

South African CRIME QUARTERLY

No. 74 | 2025

A new frontier of cyber vigilantism?

Reviewing the Black Twitter community in South Africa

Lebogang Mpuru¹

mpurulp@unisa.ac.za

<https://doi.org/10.17159/sacq.n74.16482>

Black Twitter is known to bring to light pressing issues around the world, channel Black narratives, expose misconduct and mobilise social justice movements. With popular hashtags that shape contemporary political and social discourses, the site has encouraged racial debates, cancel culture and doxing activities. Using content analysis, the data examined includes Twitter/X posts and trends, hashtag movements, commentary articles and existing literature on cyber vigilantism. This article addresses a complex interplay of social and technological factors shaping this phenomenon and emphasises the need for greater awareness to mitigate the risks associated with cyber vigilantism. The article submits that cyber vigilantism awareness and prevention strategies will benefit the social and economic wellbeing of a hyper-connected society.

Introduction

Twitter/X has been used extensively to share narratives, exchange tweets, receive the latest updates and promote business brands.²

However, it has also recently been used as a forum for exchanging narratives of African discourses, earning the title ‘Black Twitter’. The

phenomenon of Black Twitter has its roots in the United States of America (USA),³ but has since become the largest thriving Twitter/X base in South Africa, where it has become prominent among diverse ethnic groups and official languages such as English, IsiZulu, IsiXhosa and Northern Sotho.⁴ As such, Bruce describes Black Twitter as a social networking site where

culturally connected people discuss matters related to Black communities.⁵ The site is also seen as a form of state surveillance, where Black people seek to ‘critique pedagogy and challenge hegemonic power’.⁶

Most significantly, Black Twitter is known to bring to light issues that are not covered by the media.⁷ Campbell confirmed that the site seeks to avoid the racial biases of mainstream news that rely on the police for information, rather opting to expose the direct experiences frequently captured on film by Black users.⁸ Some authors, however, have raised significant concerns about how the site is being utilised to conduct cyber vigilante activities. For instance, a study conducted by Allen and Van Zyl revealed that various cases of doxing, hounding, and crowdsourcing have been conducted on the site.⁹ Nonetheless, this article was motivated by the paucity of research on the influence of cyber vigilantism on Black Twitter in South Africa. Therefore, the article seeks to answer the following question: Has the networking site evoked some dimensions of vigilante justice? In addition, the article hopes to contribute to knowledge and raise awareness by informing organisations, legislative authorities and users about the cyber vigilante activities on Twitter/X. Most significantly, it is hoped that improving knowledge and awareness of these activities will in some part increase the social and economic well-being of Twitter/X users.

Clarification of concepts

- *Twitter/X* is a free social networking platform where users may submit brief messages called tweets. Short texts, images, videos, and links can be included in these tweets.¹⁰ The purpose of Twitter/X is for users to connect and share their thoughts, opinions, and experiences with a big audience. Additionally, the site is used by a variety of users such as marketers, reporters, public relations (PR) teams and the general public.¹¹

- *Internet users/netizens* refers to people that use the internet for many purposes, such as communication, business transactions, entertainment and news, etc.¹² Achmad describes public citizens as people that have the freedom to express opinions in public, and netizens¹³ as people who are free to express opinions on the internet and online communities.¹⁴ Wong describes users/netizens as public citizens who are actively involved in the online community, particularly on social networking sites.¹⁵ In addition, users/netizens are renowned for their technical and investigative abilities as online detectives who attempt to solve real life cases.
- *Hashtags* are words or phrases preceded by the pound sign or hash symbol (#). They are used primarily on social media platforms to categorise content, making it easier for users to find posts related to specific topics. Tweets are posted on Twitter/X when users reply to text messages.¹⁶ According to Bosch, hashtag hacktivism refers to a large volume of tweets that create a public networking sphere in narrative form. Therefore, hashtag is a symbol of Twitter/X, with tweets created within the hashtag.¹⁷
- *Cyber vigilantism* is a practice in which social media networking sites are used to punish people who are thought to have violated societal norms.¹⁸ *Vigilantism* is the practice of punishing an individual for a perceived offence or crime without the need for legal justification.¹⁹ Both concepts utilise some form of punishment, delivered when an individual is perceived to have transgressed a norm. Although victims of vigilantism are often publicly tortured, killed and burned to death,²⁰ victims of cyber vigilantism experience various amounts of online doxing, bullying, or shaming activities.²¹ Moreover, victims of cyber vigilantism are often reported to commit suicide due to cyber bullying, while

others receive death threats.²² It is important to note that not all activities occurring on the Twitter/X platform fall within the scope of cyber vigilantism.

- *Doxing* is the practice of maliciously publicising the personal information of an individual, particularly their contact number or residential address.²³ According to Melck, the intention is to ruin their reputation or even cause physical harm. The doxing is perceived as a means of enacting justice and making sure that wrongdoers suffer the consequences of their actions.²⁴

Materials and methodology

Utilising content analysis, the article examines both primary and secondary data by analysing existing literature and Twitter/X posts on the phenomenon of cyber vigilantism.²⁵ Content analysis is employed when the researcher seeks to organise and find meanings attached to collected data and draw significant conclusions.²⁶ In addition, social movement hashtags such as #AmINext, #StopGBV, #MenAreTrash, #OperationDudula, and #PutSouthAfricanFirst, all of which are perceived to have influenced cyber vigilante activities, were also examined. A significant number of tweets are included in the article to ensure the accuracy and credibility of the research,²⁷ but have been anonymised, using pseudonyms.²⁸

The article was presented with the following research limitations: 1) only Twitter/X posts with South African content were examined; 2) the search was limited to tweets from 2018 to 2024 when posts, trends and hashtag movements were reviewed; 3) not every activity occurring on the site was classified as cyber vigilantism; and, 4) given the volume of tweets and retweets taking place daily on the Twitter/X platform, some tweets may have been overlooked. The article recommends that future research should

focus more on the impact of cancel culture on public figures and celebrities in South Africa.

Discussion

According to Wong, the increased accessibility of the internet and the freedom to share content has generally given rise to cyber vigilante activities.²⁹ Some authors explain cyber vigilantism as a means of exposing misconduct and identifying alleged culprits online.³⁰ According to Al Zaman, the following perspectives contribute to the development of cyber vigilantism: when internet users perceive law enforcement to be ineffective; when they feel that their lives are in danger because of an immediate threat such as the deterioration of traditional values; and when they regard themselves as the law, and police and punish others according to their own moral principles.³¹ The following section discusses some of the common cyber vigilante practices on the Twitter/X platform.

Cancel culture

Cancel culture in South Africa is rooted in Black traditional values and the issue of accountability.³² It has been argued that marginalised groups initially utilised the idea of cancel culture as a way to express complaints against politicians who became prominent by engaging in criminal activities.³³ Others perceive cancel culture as a practice utilised to ostracise an individual and hold them to account for alleged wrongdoing.³⁴ In addition, it is also seen as a voice for marginalised groups to hold others accountable if they feel that the judicial system has failed them.³⁵

Some authors outlined how cancel culture is conducted on a targeted individual or organisation: it usually begins with widespread online outrage in response to a provocative statement or alleged misconduct; over time the responses become more frequent, with mass tweets of shaming, ostracism or

boycotting; and, lastly, support is withdrawn (expressing repudiation), and the target is 'cancelled'.^{36, 37} It usually involves hate speech and other forms of harassment, such as doxing, to amplify the harassment and intimidation.³⁸ The cancel culture phenomenon, however, is not limited to online spaces. It can also include a range of offline vigilante justice actions in the form of hostility, intimidation, stalking and harassment.³⁹ According to Thomas, the consequences of being cancelled can lead to reputational damage, loss of income and psychological trauma.⁴⁰

Indeed, various celebrities in South Africa have been affected by the cancel culture in both their professional and social environments.⁴¹ The late actor Patrick Shai is one such example.⁴² According to media reports, Shai had previously posted a video where he used vulgar language, defaming the star Casper Nyovest,⁴³ and it was reported that the actor later committed suicide due to hurtful comments on Twitter/X.⁴⁴ Former Miss South Africa 2024 contestant Chidimma Adetshina (now Miss Universe Nigeria) became the target of cyber bullying on Twitter/X when significant concerns were raised about her citizenship and the eligibility to compete in a South African pageant.⁴⁵ For example, one user @Ndantse_V tweeted: 'That Miss SA hun doesn't rate our country... She's not even using our Flag on her bio.'⁴⁶ This tweet had over 86 000 likes and 1 200 comments, many of them negative. @Nota_D tweeted 'cancel her', while another user, @TwarbSA22 added: 'she deserves the hate'. With memes⁴⁷ being a favoured method of expression on Twitter/X, another user posted an image of a person being hit with a rock on the back of the head and tweeted: 'She must Voetsek, She's Nigerian.'

Ng argues that some online cancel remarks, whether explicit or suggestive, are often motivated by hate crimes. Gray also reflects on the phenomenon of hate crime and warns

that some comments have the potential to incite prejudice and discriminatory remarks. It is evident from the tweets above that cancel culture indicates a mob rule and a vigilante style of policing suited to the digital age.⁴⁸

Online shaming and cyber bullying

Online shaming is synonymous to public shaming, which was historically used to deter people from committing crimes.⁴⁹ The practice of public shaming, however, was outlawed because it was perceived to be cruel and inhumane.⁵⁰ According to Schrader, online shaming activities such as bullying, revenge porn, sexting scandals, webcam hijackings and screenshots from chats that have gone viral have become increasingly common.⁵¹ A report by Pew Research describes cyber bullying as, among others, offensive name-calling, spreading false rumours, physical threats, and receiving or sharing explicit images of an individual online without their consent.⁵² Laidlaw further notes that the internet has given online users a platform to invade the privacy of others in the name of freedom of expression.⁵³

According to Naik, online shaming, cyber bullying as well as revenge porn have become of increasing concern in South Africa.⁵⁴ For example, Zanele Sibufa, a member of the Free State provincial legislature, became a victim of revenge porn when her sexually explicit videos were leaked on Twitter/X on 8 November 2022.⁵⁵ According to Hearn and Hall, revenge pornography is the 'online, and at times offline, non-consensual distribution, or sharing, of explicit images by ex-partners, partners, others, or hackers seeking revenge or entertainment'. In this case, the offender was described as a 'sextortionist' – someone who preys on and intimidates a vulnerable victim and threatens to circulate the victim's private pictures if their demands are not met.⁵⁶

Singer Lady Zamar also experienced significant cyber bullying and public criticism on Twitter/X

after she laid sexual assault charges against her ex-boyfriend, musician Sjava.⁵⁷ This is evident from the tweets below where both men and women accused her of falsely accusing Sjava. @TinahMdu tweeted: 'How does Lady Zamar end up chasing after a man that raped her, we are not kids here... She needs to be checked for bipolar.' @Fizz tweeted: 'The painful thing about this false accusation is we won't believe even when it really happened for real.'

The singer tweeted in her defence:

Do you want me to kill myself? Do you want me to die, be murdered, go to jail to make you guys happy? Do you guys want me to stop making music or publicly cry so you can see how I feel about what happened to me?

A tweet by @Funky_Wen expressed the opinion that some matters should be reported to the police rather than attempting to seek assistance on social media:

The problem is most women think social media is a police station where you can report a case and an investigation will take place which in actual fact social media is like a court with no lawyer to help you here they will criticise, grill and break you emotional.

Munro asserts that 'the internet has created a call-out culture in which sexism and misogyny can be challenged'.⁵⁸ However, studies indicate that women tend to receive a hostile response online when they speak out, particularly on issues relating to gender equality.⁵⁹ Moreover, a report by Amnesty International highlighted that many women are subjected to various abuses online, triggered by sex and gender discrimination,⁶⁰ and may even become victims of an online 'mob trial' and harassment in real life.⁶¹

Doxing

Doxing involves sharing the personal details of alleged wrongdoers such as their names, home addresses, phone numbers and pictures.⁶² These vigilante actions have the potential to damage a person's professional life and reputation, since these are impacted by their presence and visibility on the internet. Exposing and sharing the wrongdoer's identifiable information online is also to condemn and discredit that individual.⁶³ According to Muir et al, doxing may also evolve into aggression, stalking and vandalising the individual's property.⁶⁴ Hussain confirms that information is acquired through IP addresses, social media profiles, phishing, data purchases from data brokers, as well as interception of internet traffic.⁶⁵

McCann emphasises that doxing often targets people who anonymously post prejudiced comments online, or those who are caught on camera promoting bigoted beliefs.⁶⁶ According to Karimi, Squicciarini and Wilson, doxing may lead to bigotry, hate groups, human trafficking, intimidation through swatting (making hoax calls), and spreading false information about celebrities – and pursuing these activities offline.⁶⁷

For example, news media reported that musician Kelly Khumalo received death threats after the death of football star Senzo Meyiwa.⁶⁸ According to media reports Meyiwa was shot and killed in Kelly Khumalo's residence in 2014, in what was supposedly a robbery.⁶⁹ Subsequently, there have been contentious debates on Twitter/X that Khumalo was responsible for the murder,⁷⁰ as well as reports that she was surrounded by bodyguards while in court, where she claimed to be concerned for her safety.⁷¹ Melck describes doxing as a form of cyber bullying and points out that once an individual's personal details are shared online, it is difficult to have them removed.

Hashtag movements

Black Twitter has also played an extensive part in efforts to bring about social change.⁷² Narty has commented that tweets supporting social justice movements tend to promote protest actions that put pressure on the government to address various grievances.⁷³ People tend to take the law into their own hands to address perceived injustices and to convey their dissatisfaction to government and the media.⁷⁴

In a case study analysis of digital activism, Bosch and Mutsvairo probed the ability of these movements to foster online-based protest actions and promote political discourses.^{75, 76} However, according to Morapeli and Kazembe, some of the social movements on Twitter/X have the potential to influence a xenophobic agenda, framing 'other' ethnic groups as economic and security risks.⁷⁷ Some of these social hashtag movements are outlined below.

#AmINext, #StopGBV

Black Twitter has raised awareness of gender-based violence (GBV), notably around the tragic death of Uyinene Mrwetyana on 24 August 2019.⁷⁸ Her death became a symbol of renewed efforts by government to prioritise the safety and wellbeing of women and children in the country.⁷⁹ Hashtag movements such as #AmINext, #StopGBV were mobilised across the country and on social media platforms to bring national awareness to the issue of GBV.⁸⁰ These movements were supported by a thread of tweets by #MenAreTrash, where women sought public support by sharing their lived experiences about their sexual victimisation and mistreatment by men. #MenAreTrash became popular, with some tweets reporting on missing persons and others calling for justice for victims of GBV. However, some Twitter/X users called out #MenAreTrash as being vengeful and harmful to relationships. For instance, @lamMotswane tweeted: I am man, and I am Trash. While this statement had approximately

420 likes, it also elicited contrasting views. For example, @Melancoly tweeted:

Speak for yourself man. If you keep indoctrinating mens minds into believing that they are trash, they might start believing it and actually live up to that label. You think you are coming up with a revolutionary idea merely for likes. But you are actually causing more harm.

Another user tweeted:

ah be trash alone. It's important to make a distinction between abusers and lovers. You cannot say a man is trash merely by virtue of being a man. You cannot encourage a negative stereotype. Instead we should be able to draw a distinction between trash and non-trash.

Reneses found that the comments on the #MenAreTrash movement demonstrated how Black Twitter is used as a platform for challenging gender stereotypes as well as enforcing the hegemony of masculinity.⁸¹ It also demonstrates how the system of patriarchy still dominates South African society and contributes to the GBV crisis.⁸²

#OperationDudula and #PutSouthAfricansFirst

Operation Dudula represents a vigilante group that stands for 'Afrophobia' or 'xenophobia'.⁸³ Dudula is an isiZulu word meaning 'force out' or 'knock down'.^{84, 85} Indications are that the movement was launched by Nhlanhla 'Lux' Dlamini in Soweto within a few months of the July 2021 KwaZulu-Natal civil unrest.⁸⁶ According to Myeni, the main aim of Operation Dudula is to drive migrants out of South Africa.⁸⁷ The group blames foreign nationals for the rise of unemployment and crime in the country, and calls on the South African government to account for the country's open borders, lenient immigration regulations and the rise in immigration.⁸⁸

According to Fihlani, other online movements, including the Alexandra Dudula movement and #PutSouthAfricanFirst, were spawned by #Operation Dudula.⁸⁹ It was also indicated that the group's scope of interest includes the shutdown of foreign businesses and insisting that South African businesses only employ South Africans.⁹⁰ At the time of writing #Operation Dudula had 27 700 followers and 1 239 posts, with tweets urging foreigners to leave the country.

They really should pack and leave all of them with their Asian counterpart as well, if all fails and they insist then we must go to phases up until we make this country ungovernable they forgotten about 2008.

@M_Mboseni tweeted:

#PutSouthAfricaFirst thanks to everyone. These bastards never came to my shop. I have organize moering committee for them. As soon as i see them again the community will deal with them decisively. Thank you for making my community involve. Do it to others.

#I_hate_MAKWEREKWERE⁹¹ tweeted:

When you see them again, please do not just moer them also find out who sent them or what do they want?

Although the comment received roughly 176 likes, one user criticised it for inciting more violence:

It is a disgrace that you promote violence. Good things fail because of uncivilized people like you who behave like Robert Mugabe. There is nothing that you can fix using violence, nothing absolutely nothing. Just get this in your head.

According to Hawkins, hashtags are the initiators of online mobilisations, which would be significantly slower offline without Black Twitter.⁹² As such, online movements have the

ability to spark offline protests or vigilantism by ensuring that people form the identity of a particular movement.⁹³ A study conducted by Hove confirms that movements such as #putSouthAfricanfirst and #proudSAPProduct tend to increase malicious vigilante attacks on foreigners and produce more xenophobic hatred, both online and offline.⁹⁴

Conclusion

In response to the study's question, this article contends that Black Twitter seems to be fostering the growth of cyber vigilantism. Although the Twitter/X platform can be an effective mechanism for raising awareness of pressing issues in the country, it can also become a dangerous site for inciting vigilante or vengeful actions. While the site seems to have encouraged both peaceful and violent movements in the country, and a number of social movements successfully brought about some form of social change, others merely instigated social disorder. It is clear that social media has the power to influence people's narratives and channel them into violent behaviour.

The platform has also proven harmful to some celebrities who have become victims of cancel culture. This demonstrates unequivocally that Black Twitter has been utilised to expose and retaliate against people for their transgressions. The concern is that victims are not usually given a chance to defend themselves. It is evident that many users are eager to judge and execute punishment without sufficient evidence, thus endangering the lives of others.

While cancelling an individual can be an effective form of action, it can also lead to social disorder. The individual being cancelled may go through considerable torture, shame and humiliation, not only online but in their social environments. It is evident from literature that cancel culture is harsher and much more

prominent in an unforgiving society that preys on people's online weaknesses, credulity and ignorance. Therefore, it is important to be aware of who uses the Twitter/X platform:

- 1) those who are unemployed, in debt, worried about the lack of job opportunities and therefore feel uncertain about the future;
- 2) those who have jobs but are dissatisfied with their current work conditions and salaries;
- 3) those who have experienced discrimination based on their race or gender, either in the workplace or social environments;
- 4) those who are dissatisfied with the criminal justice system due to its inability to solve crime;
- 5) those who may be involved in crime, including murderers, rapists, terrorists, cyber criminals and paedophiles;
- 6) those from the business sector who are seeking to market or promote their brands; and,
- 7) those who are vengeful by nature and enjoy the thrill of seeing others being dragged down and punished.

Given such an array of users, the prevalence of criminal activity, vindictive statements and/or violent behaviour on the platform is unsurprising. The article makes the following recommendations to prevent cyber vigilante activities.

Recommendations

It is crucial that the Twitter/X site is monitored on a regular basis to understand and investigate the dynamics of online discourses, and whether users are maintaining respect for freedom of expression as stated in the South African Constitution.⁹⁵ Twitter/X policies should frequently be amended to monitor and criminalise any new misconduct on the site. Gray proposes that hate speech and racist, sexist and derogatory comments should be dealt with decisively. But even though defamation law offers protection against naming and shaming, the anonymity offered by the internet means that individuals are still not sufficiently protected. Koops highlighted that the

availability of the internet allows cyber criminals to target their victims from various locations with little impunity.⁹⁶ Hence, it is important that users become aware of the digital vulnerabilities on social media.⁹⁷

A report by Amnesty International has raised significant concerns about how Twitter/X fails to 'adequately protect the rights of women by investigating and responding to reports on violence in a transparent manner.'⁹⁸ The article further recommends alerting users about the implications associated with cyber vigilantism through cyber security hubs, to provide prevention strategies and create awareness by regularly posting on the site.⁹⁹ Significantly, it proposes that more cyber security specialists should be employed and provided with the necessary skills to regularly monitor the platform and prevent cyber vigilantism.

The fact that fraudsters can create false profiles and hack accounts to conceal their identities should also be a matter of concern. Therefore, users should remain up to date with news media and their own social accounts, and speedily alert others when their accounts have been compromised, to avoid being associated with any aberrant behaviour. Twitter/X should also ensure that tweets (including pictures, videos and texts) that reflect sexual misconduct, racism and xenophobia are regularly deleted and removed from the platform.

Notes

- 1 ALebogang Mpuru is a lecturer at the Department of Criminology and Security Science at the University of South Africa. She is also a PhD candidate at UNISA, focusing on womanhood and victimology.
- 2 Amanda Hetler, What is Twitter? *Techtarget.com*, 1 January 2023, <https://www.techtarget.com/whatis/definition/Twitter/> (accessed 30 June 2023).
- 3 The Black Twitter community originated in 2010 in the USA to illuminate issues that affect Black communities such as racism, police brutality, gun violence, LGTBQIA+ (Lesbian, gay, transgender, bisexual, queer, intersex and asexual) rights and Black women's rights. See Whitelaw Reid, Black Twitter 101: What Is It? Where Did It Originate? Where Is It Headed? *Uva Today*, 28 November 2018, <https://news.virginia.edu/content/black-twitter-101-what-it-where-did-it->

- originate-where-it-headed (accessed on 4 June 2025).
- 4 Serino Kenichi, #RainbowNation: The rise of South Africa's 'Black Twitter', *World Africa.com*, 7 March 2013, <https://www.csmonitor.com/World/Africa/2013/0307/RainbowNation-The-rise-of-South-Africa-s-black-Twitter> (accessed 5 July 2023).
 - 5 Keisha Bruce, Black Twitter shaped the platform, but its future lies elsewhere, *The Conversation*, 1 December 2022, <https://theconversation.com/black-Twitter-shaped-the-platform-but-its-future-lies-elsewhere-194950> (accessed 14 November 2024).
 - 6 Marc Lamont Hill, Thank you, black Twitter: state violence, digital counter publics, and pedagogies of resistance, *Urban Education* 53 (2) (2018), 286–302, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085917747>.
 - 7 Roderick Graham and Shawn Smith, The content of our #characters: Black Twitter as counter public, *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity* 2(4) (2016), 433–449, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2332649216639067>.
 - 8 Adina Campbell, What is Black Lives Matter and what are the aims, *BBC News*, 13 June 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/explainers-53337780> (accessed 19 February 2025).
 - 9 Karen Allen and Isel van Zyl, Digital vigilantism, social media and cyber criminality, *Enact Africa* 20 (2020), 1–16.
 - 10 Hetler, What is Twitter?
 - 11 Caroline Forsey, What is Twitter and how does it work? Hubspot.com, 26 July 2021, <https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/what-is-Twitter> (accessed 26 June 2023).
 - 12 Michael Seese, Scrappy information security, California: *Scrappy About Publishers*, 2009, 7–149.
 - 13 The term *netizens* come from a combination of the words 'internet' and 'citizen' (or net citizen), which colloquially describes a person that is actively involved or engages in online communities. See Michael Hauben *The Net and Netizens: The Impact the Net has on People's Lives*, https://www.columbia.edu/~hauben/ronda2014/THE_NET_AND_NETIZENS.pdf (accessed on 4 June 2025).
 - 14 Willya Achmad, Citizen and netizen society: the meaning of social change from a technology point of view, *Journal Mantik* 5(3) (2021), 1564–1570.
 - 15 Yasmin Wong, Victim and the cyber vigilante: an additional perspective on cyber vigilantism, in Khader Majeed, Chai XT Whistine and Seng N Loo (eds), *Introduction to cyber forensic psychology: understanding the mind of the cyber deviant perpetrators*, Singapore, World Scientific Publishing Co, Home team behavioural sciences centre, 2021, 147–164.
 - 16 Sarah Florini, Tweets, tweeps, and signifyin': communication and cultural performance on 'Black Twitter', *Television and New Media*, 15(3) (2014), 223–237, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1527476413480247>.
 - 17 Tanja Bosch, *Social media and everyday life in South Africa* (1st ed.), London: Routledge, 2020, 166.
 - 18 Allen and Van Zyl, Digital vigilantism, 1.
 - 19 Regina Bateson, The politics of vigilantism, *Comparative Political Studies*, 54(6) (2021), 923–955.
 - 20 Bronwyn Harris, 'As for violent crime, that's our daily bread': Vigilante violence during South Africa's period of transition, *Violence and Transition Series* 1 (2001), 1–102.
 - 21 Kholofelo Maruma, Vigilante justice in modern South Africa: A post-democracy analysis, *Radinka Journal of Science and Systematic Literature Review*, 2(3) (2024), 496–503.
 - 22 Suriya Saengpranga and Savitri Gadavanijb, Cyberbullying: the case of public figures, *LEARN Journal: Language Education and Acquisition Research Network*, 14(1) (2021), 344–369; David M Douglas, Doxing: a conceptual analysis, *Ethics and Information Technology* 18 (2016), 199–210, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10676-016-9406-0>.
 - 23 Julia M MacAllister, The doxing dilemma: seeking a remedy for the malicious publication of personal information, *Fordham L. Rev* 85 (2017), 2451–2483, <https://ir.lawnet.fordham.edu/flr/vol85/iss5/21>.
 - 24 Megan Melck, Doxing and social media vigilantism, *dmlaw.co.za*, 3 November 2020, <https://www.dmlaw.co.za/doxing-and-social-media-vigilantism/> (accessed 27 October 2024).
 - 25 Rita J. Wickham, Secondary analysis research, *J Adv Pract Oncol*, 10 (4) (2019), 395–400.
 - 26 Mariette Bengtsson, how to plan and perform a qualitative study using content analysis, *NursingPlus Open* 2 (2016), 8–14.
 - 27 Uwe Flick, *The Sage handbook of data collection*, London: Sage Publications, 2018, 736.
 - 28 Gwen Bouvier, Racist call-outs and cancel culture on Twitter: The limitations of the platform's ability to define issues of social justice, *Discourse, context and media*, 38 (2020), 1–11.
 - 29 Wong, Cyber vigilantism.
 - 30 Stella C Chia, Seeking justice on the Web: how news media and social norms drive the practice of cyber vigilantism, *Social Science Computer Review*, 38(6) (2020), 655–672, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0894439319842190>; David M Douglas, Doxing: a conceptual analysis, *Ethics and Information Technology* 18 (2016), 199–210, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10676-016-9406-0>.
 - 31 Sayeed Al Zaman, Internet vigilantism: mushroom crisis, *Observerbd.com*, 19 October 2019, <https://www.observerbd.com/news.php?id=223639> (accessed 4 July 2023).
 - 32 Bruce Ironhardt, You're wrong about 'cancel culture', take your time to fully understand the situation or don't engage at all, *Medium.com*, 4 August 2020, <https://medium.com/illumination/youre-wrong-about-cancel-culture-980c4566ce23> (accessed 20 June 2023).
 - 33 Aja Romano, the second wave of 'cancel culture', *Vox.com*, 5 May 2021, <https://www.vox.com/22384308/cancel-culture-free-speech-accountability-debate> (accessed 4 June 2025).
 - 34 Nicole Dudenhofer, Is cancel culture effective? Fall 2020, <https://www.ucf.edu/pegasus/is-cancel-culture-effective/> (accessed 27 October 2024).
 - 35 John McDermott, Those people we tried to cancel? They're all hanging out together, 2 November 2019, *Nytimes.com*, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/02/style/what-is-cancel-culture.html> (accessed 20 February 2023).
 - 36 Ealasaid Munro, Feminism: a fourth wave? *Political Insight*, 4(2) (2013), 22–25, doi.org/10.1111/2041-9066.12021.
 - 37 Eve Ng, *Cancel Culture: A Critical Analysis*, Palgrave McMillan, 2022, 1–159.

- 38 Ng, Cancel culture, 20.
- 39 Ligaya Mishan, The long and tortured history of cancel culture, 3 December 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/03/t-magazine/cancel-culture-history.html> (accessed 22 February 2025).
- 40 Zoe Thomas, What is the cost of 'cancel culture'? *BBC News*, 8 October 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-54374824> (accessed on 24 February 2025).
- 41 Samantha Mochele, Cancel culture: the dark side of fame in Mzansi's celebrity scene, *Bona Magazine.com*, <https://www.bona.co.za/entertainment/cancel-culture-the-dark-side-of-fame-in-mzansis-celebrity-scene/> (accessed 24 February 2025).
- 42 Rhode Marshall, Is cancel culture really helping?, *News24*, 28 July 2019, <https://www.news24.com/citypress/trending/is-cancel-culture-really-helping-20190728> (accessed 17 June 2023).
- 43 Jedi Ramalapa, Black Twitter Kills Patrick Shai – A Country Without Compassion, *Wordpress.com*, 23 January 2022, <https://sowhatsart.wordpress.com/2022/01/23/black-twitter-kills-patrick-shai-a-country-without-compassion/> (accessed 15 November 2024).
- 44 Ray Seleme, 'Only God knows': Rapper Casper Nyovest and tweeps react to legendary actor and GBV activist Patrick Shai's passing on social media, *The South African.com*, 22 January 2022, <https://www.thesouthafrican.com/lifestyle/celeb-news/breaking-gwitsi-modimo-cassper-nyovest-reacts-to-patrick-shais-passing/> (accessed 17 June 2023).
- 45 Megan van den Heever, I'll apologise: Gayton on if Chidimma can 'prove' SA citizenship, 4 August 2024, *The South African*, <https://www.thesouthafrican.com/lifestyle/celeb-news/local-celebs/gayton-mckenzie-xenophobic-miss-sa-chidimma-adetshina-nigerian-nationality-watch/> (accessed 22 February 2025).
- 46 All tweets quoted in this article have been transcribed verbatim.
- 47 Memes include videos, pictures or the 'genre-related patterns' of the format (such as font and text position, or whether the video is a lip dub or fake movie trailer) and is used on social media to convey a message or imitations, see Kate M Miltner, 'Internet Memes,' in *The SAGE Handbook of Social Media*, ed. Jean Burgess, Alice Marwick, Thomas Poell, London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2018, 412.
- 48 Steven Arrigg Koh, Cancel culture and criminal justice, *Hastings Law Journal* 74(79) (2022), 79–122.
- 49 Shannon R Muir, Lynne D Roberts, Lorraine Sheridan and Amy R Coleman, Examining the role of moral, emotional, behavioural, and personality factors in predicting online shaming, *PLoS One* 18(3) (2023), 1–19, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0279750>.
- 50 Tree Meinck, Shame, and the rise of the social media outrage machine. This ancient social emotion has always been complex. The internet poured fuel on it. Then came social media, *Discovermagazine.com*, 12 February 2021, <https://www.discovermagazine.com/the-sciences/shame-and-the-rise-of-the-social-media-outrage-machine> (accessed 28 May 2023).
- 51 Jessica Schrader, The impact of public shaming in a digital world: how humiliation tactics are being used and confused for activism, *Psychology Today.com*, 5 July 2018, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/shame-nation/201807/the-impact-public-shaming-in-digital-world> (accessed 28 May 2023).
- 52 Pew Research, Teens and cyberbullying, *Pewresearch.org*, 15 November 2022, https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2022/12/15/teens-and-cyberbullying-2022/pi_2022-12-13_teens-cyberbullying_0-03-png/ (accessed 28 October 2024).
- 53 Emily Laidlaw, Online shaming and the right to privacy, *Laws* 6(1) (2017), 1–30, <https://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2944307>.
- 54 Sameer Naik, SA youngsters under threat from cyber bullies as online shaming and revenge porn also on the rise, *Jol.co.za*, 27 March 2021, <https://www.iol.co.za/saturday-star/news/sa-youngsters-under-threat-from-cyber-bullies-as-online-shaming-and-revenge-porn-also-on-the-rise-e6f391d5-0be6-4b52-881c-d929964122da> (accessed 28 June 2023).
- 55 Karabo Mokgonyana, Zanele Sifuba and the case of revenge porn. What to do?, *Mail & Guardian*, 9 November 2022, <https://mg.co.za/thought-leader/opinion/2022-11-09-what-to-do-if-you-are-a-victim-of-revenge-porn/> (accessed 24 February 2025).
- 56 Roberta L O'Malley and Karen M Holt, Cyber sextortion: An exploratory analysis of different perpetrators engaging in a similar crime, *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 27 (1–2) (2022), 258–283.
- 57 Joy Mphande, 'Do you want me to kill myself?' – Lady Zamar responds to cyberbullies, *Daily Dispatch*, 17 July 2023, <https://www.dailydispatch.co.za/lifestyle/entertainment/2023-07-17-do-you-want-me-to-kill-myself-lady-zamar-responds-to-cyberbullies/> (accessed 24 February 2025).
- 58 Ealasaïd Munro, Feminism: A Fourth Wave? 23.
- 59 Kim Barker and Olga Jurasz, Online misogyny: a challenge for digital feminism? *International Affairs*, 72(2) (2019), 95–114.
- 60 Amnesty International, #ToxicTwitter: violence and abuse against women online, 3 September 2018, <https://www.amnesty.org/fr/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/ACT3080702018ENGLISH.pdf> (accessed 24 February 2025).
- 61 Anne S. Y Cheung, revisiting privacy, and dignity: online shaming in the global e-village, *Laws* 3(2), 301–326, doi.org/10.3390/laws3020301.
- 62 Douglas, Doxing: a conceptual analysis, 199.
- 63 Danielle K Citron, hate crimes in cyberspace – introduction, hate crimes in cyberspace, *University of Maryland Legal Studies Research Paper* 11, Harvard University Press, 2015, 1–13.
- 64 Muir et al, Online shaming, 4.
- 65 Zoya Hussain, Explained: what is Twitter's new anti-doxing policy that led to account suspension of several journalists? *India Times*, 23 December 2022, <https://www.indiatimes.com/explainers/news/explained-what-is-Twitter-s-new-anti-doxing-policy-that-led-to-account-suspension-of-several-journalists-588337.html> (accessed 20 February 2023).

- 66 Jaymi McCann, What is doxing? Meaning of the term explained as Elon Musk accuses journalists on Twitter, *I/News*, 16 December 2020, <https://inews.co.uk/news/technology/what-doxing-official-definition-explained-elon-musk-journalists-Twitter-2032764> (accessed 20 February 2023).
- 67 Younes Karimi and Shomir Wilson, automated detection of doxing on Twitter, conference: The 25th ACM Conference on Computer-Supported Cooperative Work And Social Computing (CSCW 2022), 7 January 2022, <https://arxiv.org/pdf/2202.00879.pdf> (accessed 20 June 2023).
- 68 Katlego Sekhu, 'I have received a couple of death threats,' Kelly Khumalo fears for her life, *Kaya959.com*, 20 July 2022, <https://www.kaya959.co.za/entertainment/i-have-received-a-couple-of-death-threats-kelly-khumalo-fears-for-her-life/#:~:text=Speaking%20in%20the%20latest%20episode%20of%20her%20reality,that%20she%E2%80%99s%20received%20a%20couple%20of%20death%20threats> (accessed 20 February 2023).
- 69 Karabo Mafolo, Senzo Meyiwa Murder, *Daily Maverick*, 20 June 2022, <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2022-06-20-senzo-meyiwa-murder-how-the-5-accused-ended-up-in-the-dock/> (accessed 11 November 2024).
- 70 Sihle Mthembu, 'In Defence of Kelly Khumalo' *City Press*, 15 April 2019, <https://www.news24.com/citypress/trending/in-defence-of-kelly-khumalo-20190414> (accessed 15 November 2024).
- 71 Nomvelo Masango and Mpho Koka, Kelly Khumalo: 'I have had my life and family threatened', Star musician breaks silence on Senzo Meyiwa trial, *Sowetan Live*, 4 July 2022, <https://www.sowetanlive.co.za/news/south-africa/2022-07-04-kelly-khumalo-i-have-had-my-life-and-family-threatened/> (accessed 20 February 2023).
- 72 Emma Gehr, How social media is shaping 21st century social justice movements and activism, *Dailycampus.com*, 25 February 2021, <https://dailycampus.com/2021/02/25/how-social-media-is-shaping-21st-century-social-justice-movements-and-activism/> (accessed 7 June 2023).
- 73 Mark Nartey, Advocacy and civic engagement in protest discourse on Twitter: an examination of Ghana's #OccupyFlagstaffHouse and #RedFriday campaigns, *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 19(4) (2022), 385–401, doi.org/10.1080/14791420.2022.2130950.
- 74 Dennis Chong, Political protest and civil disobedience, *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences: Elsevier* 18 (2015), 421–426.
- 75 Tanja Bosch, Twitter and participatory citizenship: #FeesMustFall in South Africa, in B Mutsvauro (eds), *Digital activism in the social media era: critical reflections on emerging trends in Sub-Saharan Africa*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, 159–173.
- 76 Bruce Mutsvauro, *Digital activism in the social media era*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.
- 77 Seriane Morapeli and Sarah Kazambe, #Putsouthafricansfirst: exploring how hashtag activism on black twitter promotes xenophobia, *Communitas*, 29 (2014), 158–175.
- 78 *Timeslive*, in tweets: UCT turns black in anger over murder of student Uyinene Mrwetyana, *Timeslive*, 4 September 2019, <https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/south-africa/2019-09-04-in-tweets-uct-turns-black-in-anger-over-murder-of-student-uyinene-mrwetyana/> (accessed 20 May 2023).
- 79 Mpho Raborife, #AmINext: a *News24* special feature, *News24*, 20 November 2019, <https://aminext.news24.com/> (accessed 20 January 2023).
- 80 Akindare Lewis and Khanyi Mlaba, From #EndSARS to #AmINext: How young Africans used social media to drive change in 2020, *Global Citizen*, 23 December 2020, <https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/endsars-aminext-young-african-social-movement-2020/> (accessed 4 June 2025).
- 81 Pablo Aquera Reneses, From #MenAreTrash to #MensConference: networked masculinities in South African Twitter, dissertation, University of Cape Town, Cape Town, 2021, 131.
- 82 Mava Lukani, Violence against women in SA comparable to countries that are at war – Ramaphosa, *Insession News*, 19 September 2019, <https://www.parliament.gov.za/storage/app/media/Publications/InSession/2019-06/final.pdf> (accessed 19 February 2025).
- 83 Zama Mthombeni, Xenophobia in South Africa: problematising Ubuntu as ethical response', *The Thinker* 93(4) (2022), 63–73.
- 84 Thabi Myeni, What is Operation Dudula, South Africa's anti-migration vigilante? *Aljazeera*, 8 April 2022, <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2022/4/8/what-is-operation-dudula-s-africas-anti-immigration-vigilante> (accessed 23 May 2023).
- 85 Mthombeni, Xenophobia in South Africa, 64.
- 86 Chris Makhaye, Operation Dudula launch march in KZN a damp squib, *Daily Maverick*, 11 April 2022, <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2022-04-11-operation-dudula-launch-march-in-kzn-a-damp-squib/> (accessed 11 November 2024).
- 87 Thabi Myeni, What is Operation Dudula?
- 88 Eric Smalley, Twitter in 2022: 5 essential reads about the consequences of Elon Musk's takeover of the microblogging platform, *The Conversation*, 21 December 2022, <https://theconversation.com/Twitter-in-2022-5-essential-reads-about-the-consequences-of-elon-musks-takeover-of-the-microblogging-platform-196550> (accessed 23 June 2023).
- 89 Phumza Fihlani, Dudula: How South African anger has focused on foreigners, *BBC News*, 13 March 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-60698374> (accessed 23 May 2023).
- 90 Bheki C Simelane, Violence breaks out as Alexandra Dudula movement members target foreign informal traders, *Daily Maverick*, 8 March 2022, <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2022-03-08-violence-breaks-out-as-alexandra-dudula-movement-members-target-foreign-informal-traders/> (accessed 14 November 2024).
- 91 The word 'Makwerekwere' is a commonly used word in South Africa as a derogatory slur to African foreign nationals, labelling them as the 'bogeyman'. See David M Matsinhe, 'Africa's Fear of Itself: The Ideology of "Makwerekwere" in South Africa.' *Third World Quarterly* 32 (2), 2011, 295–313. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41300231>.
- 92 Deion S Hawkins, Black Twitter's expected demise would make it harder to publicize police brutality and discuss racism, *The Conversation*, 30 November 2022, <https://theconversation.com/black-twiters-expected->

- demise-would-make-it-harder-to-publicize-police-brutality-and-discuss-racism-195146 (accessed on 04 June 2025).
- 93 Brooke Auxier, Social media continue to be important political outlets for Black Americans, Pewresearch.org, 11 December 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2020/12/11/social-media-continue-to-be-important-political-outlets-for-black-americans/> (accessed 20 February 2023).
- 94 Elizabeth Hove, Twitter and the politics of representation in South Africa and Zimbabwe's xenophobic narratives during the covid-19 pandemic, *Acta Academica* 54(2) (2022), 179–197, doi.org/10.18820/24150479/aa54i2/10.
- 95 Ibid.
- 96 Bert-Jaap Koops, The internet and its opportunities for cybercrime, *Transnational Criminology Manual*, in M Herzog-Evans (ed), *Tilburg Law School Research Paper* 1(9) (2010), 735–754, doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.
- 97 Mmabatho P Aphane and Jacob T Mofokeng, Critical analysis of strategies towards creating an adequate level of awareness on cybercrime among the youth in Gauteng Province, *International Journal of Criminology and Sociology* 9 (2022), 1385–1396. doi.org/10.6000/1929-4409.2020.09.159.
- 98 Amnesty International, Toxic Twitter: a toxic place for women, 77.
- 99 South African National Computer Security Incident Response Team (CSIRT), A Baseline Study on Cybersecurity Readiness: A Report of the Department of Telecommunications and Postal Services, 2017, <https://www.cybersecurityhub.gov.za/images/docs/Cyber-Readiness-Report.pdf> (accessed 14 July 2025).