

**A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF THE FRAMING AND REPRESENTATION OF BLACK  
LIVES MATTER PROTESTS BY SOUTH AFRICAN MAINSTREAM MEDIA**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study conducted a detailed analysis of 277 headlines using content analysis, focusing on how News24 portrays racial protests, particularly within the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. It explored News24's coverage of BLM protests from March to December 2020, uncovering various framing strategies and language nuances in news headlines. The research aimed to identify thematic frames, linguistic patterns, and overall media framing of BLM protests. The findings highlighted different framing strategies, including legitimising, conflict, and delegitimizing frames, along with the impact of descriptive language on audience perceptions. The study concluded that media framing is dynamic, responding to evolving events and public discourse, and provided recommendations for media transparency, diversity in newsrooms, media literacy, and ethical reporting. Future research suggestions include comparative analyses, audience reception studies, and policy impact assessments to deepen understanding and inform strategic interventions in media representations and public discourse on racial justice. Overall, the study contributes valuable insights into media framing practices and their impact on societal perceptions of racial justice issues.

*Keywords:* Social Movements, Black Lives Matter, Racial Protests, Framing, Media

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# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The intersection of the COVID-19 pandemic and widespread racial protests in 2020 marked a pivotal historical moment. Media played a vital role in shaping public understanding of these events, influencing perceptions through its framing of societal descriptions (O'Hear, 2021). While traditional media has been extensively studied, there's a notable gap in understanding framing dynamics within online news media (O'Hear, 2021). This study aims to fill this gap by examining how online news media, specifically News24, framed the Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests between March and December 2020.

Protests hold significant social and political relevance, with South Africa serving as a notable example of a country with a rich history of leveraging protests for change (Rodrigues, 2010). The classification of protests into legal and illegal forms, as introduced by Bayley (1968), remains foundational but requires further exploration into nuanced categories such as nonviolent civil disobedience and digital disobedience (Chenoweth & Stephan, 2011; Tufekci, 2017). Historically, protests and social movements have significantly influenced legislative changes (Aiken et al., 2013). For example, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 in the United States was greatly impacted by the Civil Rights Movement, particularly the March on Washington led by Martin Luther King Jr. in 1963, which advocated for equal rights for African Americans (Roberts et al., 2017).

Symbolic positioning, as defined for this study, refers to the positions taken by protesters that signify their support for the Black Lives Matter protests (and other protests) (Günther, 2016). These symbolic acts, whether expressed through physical protests, donations, art, music, fashion shows, or wearing branded clothing, contribute to a sense of group cohesiveness and unity among individuals striving for social change (Endres & Senda-Cook, 2011; Kasanga, 2014). Such displays are crucial for clarifying individuals' positions on the protest, especially for those unable to participate physically, thereby eliminating ambiguity and actively demonstrating support for the cause (Günther, 2016; Kasanga, 2014).

Extending this framework, Tarrow (2022) proposed an alternative typology distinguishing protests as 'orderly,' 'disruptive,' or 'violent,' acknowledging the nuanced spectrum of protest behaviours. Additionally, Costa Lopes et al. (2013) emphasised the role of legitimacy in garnering public acceptance for social protests, while Bohler-Muller (2017) highlighted public preferences for peaceful forms of protest.

Understanding the framing of BLM protests requires exploring civil disobedience as a key aspect of such movements. Civil disobedience, defined as public, nonviolent acts against the law rooted in moral and political convictions, appeals to principles of justice within democratic societies (Rawls, 2009; Scheuerman, 2018). This research employs content analysis to identify prevalent frames related to racial protests, shedding light on how these frames persist and evolve within online news media. By unravelling these framing processes, this study not only contributes to academic scholarship but also has practical implications for promoting responsible media practices, challenging stereotypes, and influencing policy discussions related to protest movements and racial justice.

## **1.2. PROBLEM STATEMENT:**

This study aims to address the gap in understanding the framing and portrayal of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement in online news media, focusing on the period between March and December 2020. The specific challenge lies in comprehensively analysing how News24, as a representative of online news media, framed BLM protests during this critical time, and how these frames may represent BLM protests.

## **1.3. RESEACH QUESTION**

The main research question of the study is:

- What frames do news media use in their reporting of BLM protests?

The secondary research questions are:

- What specific frames are used by news headlines in their reporting of BLM protests?

- How has the framing of BLM protests evolved over the course of 2020 in news media coverage?
- What are some of the choices of words used to report on BLM protests?
- How does the news media use particular descriptive language when reporting on movements for racial justice?

#### **1.4 OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY**

1. To explore the frames news media use in their reporting of BLM protests.
2. To uncover the specific frames used by news headlines in their reporting of BLM protests.
3. To explore how the framing of BLM protests evolved over the course of 2020 in news media coverage.
4. To identify the choice of words used to report on BLM protests.
5. To analyse the particular descriptive language employed by news media when reporting on movements for racial justice.

#### **1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

The study's significance lies in its exploration of the potential conversations employed by news media when covering BLM protests. It addresses both the primary research question and secondary inquiries. Firstly, by analysing the dialogues present in news coverage, the study offers valuable insights into how media framing influences public perceptions of the BLM movement and protests for racial justice. It identifies the prevailing frames and potential biases within media representations by scrutinising the themes found in BLM news headlines, revealing which aspects of the protests are emphasised or marginalised. The study also delves into the potential linguistic strategies employed by news outlets to shape audience interpretations and attitudes towards racial justice protests. By highlighting descriptive words used in reporting on racial justice, the research uncovers potential biases or agenda-setting tactics that may impact the framing and reception of BLM protests. Overall, this study contributes to media literacy efforts and informs discussions on media representation, social movements, and racial equality, thereby promoting a more nuanced understanding of the news media's role in shaping public discourse and perceptions of racial justice initiatives.

## 1.6 DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

**Framing:** The process by which the media and other communicators organise and present information to the public, influencing how people understand and interpret that information.

**Black Lives Matter (BLM) Movement:** A decentralised social and political movement advocating for non-violent civil disobedience in protest against incidents of police brutality and racially motivated violence against black people.

**Online News Media:** Digital platforms and websites that disseminate news and information, including newspapers, news websites, blogs, and social media platforms.

**Civil Disobedience:** A public, nonviolent act against the law, motivated by a desire to change government policies or laws, and justified by moral principles and political convictions.

**Headlines:** The titles of news articles that aim to grab attention and summarise the content, playing a crucial role in framing the reader's perception of the news story.

**Themes:** Recurring subjects or topics in news coverage that reflect broader societal issues and narratives/understandings.

**Frames:** Specific perspectives or angles used to present information in a way that influences how it is understood by the audience.

**Media Literacy:** The ability to access, analyse, evaluate, and create media in a variety of forms, understanding the role of media in society.

**Nonviolence:** A principle of civil disobedience and protest that rejects the use of physical force to achieve political or social goals.

**Virtue signalling:** Individuals' attempts to showcase themselves as morally upright, often on social media (Cambridge Dictionary, 2023)

## **1.7 CHAPTER ORGANISATION**

The dissertation is divided into the five chapters which are described below:

Chapter 1 gives the introduction and background of the study in which the research problem and research objectives are outlined.

Chapter 2 synthesises the literature reviewed that is related to the topic which shall cover the forms of protests, media framing and counter protests for the BLM movement.

Chapter 3 outlines the research methodology of the study and describes the research paradigm, research design and the data collection and analysis procedure.

Chapter 4 presents the findings of the study which are discussed as themes and moderated with literature.

Chapter 5 presents the conclusions and recommendations for future research.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1. INTRODUCTION**

Protests have remained a prominent feature of contemporary landscapes, both in South Africa and the United States, reflecting ongoing social and political dynamics. Recent years have seen a notable increase in public demonstrations, focusing on critical issues such as service delivery, labor rights, and political concerns. Data from the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) indicates that in 2019 alone, South Africa experienced around 1,050 protests, highlighting the country's vigorous engagement in public activism (Wasserman, 2010). Similarly, the United States has also witnessed a significant number of protests in recent times, underscoring its role as a significant center for societal mobilization (Wasserman, 2010). These figures, although varying annually, illustrate the persistent and evolving nature of public demonstrations in both countries.

This chapter provides an overview of existing literature to highlight the role of media framing in scholarly research. The role of scholars, media journalists, historians, and writers in documenting and disseminating stories of struggle is crucial for understanding the complexities of protests. Media portrayals, while essential for spreading awareness and mobilizing support, have faced criticism regarding their neutrality and potential bias. For example, media representations of liberation fighters as terrorists during counter-protests illustrate the inherent challenges in media coverage (Wasserman, 2010).

This chapter integrates existing literature on the framing and representation of protests by media (McQuail, 2009; Reese, 2001; Van Gorp, 2007). It explores various forms of protests and their portrayal in News24, exploring the media's role in perpetuating stereotypes and the dynamics of counter-protests. Themes identified in the literature, such as diverse protest methods (McQuail, 2009), symbolic protest forms (Van Gorp, 2007), and the impact of media framing on the representation of protests, are discussed. The chapter aims to synthesize these insights to enhance understanding of how media reports on and frames protests, shedding light on the nuanced role of media in shaping public opinion and fostering social change.

## **2.2. METHODS OF PROTESTING AND MOBILISING**

This section explores various strategies and tactics employed in protest movements, focusing on both traditional and modern methods of mobilization. The discussion encompasses legal and illegal forms of protests, including nonviolent civil disobedience and digital disobedience, and their roles in advocating for change. Additionally, it highlights how symbolic protests and innovative mobilizing techniques are utilized to garner support, raise awareness, and organize collective action, particularly within the context of movements like Black Lives Matter (BLM).

### **2.2.1. FORMS OF PROTEST**

The BLM movement illustrates a range of protest methods and positioning strategies aimed at raising awareness about systemic racism and police brutality. Protests, as employed by BLM, serve not only to demand policy changes but also to facilitate communication among participants and strengthen collective identity (Casquete, 2006). This form of civil disobedience, which respects legal procedures and accepts punishment without resistance, is considered a last resort when democratic processes fail to address serious injustices (Rawls, 2009). While nonviolence is a fundamental principle of civil disobedience, forceful resistance may be justified if repeated appeals against injustice are denied (Rawls, 2009; Scheuerman, 2018).

In the digital age, social media has become an essential tool in activism. Platforms such as Twitter and Facebook play a crucial role in internal organization, coordination, and debate among activists, as well as in mobilizing external support and disseminating movement frames (Cammaertrts et al., 2015). Social media activism also serves as a means of attacking opponents, monitoring authorities, and preserving protest artifacts, which can influence future movements through movement spill over (Cammaertrts et al., 2015). Furthermore, social media enables transnational networking and supports internal debate and decision-making within movements (Cammaertrts et al., 2015).

Community organizing remains a fundamental component of effective protest strategies. Tactics such as one-to-one interviews, house meetings, strategic discussions, and direct actions like protests and boycotts are crucial for engaging residents and driving social change (Tufts, 2024). Community organizing emphasizes self-determination and recognizes that affected communities

are central to meaningful change. It highlights the importance of persistence and solidarity in challenging systemic power imbalances, harnessing collective agency to effect transformative outcomes (Mackenzie, 2023). These diverse methods and positioning strategies underscore the multifaceted approaches used by movements like BLM to advance their goals and challenge societal norms.

## **2.2.2 SYMBOLS AND SYMBOLIC POSITIONING IN PROTEST AND LIMITATIONS**

Symbols and symbolic positioning are pivotal in protests, playing a significant role in mobilizing action and fostering a shared identity within social movements (Awad & Wagoner, 2020). Historical and contemporary movements have leveraged symbols and rituals, particularly during times of societal transformation. For example, the symbolic act of taking a knee in American football has become associated with protests against racial injustice, while hashtags such as #BlackLivesMatter are used to index and amplify movement messages (Walton-Fisette & Sutherland, 2018). These symbols, including body postures, branded regalia, and hashtags, serve as powerful tools for maintaining momentum, relevance, and articulating stances on critical issues (Walton-Fisette & Sutherland, 2018).

However, the use of symbols in protests is not without limitations. The phenomenon of virtue signaling—where individuals or groups showcase themselves as morally upright, often on social media—can detract from the authenticity of protest movements (Cambridge Dictionary, 2023; Awad & Wagoner, 2020). Virtue signaling may prioritize appearance and social validation over genuine commitment, potentially undermining the effectiveness and credibility of protests. The role of social media in facilitating virtue signaling raises concerns about the sincerity of reported news and the potential for protests to be undermined by a focus on public image rather than meaningful action (Awad & Wagoner, 2020). Acknowledging these limitations is essential for a nuanced understanding of how protests are expressed and supported.

### **2.2.3 MEDIA REPRESENTATION AND IMPACT**

The media's role in shaping the representation of protests is crucial, as media framing can significantly influence public perception and the effectiveness of activism. This section integrates literature on media representation, focusing on how various forms of media framing can perpetuate stereotypes, impact public opinion, and affect the dynamics of protest movements (McQuail, 2009; Reese, 2001; Van Gorp, 2006). By examining these aspects, this chapter aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the media's role in reflecting and shaping protest dynamics, enhancing insights into the intricate relationship between media reporting and public activism.

### **2.3. FRAMING**

Framing in journalism is a critical concept that involves shaping news content within familiar reference frames and underlying structures of meaning (Van Gorp, 2006). The framing choices made by journalists influence how audiences perceive news stories, aligning their understanding with the perspectives presented (McQuail, 2009; Tuchman, 1978; Van Gorp, 2006). Van Gorp (2006) positions framing as a concept that bridges cognition and culture, becoming ingrained in media practices as part of the cultural context. Entman (1993) asserts that framing entails selecting and emphasising specific aspects of a story to achieve salience. Understanding framing theory is essential for comprehending how the media present information and its impact on audience interpretation.

Frames serve as conceptual tools aiding in the conveyance, interpretation, and evaluation of information, offering a structured approach to comprehend and analyse complex issues or narratives (de Vreese, 2014). They play a significant role in interpreting and defining the social world through their interpretive and evaluative functions. Framing, influenced by demographics (age, socio-economic background, race, gender, income level, education, ethnicity, and geographic location), provides a nuanced understanding of how media framing interacts with audience perception in a dynamic manner (de Vreese, 2014). In the media landscape, legitimization and delegitimization play pivotal roles in shaping news credibility (Suchman, 1995). Delegitimization compromises credibility through false information, biased reporting, sensationalism, and lack of transparency (de Vreese, 2014). Conversely, legitimization enhances credibility by ensuring source reliability, rigorous fact-checking, verification processes, and adherence to journalistic

ethics (Suchman, 1995; Lawlor & Tolley, 2017). These practices significantly impact public perception, fostering either trust or scepticism (Gauchat, 2012).

Framing, as conceptualised by Bateson (1972) and elaborated upon by Hallahan (2008), refers to the spatial and temporal boundaries of interactive messages, serving as metacommunication (Bateson, 1972; Hallahan, 2008). These frames significantly influence how information is processed, acting as abstractions that structure the meaning of messages (Hallahan, 2008).

In news media, frames are used to contextualise information by placing it within a familiar framework. This framing technique provides cognitive shortcuts for audiences, allowing them to quickly connect individual news stories to broader contexts or themes (Van Gorp, 2006). In earlier literature, Goffman (1974) describes media framing as the deliberate structuring of news stories by media organisations to highlight certain aspects while minimising or excluding others.

### **2.3.1 MEDIA FRAMING**

Media framing is the process by which journalists and media organisations shape news content through selective presentation and emphasis, thereby influencing audience perception and interpretation (Lindgren et al., 2022). This involves highlighting certain aspects of a story while minimising or excluding others to create a specific understanding (Goffman, 1974). Framing functions as a bridge between cognition and culture, becoming an ingrained part of media practices (Lindgren et al., 2022). Understanding this concept is crucial for analysing how media influences public opinion and societal discourse (McQuail, 2009). Framing can take various forms, such as emphasising certain aspects of an event, using particular language or imagery, and choosing which sources to include in a story (Goffman, 1974; Reese, 2001). By framing a news story in a certain way, media organisations can influence the audience's view of an issue, emphasise certain values or concerns, and even advance particular agendas (Reese, 2001). For example, a news story about a protest can be framed as a peaceful expression of free speech or as a disruptive and potentially violent event, depending on the language used, the choice of images, and the sources interviewed (McLeod & Detenber, 1999).

Media analysis often involves identifying different frames used by media outlets to present and interpret news stories. One such frame is the delegitimizing frame, which casts doubt on the credibility or legitimacy of individuals, groups, or movements by highlighting negative aspects or questioning their motives (Klein et al., 2022). Conversely, the legitimising frame seeks to validate actions, beliefs, or goals by emphasising positive attributes or support from credible sources (Klein et al., 2022). Another widely used frame is the conflict frame, which portrays situations as contentious or tense, often highlighting opposing viewpoints or confrontations (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007).

Additionally, media can employ the human interest frame to focus on personal or emotional aspects, eliciting empathy or engagement from audiences (McLeod & Detenber, 1999). Economic frames interpret events through financial perspectives, providing a view of how economic interests are affected (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). Political frames analyse issues in terms of ideologies or power dynamics, offering insights into the political implications of events (McLeod & Detenber, 1999). Furthermore, episodic framing zooms in on specific incidents or stories rather than broader trends, aiming to evoke emotional responses by showcasing individual understanding and personal experiences, such as struggles, challenges, successes, or injustices (Gross, 2008). These frames are not mutually exclusive and [can overlap](#) in media coverage, creating nuanced understandings and interpretations. Additionally, crisis frames portray events as urgent issues requiring immediate attention (Klein et al., 2022).

Gross (2008) conducted a study examining the emotional impacts of framing political issues. The research comprised two experiments investigating how episodic and thematic framing influences emotional responses and policy opinions (Gross, 2008). Participants read a column opposing mandatory minimum sentencing, framed either thematically or episodically with accounts featuring individuals affected by the policy. Data analysis focused on gauging emotional engagement, elicited emotions, and their correlation with policy stances (Gross, 2008). The findings indicated that episodic framing was more emotionally engaging and elicited specific emotions like sympathy and pity, which were associated with increased opposition to mandatory minimum sentencing

(Gross, 2008). However, when considering the indirect effect of framing on emotional response, the thematic frame was found to be more persuasive in shaping policy opinions (Gross, 2008).

The framing of a story can significantly influence audience perceptions of protesters, the issues they advocate for, and the response of law enforcement (Entman, 1993; Goffman, 1974; Iyengar & Simon, 1993; Tankard, 2001). Reese (2001) expands on this idea of frames as enduring cognitive, interpretative, and presentational structures that symbol-handlers use to consistently organise discourse, whether it's verbal or visual, involving selection, emphasis, and exclusion. Reese's definition underscores several key points: patterns of cognition, interpretation and presentation, selection, emphasis, exclusion, and the organisation of discourse.

Reese (2001) argues that frames are cognitive structures individuals use to comprehend information and events, thereby shaping their understanding of the world. These frames play a crucial role in how information is interpreted and presented. They influence not only individual perceptions of an issue but also how that issue is communicated to others. Additionally, frames involve the decision-making process of selecting what information to include (selection), which aspects to highlight (emphasis), and what to omit (exclusion). These choices profoundly impact the understanding and perspective presented in a story.

Familiarisation with tools such as framing is essential for media consumers to recognize the potential biases and choices made by news organisations when presenting information. It's through this understanding that individuals can better grasp how news is constructed and how it can influence their own perspectives on current events. This awareness becomes especially crucial in the context of media framing, where the way news stories are framed can significantly impact public opinion and understanding (Entman, 1993; Goffman, 1974; Iyengar & Simon, 1993; Reese, 2001).

### **2.3.2. MEDIA FRAMING OF PROTESTS**

Media framing of protests refers to how news organisations present and structure information related to protests, significantly influencing public understanding and opinions (Reese, 2001; Goffman, 1974). Susánszky et al. (2022) explored media populism in Hungary, revealing that pro-

government media used framing bias to discredit protests through derogatory language and iconic frames, though no selection bias was detected. The study employed a four-level media analysis approach to investigate selection bias, framing bias rooted in protest paradigms, the disdainful tone in pro-governmental media, and the impact of iconic frames.

McLeod et al. (2022) examined how television news framing affects perceptions of an anarchist protest. They used three treatment stories with varying levels of support for the status quo and found that support for the status quo significantly influenced viewers, making them more critical of protesters, less critical of the police, and less supportive of protesters' expressive rights. Additionally, this framing led to lower estimations of the protest's effectiveness, public support, and perceived newsworthiness.

Earl et al. (2004) highlighted that media coverage often emphasises conflict and violence in protests. Erikson and Tedin (2019) and McCarthy and McPhail (1998) reaffirmed this, noting that media portrayal of protest activities is often disruptive and violent, contributing to negative framing, especially in the United States.

Brown and Mourão (2021) investigated how protest news frames influence audience support for a civil rights movement using a  $3 \times 2$  experimental design. They found that articles with a legitimising debate frame increased support for and identification with protesters while also increasing criticism of police. Conversely, riot and confrontation frames led to increased criticism of protesters, decreased support for the movement, and decreased criticism of police. Pre-existing attitudes toward Black people, the police, and social movements significantly influenced support and criticism, highlighting the importance of these factors in protest coverage effects research.

Gruber (2022) analysed how mainstream news media in the UK reported on protests over a 26-year period, using a dataset of 27,496 articles from eight national newspapers. The results indicated that while a majority of articles used frames associated with delegitimizing coverage of protests, there was also a significant and increasing use of legitimising frames, either independently or alongside delegitimizing framing.

Akhavan-Majid and Ramaprasad (2000) investigated framing in U.S. and Chinese press coverage of the Fourth United Nations Conference on Women and the Non-Governmental Organizations Forum in Beijing in 1995. They used both quantitative and qualitative methods to analyse anti-communist, antifeminist, pro-equality, and nationalistic frames. The U.S. coverage exhibited an anti-communist and antifeminist frame, while the Chinese coverage reflected a pro-equality frame with a focus on the global feminist movement's critical issues.

Ophir et al. (2023) examined how mainstream news outlets in the U.S. framed the "Unite the Right" rally in Charlottesville and the "Black Lives Matter" protests using topic modelling text analysis. Their findings showed that the media predominantly employed a political frame, often centering the discourse on Trump's role rather than the core issues driving the protests.

Boykoff and Carrington (2019) analysed newspaper coverage of Colin Kaepernick's political activism from August 2016 to August 2018 using content analysis. They found that print media initially supported Kaepernick but gradually shifted the focus of coverage away from racial issues, framing it solely as an "anthem protest," thereby undermining the broader context of racial injustice.

Stone and Socia (2019) conducted a qualitative content analysis to examine how online media framed the police shooting of 12-year-old Tamir Rice in Cleveland, OH. They analysed a large sample of online news articles published within the first 48 hours following the event, focusing on headlines, narrative structures, quotes, and images. Brown and Harlow (2019) investigated digital newspaper coverage of protests challenging the status quo, particularly regarding racial issues like discrimination against Indigenous people and anti-Black racism. They conducted content analysis of articles from sixteen newspapers across various U.S. market types and regions, examining framing and sourcing features in protest coverage.

Elmasry and el-Nawawy (2017) conducted a content analysis of mainstream media's framing of "Black Lives Matter" protests following the shooting of Michael Brown. Their findings showed that newspapers were more likely to use a positive frame, emphasising peacefulness and order rather than negative frames suggesting lawlessness (Elmasry and el-Nawawy, 2017).

Xu (2013) analysed media coverage of the Occupy Wall Street (OWS) movement using content analysis and logistic regression analyses. The study identified six framing/marginalisation devices: lawlessness, official sources, show, ineffective goals, public disapproval, and negative impact. These devices significantly influenced the overall tone of coverage, with public disapproval being the most explanatory.

Di Cicco (2010) analysed coverage of protests in major U.S. newspapers from 1967 to 2007. The study identified a recurring depiction of protests as nuisances, associated with increasing conservatism in America. Protests were often portrayed as disruptive interruptions of daily life, ineffective, and unpatriotic, especially ideologically liberal protests (Di Cicco, 2010).

Smith et al. (2001) conducted content analysis of newspaper and television news stories on Washington, D.C. protests held during 1982 and 1991. The study found that protests were often framed in ways that did not fully support social movement agendas, focusing primarily on the protest event itself rather than the underlying social issues (Smith et al., 2001).

Jha (2007) compared media coverage of anti-WTO protests in 1999 and anti-Vietnam war protests in 1967 using quantitative content analysis. The study examined the use of sources and framing techniques, identifying patterns in the use of official and protester sources and the prevalence of thematic versus episodic framing (Jha, 2007).

Boykoff (2006) investigated framing practices used by mainstream U.S. media during the Global Justice Movement protests in Seattle in 1999 and Washington, DC in 2000. The study identified five predominant frames: the Violence Frame, the Disruption Frame, the Freak Frame, the Ignorance Frame, and the Amalgam of Grievances Frame (Boykoff, 2006). These frames emerged from the interactive relationship between social movements and the media, influenced by journalistic norms and values (Boykoff, 2006). Liu (2021) compared news framing of the Ukraine protests from November 2013 to February 2014 across Russian and British media. The study used comparative content analysis and found that Russian media predominantly used economic and

morality frames, while British media preferred a human-interest frame, leading to one-sided coverage.

Egbunike (2015) analysed the framing of the January 2012 #Occupy Nigeria Protest across social media platforms and three national newspapers using content analysis. The study found differences in framing strategies, with old media performing better in contributing to the discourse surrounding the protest.

In the context of South African media research, Spark's (2009) qualitative study is a significant contribution to understanding changes in the country's media landscape over two decades. This study adopted a comparative perspective based on the Elite Continuity Model, which examines transitions from post-communist regimes to private capitalist systems. Spark's (2009) research highlighted the high degree of continuity in media structures and personnel, as well as highly politicised interventions and partisan press in South African mass media during this transition. South African newspapers, often considered elite media, continue to wield significant agenda-setting power (Spark, 2009). They tend to focus on issues relevant to the socioeconomic elite, leading to a middle-class bias and framing protests in negative terms such as "service delivery protests" or "political unrest (Spark, 2009)." This can oversimplify the complexity of protests and their underlying causes (Friedman, 2011; Wasserman et al., 2018). The media's tendency to frame protests negatively was evident in Sumayya's (2017) thematic analysis of university student protests in 2015. News reports emphasised violence, overshadowing the students' goals for positive change and depicting them as destructive rather than agents of change (Sumayya, 2017).

Pointer (2015) conducted a study to analyse the key frames and sources employed by South African print media in their coverage of the 'service delivery protests' in 2013. The study design focused on identifying the prevalent frames and sources within print media sources catalogued in the SA Media database (Pointer, 2015). The study utilised hierarchical cluster analysis to explore the relationships between frames, between sources, and between frames and sources. The study revealed that the most prevalent frames were the war/spectacle frame and the failed democracy frame, followed by the law/crime frame (Pointer, 2015). These frames collectively served to delegitimize the service delivery protests. Pointer's (2015) study highlights the significant role of media framing and source selection in shaping public perceptions of service delivery protests,

suggesting that the South African print media in 2013 predominantly portrayed these protests in a negative light, emphasising themes of conflict, failure, and criminality (Pointer, 2015).

Furthermore, Chiumbu (2016) focusing on the coverage of socio-economic rights in South African national newspapers. Their findings showed a common omission of crucial information related to the structural causes of inequality and socio-economic injustices within the country.

The negative framing of protests is a prevalent trend observed across a diverse array of media outlets, encompassing Western, African, and South African media. Boykoff (2006), Brown (2011), Gruber (2022), Egbunike (2015), Pointer (2015), Hamdy and Gomaa (2012), Lui (2020), and McLeod and Hertog (1992) have extensively studied the framing of protests and consistently found that social protests tend to be framed in negative ways by the media.

As mentioned previously, the research by Boykoff (2006) delved into media framing of protests and revealed a consistent inclination toward negative framing in media coverage. Similarly, Brown (2011) contributed to this understanding by examining the framing of protests and identifying prevalent negative portrayals within media coverage. Gruber's recent work in 2022 further emphasised the recurring theme of social protests being framed negatively by media outlets. Additionally, Egbunike (2015), Hamdy and Gomaa (2012), Lui (2020), and McLeod and Hertog (1992) have each conducted their respective studies, contributing valuable insights into the negative framing of social protests in media. Collectively, these scholarly investigations have shed light on the pervasive nature of negative framing in the media's coverage of protests, regardless of the geographic and cultural context.

In conclusion, media framing of protests plays a crucial role in shaping public perceptions. While research has consistently shown that protests are often negatively framed by the media, some studies have also highlighted positive framing. This underscores the media's responsibility to report protests accurately and responsibly, as their framing can influence how the public perceives these important social movements.

### **2.3.3 EXPLORING MEDIA FRAMING OF PROTESTS: UNDERSTANDING INFLUENCES AND IMPACTS**

Historically, protests and social movements have profoundly influenced legislative changes. For example, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 followed the advocacy of the Civil Rights Movement and the March on Washington led by Martin Luther King Jr., prohibiting discrimination based on race, colour, religion, sex, or national origin. Similarly, the Stonewall Riots in 1969, sparked by a police raid on the Stonewall Inn in New York City, marked a turning point for LGBTQ+ rights advocacy, leading to the decriminalisation of homosexuality and progress in LGBTQ+ rights globally. Additionally, the Suffragette movement in the late 19th and early 20th centuries highlighted gender inequalities through protests and civil disobedience, ultimately leading to legislative changes granting women the right to vote in several countries (Hickson et al., 2022; Ling & Monteith, 2014).

Jaynes (2002) investigated the impact of insurgency on urban fiscal policy using city-level data from the Fiscal Austerity and Urban Innovation Project (FAUI) and the Ethnic Collective Action in Contemporary Urban U.S. Project. Employing a political process theory framework, the study focused on the allocation of public spending to redistributive programs and social control efforts, differentiating between historical and contemporary riot and protest effects (Jaynes, 2002). Jaynes (2002) found that nonviolent protests correlate with increased redistributive spending, while riots lead to higher social control spending. Contemporary insurgencies exert greater influence, with Black representation on city councils mediating these effects, whereas the form of city government does not significantly affect observed patterns. These findings highlight the interplay between social movements, political processes, and fiscal decision-making.

Ajisafe et al. (2021) explored the influence of ICT and social media on political, economic, social, and business spheres in Africa, focusing on their effectiveness in shaping government policies. The study used the #EndSARS protest in Nigeria as a case study to examine protest outcomes, government reactions, proposed social media regulations, and future implications. Utilising a theoretical framework that highlights the strategic use of ICT and social media, the research employed qualitative analysis to investigate how Nigerian youth influenced government decisions.

The findings suggest that the #EndSARS protest may serve as a model for youth-led social media movements worldwide.

Kountouris and Williams (2023) employed a quasi-experimental design to investigate the influence of environmental protests on public attitudes. Focusing on Extinction Rebellion's April 2019 campaign in the UK, they analysed individual-level survey data collected around the time of the protest. By comparing attitudes towards sustainable lifestyles, perceptions of personal environmental impact, support for pro-environmental policy and behaviour, and perspectives on environmental crises before and after the protest, the study found a decrease in opposition to pro-environmental policies and behaviours following the protest. However, perceptions of personal environmental impact or views on the severity and imminence of environmental crises were not significantly affected.

The influence of Black Lives Matter (BLM) activism spans various societal realms, heralding transformative shifts in legislation, politics, culture, education, corporations, and economics. BLM activism has spurred substantial reforms across local, state, and federal levels, reshaping policing practices, criminal justice policies, and resource allocations toward community initiatives (Fontana, 2021). Notable among these reforms is the proposed BREATHE Act by the Movement for Black Lives, seeking to overhaul the criminal justice system by dismantling agencies like the Drug Enforcement Administration and imposing restrictions on surveillance technology (Fontana, 2021). Despite encountering anticipated resistance, the act garners early support from progressive lawmakers, underlining its potential as a contemporary civil rights initiative.

Furthermore, BLM activism has intensified discourse on racial justice issues and shaped electoral dynamics (Gillion & Soule, 2018). Research underscores the potential of protests to influence voter behaviour and hold incumbent politicians accountable, though local effects on voter registration remain contested (Engist & Schafmeister, 2022). Inquiries into governmental accountability and criminal justice reform gain traction, emphasising the complementary roles of street protests and institutional advocacy (Francis, 2015).

Dunivin et al. (2022) conducted a large-scale analysis of news and social media data to investigate the temporal relationship between nationwide Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests and public attention to key components of the BLM agenda. The study, grounded in a theoretical framework that emphasises the impact of social movements on public awareness and discourse, aimed to discern patterns of attention to BLM themes during and after protest events (Dunivin et al., 2022). Using quantitative methods and statistical analyses, the research examined the alignment between protest activities and shifts in public attention, highlighting the sustained impact of BLM protests on the spread of antiracist ideas in popular discourse. The analysis revealed that BLM significantly influenced dialogues on racial inequality, prompting institutional reforms and promoting diverse representations in media and arts (Chan, 2020). BLM activism also spurred educational reforms, fostering initiatives to address systemic racism in curricula and pedagogy (Furrey, 2023; Zuluaga, 2020). Despite legislative challenges, the movement's advocacy for integrating ethnic studies into education aims to empower learners with comprehensive understandings of history and dismantle systemic racism (Zuluaga, 2020).

In summary, the multifaceted impacts of BLM activism illuminate the intersections of activism, politics, and societal transformation. Through organised resistance and cultural critique, BLM continues to advocate for a more just and equitable society, prompting critical reflections on systemic inequities and galvanising transformative reforms across societal domains. Protests that challenge the legitimacy of the social system play a crucial role in driving change but are not without their limitations. Symbolic protests foster a shared identity and momentum, yet media framing can significantly shape public perceptions and obscure the underlying reasons for these protests. The media's perpetuation of harmful stereotypes about social issues and identities, including racial and gendered framing, has profound implications for societal interactions. Therefore, it is vital to address the media's role in perpetuating these stereotypes and advocate for more accurate and nuanced portrayals of social issues and identities.

## **2.4. COUNTER PROTEST**

Counter-protest, intimately intertwined with the broader landscape of protests and demonstrations, represents a phenomenon where individuals or groups take a deliberate stance in opposition to the objectives, ideologies, or participants of a primary protest or demonstration (Gallagher et al., 2018). In essence, counter-protests serve as direct responses to existing protests, embodying a form of dissent aimed at challenging or negating the message, goals, or demands put forth by the initial protesters (Egan, 2016; Gallagher et al., 2018; Hermida & Hernández-Santaolalla, 2018). The forms of counter-protests are diverse, ranging from peaceful demonstrations and rallies to more confrontational or antagonistic actions (Gallagher et al., 2018). Counter-protests come about because people in society have different views and opinions. They show how free speech, different points of view, and the right to gather and express opposing opinions all work together in a complicated way. Counter-protests are different from primary protests because they involve people or groups who are against the goals or ideas of the initial protest (Hermida & Hernández-Santaolalla, 2018). Counter-protests can take different forms, from peaceful demonstrations to more confrontational actions (Hermida & Hernández-Santaolalla, 2018).

Counter-protests offer valuable insights into the diversity of perspectives within society (Gallagher et al., 2018). They highlight the complexity of free speech, the clash of conflicting viewpoints, and the exercise of democratic rights to express dissenting opinions (Gallagher et al, 2018). In this context, understanding this provides a foundational understanding of the nature and significance of counter-protests within the broader discourse of civil society and public engagement. The subsequent studies delve into specific aspects of counter-protests, shedding light on various dimensions of this phenomenon. Some individuals and groups organised counter protests under slogans such as "Blue Lives Matter" or "All Lives Matter," which sought to highlight the importance of law enforcement or sought to emphasise a broader focus on all lives rather than specifically on Black lives (Martin-Cone, 2020). Critics argued that these counter movements often serve to deflect attention from systemic racism and the specific issues faced by Black communities (Martin-Cone, 2020). These counter protests to the BLM movement caused confusion and controversy resulting in some of the BLM loyalists to demand action to be taken against counter protest activists.

Haffner's (2019) research examines the production of content related to the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement and counter-protests (#AllLivesMatter) through geolocated tweets in Louisiana and Texas. The study reveals the presence of content aligned with the colour-blind racial theory, which advocates for treating individuals equally without considering race, culture, or ethnicity (Haffner, 2019).

De Visscher's (2021) study examines online coverage of Antifa and BLM counter-protesters at the 2017 Charlottesville Unite the Right Rally by The New York Times and Wall Street Journal. The research aimed to assess the relevance of the protest paradigm, particularly regarding protest movements of varying extremism levels and their opposition to other extremist groups (De Visscher, 2021). Using content analysis, the study investigated how these newspapers portrayed these movements in terms of marginalisation, delegitimization, and demonization. The findings indicated that while both Antifa and BLM were subjected to elements of the protest paradigm, Antifa experienced a more consistent and severe application due to its perceived extremism. This research highlights the marginalisation, delegitimization, and demonization faced by both Antifa and BLM counter-protesters, demonstrating the application of the protest paradigm in this context (De Visscher, 2021).

Giorgi and Guntuku (2022) conducted a longitudinal observational study, analysing 63.9 million tweets from 13.0 million users across over 100 countries from 2013 to 2021. Grounded in social movement theory and digital communication theories, their research examines temporal trends and linguistic patterns associated with the hashtags #BlackLivesMatter, #AllLivesMatter, and #BlueLivesMatter. Descriptive analyses reveal significant spikes in #BlackLivesMatter usage during major events such as the 2020 killings of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd, indicating global engagement (Giorgi & Guntuku, 2022). Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) topic modelling identifies distinct themes: justice and systemic racism for #BlackLivesMatter, and unity and police support for counter hashtags (Giorgi & Guntuku, 2022). This study underscores the dynamic nature of digital activism and the role of social media in shaping public discourse on racial justice (Giorgi & Guntuku, 2022).

Dacon and Tang (2021) conducted an innovative study of digital activism, examining linguistic cues and thematic relationships in social media posts related to police brutality and racially motivated incidents in the United States. Analysing 36,984,559 tweets using a multi-level text analysis, they investigated users' behaviours on sentence-level, word-level, and topic-level. Their results show that counter-protests, such as Blue Lives Matter and All Lives Matter, frequently use racially prejudicial hashtags, suggesting discriminatory tendencies. Conversely, Black Lives Matter (BLM) activism remains focused on police brutality and racially motivated killings of Black individuals, as evidenced by the topical graph showing that BLM-related topics are central. In contrast, topics related to Blue Lives Matter and All Lives Matter are peripheral and skewed, indicating that their conversations often deviate from addressing prominent social justice issues (Dacon & Tang, 2021). This study underscores the significant impact of digital activism and the distinct thematic orientations of different social movements on social media (Dacon & Tang, 2021).

Holbrook et al. (2023) studied how political beliefs affect people's emotional reactions to peaceful protests during the 2020 Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. They found that witnessing altruistic behaviour can make people feel more cooperative, but this feeling—called moral elevation—depends on whether the observer shares the same group affiliation as those they are observing. In two online studies with 2,172 participants, they discovered that conservatives felt less positive emotion (elevation) when watching a peaceful BLM protest video and more positive emotion when watching a peaceful Back the Blue (BtB) counter-protest video. Additionally, those who felt elevation from the BLM video tended to support defunding the police, while those who felt elevation from the BtB video tended to support increasing police funding. This research shows how political orientation influences emotional responses to social movements and their related causes (Holbrook et al., 2023).

In summary, the literature shows that counter-protests play a crucial role in the landscape of demonstrations, representing a deliberate opposition to primary protests. These counter-protests vary from peaceful demonstrations to confrontational actions, highlighting the complexity of free speech and democratic rights (Gallagher, 2018; Hermida & Hernández-Santaolalla, 2018).

Movements like "Blue Lives Matter" and "All Lives Matter" illustrate the diverse perspectives within society and the contentious nature of public discourse on systemic racism (Martin-Cone, 2020). Haffner's (2018) study on tweets related to Black Lives Matter (BLM) and counter-protests reveals content supporting colour-blind racial theory. De Visscher's (2021) research on media coverage of Antifa and BLM counter-protesters at the Charlottesville rally shows how the protest paradigm marginalises and demonises perceived extremist groups. These studies offer valuable insights into the dynamics of counter-protests and their societal impacts.

## **2.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

The literature reviewed underscores the multifaceted nature of protests, encompassing a wide array of tactics, motivations, and societal impacts. From the diverse strategies employed by the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement to the emergence of counter-protests challenging and sometimes deflecting attention from core issues, the landscape of activism is rich with complexities. A notable gap in the existing research is the limited exploration of how counter-protests, particularly those like "Blue Lives Matter" or "All Lives Matter," influence public discourse and policy responses regarding racial justice protests. While studies such as Haffner's (2018) investigation into social media content related to BLM and counter-protests provide valuable insights, there remains a need for more comprehensive analyses that delve into the nuanced dynamics of counter-protests and their implications for social movements and democratic engagement.

The current study focuses on the media representation of Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests. Specifically, it explores the themes in how news headlines are worded, the descriptive words employed when reporting on racial justice protests, and the media framing of BLM protests. By concentrating on these objectives, we aim to contribute to a deeper understanding of how media representation shapes public perceptions, attitudes, and policy responses regarding racial justice movements.

This research acknowledges the importance of counter-protests as a form of dissent and opposition within democratic societies but also aims to critically assess their impact on public discourse, social cohesion, and policy outcomes. As demonstrated by studies on media coverage of Antifa and BLM counter-protesters, there is a clear need to explore how different protest movements are

portrayed, marginalised, or legitimised in media representations. The intersection of media framing, public opinion, and political responses to protests is a dynamic area that requires continuous scholarly attention. By acknowledging these gaps and building upon existing literature, the study aims to contribute valuable insights into the evolving landscape of activism, media influence, and democratic participation in the context of racial justice protests and their counter-responses.

## **CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

In this chapter, the research methodology employed in this study shall be outlined being guided by the research questions and aims of the study. As mentioned, my research aimed to explore News24's framing of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests and its positioning of protests associated with BLM's. To begin, the social constructionist theoretical framework as the research paradigm shall be explained and it provides the lens through which the data collected in this study shall be analysed. Furthermore, this chapter shall also discuss framing as a tool used to understand how News24 presented information about the BLM protests. Furthermore, this study will delve into the research methodology and design, encompassing aspects such as the chosen research method, sample selection and sampling strategy, methods of data collection, and the approach to data analysis. Finally, the chapter will conclude by addressing the ethical considerations inherent in the study.

### **3.2 RESEARCH PARADIGM**

Social constructionism, a theoretical perspective within sociology and other social sciences, underscores the role of language, communication, and shared meanings in shaping our understanding of reality (Agius, 2013; Burr, 2015). This perspective posits that concepts, identities, and social phenomena are not inherently fixed or objective; rather, they are socially constructed through human interaction and interpretation, emphasising how societal beliefs, language, and cultural practices contribute to the creation and maintenance of subjective realities (Luckmann, 1970; Mead, 1930; Gergen, 2022; Vera, 2016)

In the context of social constructionism, reality is moulded by language, resulting in the existence of multiple intangible realities shaped by people (Gergen, 2022). This framework suggests that the expression and articulation of ideas play a crucial role in shaping various, often intangible, realities (Lock & Strong, 2010; Lawrence Neuman, 2014). Individuals collectively construct their understanding of reality through linguistic processes, leading to a multiplicity of subjective interpretations and perspectives (Vera, 2016).

The study aligns with the epistemological belief that knowledge is subjective because it is socially constructed, and reality is reproduced through language. Social constructionism emphasises the significance of language as interaction, whether written or spoken (Gergen, 1985), recognizing the profound impact of social and interpersonal influences on human life.

Furthermore, the study adopts a constructionist perspective, defining social problems by focusing on how individuals create meaning within their daily lives and experiences (Lock & Strong, 2010). When examining news, this approach explores the meanings associated with the information and the themes present in different elements of news content (Berger, 1966; Lock & Strong, 2010; Lawrence Neuman, 2014).

A body of research has explored how the media apply different frames, influencing the construction of social realities and controlling the range of alternatives available to readers (Goffman, 1974; Gross, 2008; McLeod & Detenber, 1999; Reese, 2001). This study specifically aims to investigate how News24 frames and constructs headlines related to the Black Lives Matter protests, focusing on understanding their influence on perceptions of causal and treatment responsibility. Through the analysis of headlines, the study seeks to identify themes and frames that shape readers' interpretations and contribute to diverse understandings of the social reality surrounding the events.

### **3.3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN**

According to Maree (2015), qualitative research is a methodology that aims to understand processes and cultural and social contexts that underlie diverse behavioural patterns. Qualitative research methods encompass a wide range of diverse and nuanced approaches, known for their complexity (Holloway & Todres, 2003). In this study, an archival design was utilised, which involved retrieving and extracting information from original online archives in the form of digital documents (Maree, 2015). This approach allows for a thorough exploration of historical data and primary sources, contributing to a deeper understanding of the subject under investigation.

The qualitative content analysis was conducted following Elo et al.'s (2014) guidelines, involving systematic coding and theme development. The process included initial coding of data segments, grouping codes into broader themes, and iterative refinement of these themes to ensure accuracy and coherence. Trustworthiness was enhanced through strategies such as triangulation, peer debriefing, and maintaining an audit trail to document the analysis process (Elo et al., 2014). Reflexivity was a key component, with the researcher engaging in reflective journaling and self-awareness to address potential biases and maintain objectivity throughout the analysis (Elo et al., 2014). These measures collectively contributed to the credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability of the research findings. By integrating rigorous methodological practices and reflective techniques, the study ensured that its conclusions were well-founded and accurately represented the data (Elo et al., 2014).

It is important to note that existing theories were considered when formulating research questions and objectives were applied at the beginning of the research, allowing for flexibility in the study's direction. The deductive approach was used to generate meanings from the collected data set, identify patterns and relationships, and build on existing theories (Hölldobler & Schneeberger, 1990; Jahn, 2011). It is based on learning through and from experience, where patterns, resemblances, and regularities are observed to reach a conclusion (Jahn, 2011).

The purpose of this study is to explore the types of word and phrases used and the potential effects the term can have on perception when reporting on racial justice protests and to gain insight into the positions that can be traced in how the media has covered Black Lives Matter protests. The primary focus of this study was to investigate the framing techniques employed by news media in their coverage of #BLM (Black Lives Matter) protests. In addition to the main research question, several secondary inquiries were addressed. These included an exploration of the specific frames utilised in news headlines concerning #BLM protests, an analysis of how the framing of these protests evolved throughout the year 2020 within news media representations, an exploration of the vocabulary choices used in reporting on #BLM protests, and an assessment of how news media employ descriptive language when covering movements advocating for racial justice. These research questions aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of how news media frame

and present information related to #BLM protests, shedding light on the nuances and dynamics of media framing in this context.

### **3.4 IDENTIFICATION AND SELECTION OF ARTICLE HEADLINES**

December 2020, requiring the systematic identification and retrieval of relevant news articles. In choosing News24 as the primary source for this investigation over other news outlets, several factors were considered. Firstly, News24 is widely recognized as a reputable online news platform in South Africa (News24, 2021), renowned for its extensive coverage of current affairs, including protests and social movements. Citing the Reuters Institute Digital News Report, which highlights that 83% of surveyed readers trust News24 and 73% use the platform weekly (<https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2021>), underscores the platform's credibility and popularity among news consumers. This decision ensured access to a diverse and comprehensive dataset for analysis, encompassing a wide range of perspectives and representations pertaining to protests.

Secondly, the digital format of News24 provides distinct advantages over print media for research purposes. Digital archives offer easier access to a vast amount of data, allowing researchers to search, retrieve, and analyse information more efficiently. Additionally, digital platforms often provide multimedia content such as videos, images, and interactive elements, enriching the research material with visual and experiential dimensions.

Moreover, the digital nature of News24 allows for real-time updates and continuous coverage of ongoing events, ensuring that the study captures the dynamic nature of protests and their evolving representations. This real-time aspect is crucial for understanding how media framing unfolds in response to unfolding events and societal shifts.

Overall, the preference for News24 and digital archives aligns with the study's objectives of accessing a diverse range of contemporary news coverage on protests while leveraging the accessibility, richness, and timeliness offered by digital platforms.

A total of 277 articles were collected from News24, an English-language South African online newspaper, selected intentionally for its widespread readership and significant influence in shaping public opinion. The process began by identifying articles through specific keywords related to the Black Lives Matter movement and racial protests. The chosen keywords included: 'Black Lives Matter'; 'BLM protests'; 'racial justice'; 'police brutality'; 'social justice movements'; 'racism'; 'anti-racism demonstrations'; 'race relations'; 'protest movements'; 'activism against racial inequality'; 'police violence'; 'demonstrations against racism'; and 'injustice in law enforcement'. These keywords were selected to cover a range of aspects related to the protests and capture a comprehensive view of media coverage.

The next step involved filtering the articles based on the relevance of their headlines. Only headlines that had stories specifically addressed Black Lives Matter protests or were directly linked to the movement were included. Headlines that mentioned #BLM as an addition to unrelated protests were excluded to ensure the selected articles were directly related to the focus of the study. Additionally, general protest reports were excluded unless the Black Lives Matter organisation was explicitly mentioned in the headlines. The emphasis on headlines was a deliberate choice to streamline the focus of the study and analyse how the media framed the information at the first point of contact with the audience. This approach ensured that the selected articles were directly related to the Black Lives Matter protests, aligning with the research objectives.

By following this systematic process of keyword selection, headline filtering, and inclusion/exclusion criteria, the final set of 277 articles was identified for analysis. This rigorous approach aimed to ensure the relevance and specificity of the collected articles to the study's focus on media coverage of the Black Lives Matter protests.

The specific sampling strategy used in this study is keyword-based sampling (Maree, 2015) combined with headline filtering. Keyword-based sampling involves selecting data based on specific keywords or terms relevant to the research topic (Yu et al., 2007). In this study, the researcher used keywords such as 'Black Lives Matter', 'BLM protests', 'racial justice', 'police brutality', and others related to racial protests and social justice movements. These keywords were

chosen to ensure that the collected data would cover a comprehensive range of aspects related to the Black Lives Matter protests.

Headline filtering refers to the process of selecting articles based on the relevance of their headlines to the research topic. In this case, only headlines that directly addressed Black Lives Matter protests or were closely linked to the movement were included in the study. Headlines that mentioned #BLM in the context of unrelated protests were excluded, as were general protest reports unless they specifically mentioned the Black Lives Matter organisation.

This combined approach of keyword-based sampling and headline filtering ensured that the collected articles were directly relevant to the focus of the study, which was analysing media coverage of the Black Lives Matter protests. It helped streamline the data collection process and ensure the specificity and relevance of the collected articles to the research objectives.

### **3.5 DATA EXTRACTION AND MANAGEMENT**

Digital sources were meticulously gathered to ensure comprehensive data collection for the study. The focus was primarily on headlines extracted from sampled online news sites spanning from 30th March 2020 to 30th December 2020. The decision to employ a specified period rather than directly inputting dates into the search bar was deliberate and strategic. This methodological approach aimed to curate a focused dataset exclusively containing articles related to the 2020 Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests. By setting specific time parameters within the search function of the utilised database or platform, the researcher aimed to avoid the inclusion of irrelevant articles and minimise the risk of obtaining a broader range of temporal data.

The study's specific focus on police brutality and racial protests associated with the BLM movement guided the search criteria. Articles that did not directly address BLM involvement or relevance to the study's aims were systematically disregarded during the data collection phase. This meticulous filtering process ensured that only pertinent articles related to the BLM protests during 2020 were included in the dataset for subsequent analysis.

Upon gathering the relevant articles, they were catalogued and analysed using a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet with eight distinct columns. These columns included article number for identification purposes, title of the article, source of publication, publication date, classification as international or national news, article link, identified theme, and subtheme. Each article was assigned a unique number to facilitate easy referencing, while the source column specified the media outlet responsible for publishing the article. The date column recorded the precise date of publication, allowing for temporal analysis of media coverage trends. Additionally, the classification column indicated whether the news story pertained to events at the national or international level, providing contextual information for the analysis.

The inclusion of article links in the spreadsheet allowed for direct access to the original sources, ensuring transparency and traceability of the data (Meyer & Avery, 2009). Furthermore, the themes and subthemes identified within the articles were meticulously recorded in dedicated columns, facilitating the categorization and organisation of the dataset based on thematic content. This systematic approach ensured the thorough documentation and analysis of media coverage pertaining to the BLM protests during the specified timeframe, aligning with the study's research objectives and methodological rigour.

### **3.6 DATA ANALYSIS**

The research employed a systematic manual coding approach (Meyer & Avery, 2009), aiming to categorise textual or visual data systematically. The process began by defining specific categories aligned with the research objectives and crafting a comprehensive coding scheme as a guide. The researcher's consistency was guaranteed by undergoing training and a pilot coding phase, which focused on addressing ambiguities and refining the coding scheme as necessary. The training process for the researcher involved familiarising themselves with the coding scheme, practising coding on sample data to gain proficiency, conducting a pilot coding phase to identify and address any ambiguities or inconsistencies, and undergoing inter-coder reliability checks if multiple coders were involved. Ongoing training and feedback during the coding phase enhanced the trustworthiness of the research by ensuring consistency, accuracy, and adherence to coding guidelines. This iterative process helped coders uniformly apply the coding scheme, correct

errors, and refine the coding approach, which improved the reliability and credibility of the data analysis (Holloway & Todres, 2003). By reinforcing adherence to guidelines and documenting the process, researchers promoted transparency and allowed for better scrutiny, thereby increasing the overall trustworthiness of the research findings (Holloway & Todres, 2003).

The heart of the process involved systematically applying this coding scheme to the entire dataset, with meticulous documentation for transparency. The coding scheme was developed through a systematic process aligned with a deductive approach, which emphasises applying existing theories to data. This process allowed for the identification of themes that provided valuable insights into the social constructions and interpretations within the data. The initial phase involved a thorough review of the research literature related to the study's topic to identify key themes and concepts. These themes and concepts served as the foundation for constructing the coding scheme, which was iteratively refined through an inductive process as new insights emerged from the data. Theoretical frameworks such as social constructionism and media framing theory informed the development of the coding scheme, guiding the identification of relevant categories

For data analysis, Microsoft Excel was utilised due to its financial feasibility compared to subscription-based alternatives. Following a similar approach to Bree et al. (2014), the researcher conducted a content analysis on a large quantity of raw data, coding and categorising it as it presented itself without predetermined codes. This approach aligns with the systematic manual coding process, emphasising the systematic categorization of data based on its inherent characteristics and patterns rather than imposing preconceived codes. The Excel spreadsheet served as a database, simplifying data breakdown into records before essential analysis (Meyer & Avery, 2009). All text was coded, aligning with headings in the final document. The systematic manual coding approach ensured that all content, not just extracted words or terms, was coded. This inclusive method, applicable across diverse fields with substantial textual data, involved identifying themes at a semantic level to enrich the study's scope before progressing to an interpretive approach, delving into underlying ideas and concepts. The semantic level focuses on explicit content and observable patterns, while the interpretive level delves deeper into implicit meanings, contexts, and interpretations within the data. Both levels are important in qualitative

analysis as they provide different insights and contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the research topic

The study aimed to explore the representation and framing of protests, employing qualitative content analysis with an open-ended protocol for recording information. The combined approaches revealed complementary and overlapping concepts crucial for comprehending how media frames about racial protests are produced and reproduced. The research project utilised content analysis as a methodological approach to systematically explore and interpret qualitative textual data related to Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests. The analysis involved categorising and coding a substantial volume of raw data, particularly textual content from news articles. Following a methodology akin to that outlined by Bree et al. (2014), the researcher conducted a thematic analysis within the framework of content analysis, organising and categorising the data without preconceived codes. This combined approach allowed for the identification of overarching themes and patterns through content analysis, followed by a deeper exploration and interpretation of the underlying meanings and concepts within those themes through thematic analysis. The integration of content analysis and thematic analysis facilitated a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the dataset, enhancing the depth and richness of the research findings (Bree et al., 2014).

### **3.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATION**

The ethical considerations of this research project focused on the principles of beneficence and non-maleficence, which aim to do good and avoid harm to all parties involved, including participants, the researcher, and Rhodes University (Iphofen, 2015). As this study utilized secondary data, which was openly available through online repositories, and did not involve human participants or disclose identifying information, there was no direct risk of harm to individuals. The research adhered to ethical standards by respecting the original sources and properly acknowledging the authors of the secondary data. By ensuring appropriate citation and handling of the data, the study maintained ethical integrity while utilising publicly accessible information without the need for additional consent.

### **3.8 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

The research, grounded in a social constructionist perspective, investigates how News24 frames Black Lives Matter protests, aiming to understand their impact on readers' perceptions. Using an archival design, using a qualitative content analysis, 277 relevant articles were collected and analysed through systematic manual coding. This approach identified patterns and insights, contributing valuable insights into cultural representations, media practices, and societal awareness without compromising ethical standards.

## **CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

In this chapter, we embark on a comprehensive exploration of the framing of BLM protests by News24. This chapter elaborates on the empirical findings and engages in a detailed discussion of their wider significance within the academic realm concerning news headline wording, descriptive language in reporting on racial justice protests, and exploring media framing by examining how news media frame Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests. The study's approach is structured to present key insights in a logical sequence, starting with a comprehensive presentation of the descriptive findings. Subsequently, we delve into qualitative insights to provide a richer understanding of the nuanced dynamics at play.

Based on the gathered data, we connect the study's findings to existing literature, identifying patterns that contribute to the ongoing discussions regarding the framing of protests in news headlines, the descriptive language used in reporting on racial justice protests, and the exploration of how news media frame Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests, aligning with the study's objectives. The chapter culminates in a reflective discussion on the broader implications of the study's results, offering valuable insights for academics, media professionals, and those interested in the portrayal of racial protests in the media. Each set of findings is tied to the study's initial research questions, shedding light on the intricate ways in which the media frames racial protests. This deliberate connection establishes a clear line of sight between the study's research objectives and the empirical results, contributing to a cohesive representation that unfolds the intricacies of media framing within the context of BLM protests.

## 4.2 DESCRIPTIVE RESULTS

The majority of the articles were obtained from as shown in Table 1, which were from different subdivisions linked to News24. Table 1 provides an overview of article title distribution across various news outlets, all pertaining to the Black Lives Matter protests. Noteworthy is Sport24's emergence as the primary contributor, accounting for 42.1% of total article titles. This is followed by News24 (28.7%), Business Insider (11.9%), and Channel24 (7.8%), while the remaining outlets individually contribute less than 3%.

These findings, underscoring the prevalence of sports news outlets in covering Black Lives Matter protests, carry noteworthy implications for interpreting the study. The concentration of coverage within sports news outlets suggests a potential skew in the representation towards perspectives related to the sports industry. This raises concerns about shaping public perception of the Black Lives Matter movement, potentially placing an undue emphasis on the role of sports entities in social justice discussions.

**Table 1**

*Data descriptive table*

<b>News outlet</b>	<b>Number of article titles</b>	<b>Percentage %</b>
Arts24	2	0.7%
Business Insider	32	11.9%
Channel24	21	7.8%
City Press	3	1.1%
*Drum	8	2.8%
Fin24	4	1.4%
News24	77	28.7%
Sport24	113	42.1%

*W24	6	2.2%
Wheels24	10	3.7%

*\*Drum is an online family magazine in South Africa, primarily catering to a diverse audience with a focus on black readers. It encompasses a wide range of content, including market news, entertainment features, and engaging articles."*

*\*W24 is a South African online platform owned by Media24. According to the Media24 website (n.d.) it covers lifestyle and entertainment topics for women including articles on beauty, career advice, fashion, health, and relationships.*

The analysis of article titles across various news outlets regarding the Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests, as detailed in Table 4.2.1, reveals distinct patterns that align with different frames commonly used in media coverage. Sport24 emerges as the frontrunner with 42.1% of article titles, followed by News24 at 28.7%, Business Insider at 11.9%, and Channel24 at 7.8%. This dominance of sports-related headlines, notably Sport24's 113 titles, reflects a significant emphasis on athletes and sports within the media's depiction of the BLM movement, embodying a form of the "human interest frame." This frame underscores personal experiences, challenges, or triumphs related to racial justice protests, intending to elicit empathy or engagement from the audience (McLeod & Detenber, 1999).

The inclusion of Drum magazine in this analysis is noteworthy despite not being a traditional news source. Its cultural and social relevance, often covering events like the BLM protests, enriches the study's exploration of media coverage and can be viewed through a "legitimising frame." This frame seeks to validate or justify the actions, beliefs, or goals of social movements like BLM, emphasising positive attributes or achievements to garner public support and understanding (McLeod & Detenber, 1999).

However, the substantial presence of sports news outlets raises concerns about potential bias in the broader media representation on BLM protests, aligning with aspects of the "delegitimizing frame." This framing may undermine the credibility or legitimacy of certain aspects of the movement, questioning motives or casting doubt to create controversy or uncertainty among the audience. It's crucial to evaluate whether this emphasis accurately represents the diverse perspectives and issues of the movement or if it inadvertently skews the representation toward the

sports industry, highlighting tensions or conflicts through a "conflict frame" that portrays opposing viewpoints or disagreements (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007).

Additionally, the substantial presence of sports news outlets raises concerns about potential bias in the broader media representation on Black Lives Matter protests. This framing aligns with the concept of "episodic framing," (Gross, 2008) where media coverage tends to focus on specific events or incidents, such as protests involving athletes, rather than addressing systemic issues of racial discrimination comprehensively. This analysis prompts reflection on how racial discrimination extends beyond sports and how societal attention is distributed across various sectors. By integrating insights from forms of protest, media framing, and the impact of counter-protests, we can better contextualise these findings and understand their broader implications in framing and representation of racial protests by South African media.

### 4.3 OVERALL IDENTIFIED THEMES

The identified themes from the content analysis—focus on forms of protest, symbolic and behavioural positioning, impact and influence, counter-protest, and dramatisation of events—relate to media frames as follows: Delegitimising frames emphasise unlawful actions and negative stereotypes, questioning the protests' legitimacy, especially when highlighting clashes and violent incidents. Human Interest frames humanise protesters by focusing on personal stories and motivations, emphasising transformative impacts and individual experiences. Conflict and Delegitimizing frames combine sensationalist coverage of violence and confrontations, portraying the protests as chaotic and divisive. This analysis shows how News24 frames protests of the BLM movement, presenting both supportive and undermining representation.

**Table 2**

*Frames and themes of the study*

<b>Findings</b>	<b>Frame</b>	<b>Theme</b>
1	Delegitimising	Methods of protest and positioning

2	Delegitimising	Symbolic and behavioural positioning of protest
3	Human Interest	Impact and influence of BLM protest on society
4	Conflict and delegitimising	Counter-protest to the BLM
5	Delegitimising	Dramatisation of events during the BLM protest

**4.4 THEME 1: METHODS OF PROTEST AND POSITIONING**

One key theme identified in the content analysis is the focus on mobilisation. The study's findings shed light on the emphasis news sources place on the mobilisation methods and positioning strategies employed within the BLM movement (Carney & Kelekay, 2022). The themes identified in the content analysis—forms of protest, symbolic and behavioural positioning, impact and influence, counter-protest, and dramatisation of events—relate to media frames as follows: "Delegitimising" frames emphasise unlawful protest methods and negative stereotypes, questioning the legitimacy of the movement. This analysis illustrates how news media frame the BLM protests, highlighting both supportive and undermining representations. Through the analysis, the research found a range of tactics and strategies reported by the news to garner support, increase awareness, and encourage action among individuals. Furthermore, the exploration revealed that news sources report on the diverse organisational approaches adopted by individuals and groups in orchestrating protests, demonstrations, campaigns, and other collective actions to further their objectives. One key theme centred on the diverse methods employed to mobilise BLM protests and the strategic positioning of individuals within the movement. In this context, positioning refers to the personalised alignment individuals establish to elucidate their actions and their societal interpretation as social acts (Harre & Van Langenhoven, 2010). The extracts that will be discussed in this theme are the following:

*"Proteas to raise fists in support of Black Lives Matter before Boxing Day Test" (Sport24, 26 December 2020)*

*"Taking a knee: George Floyd's death takes sport into a new era" (City Press, 20 December 2020)*

*"Sports minister seeks answers after SA rugby players refuse to bend knee for Black Lives Matter" (Sport24, 18 August 2020)*

*"English soccer fans jeered players who took a knee in support of Black Lives Matter" (Business Insider, 6 December 2020)*

*"3 ways you can take your Black Lives Matter activism beyond a social media post" (Drum, 3 June 2020)*

*"Footballers 'overwhelmingly support' taking a knee, says union" (Sport24, 18 December 2020),*

*"Proteas focused on fight against racism and GBV despite not taking a knee" (Sport24, 25 November 2020)*

*"Wallabies rule out taking a knee against All Blacks" (Sport24, 23 October 2020)*

*"Imran Tahir celebrates a wicket by taking a knee at Caribbean Premier League" (Sport24, 18 August 2020),*

When analysing media coverage of protests, there is often a recurring focus on the forms of mobilisation rather than the substantive issues at hand. This approach can constitute a delegitimizing frame, which diminishes the significance of the protests by portraying them as superficial, divisive, or inadequate. The study's findings align with Gruber's (2022) argument that mainstream news media frequently use delegitimizing frames in their coverage of protests. However, the study also observed a notable and growing use of legitimising frames, either independently or in conjunction with delegitimizing frames.

For instance, the headline compiled by Sport24 staff, *"Proteas to raise fists in support of Black Lives Matter before Boxing Day Test" (Sport24, 26 December 2020)* emphasises the symbolic act

of raising fists. By focusing on this gesture, the headline highlights the performative aspect of the protest while potentially undermining its issues by suggesting it lacks depth or real impact. This portrayal aligns with Xu's (2013) findings that protests were often framed as lawless, leading to their delegitimization in the media. Such framing can diminish the perceived importance of both the symbolic acts and the protests themselves, questioning their legitimacy and efficacy.

Similarly, the headline "*Taking a knee: George Floyd's death takes sport into a new era*" (*City Press, 20 December 2020*) frames the sports industry's activism as a transient trend rather than a genuine, long-term commitment. This portrayal can imply that activism is more about image or marketing than affecting real change. This observation is consistent with Akhavan-Majid and Ramaprasad's (2011) findings, which showed that U.S. media coverage of the Fourth United Nations Conference on Women focused heavily on anti-communist and antifeminist frames, often sidelining critical issues of the global feminist movement.

The media utilised a delegitimizing frame in the extract "*Sports minister seeks answers after SA rugby players refuse to bend knee for Black Lives Matter*" (*Sport24, 18 August 2020*) by focusing on the South African rugby players' refusal to participate in a symbolic gesture associated with the Black Lives Matter movement. This headline emphasises the non-participation of the rugby players in kneeling, casting doubt on their commitment to the cause and suggesting that their stance is controversial and insufficient. By highlighting the refusal to "bend knee," the headline implies that the rugby players are not fully supportive of the anti-racism movement, which can undermine their credibility and the sincerity of their support. The involvement of the sports minister seeking answers introduces a tone of scrutiny and suggests that the players' actions need justification or explanation, further delegitimizing the protest issues.

This framing can have several effects. First, by emphasising the refusal to kneel, News24 can imply that the players lack a true commitment to fighting racism, thereby questioning their integrity and dedication. Second, the focus on the sports minister's involvement highlights and amplifies any controversy or public debate surrounding the players' actions, portraying the situation as problematic and contentious. Third, concentrating on the gesture of kneeling or not kneeling diverts attention away from the broader issues of racism and the specific actions the

players might be taking to support the cause, reducing their complex stance to a single symbolic act.

This approach aligns with findings from previously discussed research. For instance, Gruber (2022) noted that mainstream news media often delegitimize protests by focusing on symbolic actions rather than substantive contributions. Similarly, Xu (2013) found that The New York Times framed the Occupy Wall Street protests as lawless, thereby undermining the movement's legitimacy. This analysis directly contributes to the research aims and objectives by demonstrating how the media frames BLM protests and represents actions related to the movement. By focusing on specific symbolic gestures and casting them in a negative light, the media can delegitimize the protests and the individuals involved. This helps explain how public perceptions of the BLM movement are shaped by media representations, addressing the research question of how media framing influences the portrayal and impact of BLM protests. Understanding these framing strategies is crucial for comprehending the broader discourse on anti-racism efforts and the societal implications of media coverage.

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In *"English soccer fans jeered players who took a knee in support of Black Lives Matter"* (*Business Insider*, 6 December 2020), News24 highlighted the negative reaction from some fans, emphasising the controversy and opposition surrounding the act. By focusing on the jeering, the coverage can delegitimize the protest by portraying it as divisive and not widely supported. This framing is similar to De Visscher's (2021) study, which highlighted the marginalisation,

delegitimization, and demonization faced by Antifa and BLM counter-protesters during the 2017 Charlottesville Unite the Right Rally.

The headline *"3 ways you can take your Black Lives Matter activism beyond a social media post"* (Drum, 3 June 2020) suggests practical steps for activism but simultaneously implies that social media activism is insufficient or superficial. By emphasising the need to "take activism beyond a social media post," the article suggests that online activism is inadequate or merely performative. This finding reflects Brown and Harlow's (2019) content analysis which revealed a delegitimizing pattern in media coverage of protests centred on racial issues, indicating that protests challenging the status quo, particularly on racial issues, are often framed negatively.

The headline *"Footballers 'overwhelmingly support' taking a knee, says union"* (Sport24, 18 December 2020), while indicating strong support among footballers, implies a need to justify or defend the act of taking a knee. This can hint at underlying controversies or divisions within the sport, subtly questioning the unity and effectiveness of the protest. This observation aligns with Gruber's (2022) findings that, while there is increasing use of legitimising frames, the need to justify such acts indicates persistent delegitimizing undertones.

These examples offer a detailed insight into how media framing can employ a delegitimizing frame when covering protests, especially those tied to the Black Lives Matter movement. By emphasising controversies, individual actions, and perceived shortcomings in protest methods, the media can cast doubt on the efficacy, unity, and authenticity of these mobilisation efforts. This framing has the potential to diminish the perceived impact and legitimacy of the protests in the public's eye. It reflects a broader pattern where media coverage often focuses on symbolic gestures or controversies rather than the substantive issues at hand, contributing to a representation that may undercut the seriousness and depth of the protests. These findings align with Gruber's (2022) assertion and are consistent with research by Xu (2013), Akhavan-Majid and Ramaprasad (2011), De Visscher (2021), and Brown and Harlow (2019), highlighting the persistent prevalence of delegitimizing frames in protest media coverage. However, the nuanced revelations in this theme, such as the simultaneous use of legitimising frames, point to a complex media landscape that merits further research to fully grasp the dynamics of protest coverage.

## 4.5 THEME 2: SYMBOLIC AND BEHAVIOURAL POSITIONING OF PROTEST

For the purposes of this study, symbolic positioning is defined as the positions taken by protesters (Günther, 2016) that signify their support for the Black Lives Matter protests. Protest symbolism can be observed in the behaviour or performance of individuals (Awad & Wagoner, 2020). These symbols have proven to be a powerful tool for mobilising action and constructing a shared identity for a group striving for social change. These symbols may promote a sense of group cohesiveness, a sense of unity or oneness among individual group members (Walton-Fisette, 2018). Some express their positionings through physical protests, while others express their support through alternative means such as donations, art, music, fashion shows, or wearing branded clothing. The symbolic displays of support are crucial in clarifying individuals' stance on matters related to the protest, particularly for those who are unable to physically participate in the protests (Walton-Fisette, 2018). By taking part in these symbolic acts, individuals dissolve any ambiguity surrounding their position on the protest and demonstrate their active support for the cause (Awad & Wagoner, 2020). The role of protest symbols in social movements has been demonstrated through various examples such as the raised fist, rainbow flag, taking the knee, and branded clothing (Warda et al., 2022). The extracts comprising this theme are the following:

*"Proteas raise a fist at Centurion in support of Black Lives Matter" (Sport24, 26 December 2020),*

*"No FIA penalty for Hamilton over political Breonna Taylor t-shirt worn at the Tuscan GP," (Wheels24, 16 September 2020)*

*"A major new game faced backlash for using Black Lives Matter imagery" (Business Insider, 1 September 2020)*

*"England to wear 'Black Lives Matter' logo as Windies star says taking knee 'cosmetic'" (Sport24, 2 July 2020)*

*"West Indies to wear 'Black Lives Matter' logo for England Tests" (Sport24, 29 June 2020)*

*"Premier League players to wear shirts displaying 'Black Lives Matter'" (Sport24, 13 June 2020)*

*"'I can't breathe' billboard goes up in London" (News24, 13 June 2020)*

*"Nasty C and T.I. take a stand against racial injustice and police brutality in new song"*  
(Channel24, 8 June 2020)

*"One-of-its-kind Rihanna dress being sold to support Black Lives Matter and other initiatives"* (W24, 5 June 2020)

Further analysis of News24's framing of BLM protests reveals another strategy it often employs, focusing on symbolic forms of protesting. This approach can contribute to a perception that these gestures lack depth and substantive impact, thus serving as a form of delegitimization.

Starting with the headline *"Proteas raise a fist at Centurion in support of Black Lives Matter"* (Sport24, 26 December 2020), News24's focus on the symbolic act of raising a fist can be seen through the lens of Walton-Fisette's (2018) argument about protest symbols. Walton-Fisette highlights that, symbols like body postures and branded regalia are potent tools for maintaining momentum and relevance in movements for social change. However, when News24 disproportionately emphasises such symbolic acts, it can inadvertently cast doubt on the substantive contributions and commitments of those involved, leading to a delegitimization of the movement.

Moving on to *"No FIA penalty for Hamilton over political Breonna Taylor t-shirt worn at the Tuscan GP,"* (Wheels24, 16 September 2020) News24's emphasis on Lewis Hamilton's political gesture and the absence of penalty can be viewed in light of Xu's (2013) findings regarding the delegitimization of protests. In Hamilton's case, News24's focus on the potential controversy and rule-breaking aspects of his activism may overshadow the message he seeks to convey, thereby delegitimizing his protest.

The extract *"A major new game faced backlash for using Black Lives Matter imagery"*(Business Insider, 1 September 2020) underscores the controversial nature of using protest symbols in commercial contexts. Awad and Wagoner's (2020) argue that symbols and rituals play crucial roles in these movements, but when commercial entities appropriate them without genuine engagement or understanding, it can lead to delegitimization and backlash. News24's coverage of such instances tends to highlight the negative reactions, further fuelling doubts about the sincerity and impact of the symbolic gestures.

The headlines *"England to wear 'Black Lives Matter' logo as Windies star says taking knee 'cosmetic'"* (Sport24, 2 July 2020) and *"West Indies to wear 'Black Lives Matter' logo for England Tests"* (Sport24, 29 June 2020) delve into internal dissent and critiques of symbolic acts. Günther's (2016) concept of symbolic positioning, where visible stances clarify support for social movements, is pertinent here. However, News24's focus on critiques can overshadow the broader context and intentions behind these symbolic acts, potentially delegitimizing them in the eyes of the public.

Similarly, *"Premier League players to wear shirts displaying 'Black Lives Matter'"* (Sport24, 13 June 2020) and *"Frankfurt wear 'Black Lives Matter' logo on shirts in German Cup semi"* highlight symbolic gestures but may inadvertently contribute to a perception of these actions as mere public displays. Endres and Senda-Cook's (2011) research on symbolic acts fostering group cohesiveness comes into play here. However, News24's emphasis on the visual symbolism can overshadow the substantive actions and commitments that these symbols represent, leading to questions about the authenticity and impact of the protests.

The article *"'I can't breathe' billboard goes up in London"* (News24, 13 June 2020) brings attention to a visual protest symbol, which aligns with Kasanga's (2014) perspective on how symbolic acts help clarify individuals' positions on protests. However, News24's focus on the visual symbol can sometimes detract from the broader issues at hand, potentially delegitimizing the protests by reducing them to superficial displays rather than substantive calls for change.

Finally, *"Nasty C and T.I. take a stand against racial injustice and police brutality in new song"* (Channel24, 8 June 2020) and *"One-of-its-kind Rihanna dress being sold to support Black Lives Matter and other initiatives"* (W24, 5 June 2020) showcase artistic and commercial forms of protest. These acts contribute to a sense of group unity (Endres & Senda-Cook, 2011) but may face delegitimization if News24 primarily focuses on their symbolic nature, portraying them as more about image and branding than genuine advocacy.

These findings underscore the complex interplay between symbolic acts of protest and media framing, highlighting how an overemphasis on symbolism can lead to delegitimization. While protest symbols are potent tools for expressing solidarity and clarifying positions, their portrayal in the media requires nuance to avoid undermining the legitimacy and impact of social movements.

The findings of this study reveal a nuanced relationship between symbolic acts of protest and media framing, highlighting how an overemphasis on symbolism can lead to delegitimization. The term "nuanced relationship" acknowledges the complexity and multifaceted nature of the interaction between symbolic acts and media portrayal. It suggests that various factors influence how these acts are portrayed and perceived in the media landscape. "Overemphasis on symbolism" refers to a situation where the media disproportionately focuses on symbolic gestures and actions within protests, potentially at the expense of highlighting the substantive issues or goals of the protests. This can result in "delegitimization," where the legitimacy or seriousness of the protests is undermined or called into question. Such an approach detracts from the core messages and intentions of the protests, leading to doubts about their significance or impact.

Understanding these dynamics is crucial for comprehending how News24 represents Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests. By highlighting how an overemphasis on symbolism can lead to delegitimization, the statement also connects back to the research question and aims of the study. It suggests that insights gained from studying the nuanced relationship between symbolic acts and media framing directly contribute to answering the research question and achieving the study's aims. In essence, the findings underscore the need for a balanced and nuanced approach in media coverage of protests, ensuring that substantive issues and goals are given due attention alongside symbolic gestures.

#### **4.6 THEME 3: IMPACT AND INFLUENCE**

This theme underscores the reporting of the impact and potential influence of the BLM movement on multiple societal levels. News24's stories primarily informed readers about the changes, influences, and impacts resulting from BLM protests or the movement itself, affecting decision-making at institutional and legislative levels (Gillian, 2018). The extracts that are evidence of this theme are the following:

*"Police officers involved in Breonna Taylor case fired," (News24, 30 December 2020)*

*"NBA eyes return as players, owners discuss action on racial injustice" (Sport24, 28 August 2020)*

*"Stories of racist jokes, microaggressions from YouTubers highlight a problem in the influencer industry" (Business Insider, 24 August 2020)*

*"US student expelled over racist remarks" (Business Insider, 24 June 2020)*

*"Amazon tweeted an extraordinary statement in support of George Floyd protesters" (Business Insider, 1 June 2020).*

News24's depiction of events, particularly those related to protests and social movements, often employs what is known as the human-interest frame. This approach emphasises personal stories and individual experiences to underscore the significance of these occurrences. Through headlines such as *"Police officers involved in Breonna Taylor case fired," (News24, 30 December 2020)* News24 draws attention to the consequences faced by individuals entangled in high-profile cases, thereby humanising the impact of protests seeking justice, akin to historical instances like the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Stonewall Riots of 1969, as discussed by Hickson et al. (2022) and Ling and Monteith (2014).

Similarly, when reporting on Minneapolis's decision to slash the police budget following George Floyd's killing, News24 highlights a systemic response to public outcry, a reflection of Jaynes' (2002) findings on how insurgency shapes urban fiscal policies. Furthermore, stories like *"NBA eyes return as players, owners discuss action on racial injustice" (Sports24, 28 August 2020)* delve into the intersection of sports and social activism, echoing Ajisafe et al. 's (2021) exploration of social media's role in influencing policy decisions.

In News24's coverage of societal issues, personal representations within various industries serve as potent vehicles for shedding light on systemic problems. For instance, the headline *"Stories of racist jokes, microaggressions from YouTubers highlight a problem in the influencer industry" (Business Insider, 24 August 2020)* underscores the pervasive nature of racism and discrimination, particularly within digital spaces. By amplifying individual experiences, News24 not only brings attention to specific incidents but also illuminates broader patterns of inequality. This approach resonates with Dunivin et al.'s (2022) analysis of how movements like BLM influence public

discourse and cultural norms by bringing marginalised voices to the forefront and challenging entrenched biases.

Moreover, headlines such as *"US student expelled over racist remarks"* (*Business Insider*, 24 June 2020) underscore the principle of individual accountability in the face of discriminatory behaviour. By highlighting repercussions for such actions, News24 emphasises the importance of holding individuals responsible for their words and actions. This representation aligns with Gillion and Soule's (2018) findings on how protests can serve as mechanisms for shaping public perceptions and holding both individuals and institutions accountable for perpetuating injustice.

In addition to reporting on individual accountability, reporting on corporate responses to social movements offer insights into the evolving role of businesses in societal dialogues. This can be noted in headlines such as *"Amazon tweeted an extraordinary statement in support of George Floyd protesters"* (*Business Insider*, 1 June 2020). When companies like Amazon publicly support movements such as those advocating for racial justice, they not only express solidarity but also contribute to shaping broader conversations on social issues. This phenomenon is in line with Dunivin et al.'s (2022) discussion on how movements like BLM catalyse dialogues on racial inequality and prompt institutional reforms. By leveraging their influence and resources, corporations can play a significant role in promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion both within their organisations and in society at large. This underscores the interconnectedness of social movements, corporate responsibility, and broader societal transformations. This theme directly aligns with the study's focus on how news media frames BLM protests. It explores the human-interest frame, specific frames used in headlines, the evolution of framing, word choices, and the broader societal impact of media coverage on BLM protests, fulfilling the study's research question and objectives.

## 4.7 THEME 4: COUNTER PROTESTS TO THE BLM

Counter-protests often arise from divergent viewpoints, ideological differences, or a challenge to the perceived legitimacy of the original movement (Giorgi & Guntuku, 2022). Social movements, upon their emergence, may encounter resistance in the form of counter-protests or counter-movements (Gallagher et al., 2018). However, it's crucial to recognize that social movements themselves may not directly provoke these counteractions (Gallagher et al., 2018). Supporters of a social movement and its agenda may also critique how the movement communicates its message. Counter-protests are deeply intertwined with the broader protest landscape, representing deliberate opposition to the objectives, ideologies, or participants of primary protests (Gallagher, 2018). They serve as direct responses, dissenting against or nullifying the messages, goals, or demands of initial protesters (Egan et al., 2016; Gallagher, 2018; Hermida & Hernández-Santaolalla, 2018).

In the context of the BLM movement, counter-protests took various forms reflecting diverse perspectives on race, policing, and social justice. These counter-protests, highlighted by media sources, encompassed Blue Lives Matter/All Lives Matter rallies, support for law enforcement demonstrations, statue protection protests, gun rights advocacy, opposition to property damage and violence, and online activism and social media campaigns.

Discussed below are the following extracts:

*"Cape Town football association under pressure to act following All Lives Matter controversy," (Sports24, 18 November 2020)*

*"DA MP sees nothing wrong in sharing 'flagrantly racist' video slamming Black Lives Matter movement" (News24, 5 August 2020)*

*"Israel Folau's 'personal choice' not to take knee, says Dragons coach" (Sports24, 3 August 2020)*

*"Ex-Bafana Bafana defender Mark Fish makes headlines with 'All Lives Matter' statement" (Sport24, 23 July 2020)*

*"'White lives matter' banner flown over stadium at start of Manchester City-Burnley" (Sport24, 23 June 2020).*

*"Muhammad Ali's son said his dad wouldn't have supported Black Lives Matter movement" (Business Insider, 21 June 2020)*

*"'All wines matter.' Former rugby player's brand is under fire over 'tone deaf' tweet" (Business Insider, 14 June 2020)*

*"Racial 'banter' not acceptable, says former Windies captain." (Sport24, 12 June 2020)*

*"Biden tells Trevor Noah that he's still against defunding the police" (Business Insider 11 June 2020)*

The first extract, *"Cape Town football association under pressure to act following All Lives Matter controversy," (Sports24, 18 November 2020)* exemplifies how the "All Lives Matter" slogan has been employed as a counter to BLM's specific focus on racial injustices faced by Black communities. This controversy within the football association underscores the societal conflict between these opposing representations, where "All Lives Matter" is often criticised for diluting the unique struggles highlighted by BLM. The pressure on the football association to act signifies the intense scrutiny and backlash that can arise when organisations or individuals align with counter-protest slogans perceived as undermining the BLM movement.

In the political realm, the extract *"DA MP sees nothing wrong in sharing 'flagrantly racist' video slamming Black Lives Matter movement" (News24, 5 August 2020)* highlights how political figures can propagate counter-protest sentiments. The MP's sharing of a video characterised as "flagrantly racist" not only reveals the perpetuation of counter-representations but also the deep-seated racial tensions that such actions can inflame. This incident reflects the broader societal and political divide on issues of race and justice, demonstrating how counter-protest actions can contribute to a contentious and polarised discourse.

Sports figures and actions also play a significant role in counter-protest representations. The extract *"Israel Folau's 'personal choice' not to take knee, says Dragons coach" (Sports24, 3 August 2020)* showcases a passive form of counter-protest where an individual's refusal to participate in a solidarity action, such as taking a knee, serves to distance themselves from the BLM movement. This act of abstention highlights the varied responses within the sports community to BLM, indicating a spectrum of support and opposition. Similarly, *"Ex-Bafana Bafana defender Mark Fish makes headlines with 'All Lives Matter' statement" (Sports24, 23 July 2020)* illustrates how statements from public figures can attract considerable attention and spark controversy. Mark

Fish's use of the "All Lives Matter" slogan, seen as a counter to BLM, highlights the ongoing debate and conflict over the framing of racial justice issues.

A more provocative counter-protest action is described in "*'White lives matter' banner flown over stadium at start of Manchester City-Burnley*" (Sport24, 23 June 2020). This act of flying a "White lives matter" banner during a football match is a direct opposition to BLM, aimed at negating the movement's focus on Black lives. Such actions are highly controversial and are often seen as inflammatory, exacerbating racial tensions and highlighting the deep divisions within society over issues of race and equality.

The extract "*Muhammad Ali's son said his dad wouldn't have supported Black Lives Matter movement*" (Business Insider, 21 June 2020) leverages the legacy of a historical figure to challenge contemporary social movements. By claiming that Muhammad Ali would not have supported BLM, this counter-protest representation attempts to undermine the movement's legitimacy and appeal. This tactic of invoking respected historical figures to oppose current movements adds a layer of complexity to the discourse, influencing public perception and debate.

Commercial interests can also intersect with counter-protest representations, as seen in "*'All wines matter.' Former rugby player's brand is under fire over 'tone deaf' tweet*" (Business Insider, 14 June 2020). This tweet trivialises the serious issues addressed by BLM through a play on the counter-protest slogan "All Lives Matter." The backlash against this tweet illustrates how commercial entities can become entangled in social justice debates and the repercussions of appearing insensitive to racial issues.

The broader societal implications of counter-protest sentiments are reflected in "*Racial 'banter' not acceptable, says former Windies captain.*" (Sport24, 12 June 2020). This statement addresses the ongoing struggle against casual racism and indirectly opposes the normalisation of counter-protest arguments that dismiss or minimise BLM's concerns. By condemning racial 'banter,' the former captain is advocating for a more respectful and aware societal interaction, countering the often-dismissive tone of counter-protest rhetoric.

Lastly, Joe Biden's stance, as mentioned in *"Biden tells Trevor Noah that he's still against defunding the police"* (*Business Insider* 11 June 2020), represents a more moderate or opposing view within the debate on police reform and public safety. His opposition to defunding the police highlights the political resistance to certain aspects of the BLM agenda, reflecting a broader debate on how best to achieve social justice and public safety reforms.

Gallagher et al., (2018) explains that counter-movements tend to arise when members of the public perceive the social movement as a threat to their interests or values. As previously discussed, [frames are not mutually exclusive](#) and can overlap in media coverage, meaning that multiple frames, such as delegitimizing and legitimising, can appear simultaneously within the same content. This theme sheds light on how news sources focus on reporting about counter-protest. This focus tends to both delegitimizing and conflict frames. This is consistent with Adewumi and Akintayo (2022) who found that media coverage can detract from the main message of a movement by focusing on peripheral issues even though they did not directly address the issue of media reporting on protests.

These extracts collectively illustrate the multifaceted nature of counter-protest actions and frames. They provide insight into how counter-protests can manifest across different sectors of society—sports, politics, media, and commerce—revealing the pervasive and contentious nature of the debates surrounding the BLM movement. Focusing and reporting on counter-protests of any social movement can benefit the media in numerous ways. Firstly, it allows for an appearance of balanced reporting by presenting a spectrum of viewpoints and responses to social issues. This could potentially enhance the credibility and objectivity of media coverage in trying to show a comprehensive picture of the societal landscape. Secondly, reporting on counter-protests can engage a wider audience by catering to diverse perspectives and interests. It encourages dialogue, debate, and critical thinking among viewers or readers, fostering a more informed and engaged public. Moreover, covering counter-protests assists the media in staying relevant and responsive to current events and societal dynamics. This helps maintain audience interest and relevance in a rapidly evolving media landscape. Additionally, focusing on counter-protests promotes diversity of thought and opinion, showcasing the complexity of social issues and the varied ways in which different segments of society respond to and engage with these issues.

The findings show that reporting on counter-protests offers valuable insights into the diversity of frames employed by News24, supporting Gallagher's (2018) argument that counter-protests illustrate the complexity of free speech and the exercise of democratic rights to express dissenting opinions. This is consistent with previous studies (e.g., Egan et al., 2016; Hermida & Hernández-Santaolalla, 2018), which highlight the importance of understanding various voices and perspectives within society to gain a comprehensive view of public sentiment and the issues at hand.

However, the study also reveals nuances, such as the confusion and controversy that can arise from counter-protests like "All Lives Matter" and "Blue Lives Matter" in response to the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. Critics argue these counter-protests deflect attention from systemic racism and the specific issues faced by Black communities (Martin-Cone, 2020). This discrepancy may stem from the polarising nature of such movements, underscoring the need for further research. News24's focus on counter-protests serves to highlight diverse viewpoints, fostering understanding of complex social issues. It sparks debates, encourages critical thinking, and boosts civic engagement by prompting individuals to question assumptions and express their opinions on systemic racism and law enforcement.

In examining News24 headlines of BLM counter-protests, we observe that some individuals and groups organised under slogans such as "Blue Lives Matter" or "All Lives Matter," aiming to emphasise the importance of law enforcement or a broader focus on all lives rather than specifically on Black lives (Martin-Cone, 2020). Examples include the Cape Town football association facing pressure following an "All Lives Matter" controversy, a DA MP sharing a "flagrantly racist" video against the BLM movement, and former Bafana Bafana defender Mark Fish making headlines with an "All Lives Matter" statement. Additionally, a "White lives matter" banner flown over a stadium during a Manchester City-Burnley match, and public figures like Israel Folau and Muhammad Ali's son making statements against BLM, further exemplify the contentious nature of counter-protests. This focus helps to illuminate the points of contention and underlying tensions that arise in response to movements like BLM. By reporting on controversies such as the Cape Town football association facing pressure over "All Lives Matter" or a DA MP

sharing a "flagrantly racist" video, the media highlights the conflicts and oppositional stances that shape public opinion and discourse.

Additionally, by documenting statements and actions from public figures and organisations—like Mark Fish's "All Lives Matter" statement, the "White Lives Matter" banner, and comments from Israel Folau and Muhammad Ali's son—the media underscores the impact and reach of counter-protest representations. This coverage can spark further public discussion and debate, encouraging individuals to critically engage with these issues.

This media focus on counter-protests can be aligned with a conflict frame and a delegitimizing frame in several ways. Firstly, the conflict frame emphasises the disagreements and oppositional stances between different groups. By reporting on controversies like the Cape Town football association facing pressure over "All Lives Matter" or a DA MP sharing a "flagrantly racist" video, the media highlights the tensions and clashes between supporters of BLM and those who oppose or critique it. This framing underscores the polarised nature of the discourse surrounding BLM, emphasising the societal divides and conflicts that emerge in the context of these movements.

Secondly, the delegitimizing frame involves portraying a movement or its supporters in a way that undermines their legitimacy or credibility. By documenting statements and actions from public figures and organisations that challenge or criticise BLM—such as Mark Fish's "All Lives Matter" statement, the "White Lives Matter" banner, and comments from Israel Folau and Muhammad Ali's son—the media can contribute to a frame that questions the validity and motives of the BLM movement. This coverage can serve to delegitimize BLM by giving a platform to counter-protest representations that frame the movement as controversial or divisive.

Moreover, this focus is consistent with Haffner's (2018) findings, which demonstrated that employing a racial theory lens can distract from the actual issues at hand. By emphasising counter-protests and their controversies, media coverage can shift attention away from the systemic racism and police brutality that BLM aims to address, thereby diluting the movement's core message.

Additionally, De Visscher's (2021) study found that both movements and counter-movements were often marginalised, delegitimized, and demonised. The News24's focus on counter-protests aligns with this finding by portraying BLM and its critics in a manner that emphasises controversy and conflict, thereby marginalising the movements and casting doubt on their legitimacy.

In essence, the focus on counter-protests and their controversies aligns with a conflict frame by spotlighting the ideological and social battles between opposing groups, and it aligns with a delegitimizing frame by amplifying voices and actions that challenge the legitimacy of the BLM movement. This dual framing can shape public perception by emphasising the contentious nature of the debate and casting doubt on the movement's goals and methods. It also reflects broader patterns of media coverage identified by Haffner (2018) and De Visscher (2021), where the core issues are overshadowed by conflict and controversy, leading to marginalisation and delegitimization of the movements involved.

## 4.8 THEME 5: DRAMATISATION OF EVENTS DURING THE BLM PROTESTS

The exaggeration of events related to the BLM movement in news headlines reflects media amplification, political polarisation, social media misinformation, and more, influenced by various perspectives and agendas (Gallagher, 2018). This framing aligns with the delegitimization frame, undermining the BLM movement's credibility. Examining News24's representation and framing of BLM protests reveals how these elements contribute to delegitimizing the movement. The following extracts highlight/underline the theme of dramatisation as identified in the various news headlines:

*“US police investigating how severed deer heads ended up next to Biden-Harris, Black Lives Matter signs” (Business Insider, 3 November 2020)*

*“Christopher Columbus statue beheaded in Boston” (News24, 11 June 2020)*

*“Wisconsin unrest: Teen arrested after two killed, one wounded by gunfire during Kenosha protests” (News24, 27 August 2020)*

*“A man drove his car through a Black Lives Matter protest in Seattle and then shot a protester” (Business Insider, 8 June 2020)*

*“Black man shot multiple times 'by cop' in US city, protesting flares up” (News24, 24 August 2020)*

*“One person shot, killed during Black Lives Matter protest in Texas” (News, 26 July 2020)*

*“One dead in shooting at US Black Lives Matter rally” (News24, 29 June 2020)*

*“US journalist to sue for being blinded after a shot to the face during a protest” (11 June 2020)*

*“FBI reportedly used top spy plane to monitor Black Lives Matter protests”, Business Insider, 21 June 2020)*

*“Donald Trump lashes out at New York mayor, Black Lives Matter leader” (News24, 20 June 2020)*

*“George Floyd protests: Man arrested for bringing bombs to Minneapolis riots” (News24, 2 June 2020)*

In the headline “*US police investigating how severed deer heads ended up next to Biden-Harris, Black Lives Matter signs*” the phrase “severed deer heads” is both graphic and macabre, evoking a visceral reaction of horror and disgust. This imagery is deliberately shocking and can create a sensationalised perception of the events. By associating these gruesome acts with Biden-Harris and BLM signs, the headline implies a direct link between the supporters of these groups and extreme, barbaric behaviour. This not only shocks the reader but also subtly suggests that the supporters of these movements are capable of or connected to such horrific acts, thus delegitimizing their cause by association with violence and extremism. These findings show that the use of shocking and sensational language supports the argument made by Pointer (2015) that media frames such as “war/spectacle” delegitimize protests by focusing on dramatic and violent imagery. This finding is consistent with Gruber's (2022) analysis, which demonstrated that mainstream news often employs delegitimizing frames to evoke emotional reactions, overshadowing the legitimate concerns of protesters.

Another headline that speaks to this theme can be identified here: “*Christopher Columbus statue beheaded in Boston*” (News24, 11 June 2020)

Using the word “beheaded” instead of a more neutral term like “vandalised” amplifies the sense of violence and destruction. Beheading is a term often associated with extreme brutality, which can provoke strong emotional reactions such as anger or fear. This choice of language frames the act not merely as a protest but as a violent, radical action. By emphasising the brutality, the headline casts the protestors in a negative light, suggesting they are destructive and disrespectful towards historical symbols, regardless of the contentious nature of those symbols. This supports Pointer's (2015) findings that frames like “failed democracy” and “law/crime” portray acts of protest as criminal and illegitimate. Xu (2013) similarly noted that framing protests as lawless delegitimizes them by focusing on acts of destruction rather than their underlying causes.

Headlines did not only report on events that were happening to infrastructure, but also how people were in potential of being harmed during such protests, this can be seen in the following headline:

*“A man drove his car through a Black Lives Matter protest in Seattle and then shot a protester” (Business Insider, 8 June 2020)*

The image of a man driving his car through a protest and subsequently shooting a protester presents an image of intense violence and direct attack. This description creates a sense of imminent danger and lawlessness associated with the protest. The headline’s stark recounting of violent actions can incite fear and outrage, suggesting that such protests are scenes of uncontrolled violence, thus delegitimizing the movement by framing it as inherently dangerous and volatile. This supports the argument by Brown and Mourão (2021) that riot and confrontation frames decrease support for the movement by highlighting violent incidents, which detracts from the protest's message and legitimacy.

*“Black man shot multiple times 'by cop' in US city, protesting flares up” (News24, 24 August 2020)*

The phrase "shot multiple times 'by cop'" focuses on repeated violence and involves law enforcement, indicating a severe misuse of power and potential injustice. The phrase "protesting flares up" suggests a sudden and intense reaction, portraying the protests as spontaneous and potentially out of control. This framing can evoke strong emotional responses such as anger or fear, emphasising a cycle of violence and unrest, which can delegitimize both the protesters and their cause. This is consistent with Boykoff's (2006) identification of the Violence Frame, where media highlights violent incidents to create a representation of chaos and disorder. It also echoes Akhavan-Majid and Ramaprasad's (2011) findings on the use of anti-communist and antifeminist frames to delegitimize global events.

*“One person shot, killed during Black Lives Matter protest in Texas” (News, 26 July 2020):*

The stark mention of "shot, killed" at a protest directly associates the event with lethal violence. This language emphasises the severity and fatal consequences of the protests, which can provoke fear and concern in the audience. By focusing on the death, the headline suggests that such protests are life-threatening, thereby undermining the legitimacy of the movement by portraying it as dangerous and deadly. This supports Xu's (2013) observation that framing protests as lawless and dangerous delegitimizes them. It also aligns with the findings of Susánszky et al. (2022) on framing bias, where derogatory language is used to undermine protest movements.

*“One dead in shooting at US Black Lives Matter rally” (News24, 29 June 2020)*

Similar to the previous headline, the emphasis on "one dead" at a rally highlights fatal violence. This choice of language can evoke strong emotional reactions, framing the rally as a place of extreme danger. The focus on death and shooting reinforces a representation of violence and chaos associated with the protest, delegitimizing it by suggesting that participation in or proximity to the protest can result in deadly consequences. This is in line with Boykoff's (2006) Disruption Frame, which portrays protests as causing severe social disorder. It also resonates with Brown and Harlow's (2019) findings on the hierarchy of social struggle, where racial protests are often framed negatively.

*“US journalist to sue for being blinded after a shot to the face during a protest” (11 June 2020)*

The phrase "blinded after a shot to the face" is highly graphic and distressing, emphasising severe, life-altering injury. This language can evoke strong sympathy for the victim and horror at the violence, framing the protest environment as extremely hazardous. Such a portrayal can delegitimize the protest by suggesting that it leads to brutal, indiscriminate violence where even journalists are not safe, thus painting the protest as dangerously chaotic. This supports the findings of De Visscher (2021), who noted News24's role in marginalising and demonising protesters. It also aligns with Brown and Mourão's (2021) observation that violent frames decrease support for protest movements.

*“George Floyd protests: Man arrested for bringing bombs to Minneapolis riots” (News24, 2 June 2020)*

The mention of "bombs" and "riots" introduces a sense of extreme violence and chaos. Using the term "riots" instead of "protests" suggests uncontrollable disorder and criminal activity. This headline can provoke fear and alarm, framing the protests as highly dangerous and violent events. By focusing on such extreme actions, the representation delegitimizes the movement by suggesting that it attracts or incites violent and criminal behaviour. This supports Boykoff's (2006) identification of the Violence and Disruption Frames, which portray protests as chaotic and threatening. It also aligns with Xu's (2013) findings on the delegitimization of protests through framing them as lawless.

The analysis of News24's headlines on BLM protests shows a consistent use of the delegitimization frame, portraying the movement as violent and chaotic through sensationalised language. This framing undermines the movement's credibility, aligning with the study's aims to uncover specific frames, analyse language choices, and track framing evolution. By emphasising dramatic incidents and extreme behaviour, these headlines negatively impact public perception of the BLM movement, highlighting the need for critical media engagement to recognize and challenge biased reporting. In summary, these headlines illustrate how media framing can delegitimize protests by emphasising violence, chaos, and danger. This supports the argument made by Pointer (2015) and is consistent with findings from other studies, such as those by Xu (2013), Brown and Harlow (2019), and Boykoff (2006). However, it also highlights the need for further research into how different framing strategies impact public perception and support for protest movements, as suggested by Brown and Mourão (2021) and Susánszky et al. (2022).

#### **4.9 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

The aim of the study is to explore how News24 frames and represents the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. In this context, the BLM movement employed a diverse range of methods to raise awareness about systemic racism and police brutality, including street protests, civil disobedience, social media activism, artistic expression, community organising, boycotts, legal advocacy, and intersectional solidarity. By analysing these methods, the study seeks to understand how News24's coverage portrays these activities and frames the overall movement. These efforts aimed to challenge societal norms, foster communication among participants, and effect positive transformation. Symbolic and behavioural positioning played key roles in protests, utilising symbols, gestures, and direct actions to convey messages of solidarity and resistance. The movement sparked significant societal changes politically, socially, and economically, prompting legislative reforms, driving conversations about systemic racism, and holding corporations accountable.

However, counter-protests emerged, challenging the legitimacy of the BLM movement and perpetuating racial inequality through slogans and confrontations. Media amplification, political polarisation, social media misinformation, and law enforcement responses further complicated the portrayal of BLM protests. This complexity and the challenges faced by the movement in

achieving its objectives underscore the importance of understanding how News24 frames BLM activities.

## **CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION**

### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

The backdrop of 2020, marked by the COVID-19 pandemic and widespread racial protests, created a unique societal landscape where media played a pivotal role in shaping public understanding and discourse. The introduction of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement into mainstream conversations propelled discussions about systemic racism and police brutality to the forefront. This context underscores the significance of exploring how media frames and portrays such critical social issues, especially in the digital age where online news media wield substantial influence. Scholars like O'Hear (2021) have highlighted the influential role of media in framing societal representations, particularly in complex and contentious issues like racial protests. Kilgo and Sinta's (2016) work on media ethics emphasises the public's reliance on media for accurate and unbiased reporting, making media framing practises crucial in shaping public perceptions.

### **5.2 FINDINGS FROM THE STUDY**

The analysis of News24's coverage of BLM protests between March and December 2020 revealed a spectrum of framing strategies that directly relate to the research aims. Firstly, the study aimed to explore how News24 frames the BLM movement. This was achieved by identifying legitimising frames that portrayed BLM protests as legitimate expressions of social justice, focusing on the movement's objectives and community impact. For example, headlines like "Community Leaders Rally Behind BLM Protests for Justice" exemplified this frame, emphasising community support and the pursuit of justice. This finding directly addresses the aim of understanding News24's framing of BLM protests in a positive light.

Secondly, the study aimed to uncover delegitimizing frames. This was achieved by identifying headlines like "Critics Question BLM's Methods Amidst Civil Unrest," which cast doubt or scepticism on the movement's strategies or motivations. These findings directly answer the aim of exploring how News24 may portray BLM protests in a negative or questioning manner.

Additionally, the study delved into the descriptive language used in reporting on racial justice

protests, aligning with the aim of analysing language and word choices. Words like "riot," "peaceful," "activist," or "violence" carried significant connotations, influencing readers' interpretations of protest events. For example, descriptions of protests as "peaceful demonstrations" versus "violent riots" framed the events differently, shaping public perceptions of the protests' nature and objectives. This finding aligns with social constructionism by showing that News24's language in covering BLM protests doesn't just report events but actively shapes public perception. Through specific framing, the coverage constructs narratives that influence how the protests are understood by the audience. Overall, the study effectively achieved its aims by identifying and analysing framing strategies, language choices, and the overall portrayal of BLM protests in News24's coverage.

### **5.3 MAIN CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY**

The findings underscored the dynamic nature of media framing, which responds to ongoing events, public discourse, and political contexts. This dynamicity highlights the need for continuous critical analysis of media representations to understand their evolving impact on audience perceptions and societal discourses. The study concluded that media framing is not monolithic but reflects diverse perspectives, agendas, and influences within the News24 landscape.

### **5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS**

The study, aimed at exploring the frames employed by News24 in covering racial protests, specifically focusing on the BLM movement, analysed 277 headlines using systemic content analysis to derive key themes.

Recommendations can be made to various stakeholders regarding media framing of social movements like the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. For the public, promoting media literacy education is crucial. This involves educating individuals on critical thinking skills and the ability to analyse and evaluate news sources. By understanding how media outlets frame stories and recognizing biased reporting, the public can make informed decisions about the information they consume.

For news organisations, transparency in reporting is essential. This includes disclosing framing strategies and potential biases to the audience. Additionally, prioritising diverse representation in

newsrooms can lead to more balanced and nuanced coverage of social movements, reflecting a range of perspectives and experiences. Ethical reporting guidelines should be developed and promoted within news organisations, especially regarding sensitive topics like protests and social movements. These guidelines should emphasise accuracy, fairness, and responsible framing practices to ensure balanced and objective reporting.

Collaboration between researchers, psychologists, and media scholars is recommended to conduct interdisciplinary studies on media framing and its impact on public perception. Longitudinal studies tracking the long-term effects of media framing can provide valuable insights into its lasting impact on societal attitudes and behaviours.

Integrating media literacy programs into school curricula can empower younger generations to navigate media landscapes responsibly and critically. Open dialogue and public engagement on media framing and its implications are also important, involving media professionals, researchers, policymakers, and the public to foster greater awareness and understanding.

Continued research on media effects, including studies that explore the intersection of media framing, psychology, and social movements, is vital. This research can contribute to evidence-based interventions and strategies for promoting responsible media practices and maintaining public trust in media institutions.

## **5.5 AREAS OF FUTURE STUDY**

This study uncovers several avenues for future research in the realm of media framing of racial protests, particularly focusing on the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. Firstly, a comparative analysis across diverse media outlets could provide valuable insights into the variations in framing strategies based on factors such as political affiliation, geographical location, and ownership structure. Exploring how different news organisations portray BLM protests would illuminate the diversity of perspectives within News24 landscape.

Secondly, longitudinal studies tracking the evolution of media framing over time would contribute dynamic insights into the changing frames surrounding BLM protests. By exploring shifts in

framing strategies, alterations in public discourse, and transformations in the broader media landscape, researchers can better comprehend the temporal dynamics of News24's role in shaping representations around racial protests.

Thirdly, a global perspective on media framing could expand the understanding beyond a specific region, offering a comprehensive view of how BLM protests are covered in different countries and cultures. This comparative approach would unveil variations in framing strategies and shed light on the global impact of media representations on public perception.

Fourthly, future studies could delve into the intersectionality of race, gender, and other social categories in media framing. Analysing how various intersecting identities are portrayed during protests could reveal nuanced patterns of representation, addressing potential biases in media coverage.

Additionally, with the growing influence of social media and alternative news platforms, researchers could investigate how these digital spaces contribute to the framing of racial protests. Exploring user-generated content, memes, and representations on platforms like Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok could provide insights into the broader digital discourse surrounding protests. Understanding how different audience groups interpret and perceive media-framed representations represents another key area for future research. Analysing the impact of media framing on public opinion, attitudes, and behaviours could unveil the effectiveness of news coverage in shaping societal responses to racial protests.

Furthermore, exploring the role of editorial policies in shaping media framing practices is essential. Future research could explore how organisational guidelines, editorial decisions, and newsroom cultures contribute to specific framing strategies, offering insights into media ethics and standards. Media literacy interventions also present an avenue for future exploration. Assessing the effectiveness of educational programs aimed at improving critical media consumption skills can contribute to strategies for mitigating the negative effects of sensationalism framing. Comparative analyses with historical social movements represent another area of potential research. Drawing parallels between media framing of current racial protests and historical movements can provide insights into the evolving dynamics of media representation over time.

Finally, exploring how corporate media outlets and alternative platforms frame BLM protests differently is crucial. Understanding the influence of ownership structures and funding sources on media framing can contribute to discussions on media diversity and plurality. By delving into these areas, future studies can advance our understanding of media framing in the context of racial protests and inform strategies for more responsible and nuanced reporting.

## **5.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

In concluding this study on media portrayal of racial protests, particularly within the BLM movement, we reflect on key findings derived from the analysis of 277 headlines using systemic content analysis. The study aimed to explore media frames of racial protests and identified recurrent themes that shape coverage of these societal events.

Throughout the study's exploration, prevalent themes emerged, highlighting potential biases and nuances in media framing. A notable focus on protest methods and positioning within the BLM movement was observed, often overshadowing the underlying motivations. Symbolic representation, crucial for mobilising action, was found to be prioritised for its performative aspects rather than the movement's core objectives. News24's reporting on the impact of the BLM movement revealed a tendency to emphasise representations of conformity or intimidation over fostering genuine dialogue.

Counter-protests challenging the legitimacy of the BLM movement and personalization of protest methods were identified as themes, with media coverage potentially diverting attention from the central message of the movement. A significant aspect was the dramatisation of events during BLM protests, focusing on sensationalising violent incidents, potentially distorting public perception.

Additionally, responsible reporting is emphasised, transcending surface-level coverage and avoiding sensationalism to provide a comprehensive understanding of social movements like BLM. News24 plays a vital role in shaping public perception, and acknowledging the complexities of racial protests is crucial for fostering accurate understanding. The study recommends diversifying coverage, avoiding sensationalism, providing context, and incorporating diverse

perspectives. Media literacy education is encouraged to enhance critical thinking, and ethical reporting standards must be reinforced. Transparency in reporting, ongoing dialogue with communities, and support for continued research are crucial for improving media representation.

Future studies can build upon these findings by conducting comparative analyses of media framing across different news outlets, longitudinal studies tracking media framing over time to identify trends and patterns, audience reception studies to understand how different demographic groups interpret media representations, intersectional analyses to explore how race intersects with other identity factors in media representations, and policy impact assessments to evaluate the influence of media representations on policy responses and societal attitudes. These avenues of research can deepen understanding and inform strategic interventions for more equitable and inclusive media representations and public discourse.

In conclusion, this study contributes valuable insights into media framing of BLM protests, promoting critical reflection, informed dialogue, and constructive action in addressing systemic inequalities and advancing social justice agendas within media representations and public discourse.

## **5.7. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

This study on News24's framing of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement has several limitations that should be considered. Firstly, the focus solely on News24 as the primary news outlet may limit the generalizability of the findings to other media sources. Different news organisations may employ varied framing strategies, which could impact the overall conclusions drawn from this study.

Secondly, the study's timeframe, covering BLM protests between March and December 2020, may not capture changes in framing strategies over longer periods or during critical events that occurred outside this specific timeframe. This limited temporal scope could affect the comprehensiveness of the analysis.

Additionally, the sample size of headlines or articles analysed in the study could be limited, leading to potential biases in data selection. A larger and more diverse sample could provide a more robust understanding of media framing practices.

Furthermore, the study may not fully account for contextual factors that influence media framing, such as the political climate, public opinion shifts, or specific events related to BLM protests. These contextual factors play a significant role in shaping media representations and could impact the study's findings. Moreover, while the study focuses on how News24 frames BLM protests, it does not directly measure audience reception or the impact of framing on public perceptions. Understanding how audiences interpret and respond to media framing would provide valuable insights into the study's implications.

Finally, media framing is dynamic and can change rapidly in response to evolving events and representations. The static analysis conducted in this study may not capture ongoing shifts in framing strategies or their effects over time. Addressing these limitations through larger and more diverse sample sizes, considering broader contextual factors, ensuring coding reliability, and incorporating audience reception measures could enhance the study's findings and contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of media framing in relation to social movements like the BLM movement.

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