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Shopping and Guns: an analysis of public discourses in social media about mall robberies in South Africa

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Abstract

This research project investigates public opinions about South African mall robberies discussed on *Twitter*. Using the principles of discourse and multimodal analysis, it provides critical insights constructed from the represented narratives of select, proposed middle-class consumers illustrating distinct sentiments about malls, crime and shopping. Malls are empirical objects that have been trivialised as ordinary and mundane consumer sites, devoid of any sociological significance embedded within the daily practices of shopping. This paper makes the argument that when contested by criminal activity, malls become valuable sites for critical enquiry towards gaining a deeper understanding of what these shopping attitudes mean within a post-apartheid, South African consumer landscape. The central issue of crime threatening public safety at malls diverges into an array of thematic discussions, revealing distinct indoctrinations surrounding apartheid's iniquitous system of racial and social engineering. This study's principle argument makes the claim that anxieties concerning public safety are only the tip of the iceberg, and this serves as an entry point into a discourse contesting exclusive shopping rights above constitutional equality for all. The test tube of mall robberies mixes desirable pleasures and humanitarian moralities together and creates a volatile cocktail of conflicting, consumer aspirations. In short, the public discourse of mall crimes is about maintaining self-entitled spaces of exclusivity within a desperate socio-economic climate. This study concludes with questions and considerations raised by these authors which could springboard into opportunities for future inquiry.