidered.

This fear of being left behind and of being alone as young people would become central in the lockdown period.

Life in the emergence of COVID-19: Theoretical and literary inferences

Weber's social action theory

Within 11 days, that which was meaningful to participants began to drastically change. As the pandemic began to affect their proximal surroundings, its meaning to participants shifted from more casualness to significant concern. More succinctly, a change in environment was accompanied by a proportionate change in action.

For the first time in South Africa's democracy, a state of national disaster was declared and with it, unprecedented changes began to occur. Namely, the University, a safe space for many, was temporarily lost. Interestingly, however, much frustration was channelled at the University due to these changing events. While indeed the University made administrative errors (for

which it could be criticised), arguably, participants expressed frustration at the University *because* it was their safe space.

For many, the University was their world - the roof over their heads, the place where they ate their meals, met their friends and developed as young people. When one loses a space so important, and so rapidly, their frustration (and grief) can also be channelled at that same space - *because* of how important it is, of how safe it is. Alternatively, they could not channel their frustration at COVID-19 (an invisible Virus), or the Government (whose emergency actions sought to prevent further damage).

Frustration was therefore channelled at the University due its proximity, safety and meaning to users; or in Weber's terms, with changes in their environment, proportionate changes in action occurred within the space. As participants felt anxious and concerned, they channelled those feelings, showing the beginning of the Virus' disruption of interpersonal relations, first between participants and the University and later, between participants themselves.

Further, with these changes in context, social media platforms were avenues for their expression. Within the 11-day 'emergence' period, the forum chronicled participants' experiences - from their realisation of danger; their frustration at a lack of communication and guidance; their anxiety at scrambling home; and the stark socioeconomic reality that awaited many. It provided a gaze into their world, and using their words as they lived it.

This corroborates social media platforms being avenues for 'discursive activity' in the country, however, more particularly, being avenues through which real life can be reflected and expressed. Similarly to real life, the forum can be seen as a community, as submissions were made to not only be expressed but to also be expressed in the (online) company of others.

For instance, as participants expressed concern following the President's announcement of the national state of disaster, they not only did so out of concern for themselves but also for others. This was more clearly articulated with the presence of a contagious and dangerous Virus, however it is a human response to be concerned for the well-being of one's community, in and above one's self.

As participants expressed, "Please, please, please be safe, *guys*"; "I am not ok *guys*"; "Can Rhodes University confirm/deny the news […] [because] *We* need to know […]". Participants' experiences were tied to that of others, as they began to integrate COVID-19 into personal and collective meaning.

This was further facilitated by the anonymity provided, as by removing one's personal identity and credentials, this also helped to remove the stigma. Experiences were tied to genuine human expressions, and not the identities they held or judgements which could be made (Leister & O'Reilly, 2021: 55).

De Certeau's theory of everyday life

Similarly to Weber, drastic changes occurred in day-to-day life at Rhodes University. De Certeau argues that daily behaviour reflects the state of a society; and at the University, daily behaviour became a scramble in the face of the pandemic's advance.

In the 'emergence' period, a drastic shift in everyday life was observed, as participants lost their familiarity, their repetition, and a mundane end-of-term was quickly of great concern. From an avenue for daily discussions, the forum became a necessary crisis resource. In chronicling participants' experiences, it also chronicled their tactical responses to a changing context.

For instance, as a quoted participant expressed, "[...] Most of us live on campus, some residences may have more than 100 people in them. We share a lot of facilities, should one student contract the virus, it will spread very rapidly."

On one level, this participant was presenting concern at the situation, while, on another, also in the early process of coming to terms with it. They recognised the incompatibility of COVID-19 restrictions with their current daily life and anticipated the depth of changes to occur. Further, they not only expressed their thoughts as they were important to them only, but also as they were important to other people, whose inputs they were interested in engaging with[14].

Participants were able to tie their experiences with those of others, as they realised that while presented with danger, they were stronger together. Tactics are acts of skill and adaptation to fulfil outcomes, which the above demonstrates the early use of, as conditions began to change. This also links to subactivism, where youth subjectivities are displayed through social media

[14] Unfortunately, comments and impressions on posts (such as likes) from other users were unavailable in the dataset. This is because they were not 'submitted' onto the forum (the process through which posts are anonymised and moderated), and thus were not part of the archive. Further, having not been anonymised, the information would be identifiable and would present ethical concerns.

platforms. While mainly shown in political contexts, subactivism applies to personalised youth participation, which emerging collectivism began to show.

By the end of the 11-day period, everyday life had changed, as participants prepared for the hard lockdown. As a quoted user expressed, in reference to their SANDF soldier parent, "[...] Everyday you just thank God that he is back being himself…" Here, COVID-19 restrictions were significantly more accepted, as participants began to manoeuvre into their new reality.

They also were aware of their lack of resources, which was expressed in the opposition by some to 'online learning'. That said, as a participant expressed, "We ALL want to finish this year, [...] please be CONSIDERATE…" While frustrated, participants were willing to adjust and to continue their commitments.

A wide-ranging use of tactics were seen from the announcement of the national state of disaster to the start of the lockdown.

Life in COVID-19 lockdown

On 26 March, the hard lockdown began; 21 days after the first case of COVID-19 was detected. From discussions of end-of-term assessments and graduation just three weeks prior, participants were now adjusting to their new reality in quarantine.

They faced a multitude of fears and concerns. They worried for their health and that of those around them. They worried about the pandemic's socioeconomic impact. Put together, participants feared that COVID-19 would erode social progress many had made great sacrifices for.

Already mentioned was the University's safety. However, more particularly, its safety was allegorical of democratic South Africa, of its progress and continuing tribulations. Many participants had sacrificed immensely for the opportunity of an education. As one wrote, "[...] My parents have to take loans to pay [...] [which] I cannot afford down the drain".

Another wrote that they already use their NSFAS (National Student Financial Aid Scheme) allowances to support their family, and that they feared their dream of furthering their studies would vanish into thin air. They continued that they were "anxious and scared".

One participant wrote that it was a "sad reality we can't all be equal, [that] there will always be the rich and the poor, that's how it is". In addition to its threats on lives and socioeconomics,

COVID-19 also began to erode some of South Africa's democratic gains, which many clung onto to elevate themselves. As participants expressed fears of being left behind, they feared for the loss of social progress.

That said, participants expressed fears from different positionalities. While the pandemic had created some collectivism, it also exposed divides. Some participants were able to transition to online learning. Some were not, and they continued to feel unconsidered.

Those with resources were able to persevere and aimed to encourage others as well, in the spirit of unity. However, to those without, this often sounded patronising. Some participants were also unkind to those less resourced.

As a participant wrote, "Some privileged people who comment and post here are utterly disgusting. You lack empathy, logic and reasoning. Rather shut the f*** up sometimes…" In other words, 'my social progress matters too; my democratic progress matters too'.

In response, one wrote, "I am not a brat, I understand what unprivileged students go through. My friends are on NSFAS so I understand. Don't attack all of us "privileged" students, because some of us do understand. As much as you're hurt by some peoples comments, some of us are hurt by your comments and attacks." In a time of chaos, participants sought to find a sense of normalcy and comfort; yet from different positions which often clashed.

Some tried to mend these divides and offer solutions for all users. One participant tried to offer two potential solutions to make online learning more accessible saying, "...I know it's not great at all *(their proposal)*, we could possibly critically debate probable options. Let's not get caught up in the poor vs rich argument, rather give constructive criticism. We're all in this together, whether we like it or not."

They continued, "Please don't comment if you just intend to be rude. I know this may sound SO stupid - but I'm just trying to encourage brainstorming amongst everyone. We're all intellects and leaders regardless of our backgrounds. Someone is probably sitting at home with a brilliant solution but just afraid to speak up".

As young people, participants were trying to "figure it out", although from different perspectives; an earnest and valiant effort in the face of a once-in-a-century pandemic.

With the limited resources available to them, some also donated and shared with others. As one wrote, "[...] There is a guy who is very needy that I know of and I really dont have the resources to help him, I am pleading with anyone who is willing to donate clothes for him…"

Others asked for help and received it. As a participant wrote, "Hi can any kind soul please buy me electricity? I live off campus and I didn't go home since I have assignments to do…"

On the other hand, some grew tired of the in-fighting. As one wrote, "Guys, we've heard you. May I humbly ask you all to stop talking about online learning, [...] we are tired of this now…"

Some were also struggling with being at home, online learning aside. As a participant wrote, "[...] I can't be myself in my own house. I'm queer, but my mom is super homophobic. Every opportunity she gets, she'll bash the LGBTQIA+ community. I can't wait to go back. I genuinely felt safer there *(at the University)* than at home. I have to hide the fact that I'm queer at home, but it's becoming more difficult as the days go by. Please keep those of us who are forced to stay in toxic homes during the lockdown in your prayers."

Another (and containing self-harm) wrote, "I cried every night I have been home. I started drinking during the afternoon by myself and I hid a knife in my pencil case. I am not gonna do anything but I have it in case I need to feel something different." This submission was made on 3 April, one week into the lockdown, as COVID-19's mental health effects became more noticeable. Participants just wanted things to be okay.

In the midst of this, some themes remained consistent, such as discussions on relationships and sex, although less prominently than before. Many participants were separated from their loved ones. As one remarked, "I just want to see my favourite person but this lockdown has me literally a 10 minute drive away from her yet I can't see her." They continued, "I just hope that the lockdown works and the spread of COVID19 stops. [...] We have to bear with this for a little while longer so that it doesn't last even longer."

From the University's standpoint, as the lockdown began, it announced measures to transition to online learning and teaching. It announced that recess would end on 20 April[15], and that the lockdown would be used to prepare. It announced that online University domains (including

[15] From previously 14 April, in response to the hard lockdown initially scheduled to end on 16 April, before being extended by two additional weeks to 30 April.

the University's mobile app) would be zero-rated and excluded from data costs. It also announced a Teaching Continuity Task Team to ensure appropriate measures were put in place, which surveyed student and staff internet access to gauge required measures.

Its announcement did not ease concerns, as many continued to fear that they would fall behind. Some also started to feel burnt out.

As one participant wrote, "Am I the only one who's not okay at all? It feels like I'm suffocating. Sounds dramatic but that's exactly how it feels. I really don't mind being in doors, it's the uncertainty of things that's getting to me. I haven't done any work, can't seem to be productive no matter how hard I try. I have a literature review to do and I haven't done even one reading. It feels like I'm legit drowning and time is just moving. [...] I legit feel crazy guys. I don't see any solution for me. I'm so scared of not making it because of slacking".

Another wrote, "Accounting 2 people? Honestly?! What happened to putting all academic activities on hold? I mean I understand we do have to go through first terms work but where do we have to hustle the data? Every. Single. Day. Just to download and watch those videos wanting about 100mb EACH?"

One submission was made by a University lecturer saying, "[...] I want you to know that in every single meeting and communication with my colleagues, access to online learning has been on the top of the agenda. Many lecturers are advocating for you continuously and will do everything we can to help you. Some of us know what it is to learn on an empty stomach. We are worried about your academic success AND your safety and wellbeing. Let's try and figure out how to get you to the finish line together...we are listening, we are trying our best."

Lockdown extended

On 9 April, President Ramaphosa announced the lockdown's extension by two further weeks, citing the need to further prepare the public health care system and to also prepare a phased return to public activity (Government of South Africa, 2020).

Further fatigue and frustration were expressed. As one participant wrote, "Today a pensioner died on his way to the hospital after being attacked in his home during lockdown. [...] We still pick our children up from gutters who had been raped and mutilated. Our women are still being stripped from their freedom and their rights to live freely in this country. And our grandparent's are still being murdered in their homes…"

Another (containing Gender-Based Violence) wrote, "I need some crucial advice. My big sis is in an abusive relationship, the guy beats her but she keeps on going back to him. They have kids together, a boy and a girl, beautiful kids but it kills me inside to know my sister is going through that s*** and her kids have to witness that..."

Further, one wrote, "[A] bad part of the lockdown is I can't move forward with my case against my abusive ex until varsity physically opens. Being locked up alone doesn't help either, and a lot of this lockdown has just been me struggling with PTSD symptoms." These submissions mirrored reality, as 120 000 cases of GBV were reported in the first three weeks of the lockdown (SA Government Communication and Information System, 2021)[16].

Alongside feelings of loneliness and fears of falling behind, these occurrences in South Africa's environment set the scene for remaining discussions in the lockdown period.

On 19 April, the University announced a more comprehensive online learning and teaching plan. It expressed cognisance of the challenges faced by students and aimed to reassure them that the University stood with them.

It announced an orientation period to online learning and teaching from 20-30 April: where additional learning material would be uploaded onto the University's Learning Management System (RUConnected); where staff would further interact with students to gauge internet access; where those less resourced would be sent physical learning material or USB flash drives[17]; where a limited stock of laptops would be accessed[18]; and where negotiations with network providers would be finalised for more affordable rates[19] (Rhodes University, 2020).

Some continued to be dissatisfied with the University's approach. They expressed their sentiments, yet were fatigued with fighting. As one wrote, "[...] We as underprivileged or black students must not rely on the university for solutions. We have to work hard with what we have

[16] Other occurrences of violence during this period included police and army brutality, most notably seen in the torture and death of Collins Khoza (Nicholson, 2020).

[17] Delivery of materials was only available within the Republic of South Africa.

[18] The University later introduced a loan scheme for laptops, after the lockdown.

[19] It also announced a moratorium on academic probations, Duly Performed Certificates and academic exclusions. Further, that until a determined period, assessments would not be counted towards class and final marks; rather they would be used to gauge student progress.

or what we don't have. We have to be resourceful. We are on our own. You're on your own. The sooner you realise that the better…"

Another said, "[...] Let's be honest, we were never loved or thought about and we never will be. Education is our only way out of poverty. Instead of fighting battles we will never win and having a victims complex, let us focus on moving forward and stop blaming management because it will never take us anywhere".

They continued, "Stop blaming people for your misfortunes. They don't care and it won't give you what you want. Stop posting your problems on confessions because everyone will tell you it is not an official channel of communication. Lastly, when writing to the ministry of education and/ or Rhodes management, remember that you need them and they don't need you to pass. Remember to be polite and address your concerns in a coherent manner. Your anger and bitterness helps no one and your rude words might just hinder…"

In the remaining days of the hard lockdown, participants felt burnt out and simply sought normalcy and peace. One wrote, "I act like I'm okay, but deep down inside I'm not. [...] This degree has been a real struggle and I just want to make my mom proud." Another simply said, "I just need a hug."

Some participants sought to deregister, either for some of their courses or to restart the following year. The lockdown's mental toll was evident.

Life in COVID-19 lockdown: Theoretical and literary inferences

Weber's social action theory

Now in lockdown, the transition to a COVID-19 reality was complete, and in this "new world", the concerns it presented became more acute. The fears about COVID-19 resonated more deeply than general health or socioeconomic concerns, as participants feared for the loss of social progress in South Africa's young democracy. With this immense change in the country's environment, actions demonstrated its severity.

Many had made great sacrifices for an education, as the University was more than an educational institution or a campus. The University was allegorical of South Africa's progress, which COVID-19 threatened. As Hook (2013: 5) argues, the "South African experience (or situation) is characterised by historical dissonance, by the continuous juxtaposition of forward and backward-looking temporalities."

Democratic South Africa continues to be troubled by its past as it grapples with it, and COVID-19 triggered a sense of social chaos and violence which had not been seen in the country for many years. While COVID-19 holds stark differences to South Africa's history, it built on its existing social trauma.

Participants therefore fought for their social progress, and, mirroring South Africa at large, participants fought from different positionalities, in accordance to where "the struggle" placed them. Their actions were determined by their social placement in COVID-19, which exposed and widened South Africa's divides. That said, efforts to unite participants were earnest, as they still tried to 'figure it out' from their different perspectives.

It highlighted the burden of South Africa's youth, the born free generation already with immense responsibility, now with their whole world on their shoulders. Many had to adjust to their new socioeconomic reality. Many had to adjust to being at home, and while with some roofs over their heads, they were still unsafe. Many were unsafe living in their true identities. Many lived in abusive households, and even though students, many were breadwinners.

The COVID-19 pandemic stripped users of their economic safety, which was already precarious in South Africa; their health and personal safety; and also their social safety. It is therefore no surprise many felt fatigued and burnt out in the face of such immense challenges. In the course of a few weeks, participants went from focusing on end-of-term assessments and nights out to fighting for survival.

De Certeau's theory of everyday life

Likewise, with de Certeau, everyday life in COVID-19 lockdown became an act of survival. In the absence of various forms of safety, everyday life was adapted in tactical ways to adjust to the pandemic. Familiarity, repetition and the mundane life before were replaced by constant anxiety and fear.

De Certeau describes social arrangements as negotiated processes, as individuals have room to manoeuvre in society. However, aside from restrictions on movement, it is difficult to manoeuvre in further throes of poverty. Some users had to choose between using their NSFAS allowances for their education or to feed their families.

It is also difficult to manoeuvre when one's health is at risk and the health of those around one, and it is difficult to manoeuvre when the University was the space where one could truly be oneself. Yet users still made efforts to do so. They still tried to "figure it out".

The pandemic exposed South Africa's divides, resulting in varying uses of tactics by participants. Sometimes it seemed individual participants' tactical responses were pursued at the expense of others, as unkind words were often used. Yet in the midst of this social rupture, participants continued to emphasise that they were in it together. As custodians of South Africa's democracy, users still tried to build a "rainbow nation", a brave and incredible use of tactics.

Life after COVID-19 lockdown

On 30 April, the hard lockdown ended, and the country began a phased return to public activity[20]. From 1 May - 31 May, the country entered "Level 4" lockdown, which allowed limited activity. Individuals could leave their homes, but were subject to a curfew between 21h00 - 04h00. Gatherings continued to be prohibited, and public venues remained closed. Funerals and cremations were allowed, however attendance was limited to 50 people. Borders were closed for international travel. Interprovincial travel was also not allowed (Government of South Africa, 2020). The first fortnight of "Level 4" is discussed to gauge the hard lockdown's implications.

Themes from the hard lockdown period continued to emerge, such as the University being a cherished safe space for many.

As a participant remarked on 1 May, "[...] My father hates me. He is abusive and beats me for petty reasons. This goes for my younger siblings as well. He recently beat my younger brother for not responding when he called. He didn't respond because he didn't hear the call. He was beaten with a rod made of metal. His arms are swollen, he has open cuts. There was blood splashing everywhere."

They continued, "Next time he beats me. I'm fighting him back. I don't care if he kicks me out of his house. I'd rather be homeless anyway. I'm exhausted. I wish schools would reopen so I would avoid all of this and stay away from this place but that's not happening anytime soon."

[20] Levels of lockdown or 'Alert Levels' are determined by case counts or rates of infection and the burden on health care systems.

Some also contemplated harming themselves. As one wrote on 3 May, “I think of killing myself every-now and then. I don’t think I’d do it but the idea’s there.”

Overall, participants continued to feel burnt out and continued to fear for their progress. As one remarked, “[...] What about international students who don't have laptops or money to buy data? Not all international students are loaded. They sent us home, declined our requests to stay and now they want us to fund ourselves. Why can't they send money for data into bank accounts and where is the SRC International Councillor?”

Due to lockdown restrictions, international students could not receive many of the implemented measures by the University for online learning and teaching. For instance, the University was unable to physically send learning material internationally. The University had also negotiated with network providers for mobile data packages, which international students were unable to receive.

Others expressed appreciation at the University. As a participant remarked, “[...] This is a message of appreciation to Rhodes staff especially from my department. I'm a postgraduate but I did my undergrad at another institution. I have been to most of their offices seeking assistance and I have been greeted and assisted with care and respect not once have I ever left feeling disappointed and disrespected…”

Another continued, “[...] My aunt works for the university and while all of us went on holiday, they have been scrambling to organise material for students, and trying very hard to accommodate everyone. She didn’t even have a holiday like the rest of us, most lecturers have not, they’ve spent the holiday working very very hard. Nobody gives them credit, but instead the SRC and general student body seems to tell them what a s*** job they’ve been doing….”

On the other hand, in-fighting continued and the vitriol seemed to escalate. In response, a participant wrote, “[...] It is okay and normal to have different perspectives and ideas. It's not like we have the same backgrounds, experiences, goals, status, and so on. But we can choose to engage each other with respect like leaders, and to express our concerns and anger without belittling the next leader. Please avoid going on a personal attack when issues are raised…”

The continuing conflict also seemed to take its toll. As a participant remarked, “[...] As someone who endured constant bullying from pre-primary through to matric, it makes me very, very sad to see how people are treating each other online. Bullying hurts people. It causes a lot of harm, pain and suffering. It really truly can destroy and traumatise people. Trust me. I know.

I lived it day in day out for 14 years straight. 10 years of therapy and it still hurts so much. Why are you tearing into people, shredding them to pieces, ridiculing, insulting and humiliating each other to such an extent? It's heartbreaking…"

The state of South Africa's social environment and participants' feelings about it seemed to reflect themselves onto the forum, as participants' online world seemed to reflect their physical environment. The anguish that they felt at the pandemic and the chaos it caused, they channelled. They were also without an alternative outlet, as their responsibilities continued, despite the immense changes.

As a participant wrote (expressing suicidal ideations), "[...] I have been thinking of suicide a lot lately. Academically ndiyaphela *(I am tired)*. I do not enjoy being home [...], and the fact that I am still going to be here for a very long time 'kills' me…"

Another continued, "The emotional suffering that I deal with here at home is the main reason why I ignored every university in Gauteng and chose to study far away in the Eastern Cape. Far from the noise, the constant fighting, the insults thrown around…"

More expressed concern with being at home. As one wrote, "Res was better at least I knew I was not going to sleep hungry".

Another said, "Working from home is hard. One has to clean, cook, do laundry. Ensure that younger siblings are doing some school work whilst playing parent to them throughout the day. Listen to the parents constant complaints and instructions and then at 9pm after you've done all of this, as tired as you are you try to work…"

With these responsibilities, further signs of mental health struggles were present. As one user asked, "Does anyone know if the counselling centre is doing any online stuff? I really need my counsellor right now. I don't feel like I can talk to any of my friends and family about this issue because it'll hurt someone very close to me. But at the same time I feel extremely isolated…"

Another expressing loneliness said, "Almost nobody talks to me anymore during this lockdown, and what makes it worse is I've realised my best friends don't consider me to be their best friend…"

These were some of the sentiments after the hard lockdown, as its effects continued to resonate. While the period analysed was a fortnight after, a great deal of trauma continued to be caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. On one hand, one might have expected some relief to be

expressed as the country mildly relaxed its restrictions, yet it seems the trauma and suffering endured. The pandemic continued to hold similar meanings, as users continued to fight for their survival. The use of tactics as seen earlier also seemed to continue, with the effects of such manoeuvring displayed in further burnt out.

Concluding remarks

The above has sought to demonstrate the kinds of expressions that were made on a Confessions page during the COVID-19 lockdown, how they were made, and what they could be analysed within a psychosocial frame.

There is a familiarity and fluency with trauma in South Africa, which in the words of Hook (2013: 5), form part of the country's "situation". Yet, referencing Biko and Boraine, who wrote on South Africa's apartheid experience, trauma does not simply "go away" and must be dealt with.

A great deal of trauma has occurred associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly amongst South Africa's young people, and a great deal of innocence has been lost. The data show this, as occurrences in South Africa's environment were displayed in psychological processes. Participants showed their navigation and grappling with COVID-19, from their casualness to their fight for survival.

Many held their whole worlds on their shoulders, which no young person should endure, let alone in a once-in-a-century pandemic. Yet they still made efforts to do so, showing a great deal of resilience. While COVID-19 has widened South Africa's divides, it has also tested its resolve. In the midst of the chaos, participants continued to emphasise that they were in it together.

South Africa faces its challenges, yet collective action in COVID-19's advance was apparent and significant. Participants took responsibility, however their courage should not be taken for granted. They lost their economic, health, personal and social safety. They felt immensely fatigued and worn. Many also felt very lonely, which in-fighting and vitriol showed.

As such, the grief of South Africa's young people due to the pandemic ought to be of concern, because if the country's democratic history has provided any lessons, it is that violence, trauma and chaos continue to reverberate in our society. The discussion has sought to demonstrate that

activities such as xenophobia and unrest can be read as forms of communication with past trauma. Activities such as #RMF and #FMF also speak to past trauma, seeking to rectify it.

Should COVID-19's trauma go unaddressed, it too will reverberate, as the lesson the pandemic presents is an added realisation of the ways in which South Africa's social environment has a psychological impact. As unfortunate as the pandemic experience has been, it is also an opportunity for the country to reflect on its overall traumatic experiences, which span years and generations; a journey however which will hopefully lead it closer to greater social inclusion and healing.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

In closing, a return is made, once again, to Steve Biko, who wrote of South Africa's journey to democracy as a "psychological battle", one which its citizens must realise, and which will continue even after the attainment of democracy (quoted in Hook, 2004: 105). He understood democracy as a continuous project, a journey which South Africans continue to bravely travel, and the "South African situation" speaks to these steps forward and back (Hook, 2013: 4).

The COVID-19 pandemic is a new chapter, which has strongly affected South Africa's social space, and has had an impact socioeconomically, in loss of life and in mental health terms. Social media platforms were part of the experience, as they capture South Africans' daily experiences, including those of young adults. The inputs they provided during the hard lockdown showed their complex navigation as those born after the country's attainment of democracy, as they channelled their pain at the pandemic's advance.

The discussion has touched on a handful of discursive activities, which connect South Africa's environment to the matrices of young adulthood in the country. Significant levels of internet and social media usage by young adults are able to showcase this image, where their "subactivism" (or new form of citizenship) is seen. This includes "Confessions" pages, where a variety of subjectivities are discussed, eased by the anonymity provided and its reduction of stigma. For young adults, subactivism also resonates on a continental level, where those born after the attainment of liberation throughout Africa are centering themselves in their public discourses.

Further, the ability shown in wielding social media platforms for particular outcomes reveals their malleability, such that while significant discursive activities have been performed on social media platforms (both positive and negative), platforms exist as created structures for social purposes of communication and socialisation (Couldry, 2014: 881).

For theoretical explanations, insights from Max Weber's 'social action theory' and Michel de Certeau's 'theory of everyday life' were included. Weber was used to provide insight on the subjective meanings given by individuals and groups to activities they perform. In discussing discursive activities performed in South Africa, Weber helped to show that regardless of their message (whether progressive or xenophobic), these activities were significant as they held strong social meanings to their participants. Weber was also able to help bring home that social

media platforms hold their prominence in society as their utility has been socially accepted, and that they have been invented to serve social purposes.

Similarly, de Certeau's insight helped to examine how daily practices are constituted in societies, where ordinary human behaviour maintains social order. His views were important to discussing social media platforms in South Africa, which are prominent and everyday features that are used for a variety of purposes, from daily discussions to the mobilisation of mass movements. Importantly, de Certeau helped to highlight the use of 'tactics' by young adults to manoeuvre and wield social media platforms for their objectives, regardless of outcome or their intent. This resonates beyond South Africa's borders, as young people across the continent are centring themselves in their public discourses.

These issues were explored through a thematic analysis of a university Confessions page during the COVID-19 hard lockdown, with particular attention to the kinds of expressions made were analysed, how they were made, and what they were able to inform within a psychosocial frame. The following themes resonated.

First, changes to South Africa's social environment in the COVID-19 pandemic's advance reflected in discursive engagements, as participants grappled with the Virus' spread and its implications on their daily lives. The pandemic held evolving meanings, from some initial indifference to urgent panic, a fight for survival and progress, to the cause for collective responsibility.

Second, the University was cherished as a safe space to develop as a young person in South Africa, a space shielded from the outside realities in the country, and a site of progress in its democracy. Participants had made immense sacrifices for the opportunity of an education, which the pandemic threatened, yet was met with brave resistance. Despite its trauma, participants fought to maintain their social progress and united in the endeavour.

This highlighted a third, crucial theme, that being the subjectivities of young people in South Africa, or the 'born free' generation. Significant divides among participants emerged from the pandemic, such as differences in socioeconomics and points of view; yet an underlying current was togetherness. One often sees true character emerge in crises, and this spoke to the character of participants of the forum. Among this, also included prominent discussions on relationships and sex, another aspect of youth subjectivity.

The significance of these findings shows the importance of having more substantive mental health discussions in South Africa, due to our familiarity and resonance with trauma. Prior to the pandemic, one in six South Africans lived with a mild or moderate mental health condition, and one in three endured a mental health condition in their lifetime (Nguse & Wassenaar, 2021: 306; Jack et al, 2014: 1). With COVID-19, these figures are sure to increase, with other factors such as high rates of GBV, HIV/AIDS and crime contributing to the image of South Africa's social space. While South Africa holds one of the most progressive legislative frameworks in the world in pertaining to mental health care, a further grappling with social space in mental health terms is required, one that this project has sought to indicate that there is space for (Burns, 2011: 100; Nguse & Wassenaar, 2021: 305).

On a more continental level, an attempt has also been made to show Africa as an area of considerable discursive activity, where psychological processes have been displayed on social media platforms, both prior to and since COVID-19. These too have been inspired by young people and include the Arab Spring, the End SARS protests, and significant election participation through social media platforms. While discussed less prominently than discursive activities in the Global North, Africa and the broader Global South are also spaces of interest, in particular involving the activities of their young people (Adegbilero-Iwari et al, 2021; Howard et al, 2011; Muzee & Enaifoghe, 2020: 195).

References

Adegbilero-Iwari, I., Fasae, J. & Subair, R.E. (2021). Social Media for Social Change: A Review of the Nigerian Anti-Police Protests through the Lens of the #EndSARS Movement, *SSRN*, 24 November. Available at: https://ssrn.com/abstract=3970744 [Accessed 12 August 2022].

Al Jazeera Media Network. (2021). Ugandan opposition leader Bobi Wine withdraws poll result challenge, 22 Feb. Available at: https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/2/22/ugandan-opposition-leader-wine-withdraws-poll-result-challenge [Accessed 12 August 2022].

Allen, K., Lancaster, L. & Machabaphala, T. (2022). Social media vigilantism is alive and trending in South Africa, *Institute for Security Studies*, 12 July. Available at: https://issafrica.org/iss-today/social-media-vigilantism-is-alive-and-trending-in-south-africa [Accessed 12 August 2022].

Beetar, M. (2019). A contextualisation of the 2008 and 2015 xenophobic attacks, *Current Sociology*, Vol. 67 (1), pp. 122-140.

Blaikie, N. & Priest, J. (2017). *Social research: Paradigms in action*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Bosch, T. (2017), Twitter activism and youth in South Africa: the case of #RhodesMustFall. I*nformation, Communication & Society*, Vol. 20 (2), pp. 221-232.

Bosch, T. & Mutsvairo, B. (2017). Pictures, Protests and Politics: Mapping Twitter Images during South Africa's Fees Must Fall Campaign. *African Journalism Studies*, Vol. 38 (2), pp. 71-89.

Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology, *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, Vol. 3 (2), pp. 77-101.

Burdee, A., Fietkiewicz, K.J. & Lins, E. (2019). Investigating usage of social media platforms in South Africa. *The African Journal of Information Systems*, Vol. 11 (4), pp. 314-336.

Burns, J. K. (2011). The mental health gap in South Africa: A human rights issue. *The Equal Rights Review*, Vol. 6 (99), pp. 99–113.

Cadwalladr, C. & Graham-Harrison, E. (2018). Revealed: 50 million Facebook profiles harvested for Cambridge Analytica in major data breach, *The Guardian*, 17 March.

Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/mar/17/cambridge-analytica-facebook-influence-us-election [Assessed 12 August 2022].

Chenzi, V. (2020). Fake news, social media and xenophobia in South Africa. *African Identities*, Vol. 19 (4), pp. 1-20.

Chetty, K. (2021). The Case of South Africa: The Societal Impact of COVID-19. *International Journal of Social Quality*, Vol. 11 (1 & 2), pp. 85–110.

Clearly, K. & Low, M. (2021). Government strategy shows billions needed to avert healthcare worker crisis, *Spotlight*, 1 September. Available at: https://www.spotlightnsp.co.za/2020/09/01/government-strategy-shows-billions-needed-to-avert-healthcare-worker-crisis/ [Accessed 07 November 2022].

Dawood, B., Tomita, A., Ramlall, S. (2022). 'Unheard', 'uncared for' and 'supported': The mental health impact of Covid-19 on healthcare workers in KwaZulu-Natal Province, South Africa. *PLoS*, Vol. 17 (5), pp. 1-17.

De Certeau et al. (1980). On the oppositional practices of everyday life, *Social Text*, Vol. 3: 3-43.

Disaster Management Act, No. 57 of 2002. Available at: https://www.cogta.gov.za/cgta_2016/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/DISASTER-MANAGEMENT-ACT.pdf [Accessed 20 October 2022].

Duby, Z., Bunce, B., Fowler, C., Bergh, K., Jonas, K., Janan, J.D., Govindasamy, D., Kuo, C. & Matthews, C. (2022). Intersections between COVID-19 and socio-economic mental health stressors in the lives of South African adolescent girls and young women. *Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Mental Health*, Vol. 16 (23), pp. 1-16.

Du Preez, L. (2022). Inflation - and interest rates - will things get worse before they get better? *Independent Online*, 26 July. Available at: https://www.iol.co.za/business-report/economy/inflation-and-interest-rates-will-things-get-worse-before-they-get-better-7cae7388-6694-4d52-8eb5-3a8f95dcb39b [Accessed 12 August 2022].

Elliot, V., Christopher, N., Deck, A. & Schwartz, L. (2021). The Facebook Papers reveal staggering failures in the Global South. *Rest of World*, 26 October. Available at:

https://restofworld.org/2021/facebook-papers-reveal-staggering-failures-in-global-south/ [Accessed 10 June 2022].

Ephraim, P.E. (2018). Bobi Wine case demonstrates the power of social media. *The Conversation*, 27 August. Available at: https://theconversation.com/bobi-wine-case-demonstrates-the-power-of-social-media-102179 [Accessed 12 August 2022].

Garman, E.C., Eyal, K., Avendano,M., Evans-Lacko, S. & Lund, C. (2022). Cash transfers and the mental health of young people: Evidence from South Africa's child support grant. *Social Science & Medicine*, Vol. 292, pp. 1-9.

Giandhari et al, (2020). Early transmission of SARS-CoV-2 in South Africa: An epidemiological and phylogenetic report. *International journal of infectious diseases: International Society for Infectious Diseases*. Vol. *103*, pp. 234–241.

Government of South Africa. (2020). President Cyril Ramaphosa: Measures to combat Coronavirus COVID-19 epidemic, 15 March. Available at: https://www.gov.za/speeches/statement-president-cyril-ramaphosa-measures-combat-covid-19-epidemic-15-mar-2020-0000 [Accessed 20 October 2022].

Government of South Africa. (2020). President Cyril Ramaphosa: Extension of Coronavirus COVID-19 lockdown to the end of April, 09 April. Available at: https://www.gov.za/speeches/president-cyril-ramaphosa-extension-coronavirus-covid-19-lockdown-end-april-9-apr-2020-0000 [Accessed 07 November 2022].

Government of South Africa. (2020). Disaster Management Act: Regulations: Alert level 4 during Coronavirus COVID-19 lockdown. Available at: https://www.gov.za/covid-19/about/coronavirus-covid-19-alert-level-4 [Accessed 07 November 2022].

Government of South Africa, Communication and Information System. (2021). SA records over 100 000 GBV cases during lockdown, 06 September. Available at: https://www.sanews.gov.za/south-africa/sa-records-over-100-000-gbv-cases-during-lockdown [Accessed 07 November 2022].

Government of South Africa. (2021). Report of the Expert Panel into the July 2021 Civil Unrest, 29 November. Available at: https://www.thepresidency.gov.za/download/file/fid/2442 [Accessed 12 August 2022].

Government of South Africa. (2022). Minister Joe Phaahla: Repeal of regulations regarding Covid-19 pandemic and monkey-pox, 23 June. Available at: https://www.gov.za/speeches/statement-minister-phaahla-repeal-regulations-covid [Accessed 12 August 2022].

Helliker et al., (2021), *Everyday Crisis-Living in Contemporary Zimbabwe*. Routledge.

Hook, D. (2004). Frantz Fanon, Steve Biko, 'psychopolitics' and critical psychology. *LSE Research Online*, July. Available at: http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/961 [Accessed 12 August 2022].

Hook, D. (2013). *(Post)apartheid Conditions: Psychoanalysis and Social Formation*. Palgrave Macmillan: London.

Howard, P., Duffy, A., Freelon, D. Hussain, M.M., Mari, W., Maziad, M. (2011). Opening Closed Regimes: What Was the Role of Social Media During the Arab Spring? Available at SSRN: https://ssrn.com/abstract=2595096 [Accessed 12 August 2022].

Jack, H., Wagner R.G., Peterson, I., Thom, R., Newton, C.R., Stein, A., Kahn, K., Tollman, S. & Hofman, K.J. (2014). Closing the mental health treatment gap in South Africa: a review of costs and cost-effectiveness, *Global Health Action*, Vol. 7 (1), pp. 1-11.

Jones, J.L. (2010). 'Nothing is straight in Zimbabwe': The rise of the Kukiya-kiya economy 2000-2008, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 36 (2): 285-299.

Kamer, L. (2022). Africa: number of internet users in selected countries 2022. *Statistica*, 21 July. Available at: ttps://www.statista.com/statistics/505883/number-of-internet-users-in-african-countries/#statisticContainer [Accessed 12 August 2022].

Khumalo, J. (2022). Jessie Duarte memorial: I fear we are going to have our own version of Arab Spring - Thabo Mbeki. *News24*, 22 July. Available at: https://www.news24.com/news24/southafrica/politics/jessie-duarte-memorial-i-fear-we-are-going-to-have-our-own-version-of-arab-spring-thabo-mbeki-20220722 [Accessed 20 August 2020].

Lester, J.N. & O'Reilly, M. (2017). *Examining Mental Health through Social Constructionism: The Language of Mental Health*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Lund, C., Kleintjes, S., Kakuma, R. & Flisher, A. (2009). Public sector mental health systems in South Africa: Inter-provincial comparisons and policy implications. *Social psychiatry and psychiatric epidemiology*, Vol 45, pp. 393-404.

Mental Health Care Act, No. 17 of 2002. Available at: https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/201409/a17-02.pdf [Accessed 12 August 2022].

Menzies, R.E., Neimeyer, R.A., Menzies, R.G. (2020). Death Anxiety, Loss, and Grief in the Time of COVID-19. *Behaviour Change*, Vol. 37, pp. 111–115.

Meta, (2022), Facebook Community Standards. Available at: https://transparency.fb.com/en-gb/policies/community-standards/ [Accessed 07 November 2022].

Mthethwa, C. (2022). Krugersdorp rapes: What we know so far about horrific attack that shocked SA. *News24*, 31 July. Available at: https://www.news24.com/news24/southafrica/news/krugersdorp-rapes-what-we-know-so-far-about-the-horrific-incident-that-shocked-sa-20220731 [Accessed 20 August 2022].

Mutinta, G. (2022). Mental distress among university students in the Eastern Cape Province, South Africa, *BMC Psychology*, Vol. 10 (204), pp. 1-8.

Muzee, H. & Enaifoghe, A.O. (2020). Social Media and Elections in Uganda: The Case of Bobi Wine and the Arua Primary Elections. In: M.N. Ndlela & W. Mano (eds) *Social Media and Elections in Africa, Volume 1: Theoretical Perspectives and Election Campaigns*, pp. 195 - 213. Palgrave Macmillan.

Ndlela, M.N., Mano, W. (2020). *Social Media and Elections in Africa, Volume 1: Theoretical Perspectives and Election Campaigns*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Nguse, S. & Wassenaar, D. (2021). Mental health and COVID-19 in South Africa. *South African Journal of Psychology*, Vol. 51 (2), pp. 304-313.

Ntsebeza, L. & Hall, R. (2007). *The Land Question in South Africa: The Challenge of Transformation and Redistribution*, Cape Town: HSRC Press.

Omale, S. (2019). Ramaphosa Apologises to Nigeria for Xenophobic Attacks on its Citizens in SA. *Eyewitness News*, Available at: https://ewn.co.za/2019/09/17/ramaphosa-

apologises-to-nigeria-for-xenophobic-attacks-on-its-citizens-in-sa [Accessed 12 August 2022].

Oyedemi, T.D. (2021). Postcolonial casualties: 'Born-frees' and decolonisation in South Africa, *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, Vol. 39 (2), pp. 214-229.

Perrigo, B. (2021). How Facebook Forced a Reckoning by Shutting Down the Team That Put People Ahead of Profits. *Time*, 7 October. Available at: https://time.com/6104899/facebook-reckoning-frances-haugen/ [Accessed 10 June 2022].

Perrigo, B. (2022). Inside Facebook's African Sweatshop. *Time*, 17 February. Available at: https://time.com/6147458/facebook-africa-content-moderation-employee-treatment/ [Accessed 10 June 2022].

Posel D., Oyenubi A. & Kollamparambil, U. (2021). Job loss and mental health during the COVID-19 lockdown: Evidence from South Africa. *PLoS ONE*, Vol. 16 (3), pp. 1-15.

Reporters Without Borders, (2022), South Africa: a profile. Available at: https://rsf.org/en/country/south-africa [Accessed 12 August 2022].

Rhodes Confessions 2017-2020 Team. (2021a). A Letter to the Readers of Rhodes Confessions 2017-2020 (Facebook). 10 March. Available at: https://web.facebook.com/rhodesuniconfessions/?_rdc=1&_rdr [Accessed 11 July 2022].

Rhodes Confessions 2017-2020 Team. (2021d). For Researchers - About the Rhodes Confessions 2017-2020 Data (Facebook). 10 March. Available at: https://web.facebook.com/rhodesuniconfessions/?_rdc=1&_rdr [Accessed 11 July 2022].

Rhodes University. (2020). [14 March] VC's Circular - Cancellation or postponement of events at Rhodes University. Available at: https://www.ru.ac.za/rucoronavirusgateway/latestnews/14marchvcscircular-cancellationorpostponementofeventsatrhodesuniv-1.html [Accessed 20 Ocyober 2022].

Rhodes University. (2020). [17 March] VC's Circular - Covid-19 Update. Available at: https://www.ru.ac.za/cvrtt/latestnews/17marchvcscircular-covid-19update.html [Accessed 20 October 2022].

Rhodes University. (2020). [18 March] SRC's response to VC's 17 March circular on Covid-19. Available at:

https://www.ru.ac.za/studentrepresentativecouncil/latestnews/srcsresponsetovcs17marchcircularoncovid-19.html [Accessed 20 October 2022].

Rhodes University. (2020). [19 April] Remote/Online Teaching and Learning Plan - 2020. Available at: https://www.ru.ac.za/latestnews/archives/2020/ [Accessed 07 November 2022].

Runciman, W. G. & Matthews, E. (2007), *Max Weber: Selections in Translation*. Cambridge University Press.

Sacks, B., Gressier, C. & Maldon, J. (2021). #REALTALK: Facebook Confessions pages as a data resource for academic and student support services at universities. *Learning, Media and Technology*, Vol. 46 (4), pp 550-563.

Stein, D.J. (1998). Psychiatric aspects of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa. *British Journal of Psychiatry*, Vol. 173, pp. 455 - 457.

StatCounter. (2022), Social Media Stats South Africa: Mar 2009 - Apr 2022. Available at: https://gs.statcounter.com/social-media-stats/all/south-africa/#monthly-200903-202204 [Accessed 11 July 2022].

The Presidency: Republic of South Africa, (2020). Statement by President Cyril Ramaphosa on Escalation of Measures to Combat COVID-19 Epidemic. 23 March. Available at: http://www.dirco.gov.za/docs/speeches/2020/cram0323.pdf [Accessed 20 October 2022].

Van Niekerk, R.L. & van Gant, M.M. (2021). Mental health and well-being of university staff during the coronavirus disease levels 4 and 5 lockdown in an Eastern Cape university, South Africa. *South African Journal of Psychiatry*, Vol. 27, pp. 1-7.

Visser, M. & Law-van Wyk, E. (2021). University students' mental health and emotional wellbeing during the COVID-19 pandemic and ensuing lockdown, *South African Journal of Psychology*, Vol. 51 (2), pp. 229-243.

World Health Organisation. (2020). WHO Director-General's opening remarks at the media briefing on COVID-19 - 11 March 2020. Available at: https://www.who.int/director-general/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-the-media-briefing-on-covid-19---11-march-2020 [Accessed 20 October 2022].

World Health Organisation. (2021). Chronic staff shortfalls stifle Africa's health systems: WHO study. Available at: https://www.afro.who.int/news/chronic-staff-shortfalls-stifle-africas-health-systems-who-study [Accessed 07 November 2022].

Yeo, T.E.D. & Chu, T.H. (2017). Sharing "Sex Secrets" on Facebook: A Content Analysis of Youth Peer Communication and Advice Exchange on Social Media about Sexual Health and Intimate Relations. *Journal of Health Communication*, Vol. 22 (9), pp 753-762.

Yilmaz, G.G., (2013), Tactics in Daily Life Practices and Different Forms of Resistance, *Procedia - Social and Behavioural Sciences*, Vol 82, pp. 66-73.

Zakrzewski, C., de Vynck, G., Masih, N. & Mahtani, S. (2021). How Facebook neglected the rest of the world, fuelling hate speech and violence in India. *The Washington Post*, 24 October. Available at: https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2021/10/24/india-facebook-misinformation-hate-speech/ [Accessed 10 June 2022].