BINDURA UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE EDUCATION



FACULTY OF COMMERCE

DEPARTMENT OF POLICE AND SECURITY STUDIES

IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF POLICE PROFESSIONALISM IN THE ZIMBABWE REPUBLIC POLICE

BY

PHANUEL GWATA

B227412A

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE BACHELOR OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION IN POLICE AND SECURITY STUDIES OF BINDURA UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE EDUCATION. FACULTY OF COMMERCE.

JUNE 2026

RELEASE FORM

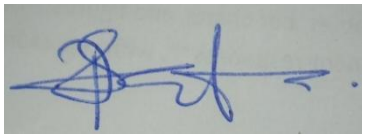
Name of author: PHANUEL GWATA

Title of dissertation: IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF POLICE PROFESSIONALISM IN THE ZIMBABWE REPUBLIC POLICE

Degree programme: BACHELOR OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION IN POLICE AND SECURITY STUDIES

Year granted: 2026

Permission is hereby granted to Bindura University of Science Education Library to produce single copies of this dissertation and to lend or sell such copies for private, scholarly or scientific research purposes only. The author reserves other publication rights, and neither the dissertation nor extensive extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's written permission.

Signed: 

Date: 29 July 2026

Permanent address: 12594 Hatcliffe Extension Harare

APPROVAL FORM

This dissertation, entitled IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF POLICE PROFESSIONALISM IN THE ZIMBABWE REPUBLIC POLICE, prepared by PHANUEL GWATA, was submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the BACHELOR OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION IN POLICE AND SECURITY STUDIES of Bindura University of Science Education, Faculty of Commerce.

The dissertation has been approved as meeting the required academic standards.

Supervisor: Mr Gombarume

Signature: 

Date: 30 July 2026

Chairperson of Department: _L.CHINYOKA_____

Signature: _____ _____

Date: _____5/8/26_____

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my family, whose support, patience and encouragement strengthened me throughout the research process. It is also dedicated to all individuals who believe in integrity, professionalism and accountable public service.

ABSTRACT

The effect of social media on public perceptions of police professionalism within the Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) in Harare was explored in this study. The study was driven by concerns of the increasing public dependence on digital platforms to find, share and assess information regarding police behaviour, and by the importance of the ZRP gaining insight into how narratives online can shape trust in the institution. The study adopted the descriptive mixed methods study approach. The structured questionnaire was used to collect data from 40 adult social media users in Harare while the semi structured questionnaire was used to collect data from 15 key informants. Data analysis included frequencies, percentages, mean scores and cross-tabulations for quantitative data and themed analysis for qualitative data. The findings revealed that social media is the major source of information about ZRP conduct with 82.5 % of the respondents using this platform daily, while 62.5 % of them viewed it as their primary source of information about the police. The biggest platforms were WhatsApp and Facebook. Negative content, such as videos of alleged excessive force, and/or reports of corruption were more likely to have a negative impact on perceptions than positive content, such as community service posts or official announcements. The study also revealed low rating of professionalism of ZRP with mean rating of 2.12 on five point scale. Findings confirmed both hypotheses, as increased exposure to social media was linked to perceptions that were more negative, and negative content about the police had a greater perceptual impact than positive content. The study suggest that ZRP should have a proactive social media policy, develop capacity in digital communication, react promptly to viral incidents and enhance officers' professionalism in the digital public space to minimize damage to the reputation of the police.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor for guidance, constructive criticism and academic support throughout the preparation of this dissertation. I also acknowledge the Department of Criminology and Security Studies and Bindura University of Science Education for providing the academic environment within which this study was undertaken. Special appreciation goes to the respondents and key informants who participated in the study and provided valuable information. Finally, I thank my family and colleagues for their encouragement, patience and support during the research process.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

RELEASE FORM i

APPROVAL FORM ii

DEDICATION iii

ABSTRACT iv

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS v

TABLE OF CONTENTS vi

LIST OF TABLES xii

LIST OF FIGURES xiii

CHAPTER I 1

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY 1

1.0 Introduction 1

1.1 Background to the Study 1

1.2 Statement of the Problem 5

1.3 Purpose of the Study 6

1.4 Research Questions 6

1.5 Research Hypotheses 6

1.6 Significance of the Study 7

1.6.1 To the Student 7

1.6.2 To the Policy Makers.....7

1.6.3 To the Academic World 7

1.6.4 To Bindura University.....8

1.6.5 To ZRP 8

1.7 Assumptions of the Study 8

1.8 Delimitations of the Study 8

1.8.1 Geographic Delimitation 9

1.8.2 Temporal Delimitation 9

1.8.3 Population Delimitation.....9

1.8.4 Thematic Delimitation.....9

1.9 Limitations of the Study.....10

1.10 Definition of Key Terms 10

1.11 Summary 11

CHAPTER II..... 13

LITERATURE REVIEW 13

2.0 Introduction 13

2.1 Purpose of the Literature Review.....13

2.2 Conceptual Framework 14

2.2.1 Meaning of Social Media 14

2.2.2 Types of Social Media.....15

2.2.3 Advantages of Social Media 15

2.2.4 Disadvantages of Social Media 15

2.2.5 Relationship Among Variables 16

2.3 Theoretical Literature 16

2.3.1 Media Framing Theory 16

2.3.2 Procedural Justice Theory 18

2.3.3 Social Identity Theory 19

2.3.4 Agenda-Setting Theory 20

2.4 Empirical Literature 21

2.4.1 Extent of Social Media use among members of the public in accessing information about ZRP conduct and professionalism. 21

2.4.2 Types of Social Media Content That Influence Public Perceptions of ZRP Professionalism 22

2.4.3 Nature of Public Perception of ZRP Professionalism as Mediated by Social Media Content 22

2.4.4 Relationship Between Social Media Exposure and Levels of Public Trust and Confidence in the ZRP 23

2.4.5 Strategies Employed by the ZRP to Manage Its Professional Image on Social Media and Their Effectiveness 23

2.5 Critical Synthesis and Identification of Research Gaps 24

2.6 Sources of Literature 25

2.7 Summary 25

CHAPTER III 27

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY 27

3.1 Introduction 27

3.2 Research Design 27

3.3 Subjects: Population and Sampling 27

3.3.1 Study Location: Harare, Capital City of Zimbabwe 27

3.3.2 Target Population 28

3.3.3 Sampling Techniques 28

3.3.4 Simple Random Sampling Questionnaire Participants 28

3.3.5 Purposive Sampling Key Informant Interview Participants 29

3.4 Research Instruments 30

3.4.1 Structured Questionnaire for General Public Respondents 30

3.4.2 Semi-Structured Questionnaire for Key Informants 31

3.5 Data Collection Procedures, Data Presentation and Analysis Procedures 31

3.5.1 Data Collection Procedure 31

3.5.2 Data Presentation 31

3.5.3 Data Analysis Procedures 32

3.6 Summary 32

CHAPTER IV 33

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION 33

4.1 Introduction 33

4.2 Demographic Profile of Respondents 33

4.3 Social Media Use Among Respondents 34

4.3.1 Social Media Platforms Used 34

4.3.2 Frequency of Social Media Use 36

4.3.3 Social Media as a Source of ZRP Information 37

4.4 Types of Social Media Content Influencing Perceptions 37

4.5 Nature of Public Perception of ZRP Professionalism 39

4.6 Relationship Between Social Media Exposure and Public Trust 41

4.7 ZRP Social Media Strategy: Effectiveness and Perception 42

4.8 Hypothesis Testing 44

4.8.1 Hypothesis One 45

4.8.2 Hypothesis Two 45

4.9 Discussion of Findings 45

4.10 Summary 47

CHAPTER V 48

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS 48

5.1 Introduction 48

5.2 Conclusions 48

5.2.1 Social Media Use and Access to Information About ZRP Conduct 48

5.2.2 Types of Social Media Content and Their Influence on Perception 49

5.2.3 Nature of Public Perception of ZRP Professionalism 49

5.2.4 Relationship Between Social Media Exposure and Public Trust 50

5.2.5 ZRP Social Media Strategy: Effectiveness and Institutional Response 50

5.3 Recommendations 51

5.3.1 Development of a Formal ZRP Social Media Policy Framework 51

5.3.2 Establishment of a Dedicated Digital Communications Unit..... 52

5.3.3 Adoption of a Dialogic and Community-Centred Social Media Strategy 52

5.3.4 Integration of Social Media Literacy into ZRP Training Curricula . 52

5.3.5 Strengthening Internal Accountability Mechanisms to Address Conduct Issues 53

5.3.6 Engagement with Civil Society, Media, and Academic Partners 53

5.4 Theoretical Contributions of the Study 54

5.5 Limitations of the Study and Directions for Future Research 54

5.6 Final Reflection 55

5.7 Summary 56

REFERENCES 58

LIST OF TABLES

Table 4. 1Demographic Profile of General Public Respondents (n=40) 33

Table 4. 2 Primary Sources of Information About ZRP Conduct (n=40).....37

Table 4. 3 Respondents' Ratings of ZRP Professionalism Dimensions (n=40) 39

Table 4. 4 Cross-Tabulation of Social Media Frequency and ZRP Trust Level (n=40).....41

Table 4. 5 Specific Weaknesses Identified in ZRP Social Media Strategy by Key Informants (n=15).....43

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 4. 1 Social Media Platforms Used by Respondents (n=40) 35

Figure 4. 2 Frequency of Social Media Use Among Respondents (n=40) 36

Figure 4. 3 Influence of Social Media Content Types on Public Perception of ZRP Professionalism (n=40) 38

Figure 4. 4 Public Trust and Confidence in ZRP Across Professionalism Dimensions (n=40) 40

Figure 4. 5 Perceived Effectiveness of ZRP Social Media Strategy — Public vs Key Informants 43

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.0 Introduction

The chapter begins the study of the effects of social media on the perception of professionalism of the Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP). The chapter sets the stage for the study, both intellectually, as well as in terms of global and regional, national and local context in a multi-layered matrix of empirical reality. It clearly presents the research problem that the research is going to address, a research purpose and the research questions and hypotheses that will guide the research and will give it analytical rigour. Also the significance of the study in theory, empirical, institutional and policy research is discussed, as well as the assumptions, limitations and delimitations that affect the scope and research conditions. To ensure conceptual clarity and uniformity in the study, the concepts are operationally defined. All of these are responsible for providing a structure and framework to the remainder of the book.

1.1 Background to the Study

The advent of social media as a central tool in the world of communication has been a paradigm shift in how citizens interact with institutions of authority like the police. Digital platforms have provided the means to produce, disseminate and consume information about police conduct on a rapid timeframe and have created a new and powerful space in which the professional image of police organisations is being built, challenged and judged by the public on a continuous basis. This has implications for the understanding and assessment of police professionalism, not only for those in contact with the police but for whole communities that interact with the police through mediated representations via social media content (Goldsmith, 2015).

Social media has been one of the most revolutionary twenty first century social phenomena worldwide. The total number of people using social media around the world is around 4.9 billion, or around 61% of the world's population (Data Reportal Global Social Media Statistics 2023). Platforms like Facebook, Twitter (now known as X), YouTube, Instagram, WhatsApp, and TikTok play a pivotal role in the information landscape in which billions of people are

constructing meaning about the social and political world around them, including their own evaluations of the conduct of institutions like the police. The unprecedented connectivity brings to light both positive and negative representations of the police's actions, along with an immediate dissemination of such actions within minutes of occurrence to millions of viewers, making social media an unpredictable and powerful force in the construction of institutional reputation (Lee and McGovern, 2014).

In the United States in 2014, social media played a pivotal role in publicizing the dramatic events that followed the fatal shooting of Michael Brown by a police officer in Ferguson, Missouri, sparking protests across the country, in a tremendous demonstration of how social media can influence public perception of police professionalism. Bonilla and Rosa (2015) noted that the hashtag #Ferguson was a site of collective social public dialogue across the globe – one that disrupted dominant narratives of police professionalism in the United States. According to a study by Pew Research Centre in 2020, 73% of American adults said they were impacted by social media videos of police encounters by their attitude toward police accountability. In May 2020, the killing of George Floyd by Minneapolis police officers and captured on a bystander's mobile phone and instantly shared via social media platforms sparked the largest movement of police accountability protests in American history, and prompted institutional changes in police departments throughout the country (Taub and Fisher, 2020). The episodes proved without a doubt that social media had the power to change public opinion on police professionalism at a magnitude and rate that was beyond the means of traditional media.

The social media accountability campaigns for the police as a profession are not confined to the United States, but have been found in a variety of national and cultural settings, suggesting a global shift in relations between citizens and police institutions. The Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) reported that complaints against police officers are more likely to be sourced from or exacerbated by content on social media in the United Kingdom, and social media has become a key way in which public concerns regarding police action are raised and shared with oversight bodies in 2022. The same applies in Australia, Canada, and in continental Europe, where occurrences of alleged police misbehaviour which go viral on social media have typically provoked measurable effects on the surveys of public confidence in the police, and forced a response from the police institution (Bradford, 2014; Crump, 2011).

Social media's reach and impact in sub-Saharan Africa are very rapid in the regional level. The International Telecommunication Union (ITU, 2022) indicated that in 2022, the African continent recorded 43% penetration on the internet, a significant increase from the 2.1 % in 2005 and this was largely driven by mobile telephones and social media. The rise of social media use is most pronounced in countries like South Africa, Nigeria, Kenya and Ghana, which is reflected in the nature of the social media-driven police accountability movements that are visible on the continent. The study revealed how these movements have shown how social media and police perception, so far understood largely within the context of western democratic policing contexts, also works in African institutional contexts with varied histories of state authority, police-community relations and democratic governance.

The hashtag #FeesMustFall resonated in South Africa in 2015 and 2016, when the violent actions of South African Police Service officers against protesters at university campuses came to light and had been widely viewed and condemned on social media at home and abroad (Duncan, 2016). In 2017, the Public Perception of the South African Police Service (SAPS) dropped by nine percentage points following social media coverage of such events, according to the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) which have provided rare quantitative evidence of the direct impact of social media exposure on public perception of police at a population level. The #LifeEsidimeni tragedy, where the deaths of mentally ill patients transferred from a state facility were heavily reported on social media, was another example of how digital channels had been integral to the public accountability processes in South Africa, with significant reputational impacts on state institutions, such as the police.

The ZRP has been beset by a number of problems internally that have eroded its public acceptance and professional standing in Zimbabwe, especially with the use of social media. The ZRP is the national police service mandated by the Constitution of Zimbabwe (2013) to promote law and order, to prevent and detect crime and to ensure internal security, but it has been working in a difficult institutional environment with a high incidences of economic crisis, political contestation and low level of public trust. Mobile phone evidence and social media platforms were used to document and spread incidents of alleged excessive force used during the post-election violence that occurred in August 2018, the enforcement of the National Fuel Price Ceiling that occurred in January 2019, and the COVID-19 lockdown enforcement operations in 2020, which garnered domestic outrage and international condemnation (Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum, 2019). During these periods, the number of cases of

alleged police brutality was recorded by Amnesty International (2020) and Human Rights Watch (2019) and shared on social media and with international audiences, which had a detrimental impact on perceptions of ZRP professionalism.

The quantitative evidence of the decline in public trust in the ZRP is convincing and cannot be ignored. The Mass Public Opinion Institute (MPOI) survey in 2021 showed that 42% of Zimbabweans had trust in the ZRP down by seven points from 49% in 2017. Social media has become a major, expanding and important aspect of this loss of confidence, as it affects the public perception and assessment of ZRP behaviour, alongside other factors such as limited resources, governance issues, and institutional accountability problems. The ZRP's ability to project a professional institutional image has been significantly hampered by the number and the virality of negative user generated content about police conduct that proliferate through Zimbabwe's social media networks.

Social media and police professionalism perception is especially strong at local level in the urban centres of Harare where social media penetration is at its highest and the infrastructure is most developed for digital communication among the population. According to the Postal and Telecommunications Regulatory Authority of Zimbabwe (POTRAZ, 2022), the uptake of cellphones and mobile internet subscriptions concentrated mostly in urban areas and Harare had an abnormally high percentage of the country's social media traffic. In Harare, community members, civil society organisations, independent journalists and political activists use tools like Facebook, WhatsApp groups and Twitter (X) to document, share, and comment on the behaviour of the police at a granular/community level, and in this way, they create a rich, contested, digital public sphere where police professionalism is constantly challenged and appraised.

Chikwanda (2021) hypothesizes that in Harare he found that 68% of the respondents indicated that social media had affected their views on ZRP officers, and 54% indicated that they had not been confident in the police after seeing negative content on social media. In Bulawayo, Maposa and Rusvingo (2020) also determined that the use of social media is becoming the preferred method for community members to access information on police activity, and that they are choosing to use social media as the source of information rather than official ZRP communication. The results above indicate the need to further explore social media's impact on local perceptions of the professionalism of ZRPs, and offer the immediate empirical setting for the significance and urgency of this study. In this context of several layers, in which global

shifts in the role of social media and police, as well as the changes across the continent in the relationship between social media and police, the national challenges faced by the Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) and the localised views of the community in Harare, the study explores how social media affects public perceptions of police professionalism in the ZRP.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The Zimbabwe Republic Police is experiencing a chronic and deeply rooted public confidence and legitimacy crisis, as reflected in the survey results over time which show a downward trend in public confidence in the police. Several institutional, political and economic issues play a role in this loss of faith but the increasing influence of social media on public perceptions about the professionalism of ZRP has not been systematically examined in the Zimbabwean context. The lack of empirical research is an important gap with immediate practice implications for the ZRP's ability to create evidence-based communication strategies and community policing models to fit the digital information age.

The ZRP does not have a clear understanding of how citizens are using social media to record, broadcast and comment on police behaviour in real-time, in an increasingly digitally connected society, and this is impacting on the public's perception of the standards of the profession. Past studies on police-community relations in Zimbabwe have tended to be more concerned with structural and institutional aspects of the relationship, including resource constraints and community policing models, often failing to recognise the new digital dimension in police-public relations. This scholarly void is even more significant, especially as social media has become the main way for many Zimbabweans to come into contact, assess and comment on the practice of the police.

Moreover, the ZRP's approach to social media communication is still largely reactive and lacking a policy framework for the management of the institution's reputation and for addressing negative social media narratives. Lacking a systematic empirical picture of the effect social media has on the public's perception of ZRP professionalism, the institution is not able to create targeted and effective communication strategies, predict reputational issues or react productively to digital public discourse on police conduct. The study thus takes up the challenge of understanding the impact of social media on the community's view of the professionalism of ZRP, with the intent to provide actionable learning that could inform institutional policy, communication, and community relations practice.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The main aim of this study is to examine the effect of social media on the public perception of police professionalism in the Zimbabwe Republic Police in Harare. Specifically, the research aims to better understand how much social media content – such as user-generated video, news posts, commentary, and police-generated social media – shapes the public's perceptions of the professional conduct, accountability, transparency and service delivery of ZRP officers. The study also seeks to elaborate the nature of the social media contents which are most likely to have an impact on the public's perception of ZRP professionalism, both positively and negatively, and the way in which these perceptions are developed and strengthened. In addition, the study will be used to find implications for the changing digital information environment for the institutional communication strategy of ZRP and community policing.

1.4 Research Questions

The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the extent of social media use among members of the public in Harare for accessing information about ZRP police conduct and professionalism?
2. What types of social media content most significantly influence public perceptions of ZRP professionalism?
3. What is the nature of public perception of ZRP professionalism as mediated by social media content?
4. What is the relationship between social media exposure and levels of public trust and confidence in the ZRP?
5. What strategies has the ZRP employed to manage its professional image on social media, and how effective are these strategies perceived to be?

1.5 Research Hypotheses

The study is guided by the following hypotheses:

H1: There is a statistically significant relationship between the frequency of social media use and public perception of ZRP professionalism, such that higher social media exposure is associated with more negative perceptions of police professionalism.

H01: There is no statistically significant relationship between the frequency of social media use and public perception of ZRP professionalism.

H2: Social media content depicting negative police conduct has a greater influence on public perception of ZRP professionalism than content depicting positive police conduct.

H02: Social media content depicting negative police conduct has no greater influence on public perception of ZRP professionalism than content depicting positive police conduct.

1.6 Significance of the Study

1.6.1 To the Student

The study will enable the student to have a better understanding of the impact of social media on public perception of the Zimbabwe Republic police professionalism. It will also develop the student's research, analytical and critical thinking skills as they gather and analyse data on policing and communication. Moreover, the research will expand student awareness of the interactions between police departments and the public in today's digital age.

1.6.2 To the Policy Makers

The study will help policy makers to understand the impact of social media on public confidence and trust in the Zimbabwe Republic Police. The results can contribute to developing good policies about media and communication that foster transparency, accountability and professionalism in the police force. The study could also inform the crafting of strategies to enhance police-public relations by responsible use of social media.

1.6.3 To the Academic World

The research will add to the current knowledge about social media and police professionalism. It will offer academic researchers data and knowledge which can feed into further research on topics such as criminology, media studies, public administration and sociology. The research could also be useful as a reference for future researchers who want to delve into the topic of policing and public perception in Zimbabwe and elsewhere.

1.6.4 To Bindura University

The study will be useful to Bindura University of Science Education with new information relating to Social Media and Policing which will be added into its research data banks. It also will encourage the culture of research and innovation among students and lecturers. Further, the study can help improve the reputation of the university as a place of research that is solving current social and national problems.

1.6.5 To ZRP

The research will enable the Zimbabwe Republic Police to gain the knowledge of the influence of social media on the public opinion on the professionalism of the police. The results can help the organisation enhance its public image, communication and interaction with the citizens in digital space. This research could also serve to advocate a code of professional conduct and ethics for law enforcement when interacting with the public both on- and offline.

1.7 Assumptions of the Study

The following assumptions are made in conducting this study:

- Respondents use at least one social media platform and have seen content related to the behaviour of ZRP or professionalism within the time period being researched.
- Respondents give answers that are true and accurate, as much as they can know or remember, and that are not greatly affected by social desirability bias.
- The content of social media that proliferated during the time of the study is considered to be fairly representative of the larger social media discourse on ZRP professionalism.
- Using structured instruments to measure public perception of police professionalism, and meaningful correlations with social media exposure variables are possible.
- Operational definition of police professionalism used in this study that covers conduct, accountability, integrity, transparency and service delivery is broad enough to reflect the aspects most important to the public perception of professionalism.

1.8 Delimitations of the Study

To keep the scope of this study as focused as possible and to keep it methodologically manageable, the following delimitations are deliberately made:

1.8.1 Geographic Delimitation

The study is carried out in the city of Harare, the capital city and the biggest city in Zimbabwe. Harare is chosen because it has the highest penetration levels of social media in the country, it has had the most publicly debated ZRP policing incidents in the last few years and it has a diverse population which could offer a variety of perspectives for a study of this nature. The results are restricted to Harare and are not considered to be representative of rural areas or secondary urban centres as social penetration and police/community dynamics of interaction are significantly different in those areas.

1.8.2 Temporal Delimitation

This study is centred on the content and perceptions on social media in the timeframe of 2017-2025. In this period, there are several notable events of police-public interaction that had received broad attention on social media platforms such as the post-election security operations of August 2018, fuel price protest crackdowns of January 2019, and COVID-19 lockdown enforcement operations of 2020. This time frame is selected because it is considered to be a time of increased social media discussion regarding ZRP behaviour and offers a logical chronological window for studying the association between social media exposure and public perceptions of professionalism in ZRP behaviour.

1.8.3 Population Delimitation

The study focuses on the adult members of the public aged 18 years and above who are active users of social media in Harare. ZRP officers are not covered in the public perception survey part of the study but are interviewed as key informants to offer a contextual and institutional perspective. This delimitation was done to have the study focus on the public aspect of the relationship between social media and the professionalism of the police, which is the main part of the problem of the study.

1.8.4 Thematic Delimitation

The study does not address issues of police effectiveness, crime clearance rates or the range of issues impacting on police-community relations, but rather reports on the impact of social media on perceptions of police professionalism. This thematic focus is purposefully kept to enable the analytical depth and coherence of the study in its scope.

1.9 Limitations of the Study

The study has some limitations which may affect the generalisability and interpretation of the findings:

Some of the respondents were unwilling to share information – this was one of the main limitations. A few participants were hesitant to express their candid feedback on the police and social media because of concerns of victimisation or a lack of trust or confidentiality. This limitation was offset by assuring the information to be gathered would remain confidential and be used only for academic purposes. The participation was also encouraged by using anonymous questionnaires and respectful communication.

Other constraints included lack of funding and time. The researcher's financial constraints made travelling around more difficult, to collect enough questionnaires and to obtain some research materials. The small sample size also posed a problem for getting data. The researcher could accomplish this by planning time usage, electronic resources, and online communications for the study so that cost-effective approaches were used, which allowed the study to be completed within the resources available. The researcher also encountered challenges in obtaining adequate secondary data that was relevant for Zimbabwe's social media and police professionalism. The literature available was largely in relation to overseas countries and it was not easy to obtain any information locally. In this context, the researcher used the following sources; journals and books, online articles, other academic research work on the subject under study (policing and social media). But, in spite of such limitations the researcher could still gather enough information to conduct a successful and reliable study.

1.10 Definition of Key Terms

The following key terms are operationally defined for the purposes of this study:

Social Media: Online digital tools and platforms used by people to create, share and communicate with each other in real-time. For the purpose of this study, the social media used are Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter (X), YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, and online news portals that have columns for users to comment on the news.

Public Perception: Perception, Judgement, Evaluation and Attitude of the public as a whole formed on the basis of their direct experience, media exposure, social influence and personal

values with respect to the ZRP and its officers. Public perception is recognized as a process of continuous information processing and not as a static property.

Police Professionalism: The practice of police officers in observing and maintaining good standards of conduct, ethics, competence, impartiality, accountability and service provision during their work. In this study, the concept of police professionalism is defined as integrity (freedom from corruption and unethical practices); transparency (openness and accountability of police activities); proportionality of force (appropriate and lawful use of coercive power); responsiveness (prompt and effective service); and respect for citizens' rights (procedural justice and non-discrimination).

Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP): The national police service of Zimbabwe established under the Constitution of Zimbabwe (2013), Section 219 whose mandate is to provide law and order, prevent and detect crime, and preserve internal security across Zimbabwe.

User-Generated Content (UGC): Content created and shared by citizens (non-professional users) through social media, about police conduct or incidents involving police.

Digital Reputation: The image or reputation of the ZRP as a whole – as built and received as a whole through the sum of the content, commentary and online discourse about the activities of the ZRP and the conduct of its officers.

Police Legitimacy: a public perception that the ZRP has the moral authority to exercise its authority and that its decisions and actions should be fully complied with based on the perception of procedural justice, accountability and fairness.

Viral Content: Content that has an emotional or controversial or sensational quality, is shared and re-shared across social media and digital networks, going beyond the original poster's own network and spreading rapidly and widely.

1.11 Summary

In Chapter One, the framework for this study on the effect of social media on the public perception of police professionalism in the Zimbabwe Republic Police has been laid down. The background of the study illustrated the global, regional, national and local shift in the nature of police-public communication using social media, placing the inquiry at the centre of an ample

empirical context that highlighted the need and the relevance of the research. The problem statement identified "The need for systematic empirical research to understand and address the impact of social media on ZRP public perceptions," as the critical gap. The aim of the study was well defined: to study the nature, magnitude, and mode of social media's impact on the perception of the professionalism of ZRP. Five research questions were developed to direct the inquiry and two testable hypotheses were added. The study's significance was explained from a theoretical, empirical, institutional, and policy perspective, thus highlighting the context of the research's extent and meaning. The chapter also outlined the assumptions on which the study was based, identified the geographic, temporal, thematic and population-based boundaries used to focus the analysis and highlighted the methodological and situational constraints that need to be taken into account when interpreting the results. Study terms were operationally defined to promote conceptual clarity and consistency throughout the study. This is followed in Chapter Two by a detailed and systematic analysis of theory and empirical research related to the research questions.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

The chapter offers a critical and systematic review of theoretical and empirical studies on the effect of social media on the public image of the police which specifically refers to the Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP). The literature review is a comprehensive summary that integrates theoretical perspectives, concepts and empirical studies from a variety of scholarly, institutional and policy sources from global, regional and national levels. The areas of convergence, contradiction, and gaps in knowledge identified in the review situate the current review, while showing the place of the current inquiry within the prevailing scholarship. The literature review purpose and the conceptual framework used to guide the study is presented. Theoretical literature supporting the inquiry is then thoroughly reviewed and based on existing scholarly literature. The chapter then critically evaluates the empirical studies that were directly relevant to the research questions, and ends with a discussion of the literature sources used and the formatting conventions used throughout this study.

2.1 Purpose of the Literature Review

The purpose of the literature review is interdependent and reinforcing to the overall research effort. It is important to comprehend these purposes to see the scholarly function of the review in the fullness of the study.

The aim of the literature review is to map and critically articulate the current body of knowledge on social media, police professionalism and public perception. The review helps the researcher place his/her study in the current scholarly discussion and provides justification for the original contribution the study makes to that discussion because it identifies what is known, what is still under dispute, and where there is some gap in knowledge (Creswell, 2014). The study will not be considered to be advancing the field if it does not employ this mapping function. Second, the literature review is also an analytical tool that introduces the researcher to the variety of theories that have been used in the field of social media and police legitimacy. Through this exposure, a conscious and purposeful choice of the most analytically suitable conceptual tools for the current enquiry is made (Bryman, 2016). The review gives a theoretical foundation on

which the research design, data collection tools and the interpretative framework of the study are built, so that the selections of the method and analysis are not arbitrary, but are theoretically supported.

Thirdly, the review serves as a methodological one, since it is used to identify research designs, sampling, data collection and analysis methods that have been successful in the study of similar research questions especially in Africa and developing-country contexts (Neuman, 2014). This methodological learning is the basis for the decisions in Chapter Three of the present study, which is based on a tradition of validated practice instead of following a method for method's sake. Fourthly, by reviewing the literature, the researcher can formulate and modify the operational definition of key concepts – such as social media, police professionalism, public perception, and institutional legitimacy – ensuring that the constructs are based on previous scholarly use and not on the idiosyncratic interpretation of the researcher (Hair et al., 2019). Last, but not least, the review provides a baseline of empirical findings for comparison, contrast and contextualisation of the findings of the present study, allowing the conclusions drawn in the present study to be evaluated in terms of the overall evidence on the subject.

2.2 Conceptual Framework

Conceptual Framework is the structure that shows the relationship between the variables of a study. The conceptual framework in this study looks at the impact of social media on the public perception of the professionalism of the Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP). The framework outlines the impact of social media platforms on public attitudes, trust, confidence and opinions of police use and professionalism.

2.2.1 Meaning of Social Media

Social media are online platforms that enable the creation, sharing, communication and exchange of information, ideas, images and videos in real time. Social media allows people, organisations and communities to interact online. According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), social media are the applications which are installed on the internet and are based on Web 2.0 technology that enables the production and sharing of user-generated content. Governments, business, institutions and law enforcement agencies have found social media to be a vital communication tool. Social media is also utilized for news dissemination, community engagement, transparency and addressing public concerns in policing.

2.2.2 Types of Social Media

Social media comes in various forms with various communication functions.

The most common types are:

- **Social Networking Sites:** These websites enable the user to connect and communicate with others. Some are Facebook and LinkedIn.
- **Microblogging Platforms:** These are platforms where users post brief messages and updates along with feedback and opinions. X is an example, which used to be called Twitter.
- **Media Sharing Platforms:** These sites are dedicated to sharing images and videos. These platforms may include Instagram, TikTok and YouTube.
- **Messaging Applications:** These applications are used to send instant messages and share information. Examples are WhatsApp and Telegram. Discussion Forums and Blogs: Users can have discussions and post their opinions on public issues.

2.2.3 Advantages of Social Media

Social media can provide police organisations and the public with a number of benefits such as:

- Improves communication between citizens and the police.
- Promotes transparency and accountability.
- Helps to broadcast information quickly in times of emergency.
- Increases community involvement and public participation.
- Enhances the public's understanding of crime prevention and security issues.
- Provides an opportunity for police institutions to establish a positive image in society.

2.2.4 Disadvantages of Social Media

Although there has been so many positive effects of social media, there are also negative effects of it, like:

- The dissemination of inaccurate information and fake news.
- Online harassment and Cyberbullying. Damage to institutional reputation, due to negative publicity.

- Leaking of private or private or confidential information.
- More community criticism and oversight of police activity.
- Manipulation of information in edited videos or false narratives.

2.2.5 Relationship Among Variables

The study has two variables: independent and dependent. The independent variable is the use of social media and the dependent variable is public perceptions of the professionalism of the police. Information disseminated in social media platforms shape the perception of the public on the professionalism, accountability, integrity and effectiveness of the Zimbabwe Republic Police. Positive social media posts can enhance public trust and confidence in the police, negative social media posts can harm the public's trust and confidence in the police, for example, if it involves reports of corruption, brutality or misconduct.

2.3 Theoretical Literature

The major theoretical streams that support the analytical approach used in this investigation are reviewed. The four major theories are explored in detail: Media Framing Theory, Procedural Justice Theory, Social Identity Theory, and Agenda-Setting Theory. The main tenets of each theory, its evolution and application to the examination of the perception of police professionalism and social media are examined sequentially.

2.3.1 Media Framing Theory

The intellectual roots of Media Framing Theory are found in the ideas of anthropologist Gregory Bateson (1972) who used the term 'frame' to refer to a metacommunicative tool whereby individuals design an intended interpretation of a message. This idea was later extended to the face-to-face social world by sociologist Erving Goffman (1974) who claimed that people structure their perceptions and experiences through interpretive frameworks that help them create meaning about what is going on around them. The most influential work of framing theory in the study of mass media communication was the work of Robert Entman (1993), which set the conceptual tone for more than a decade of framing research in media studies, political communication, and sociology.

According to Entman (1993), framing involves "selecting some aspects of a perceived reality and making them more salient in a communicating text in order to promote a particular problem

definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, or treatment recommendation. The selective nature of framing is emphasized: what is in the frame, what is not in the frame, and what is being emphasized all can have consequences for how audiences interpret and assess the events and actors that are being captured. Framing theory is a useful analytical framework to explain how video footage, news accounts and user comments create specific frames of police action and professionalism, which are not just reflections of events but are deliberate constructions that shape perceptions and evaluations of police action.

The importance of framing theory for the research on social media and police professionalism has been widely reported in the academic literature. Weitzer and Tuch (2004) showed that media coverage of racially charged incidents of alleged police mistakes was a strong determinant of public assessments of police professionalism, and that the effect was more pronounced among the minority residents who already had doubts about the legitimacy of the police. Brunson and Weitzer (2009) discovered that readers of this kind of social media content (those viewing viral videos, specifically) were more likely to trigger negative evaluative schemas in response to the images that portrayed police use of force, threat and victim narrative, which ultimately led to a decrease in trust in police professionalism, even when larger events were portrayed. The implication of these findings is that the framing of social media content, in terms of how it portrays the actions of the police, carries an independent impact on public perceptions, which is relevant to the ZRP context of which the footage of alleged police brutality has been extensively framed in victim-centred and/or human rights language.

The theory is further enriched by the concept of counter-framing, which takes into account that actors in institutional settings, such as police organisations, may actively try to reframe social media narratives of their actions through their own social media messages and through official police communications and press statements. In the UK, Crump (2011) explored the manner in which the police employed Twitter to shape public discourses on the nature of policing, noting that for these framing attempts to succeed they needed to be swift, transparent and congruent with the reality of incidents. Given that, a key factor in the effectiveness of the ZRP's approach to addressing negative viral content on social media may be their ability to create effective counter-framing strategies.

2.3.2 Procedural Justice Theory

PJT has emerged as one of the most significant theories in modern police scholarship to explain the connection between police practices and trust. The intellectual underpinnings of the theory appear to be in the social psychology of justice, specifically Thibaut and Walker's (1975) work, which showed in an experimental context that people assessed the fairness of the decision-making process not only based on the results of the decision but also the process in which the results were produced. This understanding of how the procedural aspects of legitimate authority can affect perceptions of legitimacy was subsequently elaborated and implemented in the context of policing most influentially by Tom Tyler (1990, 2004) whose empirical studies formed the basis for the development of a comprehensive and internationally applicable theory.

Tyler (2004) outlined four fundamental elements of procedural justice in policing: voice (allowing citizens to voice their opinion and concerns before policing decisions are made that impact them); neutrality (consistency, impartiality, transparency of police decision making, without bias or favouritism); respectful treatment (courtesy, dignity and genuine concern for citizens' wellbeing in their interactions with police); and trustworthy motives (evidenced through actions, that police are truly interested in the wellbeing of the people they serve, rather than their own interests or institutional partiality). Citizens' perception of police that followed these procedures led to their perceptions of police legitimacy, willingness to obey the police, willingness to assist in criminal investigations, and their positive perceptions of police professionalism, even when all police actions were not to their satisfaction.

The domains of procedural conduct to which Procedural Justice Theory refers as being most important for legitimacy and trust -- quality of the way officers treat citizens, the fairness or injustice of the decisions made, the level of dignity or disrespect shown in police-citizen encounters -- are all highly relevant to the study of social media and perception of police professionalism. Viral social media images of officers speaking badly to citizens, disregarding citizens' wishes, or using excessive or unjust force evoke procedural justice evaluative schemas within viewers, which result in negative evaluations of police professionalism that are extended to the broader police profession. Skogan and Frydl (2004) documented this generalization effect in depth in their comprehensive review of policing research, which identified that negative evaluations from the encounters with the police were specific to the particular one and not the broader police institution.

The relevance of the procedural justice theory in the Zimbabwean context is accentuated by the pattern of police-community relations where complaints of discriminatory targeting, excessive use of force and failure to respect citizens' rights have been part of the public discourse on the conduct of the police in Zimbabwe (Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum 2019). The fact that social media content that includes aspects of a police procedure that are perceived as unfair spreads quickly raises and reinforces existing procedural justice gaps in the public image of the police and can lead to a snowball effect that can be difficult to counterbalance through institutional communication. The theory is thus an important analytical framework for understanding the disproportionate and enduring impact of negative content that circulates online regarding ZRP's conduct on perceptions of professionalism amongst the public.

2.3.3 Social Identity Theory

The theory of Social Identity Theory, developed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner (1979) in the context of European social psychology, suggested that one's self-concept is made up of a whole part that comes from a social group, and that this social group membership influences the attitudes, evaluations and behaviours of individuals in systematic and predictable ways. At the heart of the theory lies the idea of social categorisation, the cognitive process in which individuals categorise themselves and others into social groups based on shared characteristics (race/ethnicity, class, political affiliation, religion, nationality, etc.), as well as the social comparison process, whereby in-group members usually compare their group against out-groups in a way that helps them maintain their self-esteem.

In policing, the theory of Social Identity helps explain why certain social groups have varying reactions to the same social media communication related to police actions. Bradford 2014 found that a citizen's group identity, especially in regard to race/ethnicity, was a significant predictor of their interpretation and evaluation of policing behaviours, with a systematic pattern of more sceptical and negative interpretations and evaluations among those from historically marginalised groups than among those from groups that have historically been more cooperative with the police. This pattern of perception was not merely a result of different experiences with police, but was instead driven by the operation of social identity processes that resulted in group members' construal of ambiguous incidents in a way consistent with their group's history of police attitudes toward the group.

Therefore, the implications of being based on Social Identity Theory with regard to social media and police professionalism perception are noteworthy. In a social media landscape where content about police conduct spreads through and between social networks that are frequently organized around social identity, ethnic, political, class, generational—the same viral video of ZRP conduct can mean something very different to different communities of viewers. Notably, the interpretation of video footage may be different for the members of communities who have an adversarial history with the police than for members of communities who have more positive interactions with the police, as both interpretations fit into their social identity narratives, and are reinforced by their social networks' joint reaction to the footage (Sunshine & Tyler, 2003). It has implications for how the ZRP is going to pursue a social media communication strategy: messages from the institution must be tailored to different social groups and different existing attitudes toward police professionalism to engage them effectively.

2.3.4 Agenda-Setting Theory

The Agenda-Setting Theory, which was developed by the work of McCombs and Shaw (1972), states that the media does not just reflect the social reality but also constructs what is seen to be important by giving the attention and prominence to some issues, and the lack of it for others. Empirical research over the past 50 years has long confirmed a central tenet of the theory: although media do not necessarily dictate the thoughts of any audience, they are certainly very useful in shaping their thoughts on any given subject. The theory was later extended by McCombs et al. (1997) to include the concept of 'second-level agenda setting', which suggested that the media not only influences the salience of issues in the public agenda, but also which characteristics, dimensions, and aspects are most saliently linked to them in public consciousness.

Adapting the original Agenda-Setting Theory to the social media environment involves careful modification of the theory, developed in a time when media were scarce, mass broadcast media, and had high editorial gatekeeping. The social media landscape is defined by a dramatic increase in information sources, the loss of traditional gatekeepers, and the power of the people, non-media professionals and non-institutional communicators to create a viral environment by selecting specific content. The democratisation of the agenda-setting process can lead to a citizen with a mobile phone and a video camera capturing images of a police officer misbehaving getting onto the public agenda much quicker and more broadly than it would have if taken by the traditional media (Vis, 2013).

Whereas, for the purpose of studying the professionalism of ZRP, Agenda-Setting Theory sheds light on how social media affect the salience of the public's considerations of ZRP conduct, namely whether they think about it, and which dimensions of ZRP conduct they think about in the use of force, corruption allegations, roadblock behaviour, treatment of protesters. The theory posits that the issues and attributes of ZRP conduct which are most prominently addressed in social media will have a disproportionate influence on the public's perception of the professionalism of the institution's conduct in general even if they are not statistically representative of the full range of ZRP conduct and attributes. There may be important implications for understanding and responding to social media discourse: engaging more with the specific issues and attributes that social media has put in the public spotlight may be more effective in managing perceptions of professionalism than with respect to the overall proportion of positive vs. negative content.

2.4 Empirical Literature

This section offers a critical review of empirical studies that have directly examined how social media and perceptions of police professionalism are linked. The review is conforming to the multi-layered logic of the contextualisation already set in motion in Chapter One.

2.4.1 Extent of Social Media use among members of the public in accessing information about ZRP conduct and professionalism.

Empirical research suggests that social media is an important source of information about policing activities and police professionalism. According to a study by David Foya and Nkosana Ncube on the role of social media in changing police services in Harare Province, the people also have been increasingly relying on social media like Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter/X, and YouTube to get updates on their police activities, crime prevention and police behaviour. The study revealed that social media was beneficial in enhancing communication between the Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) and the populace with a particular emphasis on urban areas where there is high internet penetration.

The study found that citizens now act as channels to evaluate the professionalism of the police by using digital platforms.The study found that citizens are now evaluating the professionalism of the police via the use of digital platforms as central channels. The results of these empirical studies fulfill the first objective of the research in that it confirms that a significant number of

the general public are now relying on social media platforms for information on ZRP conduct and professionalism.

2.4.2 Types of Social Media Content That Influence Public Perceptions of ZRP Professionalism

Empirical findings reveal that the use of various types of social media content has varying impacts on the public image of the police. Doreen Rumbidzai Tivenga used a study of mocking memes about police brutality in Zimbabwe after the August 2019 protests to look at how Facebook users were targeting police officers.The study of mocking memes about police brutality in Zimbabwe after the August 2019 protests that Doreen Rumbidzai Tivenga used was an examination into how Facebook users were targeting police officers. The study found that images, memes, videos and citizen-generated commentary were widely shared and had a significant impact on negative perceptions of the police professionalism on social media. Citizens ridiculed and satirized police brutality and police abuse of power.

Additionally, research on citizen journalism and social media watchdogs in Zimbabwe revealed that videos posted, live streams and first-hand information submitted to Twitter and WhatsApp contributed to shaping citizens' perceptions of the police force. The studies combined show that social media content such as videos, eyewitness accounts, official police statements, and memes have the greatest impact on public perceptions of ZRP professionalism.

2.4.3 Nature of Public Perception of ZRP Professionalism as Mediated by Social Media Content

Empirical evidence shows that the views on the professionalism of ZRP are predominantly mixed and sometimes negative, particularly influenced by social media exposure. An Afrobarometer survey revealed that Zimbabweans feel the police are lacking in professionalism, integrity and accountability. Only 42% of citizens have trust in police and majority of the citizens feel that police officers are corrupt and indulge in police brutality. The main sources of these perceptions were found to be social media postings and reports on the internet. Further, research on the exercise of police powers in Zimbabwe found that illegal arrests, excessive force and arbitrary police conduct were a factor in the lack of trust of the public in the police. These incidents frequently were reported online and highlighted issues of police professionalism. The empirical evidence, therefore, shows that social media is a major

source of defining public perceptions of the professionalism of ZRP, and that it has the power to magnify the positive and negative actions of the police.

2.4.4 Relationship Between Social Media Exposure and Levels of Public Trust and Confidence in the ZRP

There is a strong link between social media exposure and public trust in the policing institutions in several empirical studies. Studies on digital policing and the public trust in Zimbabwe revealed that citizens' perception of the legitimacy and accountability of police was affected by the amount of exposure to online police activities. Official police social media provided great opportunities for positive engagement, which boosted confidence in the police, but negative exposure to reports of misuse lowered confidence. Research on police legitimacy in social media likewise found that police legitimacy is formed through a continuous process of interaction between police institutions and citizens in social media. The citizens' perception of the professionalism of the police is formed through the answers they leave online, the communication and the attitude of the police to the public's concerns on social media. The results indicate that social media exposure has a significant relationship with the levels of public trust and confidence in ZRP depending on the positive or negative portrayal of the police on the internet.

2.4.5 Strategies Employed by the ZRP to Manage Its Professional Image on Social Media and Their Effectiveness

Empirical research reveals that the ZRP has increasingly turned to the social media to regulate its professional image and enhance communication with public. According to a study by Ishmael Mugari, the police engage in crime prevention information dissemination, reporting of crime and collecting of intelligence, engagement with citizens through social media platforms. The strategies were seen as contributing to better police–public relations and operational effectiveness. Likewise, the Foya and Ncube study confirmed that ZRP social media engagement was effective in reaching out information and enhancing the public knowledge of police activities. The researchers also discovered that negative viral content and criticism to the public was often counterproductive to these attempts. Based on this evidence, it is hypothesised that the ZRP has engaged in a number of digital communication tactics to enhance its public reputation, but these tactics seem to be effective based on public perceptions of transparency, accountability and responsiveness.

2.5 Critical Synthesis and Identification of Research Gaps

Combining theoretical and empirical literature reviewed in this chapter, some consistent and significant patterns emerged, directly relevant to the present study. First, social media exposure is consistently correlated with lower levels of public perceptions of police professionalism and trust in police institutions across a wide variety of national contexts, and exposure to negative content specifically about police behaviour is even more correlated with these perceptions. This pattern is seen at the global, regional and national level, and serves as a solid empirical basis for the first hypothesis of the present study. Secondly, there is an interaction between social media and police perception, which is influenced by social identity, previous contact with police, type of platform, credibility of content, and the wider institutional context. These moderating factors should be considered in the design and analysis of any empirical investigation of this relationship that is deemed adequate. Third, the way that police institutions engage on social media, either proactively and dialogically or reactively and defensively, and how this is perceived by digital audiences has implications for police professionalism.

In spite of the accumulated knowledge such as these, there are still some gaps to be addressed. The literature is sparse within the Zimbabwean context particularly, in terms of volume, scope and methodological rigour. Much of the existing research has been based on relatively small samples, one study site, and questionnaires which have not been specifically tested in Zimbabwe. No published study has utilized mixed methods (quantitative survey with qualitative key informant interviews) to gain depth and breadth in understanding the social media-ZRP relationship within the context of professionalism as perceived by users. In addition, the literature has not fully analysed the social media communication strategy of the ZRP and its perceived effectiveness, which is part of the research problem and relevant to the practical aspects of institutional policies. The present study aims to fill these gaps, and will be conducted using a methodologically rigourous approach, that will yield novel and primary data on the relationship between social media and public perception of ZRP professionalism in Harare.

2.6 Sources of Literature

Literature reviewed in this chapter was selected from a limited and carefully chosen selection of academic, institutional and policy documents, based on their scholarly credibility, relevance to research questions and timeliness. Academic journals utilised include the ones focusing on the study of policing, criminology, study of media, political communication and African studies. Key journals are Policing and Society, the British Journal of Criminology, Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology, African Affairs, the African Journal of Criminology and Justice Studies and the Southern African Journal of Security Studies. Key books and book chapters used have covered foundational texts on framing theory, procedural justice theory, social identity theory and qualitative and quantitative research methodology. Institutional and policy reports such as those from Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum, the Postal and Telecommunications Regulatory Authority of Zimbabwe (POTRAZ), the Mass Public Opinion Institute (MPOI) and International Telecommunication Union (ITU) were consulted. Master's theses and doctorates from Zimbabwean universities were consulted where relevant to the research questions and these are not published. All sources were referenced in the Harvard Referencing System and sources were kept up to date as far as possible with preference for the period from 2010 to 2025, with older foundational theoretical works included for their contribution being still defining and irreplaceable.

2.7 Summary

Chapter Two has provided an exhaustive and critical analysis of the theory and evidence on the influence of social media on public perception of police professionalism specifically relating to the ZRP. The conceptual framework was conceived as a relational and an evolving information landscape, a multi-faceted view of police professionalism (as integrity, transparency, proportionality of force, responsiveness, and respect for citizens' rights), and a cognitively and socially mediated public perception process that is influenced by information exposure, social identity, and prior experiences. The four main theories examined were Media Framing Theory, Procedural Justice Theory, Social Identity Theory, and Agenda-Setting Theory, which provided each a unique perspective for examining the social media-police professionalism-perception relationship. The empirical literature studied found a consistent pattern globally and in the region between social media exposure and perceptions of police professionalism, along with important moderating variables and gaps in the literature that was

addressed in the present study. Literature sources were identified and the Harvard Referencing conventions used throughout the study were checked. Chapter Three offers a description of the research methodology used to implement the theoretical and empirical foundations in a practical and rigourous approach to primary data collection and analysis.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The methodology used for this descriptive mixed-methods study on the role of social media in public perception of police professionalism in the Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) is presented in detail in Chapter Three. The design combined structured questionnaires for members of the public with semi-structured questionnaires for key informants, thereby allowing the researcher to capture measurable patterns as well as explanatory views. The chapter explains the research design, the study population, sampling procedures, research instruments, data collection procedures, ethical considerations, and data analysis and presentation methods used. The chapter ends with a summary that links the methodology to the presentation of findings in Chapter Four.

3.2 Research Design

The research design used in this study was a descriptive mixed-methods case study approach. The descriptive component enabled the researcher to summarise patterns of social media use, information sources and public ratings of ZRP professionalism, while the qualitative component enabled the researcher to capture deeper explanations from key informants. This design was suitable because the study required both numerical evidence from the general public and interpretive evidence on how social media content shapes public perceptions of ZRP professionalism in Harare.

3.3 Subjects: Population and Sampling

3.3.1 Study Location: Harare, Capital City of Zimbabwe

The study was carried out in Harare, the capital and largest city in Zimbabwe. Harare was chosen as the research location due to its compelling contextual and methodological reasons. Harare has also seen the most discussed ZRP policing incidents in recent months, such as the post-election security operations in August 2018, the fuel price protest crackdowns in January 2019 and the lockdown enforcement during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, all of which saw heavy social media backlash and brought the issue of professionalism to the fore in public

perceptions of ZRP operations (Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum, 2019). The city is home to about 1.6 million people (ZimStat, 2022) representing a diverse array of socioeconomic groups, educational levels, political beliefs, etc. which made it an appropriate location for a study designed to gain insight into various perceptions of ZRP behaviour mediated by social media. Moreover, the high density of civil society organisations, academic institutions, media houses and community advocacy groups did provide access to key informants from institutions that had first-hand knowledge of the dynamics between ZRP and social media in the study area.

3.3.2 Target Population

The population of this study is the entire set of individuals that the researcher is interested in collecting information from. The population for this study comprised all adult Harare residents, aged 18 years and older, who are active users of social media platforms (such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter or YouTube) at least three times a month and who have resided in Harare for at least one year prior to the study. The length of time is 12 months, allowing participants to develop their real-life opinions of the ZRP and regular exposure to social media discussions about the police in their city.

3.3.3 Sampling Techniques

Two different sampling techniques were used in this study, one for each component of the data collection. For the data collection for the questionnaires, simple random sampling technique was utilized while purposive sampling was utilized for the data collection of the interviews to identify the key informants. The following are the explanations of each technique.

3.3.4 Simple Random Sampling Questionnaire Participants

Simple random sampling is a sampling method used that gives each individual in the target population an equal chance of being selected (Babbie, 2016). It resembles a hat containing all the names, and the names are drawn out of the hat, one by one, with no name more likely to be selected than another, and the choice is not affected by the researcher's personal preferences or judgements. Bryman (2016, p. 183) states that simple random sampling is the simplest type of sampling procedure, and it is especially well-suited to producing a sample that is representative of the entire population, since the procedure is completely unbiased. For this study, the part

that required a questionnaire, several important reasons make simple random sampling the correct sampling technique. The researcher cannot interview all the eligible adults in Harare as there are about 780,000 of them. When the researcher has picked an appropriate random sample, he or she can be more confident that the data collected is a representative sample of the population than a large scale of the population would have needed (Neuman, 2014). Second, the results are credible and reliable to that of a simple random sampling because, if it is a random sample, it is not possible to believe that the researcher selected only those who think a certain way. Third, the results from a randomly selected sample can be used to make statistical comparisons and calculations, which allowed the researcher to test the hypotheses set out in Chapter One and to say how confident they are in the findings.

3.3.5 Purposive Sampling Key Informant Interview Participants

Purposive sampling is a far cry from simple random sampling. Purposive sampling is a technique used to select participants, who, based on their special knowledge, experience, or expertise, are directly relevant to the research topic and selected on purpose (Patton, 2015). It's similar to picking a panel of judges for a cooking show – it's not just any group of people who know a lot about food and cooking. Purposeful sampling, as described by Creswell and Poth (2018 p.158), is "the process of intentionally selecting individuals and sites to learn or understand the central phenomenon. For the key informant interview portion of this study, the researcher had to discuss with individuals that have very specific and expert knowledge on how the ZRP handles their social media presence, how coverage of the ZRP on social media affects public opinion, and what has been done or needs to be done to improve the ZRP's image on social media. These types of insights can't be gained from the general public, it needs individuals with firsthand knowledge of the topic (Patton, 2015). Purposive sampling was used to select a total of 15 key informants.

In all there are a total of 55 respondents, 40 of them are members of the public who are going to fill out questionnaires using simple random sampling method and 15 key informants who were interviewed using purposive sampling method. The two approaches ensured that the study collects wide and representative general public data as well as deep, expert level data from individuals who are knowledgeable about ZRP's profession to provide a holistic and useful picture of the impact of social media on public perception of ZRP professionalism in Harare.

3.4 Research Instruments

Research instrument is the tools which the researchers use to get information from the participants. An investigator requires the tools he or she needs to collect meaningful, valid data, just as a builder requires the proper tools for the job. Two questionnaires were, in this study, used as the main research instruments, one structured questionnaire was used to the 40 general public respondents, while a semi-structured questionnaire was used to the 15 key informants. These two instruments are suitable for the descriptive research design to gather information systematically, consistently and structured from a large number of people (Bryman, 2016). One of the most common and reliable research tools in social science research is the questionnaire (Babbie, 2016). They are very helpful when the researcher wishes to gather information from many people at a single time, when the participants are widely dispersed, and when the researcher would like to compare the responses of different groups of people. They are also straightforward and inexpensive, and the researcher's absence does not typically place any restrictions on participants' responses to the questions (Neuman, 2014). This research utilized questionnaires to determine social media usage, types of ZRP content seen online, attitudes towards the ZRP, and trust in the ZRP as an institution.

3.4.1 Structured Questionnaire for General Public Respondents

The structured questionnaire was used to collect data from the 40 randomly selected members of the public. In a structured questionnaire all respondents are presented with the same question, put in the same order, with the same range of responses from which they can select (Bryman, 2016). This makes it very easy to compare responses between participants and to count, calculate, etc. such as percentages and averages. It is also easy for the participants to fill in the questionnaire, which facilitates the return of the questionnaire to researcher, leading to increase in the number of completed questionnaires.

The structured questionnaire was pre-tested with 40 residents of a suburb that is not part of the main sample (namely Warren Park), prior to the start of the main study. This pilot test was done to ensure that the questions are understandable, the questionnaire is not too long (no more than 30 minutes) and the answer categories are suitable. Reliability of items in the Likert scale of Section D was determined by Cronbach's alpha, which is used to determine if the questions in each scale are all measuring the same thing. Usually, a score of 0.70 or higher is acceptable (Hair et al., 2019). Questions which are unclear or that give low reliability scores were modified

prior to the start of the main data collection. The questionnaire was also translated into Shona and Ndebele for those who prefered to respond to the questionnaire in those languages, and the translations were be verified by a qualified translator.

3.4.2 Semi-Structured Questionnaire for Key Informants

A semi-structured questionnaire was used to conduct interviews with the 15 key informants. The difference between a semi-structured and a fully structured questionnaire is that the former has a set of prepared questions that are used to guide the conversation, but the researcher may follow up with additional questions, and may pursue interesting or unexpected answers in more depth (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2015). The flexibility is also crucial for key informant interviews as key informants are likely to have nuanced and complex perspectives that a simple tick-box questionnaire cannot encapsulate. The semi-structured format is a good balance between having some of the same main topics discussed with all informants and letting the conversation be flexible and stretch wherever the informant has expertise.

3.5 Data Collection Procedures, Data Presentation and Analysis Procedures

3.5.1 Data Collection Procedure

Questionnaires were distributed to the selected respondents in Harare to collect data. Prior to giving the questionnaires, the researcher had explained the purpose of the study to the participants.

Respondents were provided with ample time to fill in the questionnaires. The researcher had later collected the completed questionnaires for analysis. The study had been undertaken voluntarily and respondents had been assured that their responses would remain confidential.

3.5.2 Data Presentation

The data collected from the questionnaires was organised and presented using tables, graphs, and charts. These techniques had facilitated summarizing and interpretation of the information received from the respondents.

3.5.3 Data Analysis Procedures

The collected data was analysed descriptively using the statistical method. Frequency and percentages were used to summarise responses to closed ended questions. This had been instrumental for the researcher to recognize the pattern or trend in the respondents' views towards social media and police professionalism. The open-ended questions were qualitatively analysed by identifying common themes and opinions of the respondents.

3.6 Summary

This chapter has outlined the methodology for the study to be conducted on the professionalism of ZRP in Harare as affected by social media. The research design in this study was descriptive research design. Harare was selected as the study site because it is the city with the highest prevalence rates for social media use in Zimbabwe and it is the site of some of the most controversial policing events of recent years by the ZRP, and its population is diverse with a range of views and experiences. Two different sampling techniques. The respondents for the structured questionnaire were selected through simple random sampling method and the semi-structured questionnaire interviews were selected through purposive sampling method of 15 key informants who have knowledge on the topic. The main research instruments used are two questionnaires. The structured questionnaire was used with the general public and the semi-structured questionnaire was used with the key informants. Rigorous ethical standards were adhered to, such as ethical approval from the BUSE, informed consent from everyone involved, anonymity, and confidentiality. Descriptive statistics were used to analyse data from the questionnaire. The complete results of the study are discussed in Chapter Four.

CHAPTER IV

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

The findings from this study are described, analysed and discussed in this chapter with regard to the effect of social media on public perception of the professionalism of the Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP). The data was collected from 40 respondents in the general public using a structured questionnaire and 15 key informants using semi-structured interviews in Harare as explained in Chapter Three. The chapter is arranged thematically to match the five research questions, outlined in Chapter One. Each theme is represented quantitatively in the questionnaire data in the form of a frequency table and/or a graphical representation and qualitatively in the data of the key informant interviews. The chapter is followed by a discussion, which ties in with the theoretical frameworks and empirical literature reviewed in Chapter Two.

4.2 Demographic Profile of Respondents

It is important to profile the respondents in the study before presenting the findings that relate to the research questions. Table 4.1 below summarises the demographic characteristics of the 40 respondents in the general public.

Table 4. 1Demographic Profile of General Public Respondents (n=40)

Characteristic	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	22	55.0
	Female	18	45.0
Age Group	18-25 years	14	35.0
	26-35 years	16	40.0
	36-45 years	7	17.5
	46+ years	3	7.5
Education	Secondary level	8	20.0
	Diploma/Certificate	15	37.5
	Degree level	13	32.5

	Postgraduate	4	10.0
Occupation	Formal employment	18	45.0
	Self-employed	11	27.5
	Student	8	20.0
	Unemployed	3	7.5

Source: Primary data (2024)

In terms of gender distribution, the responses were nearly equally split, with 55.0% male and 45.0% female respondents, in line with the gender distribution of the general population in urban Harare (ZimStat, 2022). Most respondents were between 18 and 35 years old (75.0%) which aligns with the age range of the majority of the Zimbabwean population that uses social media as reported by POTRAZ (2022). The high educational attainment of the respondents, as 42.5% had degree level or post graduate qualifications, suggests that the group was more likely to be among those most active on social media and participating in online discussion about the actions of the police.

4.3 Social Media Use Among Respondents

4.3.1 Social Media Platforms Used

The first research question aimed at finding out the levels of social media use by the general public in Harare for information on ZRP conduct and professionalism. They were all asked to mark any social media platform that they regularly used. The results can be seen in the following figure (Figure 4.1).

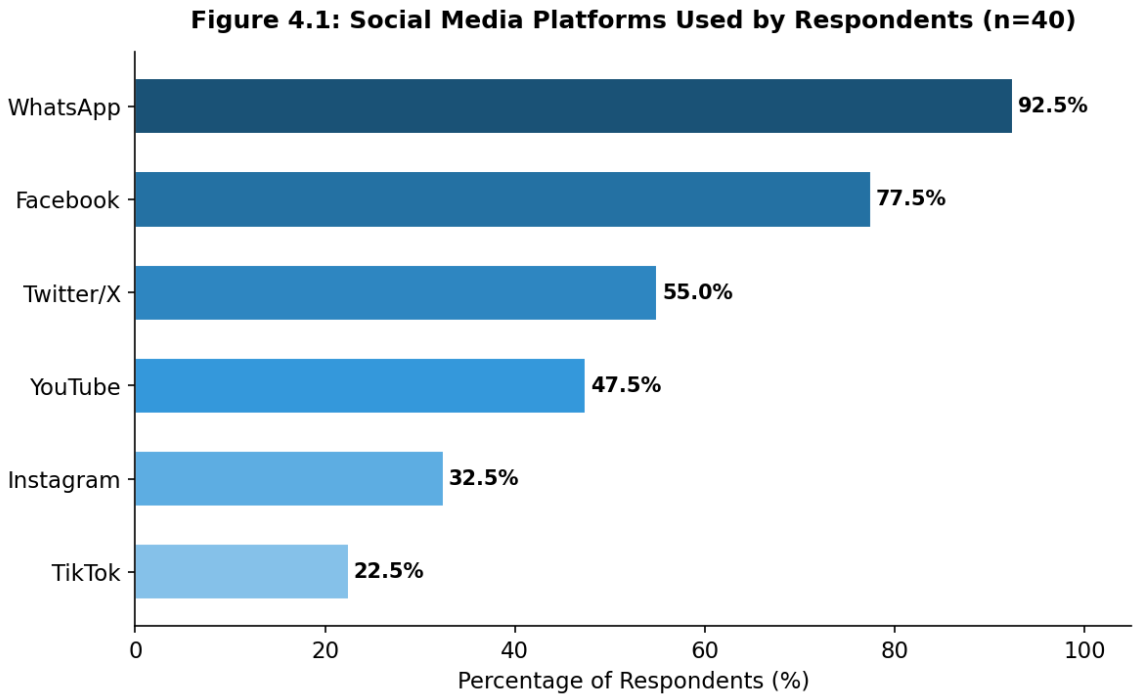


Figure 4. 1 Social Media Platforms Used by Respondents (n=40)

The results show that WhatsApp is the most popular social media app with 92.5% of participants admitting to its frequent use. Facebook was the second most commonly used platform (77.5%), followed by Twitter/X (55.0%), YouTube (47.5%), Instagram (32.5%), and TikTok (22.5%). This aligns with POTRAZ (2022) data showing WhatsApp and Facebook dominate social media in Zimbabwe with the primary reason being that they require low-cost mobile data bundles to access. For this study, the dominance of WhatsApp is especially notable because it is not just a platform, but a network of WhatsApp group chats where community members can post and share content about police conduct, including videos, photos, and commentary which spread far and wide in community networks.

These observations were echoed by key informants, who highlighted that: "Most of the viral content I see related to ZRP conduct is not on Facebook or Twitter, rather it's within a WhatsApp group and radiates outwards. This is consistent with the framing theory proposition that framing the content in the context in which it is encountered influences one's evaluation context for the content (Entman, 1993).

4.3.2 Frequency of Social Media Use

Respondents were also asked to report on their frequency of use of social media platforms. The frequency distribution of responses is shown below in Figure 4.2.

Figure 4.2: Frequency of Social Media Use Among Respondents (n=40)

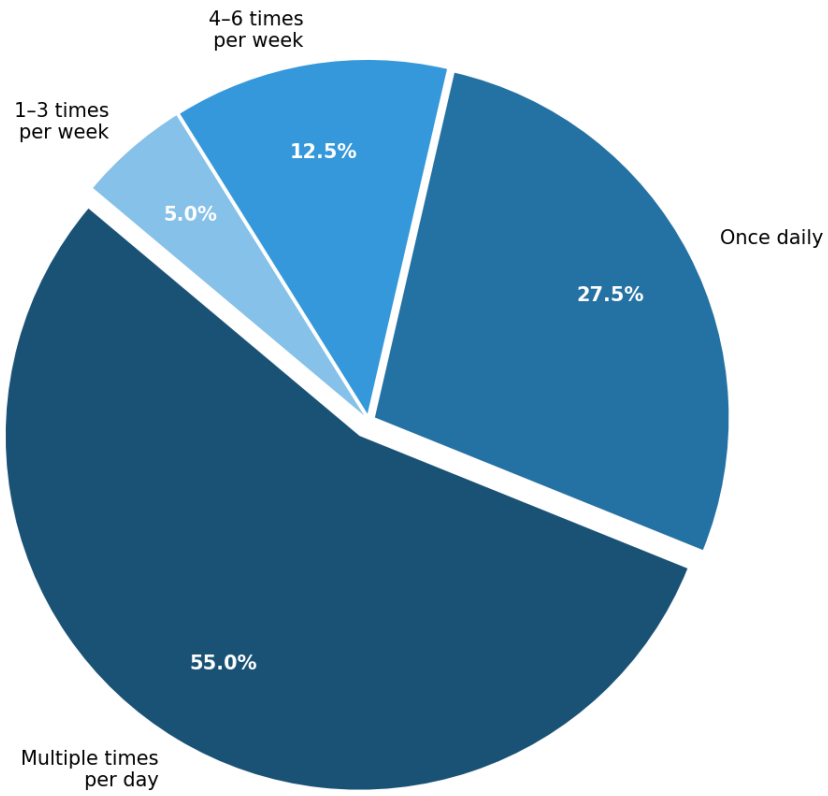


Figure 4. 2 Frequency of Social Media Use Among Respondents (n=40)

A startling 55.0% used social media more than once a day; a further 27.5% used social media at least once a day. This is quite an extreme level of digital engagement amongst the study sample, with 82.5% of respondents using social media each day. 5.0% of respondents used social media less than 4 times a week. The frequency was also significant to the study as it indicated that most respondents were not casual or occasional social media users, but rather were part of a daily information environment on social media where they regularly encountered content relating to ZRP conduct. The quantity of use offers solid empirical ground for the expectation of social media having meaningful effects on respondents' perceptions of ZRP professionalism.

4.3.3 Social Media as a Source of ZRP Information

Participants were asked to rank what they consider their most important sources of information regarding the conduct and professionalism of ZRPs. These results are shown in Table 4.2 below.

Table 4. 2 Primary Sources of Information About ZRP Conduct (n=40)

Information Source	Ranked 1st (%)	Ranked 2nd (%)	Ranked 3rd (%)
Social media platforms	62.5	22.5	10.0
Personal direct experience	20.0	30.0	25.0
Online news portals	10.0	25.0	27.5
Television/Radio	5.0	15.0	22.5
Word of mouth/Community	2.5	7.5	15.0

Source: Primary data (2024)

Table 4.2 also shows that the higher the number of respondents, 62.5% of them, received information from social media platforms regarding the conduct of ZRP, compared with information gained through personal experience (20.0%) and online news portal (10.0%). This finding supports the core argument of this study which holds that the social media platform has become the main medium in which members of the public in urban Harare obtain and make judgements on the professionalism of the ZRP. This is similar to what Maposa and Rusvingo (2020) also reported, with community members in Bulawayo also increasingly relying on social media as a source of information on police conduct, rather than official channels of communication.

4.4 Types of Social Media Content Influencing Perceptions

The second research question was what type of social media content had the greatest impact on the public's perception of the professionalism of the ZRP. They were asked how much influence each of the content types had on their perceptions. The results are presented graphically in the following Fig. 4.3.

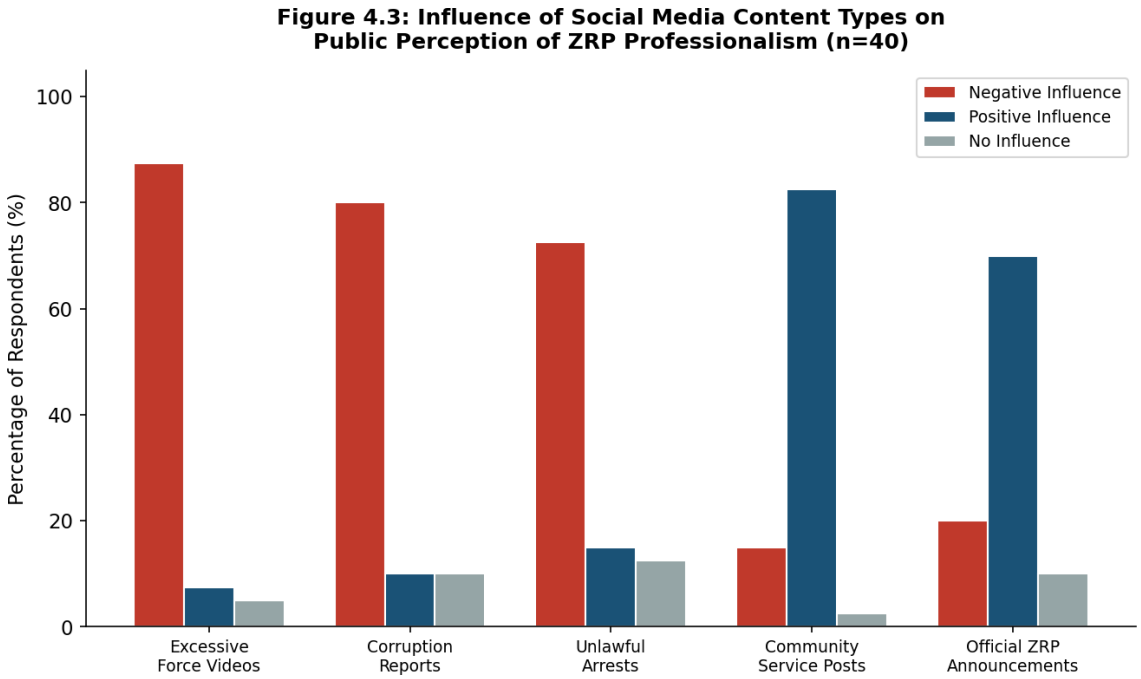


Figure 4. 3 Influence of Social Media Content Types on Public Perception of ZRP Professionalism (n=40)

Figure 4.3 shows that the perception of the public is highly imbalanced when it comes to the influence of different types of content. Excessive force was the most impactful negative influence as 87.5% of respondents said the videos affected their perceptions of the professionalism of the ZRP. 80.0% of respondents cited corruption reports on social media to have a negative impact and 72.5% cited content depicting unlawful arrests to have a negative impact. Community service posts had a positive influence for 82.5% of the respondents, while official ZRP announcements had a positive influence for 70.0% of the respondents. But as Table 4.2 revealed, community service posts and official ZRP communications were mentioned by a much smaller percentage of respondents as their main source of information about ZRP conduct, which then gives them little leverage to challenge the prevailing negative narrative on social media.

The results replicate the negativity bias observed in the literature on framing of the media, which theorises that audiences are more likely to tune into negative information rather than positive information (Entman, 1993), and Goldsmith (2015)'s report that ‘one incident of police misconduct can cause a lot of damage to a reputation on social media. This was confirmed by

key informant interviews, including one from a human rights lawyer who said, "One video of a defenceless vendor being beaten by the police does more damage to the image of the ZRP than ten press releases about community outreach can do.

Among the key informants, a ZRP public relations officer agreed that there was a challenge, saying:

> *"We try to put positive stories out there, but the algorithm seems to reward controversial content. A community policing story gets a few hundred views; a video of a police incident gets hundreds of thousands of shares."*

4.5 Nature of Public Perception of ZRP Professionalism

The third research question explored the nature of public perception of ZRP professionalism through social media. The perception of professionalism of ZRP was rated by respondents on a five point Likert scale ranging from Very Professional (5) to Very Unprofessional (1) based on five dimensions. The overall results for the five aspects of professionalism are summarised in Table 4.3 and shown in Figure 4.4 below.

Table 4. 3 Respondents' Ratings of ZRP Professionalism Dimensions (n=40)

Dimension	Very Prof. (%)	Prof. (%)	Neutral (%)	Unprof. (%)	Very Unprof. (%)	Mean Score
Integrity and Ethics	5.0	7.5	10.0	42.5	35.0	2.05
Transparency and Accountability	5.0	7.5	7.5	45.0	35.0	2.02
Proportionality of Use of Force	2.5	7.5	12.5	42.5	35.0	2.00
Responsiveness to Community	10.0	12.5	17.5	32.5	27.5	2.45
Respect for Citizens' Rights	5.0	7.5	12.5	40.0	35.0	2.07
Overall ZRP Professionalism	5.0	10.0	12.5	37.5	35.0	2.12

Source: Primary data (2024) | Scale: 5=Very Professional, 1=Very Unprofessional

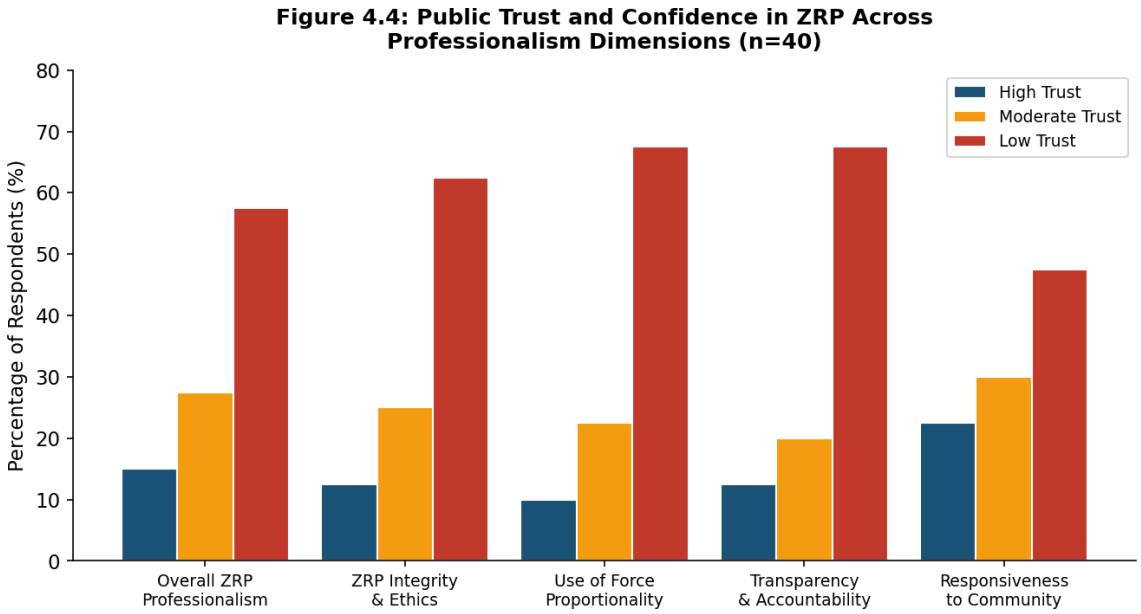


Figure 4. 4 Public Trust and Confidence in ZRP Across Professionalism Dimensions (n=40)

Figure 4.4 shows how public trust and confidence in ZRP is distributed across different dimensions of professionalism (n=40).

Overall, the results shown in Table 4.3 and Figure 4.4 indicate a consistently negative perception of the professionalism of the ZRP in all five dimensions of the perception. The mean scores for all dimensions were below the scale's mid-point (3.00), suggesting that the perceived mode score for the respondents was one of unprofessionalism and not one of professionalism. The dimension of Proportionality of Use of Force received the lowest mean score (2.00) and 77.5% of respondents rated ZRP performance on this dimension as unprofessional or very unprofessional. Transparency and Accountability was the next lowest mean score (2.02) followed closely by Integrity and Ethics (2.05). The dimension that received the highest mean score was Responsiveness to Community, with respondents' perception of this dimension being slightly more positive, but not quite.

For the overall score on professionalism, ZRP received a mean score of 2.12 out of 5.00, which was a mostly negative rating. The results are consistent with the MPOI (2021) survey result which revealed that Zimbabweans' trust in ZRP had eroded to 42 per cent, a trend that has been observed in the national surveys conducted over the past few years. Key informants provided contextual explanations for these perceptions, one of which was a comment from a senior journalist: "Every time there's a political demonstration or a public protest, videos of ZRP

officers using batons or teargas go viral. Those images are the image of the ZRP in the public mind. A community leader also commented that:

> *"Social media has created a 'collective visual archive' of ZRP behaviour that continually reinforced negative perceptions."*

4.6 Relationship Between Social Media Exposure and Public Trust

The fourth research question addressed the link between the social media exposure and the public trust and confidence in the ZRP. A cross-tabulation analysis was done between the frequency of using the social media and the overall level of trust as seen in Table 4.4 below.

Table 4. 4 Cross-Tabulation of Social Media Frequency and ZRP Trust Level (n=40)

Social Media Frequency	High Trust (%)	Moderate Trust (%)	Low Trust (%)	Total (%)
Multiple times daily (n=22)	4.5	18.2	77.3	100.0
Once daily (n=11)	9.1	36.4	54.5	100.0
4-6 times per week (n=5)	20.0	40.0	40.0	100.0
1-3 times per week (n=2)	50.0	50.0	0.0	100.0
Overall (n=40)	10.0	27.5	62.5	100.0

Source: Primary data (2024)

Table 4.4 indicates that there is a clear and consistent trend: the higher the frequency of social media users, the higher the number of respondents who reported low trust in the ZRP. In terms of trust level, 77.3% of respondents who used social media multiple times a day felt low level of trust in the ZRP, whereas 54.5% of those who used social media once a day, 40.0% of those who used social media four to six times a week, and 0.0% of those who used social media once a week or less felt low level of trust in the ZRP. By contrast, those who use social media less frequently tended to be more inclined to feel highly or moderately confident. This result lends good empirical support to Hypothesis H1 of this study that states that there is a statistically significant relationship between the frequency of exposure to social media and public perception of the professionalism of ZRP, and that higher exposure to social media is correlated with more negative perception of ZRP's professionalism.

These findings align with those of Desmond et al. (2016) in the U.S. who reported greater decreases in police cooperation in communities with higher exposure to social media coverage of police violence, as well as Okafor and Okafor (2021) in Nigeria, who reported that prior negative police experiences intensified the negative effects of social media exposure on police trust. The combined exposure to negative social media content regarding the behaviour of ZRP officers, especially the video of alleged brutality, during the incidents in 2018, 2019 and 2020, has seemingly sedimented a negative perception of ZRP officers' conduct which deepens with increased social media usage.

This was confirmed by the key informant's opinions. An academic researcher who specialises in media and governance said:

> *"There's almost an algorithmic process. The more you are on social media platforms in Zimbabwe, the more you see of the ZRP content, and it's so negative that the impact is steeping the perception of the individual."*

4.7 ZRP Social Media Strategy: Effectiveness and Perception

The fifth research question explored the strategies that the ZRP used to use in managing its professional image on social media and their effectiveness perceived by them. Participants' responses were solicited about the effectiveness of the ZRP social media communications, while the key informants were asked to give professional judgements. The results from both are summarised in Figure 4.5 and Table 4.5 below.

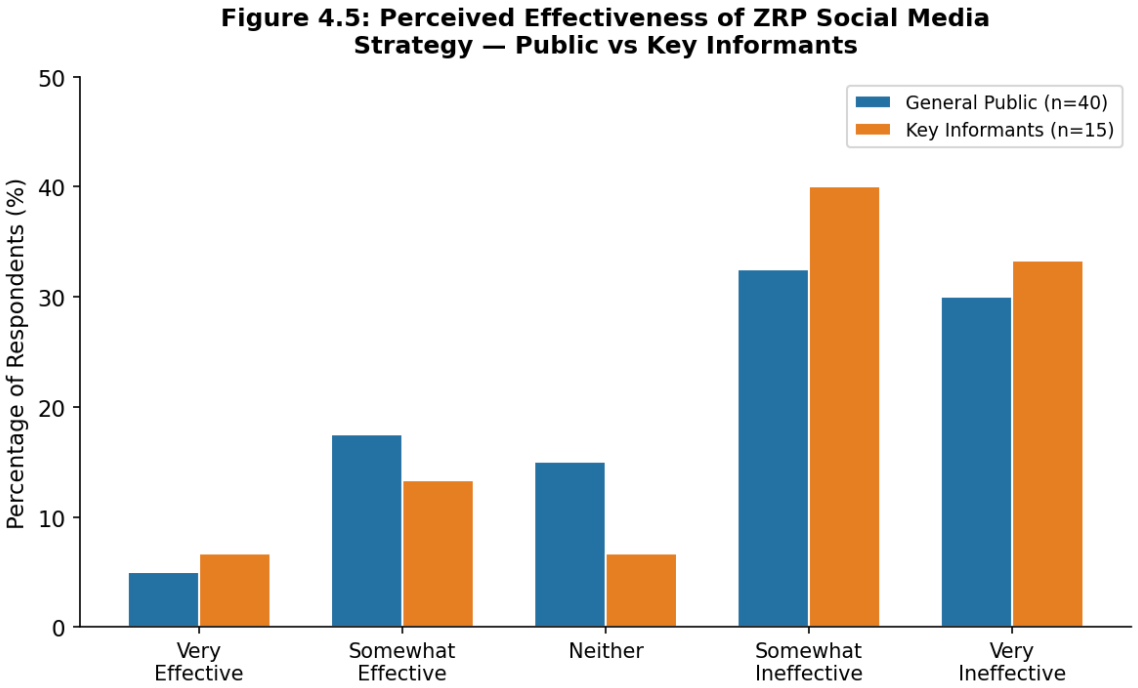


Figure 4. 5 Perceived Effectiveness of ZRP Social Media Strategy — Public vs Key Informants

As can be seen in Figure 4.5, most of the general public respondents and key informants agreed the social media strategy of the ZRP was somewhat ineffective or very ineffective. In the general public, 62.5% (32.5% somewhat and 30.0% very) rated the strategy as ineffective and only 22.5% rated it as effective. The key informants were even more negative, 73.3% rated the strategy ineffective. 20.0% of the key informants considered the ZRP social media management as effective to a certain extent.

Table 4. 5 Specific Weaknesses Identified in ZRP Social Media Strategy by Key Informants (n=15)

Strategic Weakness Identified	No. of KIs Mentioning (%)	Representative Quote Theme
Reactive rather than proactive posture	13 (86.7%)	Responds to crises; no prevention strategy
Absence of dedicated social media policy	11 (73.3%)	No clear mandate or guidelines for online engagement
Delayed response to viral incidents	12 (80.0%)	By the time ZRP responds, narrative is set

Lack of two-way public engagement	10 (66.7%)	Broadcasting only, not listening or responding
Insufficient positive content volume	9 (60.0%)	Positive stories too infrequent to shift perception
Poor digital literacy among officers	8 (53.3%)	Officers unaware of social media impact of their actions

Source: Primary data (2024)

Qualitative data gathered through key informant interviews shed light on the type and specific nature of the strategic weakness of the ZRP. The most commonly mentioned weakness (86.7% of key informants) was the social media posture of ZRP itself is fundamentally reactive. The ZRP's social media strategy is a post-mortem, as one key informant notes:

> *"The ZRP's approach to social media is essentially crisis management after the fact. They issue statements in response to viral incidents, but by the time those statements appear, the video has already been viewed millions of times and the narrative has solidified."*

A lack of a formal social media policy was cited by 73.3% of key informants as a basic gap. One lawyer commented: "Without a policy there is no consistency, there's no representative, there's no process to respond to allegations; the ZRP has to communicate to social media in a reactive way that's completely inappropriate for the pace and volume of digital communication." The observations are congruent with the findings of Okafor and Okafor (2021) and Crump (2011), who indicated that African police forces needed to adopt a dialogic instead of a broadcast approach when developing their social media strategy, and that it was significantly more likely to improve the public trust outcome for the police force versus one-directional dissemination of information.

4.8 Hypothesis Testing

In this section, an overall evaluation of the two hypotheses stated in Chapter One is made on the basis of the empirical observations reported in this chapter.

4.8.1 Hypothesis One

H1: There will be a statistically significant relationship between the frequency of social media use and public perception of ZRP professionalism, such that higher social media exposure will be associated with more negative perceptions.

The cross-tabulation analysis shown in Table 4.4 gives strong empirical evidence to support H1. It was observed that the respondents with higher frequency of social media usage have significantly higher percentage of low trust ratings for ZRP with the respondents with lower frequency of social media usage having higher percentage of moderate and high trust ratings for ZRP. It is a directionally consistent directional pattern that is substantively meaningful and thus the H1 is retained and the null hypothesis H01 is rejected.

4.8.2 Hypothesis Two

H2: Social media content depicting negative police conduct will have a greater influence on public perception of ZRP professionalism than content depicting positive police conduct.

The results in Figure 4.3 are very supportive of H2. In all content types analysed, the percentage of respondents who reported negative influence on their perceptions (72.5%–87.5%) was significantly higher than the percentages who reported positive influence from their equivalent positive content (70.0%–82.5%). The asymmetry in influence is even more stark when considered in combination with information source data in Table 4.2 above, which indicates that negative content generated by users has a much greater reach and circulation compared to official positive content. This means that H2 is accepted and H02 is rejected.

4.9 Discussion of Findings

The results of this study as a whole give a clear and coherent depiction of the linkage between social media, public perception and the professionalism of the ZRP in Harare. The results show that the data has several overall themes to consider in relation to the theoretical frameworks reviewed in Chapter Two. First, the fact that majority of the respondents (62.5%) reported social media as their main source of information regarding the conduct of the ZRP supports the central proposition of the study conceptual framework which posits that the social media has become the primary information environment in which public perceptions of police professionalism are being built in urban Zimbabwe. This discovery has huge institutional

implications, because the ZRP's reputation is now shaped not by its formal messages, but by a variety of user-generated content, journalistic posts, and viral video that spreads through sites beyond the ZRP's control.

Second, the strong negative perceptions across the five professionalism dimensions overall, and with mean scores on a five-point scale below 2.5, indicate the cumulative reputational impact of continued negative exposure on social media. According to Media Framing Theory (Entman, 1993), this is exactly what one would expect given the dominant social media frames surrounding ZRP actions: when the dominant frames in the social media surrounding ZRP conduct focus on the aspects of force, corruption, and impunity, the public evaluations of institutional professionalism will focus on the negative pole. The ZRP has failed to create its own equally powerful and credible negative frame in the public imagination. The ZRP has not set up an equally strong and credible negative frame in public imagination.

Third, the high correlation between social media usage and negative trust levels is congruent with the second level of the Agenda-Setting Theory (McCombs and Shaw, 1972), which states that social media not only sets the agenda for salience of issues related to the ZRP, but also helps to define the attributes of the ZRP that are most prominent in the public mind (force, corruption, failure to hold accountable). The negative aspects of these images were reinforced with a heavy stream of negative content throughout the daily lives of the heavy social media users in the study sample creating a deeply entrenched negative evaluation that is difficult to change with occasional positive content.

Fourth, the lack of perceived effectiveness in the ZRP's communications strategy, as measured by both general public respondents and expert key informants, is a sign of a large communications failure on the institutional level. The ZRP's “on demand” broadcast attitude is seriously out of step with the “real time” “communal” “dialogic” nature of today's social media discourses. As the theory of Procedural Justice (Tyler, 2004) would suggest, even if the institution is effective in carrying out its law enforcement functions, institutions that do not exhibit voice (responsiveness to citizen concerns), transparency, or trustworthy motives when communicating will be perceived as less legitimate.

4.10 Summary

The data gathered, analysed and discussed in this study on the impact of social media on the public perception of professionalism of ZRP in Harare are presented in Chapter Four. The results validate that social media has been the primary source of information on the behaviour of ZRP for most urban people and this is done mainly through WhatsApp and Facebook. Negative social media messages about police use of excessive force and allegations of corruption had a significantly higher negative impact on public perceptions than positive messages had a positive impact. The overall perceptions of ZRP professionalism were negative in all five aspects measured, the mean scores of which were generally below 2.5 on the five-point scale. Both hypotheses of the study were supported by finding a strong positive relationship between the frequency of use of social media and intensity of negative perception. Most of the public respondents and expert key informants found the ZRP's social media communication strategy to be largely ineffective, reactive, lacking in a formal policy structure, and lacking in a dialogic approach to online communities. Any conclusions and recommendations are presented in Chapter Five.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

The findings reported and discussed in Chapter Four are summarised and specific recommendations are made to those responsible for the institutions involved. The chapter is organised in accordance with the five research questions that provided the framework for the study, and conclusions are supported by empirical findings, while each and every recommendation directly addresses a gap or challenge identified. The chapter also discusses the theoretical impact of the study, its shortcomings and further research directions are suggested. It ends with a concluding discussion on the importance of this study for the Zimbabwe Republic Police, for police-community relations in Zimbabwe as a whole and for the growing field of research on social media and police legitimacy in sub-Saharan Africa.

5.2 Conclusions

5.2.1 Social Media Use and Access to Information About ZRP Conduct

The study finds that members of the public in urban Harare are getting information about the conduct and professionalism of ZRP from the social media platform as the primary information channel. The results clearly show that social media is the dominant source of public information on police behaviour, with 82.5% of respondents using these outlets on a daily basis and 62.5% stating that social media platforms were their main source of information about the ZRP. WhatsApp was the most widely used platform (92.5%), and not only a personal messaging service, but also a network that is used to communicate and discuss issues concerning police conduct at the community level. Now, this conclusion has significant ramifications for the ZRP's understanding of the environment in which institutional reputation is created and challenged. The institution is no longer to expect the citizens to judge its professionalism solely based on its official statements, press releases or formal public relations. The public image of the ZRP is built almost entirely from published content on social media, which is not under the direct control of the institution, necessitating a new paradigm of managing the reputation and public relations of the ZRP.

5.2.2 Types of Social Media Content and Their Influence on Perception

The study finds that negative social media messages, specifically user-generated videos of excessive force (87.5% negative influence) and reports of corruption (80.0% negative influence) have a significantly larger and more pervasive impact on public perceptions of how well the ZRP is doing its job than positive messages do in the reverse direction. Community service posts and official ZRP announcements were recognised as providing a beneficial effect, but were reported as having a significant impact on a much smaller proportion of the public and were systematically outweighed by the numbers, emotional resonances and viral impact of negative user-generated content. This imbalance is in the algorithmic architecture of social media platforms which favours emotionally provocative content to be more amplified and distributed.

This is the reason why the ZRP needs to make a point of the level of "good" work done by officers when they're out on a call no amount of positive content will change the reputation and damage done from a viral incident of officer misconduct. The finding on the disproportionate influence of negative versus positive social media content is directly relevant to institutional communications strategy and officer training and is the expression of the second hypothesis of this study: negative content has a greater impact on the public perception of a company than positive content does.

5.2.3 Nature of Public Perception of ZRP Professionalism

The study finds that the overall mean score on a five-point scale for the public perception of ZRP professionalism in urban Harare is 2.12, with values ranging from zero to five, with zero representing the lowest, and five the highest, representation of the five dimensions studied, namely integrity and ethics (2.05), transparency and accountability (2.02), proportionality of use of force (2.00), responsiveness to community (2.45), and respect for citizens' rights (2.07). These scores reflect institutional trust and perceived professionalism which are well below the scale's median, suggesting a 'unprofessionalism' score as the modal public view of the ZRP. The findings on the dimension of proportionality of use of force were especially alarming in that only 77.5% of respondents gave a rating of "unprofessional" or "very unprofessional" to the performance of ZRP.The dimension of proportionality of use of force was alarming in that the lowest mean score of the five dimensions was given in that dimension, with only 77.5% of the respondents rating the performance of ZRP as "unprofessional" or "very unprofessional".

This is indicative of the significant reputational impact suffered as a result of social media coverage of alleged excessive force in 2018, 2019 and 2020. The results are consistent with national survey results on public confidence in the ZRP from the Mass Public Opinion Institute (2021) at 42%. It also continues and extends the public confidence in the ZRP decline trend seen in the past surveys. The ZRP is facing an institutional legitimacy crisis in the digital public space which poses a threat to its institutional pillars of voluntary compliance, community cooperation and effective policing.

5.2.4 Relationship Between Social Media Exposure and Public Trust

Finally, the study finds a clear, substantively significant and positive association between the frequency of social media use and the level of negative public perceptions of ZRP professionalism. 77.3% of respondents who used social media more than once a day expressed low trust in the ZRP while 0.0% of respondents who use social media only once to three times per week expressed low trust in the ZRP. This gradient shows a progressively more negative evaluation of the professionalism of institutions the greater the immersion into the information environment of social media, in line with the cumulative exposure model presented in the conceptual framework of the study and supported by the second level proposition of the Agenda-Setting Theory (McCombs and Shaw, 1972).

This finding was found to be very strong to support the study's Hypothesis H1 and aligned with the international findings by Desmond et al., (2016) and Okafor and Okafor (2021). The practical implication is that with growing social media penetration in Zimbabwe, which is attributed to the rising affordability of data services on mobile devices and greater access to smartphones, the percentage of the Zimbabwean public inundated with continuous negative social media discourse about the ZRP will rise. The ZRP's legitimacy crisis will grow in direct proportion to increasing digital connectivity, if nothing is done to fix the institutional issues responsible for the negative contents, and to the communication gap that enables negative narratives to take hold.

5.2.5 ZRP Social Media Strategy: Effectiveness and Institutional Response

The results of the study indicate that the ZRP's current communication model using social media is mainly insufficient to solve the problem of reputation as identified in this study. The ZRP's social media strategy is reactive, not proactive, and is lacking in a formal social media

policy, timely responses to viral incidents, two-way communication with the community, and volume and reach of positive content, as evidenced by the 62.5% of general public respondents and 73.3% of expert key informants who found it to be ineffective. Together, these shortcomings leave the ZRP in a permanent disadvantageous position that allows the negative frames of social media to create institutional identity in public consciousness.

This conclusion is consistent with the tenets of Procedural Justice Theory (Tyler, 2004) that posits that institutions that are seen as being responsive, transparent, and operating with trustworthy motives in their public communications will be deemed as more legitimate, even if they are not highly functional. The communications issue is not only a public relations issue, but an institutional legitimacy issue with tangible impacts on public engagement, crime reporting, and building community-police relationships. Lack of documented social media policy framework is a governance gap which needs to be addressed as an institutional priority.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the findings presented above, the following recommendations are made to the Zimbabwe Republic Police, the Ministry of Home Affairs and Cultural Heritage and other institutional stakeholders. The recommendations are presented based on the main target groups and are based on the empirical results and theories of the study.

5.3.1 Development of a Formal ZRP Social Media Policy Framework

The ZRP Command is encouraged to create and implement a comprehensive Social Media Policy Framework as a ZRP institutional priority in consultation with the Ministry of Home Affairs & Cultural Heritage. The framework should include the ZRP's social media goals, who will be the authorised people to speak on its behalf on social media, communications channels, procedures to take when a situation goes viral and within a certain time frame, guidelines for the content of proactively shared positive information and its frequency, and guidance on the nature of the officers' interactions on social media. The framework should be developed based on comparative analysis of the social media policies implemented by South African police services, the Kenyan police services and the UK police services, taking into account the legal, political and technological environment in Zimbabwe. If the ZRP has no policy, its social media engagement will be inconsistent, ill structured and inability to manage the pace and scale of digital narrative formation.

5.3.2 Establishment of a Dedicated Digital Communications Unit

The ZRP should have a separate Digital Communications Unit in its Public Relations Department with members trained in social media, digital content, crisis communication and online community management. The unit needs to have the authority and tools to listen to what is being said on social media about the ZRP in real time, respond quickly to new incidents that go viral and generate a steady flow of positive proactive content reflecting community policing successes, crime prevention accomplishments and officer excellence. The unit should be operating on 24-hour basis during high tension periods of public life, such as during elections, public demonstrations, and significant policing events at a national level, to ensure that the ZRP's voice is heard and credible in the digital public sphere at the moment public perception is forming and being challenged.

5.3.3 Adoption of a Dialogic and Community-Centred Social Media Strategy

The ZRP's social media approach is recommended to shift from a broadcast-only approach to a dialogic approach, based on the principles of Procedural Justice Theory (Tyler, 2004). This involves responding actively to what community members post and comment on social media, responding to their questions and concerns openly and honestly instead of defensively; giving community members their own voice to respond to concerns they have about policing priorities and concerns about community safety in a two-way dialogue; and reflecting on their own actions, decisions, and policies openly and honestly in response to legitimate criticisms. To maximize the use of WhatsApp as a community engagement platform, the ZRP should establish officially managed community policing group chats at the station level which was identified by 92.5% of respondents as their main social media platform. In this way, the concept of community policing would be expanded to the online world and direct communication lines would be established less influenced by the framing of public broadcast media.

5.3.4 Integration of Social Media Literacy into ZRP Training Curricula

The Zimbabwe Republic Police Staff College and all ZRP training institutions are encouraged to incorporate a comprehensive module on social media literacy in their officer training programmes and in Continuous Professional Development. The module should give officers a sense of how social media documents and reinforces their actions, how viral content is created and spread and the reputational and legal risks of officers' actions captured on video recording,

and how they can conduct themselves in public in ways that respect citizens' rights, and demonstrate integrity, transparency, proportionality, responsiveness, and respect for citizens' rights, as identified in this study. With a basic understanding of how to conduct themselves in their role as a public presence, officers are better equipped to internalize the standards of their profession beyond mere adherence to procedures, and truly embrace their profession's values. This learning component addresses directly the need identified by key informants for officers to have better digital skills, which is an institutional vulnerability.

5.3.5 Strengthening Internal Accountability Mechanisms to Address Conduct Issues

The ZRP Command and the Ministry of Home Affairs and Cultural Heritage should make efforts to improve their own accountability system as a good preventive measure against the problems of behaviour that create negative content on social media networks in the first place. No matter how advanced a communications program is, it cannot replace good officer behaviour. The results of this research, specifically the 77.5% who say that ZRP use of force is unprofessional or very unprofessional, highlight a serious conduct issue that social media has brought to the forefront of the institution without causing it. They call for an independent civilian complaints body to have investigative powers over allegations of excessive force and corruption; body-worn camera programmes in high-density urban areas; the strengthening of the ZRP's internal discipline procedures; and adoption of a use-of-force policy, which is consistent with international human rights standards and which sets clear and enforceable guidelines on proportionality.

5.3.6 Engagement with Civil Society, Media, and Academic Partners

The ZRP is encouraged to develop structured collaborations with CSOs, academia and the media to co-produce a more nuanced and balanced public debate on policing in Zimbabwe. Some joint efforts could involve community policing forums with media presence, agreements for research cooperation with the university, transparency programmes giving journalists and civil society monitors frequent updates on police performance data, disciplinary results and statistics on engagement with the community. These partnerships would have two purposes: Firstly, they would provide alternative, credible sources of positive information about the ZRP that is not seen as institutional 'spin' but would lead to the establishment of relationships of trust with civil society and media actors who are currently the most influential sources of negative social media information about the ZRP.

5.4 Theoretical Contributions of the Study

This study has several important theoretical contributions to the field of media studies, policing scholarship, and institutional legitimacy theory in addition to its empirical findings. The study also applied Media Framing Theory (Entman, 1993) to the social media and policing in sub-Saharan Africa, and found that the framing dynamics theorised in the context of the traditional mass media work equally as well and arguably even more so in the social media environment, which lacks the editorial gatekeeping role that would filter out emotionally provocative frames and prevent them from achieving mass reach in the traditional mass media environment. Secondly, the study helps strengthen the empirical foundations of the Procedural Justice Theory (Tyler 2004) in Zimbabwean contexts as it shows that public perception of police legitimacy in urban Zimbabwe is closely related to the perception of the procedural aspects of police activities, namely transparency, accountability and respect for rights, which are either affirmed or undermined by the content of social media.

Finally, the dimension of responsiveness to the community had the highest rating on the professionalism scale (2.45) but was still below the neutral (midpoint) score, indicating that citizens are sensitive to and value the responsiveness of police when it occurs, which provides a theoretical justification for emphasizing the need to engage citizens in a dialogic fashion as a means of building legitimacy. Third, the study provides an empirical conceptual framework for the recursive nature of social media, media perception and police professionalism in an emerging country context, with the moderating effect of platform type, content credibility, social identity and previous police experience. The framework offers a replicable analytical template for future studies of the relationship between social media and police legitimacy in similar African settings where the fast-expanding digitalization of social life is transforming police/community relations, which existing, largely Western literature has not fully theorized.

5.5 Limitations of the Study and Directions for Future Research

The study has some limitations that would restrict the scope and generalisability of the findings, these have been discussed in Chapter One. The results are limited to urban Harare, and cannot be simply extrapolated to rural areas, where there's less social media uptake, social media involvement in perceptions are somewhat different, and social media influence on perceptions is likely to be less. The relationship between social media and the Zimbabwean police should be explored in a wider socio-geographic landscape of peri-urban and rural areas of Zimbabwe

to ascertain if the urban results are valid for the entire country. The cross-sectional design of the study was only able to detect perceptions at a point in time and was not designed to detect changes in perceptions over time or to draw causal conclusions between specific social media events and measurable changes in public trust.

Longitudinal studies or quasi-experimental studies involving pre- and post-measures of perceptions related to specific viral events, would enable more robust causal conclusions and a more dynamic and nuanced view of the correlation between social media content and changes in perception. Furthermore, the limited number of respondents (N = 40) general public, due to the qualitative research design and the resources available for the research, reduces the degree of statistical precision and generalisability of the quantitative results obtained. Further studies with larger probability samples could provide more powerful statistical testing and permit multivariate analysis of the factors identified in the conceptual framework.

The following are suggested future research directions from this study: a comparative study on social media strategies and subsequent outcomes of public trust amongst police services across the SADC, a content analysis of public posts on ZRP social media over a period of time to determine the volume, type and reach of the posts and messages, qualitative study of the officers' perceptions of the effects social media has had on their professional conduct and the public's perception of the officers' professional conduct, and an experimental study to determine the effect of proactive release of body worn camera footage on public perception of police accountability and transparency.

5.6 Final Reflection

The study aimed to explore the effect of social media on the perceptions of the public about the professionalism of the Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP), a topic that has become increasingly relevant due to the increasing power of social media in Zimbabwe and the concomitant changes in the information environment that forms the context in which the ZRP operates and is evaluated. The results have proven that this sense of urgency is entirely justified: social media is not just a tool used for side-streams of communication for the ZRP, but the main space where institutional legitimacy is presently being won or lost in the minds of the urban Zimbabwean public.

The data suggest a considerable disparity between the ZRP's vision of the professional policing role and how people actually perceive it, as presented through social media platforms. The ZRP will need to go into the two fronts at once: improving the conduct of officers in the field, which is the main source of the negative social media content that influences public perception; and creating a sophisticated, proactive and dialogic strategy for social media communications to help the ZRP gain a foothold in the digital public sphere in a credible and constructive way.

This is a big challenge for the ZRP, but it's not impossible. In a world with troubling histories, police services have proven that investing in procedural justice, accountable transparency, and communication with communities can turn around trends of dwindling trust in police. But the digital age, which brings with it so many reputational challenges for police institutions, also gives them tremendous potential to be seen as professional, establish community credibility and legitimacy through frequent, civilian and respectful communication and engagement. How the ZRP will take advantage of these opportunities will rely on the leaders' dedication to the cause, government backing, and the willingness of the institution to meet the challenges of policing in the social media era.

5.7 Summary

This study has highlighted the findings and recommendations in Chapter Five with regards to the effects of Social Media on public image of the Zimbabwe Republic Police. The five main conclusions identified were in response to the five research questions of the study: social media is the primary source of information for citizens on how the ZRP operates; negative social media content materialally influences public perceptions more than positive content; public perception of ZRP professionalism is negative across all five dimensions and with overwhelming frequency; increased frequency of exposure to social media content is directly correlated with negative trust assessments; and a reactive social media approach has been adopted by the ZRP and there is no formal policy framework. There were six recommendations that were advanced, including that there should be a formal social media policy; there should be a dedicated digital communications unit; there should be a strategy for dialogic engagement; there should be an increase in social media literacy amongst officers; there should be enhanced systems for accountability within the organisation; and there should be an increase in civic partnerships and media partnerships. The chapter also summarised the theoretical implications of the study and suggested future research. The research results indicate that social media and police professionalism are one of the most important and less discussed governance issues

confronting the ZRP in the modern digital context, and that solutions in the institutional, policy, and academic realms must be equally urgent and extensive.

REFERENCES

Amnesty International (2020) Zimbabwe: Crackdown on dissent. London: Amnesty International.

Babbie, E. (2016) The practice of social research. 14th edn. Belmont: Cengage Learning.

Babbie, E. (2016) The practice of social research. 14th edn. Cengage Learning.

Bateson, G. (1972) Steps to an ecology of mind. New York: Chandler Publishing.

Bazeley, P. and Jackson, K. (2013) Qualitative data analysis with NVivo. 2nd edn. SAGE.

Bonilla, Y. and Rosa, J. (2015) '#Ferguson: Digital protest, hashtag ethnography, and the racial politics of social media in the United States', American Ethnologist, 42(1), pp. 4–17.

Bradford, B. (2014) 'Policing and social identity: Procedural justice, inclusion and cooperation between police and public', Policing and Society, 24(1), pp. 22–43.

Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006) 'Using thematic analysis in psychology', Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3(2), pp. 77–101.

Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2021) Thematic analysis: A practical guide. SAGE.

Brunson, R.K. and Weitzer, R. (2009) 'Police relations with black and white youths in different urban neighbourhoods', Urban Affairs Review, 44(6), pp. 858–885.

Bryman, A. (2016) Social research methods. 5th edn. Oxford University Press.

Bryman, A. (2016) Social research methods. 5th edn. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Burns, N. and Grove, S.K. (2009) The practice of nursing research: Appraisal, synthesis, and generation of evidence. 6th edn. Saunders Elsevier.

Chikwanda, T. (2021) Social media and public trust in the Zimbabwe Republic Police: A Harare urban perspective. Unpublished master's thesis. University of Zimbabwe.

Chitiyo, K. and Broderick, S. (2018) Zimbabwe's security sector governance. London: Royal United Services Institute.

Creswell, J.W. (2014) Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches. 4th edn. Thousand Oaks: SAGE.

Creswell, J.W. and Creswell, J.D. (2018) Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches. 5th edn. SAGE.

Creswell, J.W. and Poth, C.N. (2018) Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches. 4th edn. Thousand Oaks: SAGE.

Crump, J. (2011) 'What are the police doing on Twitter? Social media, the police and the public', Policy and Internet, 3(4), pp. 1–27.

DataReportal (2023) Digital 2023: Global overview report. Available at: https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2023-global-overview-report (Accessed: 10 January 2025).

DataReportal (2023) Digital 2023: Global overview report. Available at: https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2023-global-overview-report

Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y.S. (eds.) (2018) The SAGE handbook of qualitative research. 5th edition. Thousand Oaks: SAGE.

Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y.S. (eds.) (2018) The SAGE handbook of qualitative research. 5th edn. SAGE.

Desmond, M., Papachristos, A.V. and Kirk, D.S. (2016) 'Police violence and citizen crime reporting in the black community', American Sociological Review, 81(5), pp. 857–876.

Duncan, J. (2016) Protest nation: The right to protest in South Africa. Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press.

Duncan, J. (2016) Protest nation: The right to protest in South Africa. University of KwaZulu-Natal Press.

Entman, R.M. (1993) 'Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm', Journal of Communication, 43(4), pp. 51–58.

Glaser, B.G. and Strauss, A.L. (1967) The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research. Aldine Transaction.

Goffman, E. (1974) Frame analysis: An essay on the organisation of experience. New York: Harper and Row.

Goldsmith, A.J. (2015) 'Disgracebook policing: Social media and the rise of police indiscretion', Policing and Society, 25(3), pp. 249–267.

Hair, J.F., Page, M. and Brunsveld, N. (2019) Essentials of business research methods. 4th edn. New York: Routledge.

Human Rights Watch (2019) Zimbabwe: Security forces use excessive force. New York: Human Rights Watch.

Human Rights Watch (2019) Zimbabwe: Security forces use excessive force. Human Rights Watch.

International Telecommunication Union (2022) Measuring digital development: Facts and figures 2022. Geneva: ITU.

Kvale, S. and Brinkmann, S. (2015) InterViews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing. 3rd edn. SAGE.

Landis, J.R. and Koch, G.G. (1977) 'The measurement of observer agreement for categorical data', Biometrics, 33(1), pp. 159–174.

Lee, M. and McGovern, A. (2014) Policing and media: Public relations, simulations and communications. London: Routledge.

Lincoln, Y.S. and Guba, E.G. (1985) Naturalistic inquiry. SAGE.

Loader, I. and Mulcahy, A. (2003) Policing and the condition of England: Memory, politics and culture. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Maposa, R. and Rusvingo, T. (2020) 'Police-community relations in urban Zimbabwe: The emerging role of social media', Southern African Journal of Security Studies, 3(1), pp. 45–61.

Mass Public Opinion Institute (2021) Zimbabwe governance and democracy survey 2021. Harare: MPOI.

McCombs, M., Shaw, D. and Weaver, D. (1997) Communication and democracy: Exploring the intellectual frontiers in agenda-setting theory. Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

McCombs, M.E. and Shaw, D.L. (1972) 'The agenda-setting function of mass media', Public Opinion Quarterly, 36(2), pp. 176–187.

Morgan, D.L. (2019) Basic and advanced focus groups. SAGE.

Neuman, W.L. (2014) Social research methods: Qualitative and quantitative approaches. 7th edn. Harlow: Pearson.

Neuman, W.L. (2014) Social research methods: Qualitative and quantitative approaches. 7th edn. Pearson.

Okafor, C. and Okafor, I. (2021) 'Police self-presentation on social media and public perception of professionalism in Nigeria', African Journal of Criminology and Justice Studies, 14(1), pp. 102–124.

Olukoya, S. (2020) '#EndSARS: How Nigerian youths forced a police unit's disbandment', Al Jazeera, 12 October.

Patton, M.Q. (2015) Qualitative research and evaluation methods. 4th edn. SAGE.

Postal and Telecommunications Regulatory Authority of Zimbabwe (2022) Postal and telecommunications sector performance report: Second quarter 2022. Harare: POTRAZ.

Postal and Telecommunications Regulatory Authority of Zimbabwe (POTRAZ) (2022) Postal and telecommunications sector performance report: Second quarter 2022. POTRAZ.

Reiner, R. (2010) The politics of the police. 4th edn. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Rosenbaum, D.P., Graziano, L.M., Stephens, C.D. and Schuck, A.M. (2011) 'Understanding community policing and legitimacy-seeking behaviour in virtual reality: A national study of municipal police websites', Police Quarterly, 14(1), pp. 25–47.

Skogan, W. and Frydl, K. (eds.) (2004) Fairness and effectiveness in policing: The evidence. Washington, DC: National Academies Press.

Sunshine, J. and Tyler, T.R. (2003) 'The role of procedural justice and legitimacy in shaping public support for policing', Law and Society Review, 37(3), pp. 513–548.

Tajfel, H. and Turner, J.C. (1979) 'An integrative theory of intergroup conflict', in Austin, W.G. and Worchel, S. (eds.) The social psychology of intergroup relations. Monterey: Brooks/Cole, pp. 33–47.

Tankebe, J. and Asante, D.A. (2016) 'Police-citizen relations in Ghana: Drivers of trust', Policing and Society, 26(4), pp. 387–405.

Taub, A. and Fisher, M. (2020) 'Why the death of George Floyd sparked protests in more than 60 countries', The New York Times, 12 June.

Thibaut, J. and Walker, L. (1975) Procedural justice: A psychological analysis. Hillsdale: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Tyler, T.R. (1990) Why people obey the law. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Tyler, T.R. (2004) 'Enhancing police legitimacy', The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 593(1), pp. 84–99.

Vis, F. (2013) 'Twitter as a reporting tool for breaking news', Digital Journalism, 1(1), pp. 27–47.

Weitzer, R. and Tuch, S.A. (2004) 'Race and perceptions of police misconduct', Social Problems, 51(3), pp. 305–325.

Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum (2019) Human rights violations in Zimbabwe: Fuel protests. Harare: Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum.

Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum (2019) *Human rights violations in Zimbabwe: Fuel protests.* Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum.

Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency (2022) Zimbabwe population and housing census 2022: Preliminary report. Harare: ZimStat.

Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency (ZimStat) (2022) *Zimbabwe population and housing census 2022: Preliminary report.* ZimStat.