

How does mainstream print media frame service delivery protests? The application of the protest paradigm and propaganda model in the South African case

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COMPULSORY DECLARATION

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Abstract

This thesis examines how the South African mainstream print media frame service delivery protests in the country. Studies in countries such as the United States (U.S.), Brazil and Canada show that media coverage of social movements conforms to the protest paradigm by depicting protesters as violent, destructive, unreasonable and a threat to the national economy. This thesis builds on existing literature on the protest paradigm, framing theory, agenda setting and the propaganda model (PM) to analyse mainstream print media coverage of service delivery protests in South Africa. The thesis examines the inclusion of the voices of protesters and women in the press, use of terminology, diversity of news content and media coverage of the underlying causes of the protests. This was done to determine how media coverage of protests in South Africa fits within the global debate on mainstream media coverage of social movements. A sample of 603 news articles from 10 different English-language mainstream newspapers were analysed longitudinally using a quantitative content analysis. The selected time, spanned over a six-year period starting on 15 January 2016 and ending on 12 August 2021. The findings showed that the media tends to marginalise protesters or groups that are challenging the status quo and thus the coverage of service delivery protests conforms to the protest paradigm. The mainstream press foregrounds episodic frames such as violence and destruction when reporting on these protests. The thesis concludes by illustrating that extensive coverage of violence associated with service delivery protests has a potential to escalate conflict instead of contributing to peaceful resolution of service delivery problems. Because of the power that the mainstream media holds in a society, the thesis proposes that the South African mainstream press could focus instead on alternatives to violence by emphasising positive action taken by both conflicting parties to solve service delivery problems.

Keywords: Framing theory; violence; mainstream media; press; media coverage; protest; protest paradigm; South Africa

Chapter 1: Introduction

According to the South African Press Code of Professional Practice, “the primary purpose of gathering and distributing news and opinions is to serve society by informing the citizens and enabling them to make informed judgements on the issues of the time” (Kruger, 2004, p. 1). The normative role of journalism from this perspective is to produce news that reflects a diversity of viewpoints and positions (Wolfgang et al., 2021). Due to the role of journalism in facilitating public political discussions and participation, journalists in South Africa see “themselves as truth tellers, the Fourth Estate and *as* performing a watchdog function” (Ndlovu, 2015, p. 125).

Apart from facilitating public political discourse and providing space for dissent, journalism is a necessary component of a healthy democracy (Albæk et al., 2014; Brookes, 2020; Skogerbo, Josefsen, & Fjellstrom, 2019). For example, Coronel (2010) argues that the press as the Fourth Estate exists primarily as a check on those who hold public office and consequently prevents the misuse of power. However, some scholars argue that the press does not live up to this normative role (Friedman, 2011; Kruger, 2004; Sparks, 2009; Wolfgang et al., 2021). These individuals support the political economy approach which views “media as serving an ideological function, legitimising the existing *liberal* order on behalf of the ruling classes” (Kruger, 2004, p. 6). From this perspective, the media is not entirely neutral. It is used by the dominant elites who ensure that media products support the dominant consensus (Kruger, 2004).

Kruger (2004) notes that in South Africa “media products follow the money and *as the result* poor people are left out in the cold” (p. 6). This view is echoed by Sparks (2009) who points out that during transition from apartheid to democracy, commercial mainstream press in the country was subjected to less radical changes. Today, private owned newspapers are criticised for continuing to privilege the interest of white or middle-class audience who have the most disposable income at the expense of the historically disadvantaged individuals (Chiumbu & Radebe, 2020; Chiumbu et al., 2018; Sparks, 2009; Sparks, 2011). Because of media’s focus on an elite audience, during social unrest, news editors are expected to frame these protests in a way that is appealing to the target audience (see Kruger, 2004). This includes the portrayal of protests that do not conform to legislative regulations or those that are challenging neoliberal policies as illegitimate (Day, Cornell, & Malherbe, 2021).

This thesis will acknowledge the contribution made by various scholars on mainstream media coverage of student movements, labour movements, social movements, collective action, and protests in South Africa before presenting the author's main findings and argument. Studies on protests in the country show that there is a contradiction between the South African National Editor's Forum (SANEF) conceptualisation of the role of the press as the watch dog of the public interest or facilitator of public political discussions and the way in which the previously marginalised communities are treated and represented in the mainstream media (Duncan, 2016; Friedman, 2011). The tendency by the mainstream press to target an elite audience has led some scholars to dismiss the watchdog function of the media (Chiumbu, 2016; Friedman, 2011; Schutte, 2015). For example, Friedman (2011) believes that the press is the eyes and ears of the suburban middle class and the freedom it seeks to safeguard is that of the middle class.

This thesis will focus specifically on the contradiction between the role of the press in facilitating peaceful resolution to social problems and the way in which service delivery protests or dissenting views are framed in the mainstream media. However, before outlining the rationale for this study and the main objectives, it is essential to explain some concepts that will be employed in this thesis. These terms includes protests, social movements and collective action and they are used interchangeable with service delivery protests. The concept, mainstream media will also be used frequently in this study.

1.1 A conceptualisation of protests, social movements and, collective action

According to Orum (1974) "a... protest movement is an organisation, or cluster of organisations, whose purpose is to change the established political system" (p. 183). The aim of a protest is to challenge the established political, economic, and social arrangements. However, it is important to note that this definition is too formal, and it excludes less organised social movements such as the ongoing service delivery protests in South Africa. In this context, service delivery protests refer to a "collective action by a group of community members against a local municipality because of poor or inadequate provision of basic services, as well as a wider spectrum of concerns including government corruption, rampant crime, and unemployment" (Matebesi & Botes, 2017, p. 82). Service delivery protests do not conform to the traditional conceptualisation of social movements by Western scholars. This is because unlike Western social movements, service delivery protests are similar to what Young, Selander, and Vaast (2019) refer to as crowds since they are unorganised collectives with no identifiable coordination structures.

Similar to the conceptualisation of service delivery protests, a collective action “is a response to an objective state of disadvantage” (Van Zomeren, Spears, & Postmes, 2008, p. 505). In other words, people with shared values often act together or protest together to pursue their interests (Oliver, 1993). According to Snow et al. (2019) unconventional collective action such as looting rioters cannot be easily separated from social movements because even though these events are sporadic and dissipate quickly, they involve prior planning, negotiation, and organisation. In this case, this means that service delivery protests can be regarded as social movements even though they lack clear coordination structures. Importantly, “social movements can be thought of as collectivities acting with some degree of organisation and continuity outside of institutional... channels for the purpose of challenging... extant authority...” (Snow et al., 2019, p. 10).

It is crucial to emphasise that the conceptualisation of social movements by Western scholars tend to exclude the poor resourced movements found in developing countries. For example, Pullum (2014) notes that a social movement’s life cycle involves four distinct stages namely, emergency, coalescence, institutionalisation, and decline. During emergency, people start to identify a social issue and they try to bring it to the public attention. During the coalescence stage, leadership structures are created to solve the problem and the institutionalisation stage is when a movement is formed. The last stage, decline is when a movement has failed or achieved its objectives. Clearly, only one stage is applicable to service delivery protests, and that is emergency stage, and the others are not because service delivery protesters do not form established movements and these protests are recurring and thus there is no decline stage. However, they are still social movements because they occur as a result of prior planning where main leaders are involved. Further, service delivery protests share some characteristics with Western social movements, and this includes the idea that when there are weak ties between the government and protesters these movements often turn violent (Useem, 1998).

This is very relevant because Wasserman, Bosch, and Chuma (2018a) show that service delivery protests are not only about the top-down provision of basic services. These protests often turn violent because protesters are frustrated by the elites who fail to listen to them, and this includes not only the government but also the mainstream media, academic institutions, and even non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Apart from this, scholars have extensively researched why people engage in protest activities (Klandermans, 2013; Kurer et al., 2019; Meyer, 2004; Snow, Soule, & Cress, 2005). Snow, Soule, and Cress (2005) note that social

problems such as widespread unemployment and the disparity between the cost of living and wages increases individual's chances of participating in social movements. Kurer et al. (2019) highlight economic inequalities as the main problem. For example, van Stekelenburg and Klandermans (2013) argue that low status groups tend to challenge high status groups through collective action. A protest sometimes can force those in power to promote favourable policies and for Meyer (2004) this tend to encourage people left outside of the pluralist arena to engage in protest activities. There are many reasons people join social movements, however the main idea here was to explain the concepts before expanding on service delivery protests. Another useful concept worth explaining is the idea of mainstream media.

1.2 Mainstream media

In this thesis, the concept mainstream media is used in contrast to alternative media to refer to traditional media or what Chomsky (1997) call elite media because “they are the one with the big resources *that enable them to set a framework within which others operate*” (para. 6). According to Olagoke, Olagoke, and Hughes (2020) mainstream media play an important role in shaping public opinion because of its widely accessible news conglomerates such as electronic, digital and print media. Mainstream news organisations have a huge influence on public perception because sometimes they are supported by national states, and this includes public news broadcasters such as the British Broadcasting Commission (BBC), the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) and the South Broadcasting Commission (SABC) in this context (Hoynes, 2003; Kidd, 1999). Those news organisations that are privately owned rely heavily on advertising and as the result they are accused of serving corporate interests (Rauch, 2015). For example, studies show that audience trust in mainstream media is fading and people who are sceptical of the traditional media prefer alternative media (Tsfati & Peri, 2006; Tsfati, 2010).

According to Atkinson (2006) alternative media can be defined “as any media that are produced by non-commercial sources and attempt to transform existing social roles... by challenging power structures” (pp. 251-252). Alternative media includes social media platforms such as Twitter which tends to privilege diverse and disadvantaged voices (Moon & Hadley, 2014; Rauch, 2016). Hajek and Carpentier (2015) note that alternative media has led to new participatory possibilities such as content sharing and thus act as a direct challenge to the dominance of mainstream media. The outbreak of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) has increased the relevance of alternative media as main producer of news because lockdown

policies did not only force schools to close and utilise online learning platforms (Neidhofer, Lustig, & Tommasi, 2021). The print media industry was also forced to reduce production because of the decline in demand for print newspapers and magazines in general (Finneman, Mari, & Thomas, 2021). In South Africa, the announcement of national lockdown on March 23, 2020, increased the demand for online news and thus improving the relevance of alternative media as serious producer of news information (Finlay, 2020). Similarly, in the United States (U.S.) community newspapers witnessed an increase in online readership following lockdown measures in some states between March and May 2020 (Finneman & Thomas, 2021).

However, it is important to note that mainstream news broadcasters and newspapers have acted swiftly in adopting social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube to their advantage (Loreille, 2021). These platforms are now mainstream and are in the frontline in the battle for a wide audience between international mainstream news broadcasters such as CNN, Sky News, Fox News, MSNBC, NBC News, BBC News, CGTN, DW News, France24 and others including mainstream online newspapers (Loreille, 2021). Hasnat (2015) notes that mainstream news channels such as CNN, now have monopoly in the alternative media sphere because news content created and shared by ordinary people online is controversial, lack credibility and it is plagued with serious ethical issues and thus audience prefer content shared by mainstream news organisations. The introduction of a new legislation by the Australian government in 2020 forcing Facebook and Google to pay mainstream news organisations for using their content in Google's search and Facebook's newsfeed showed the influence of traditional media in these platforms (Meade, 2020). The legislation was welcomed by Australia's mainstream news organisations such as News Corp Australia, Guardian Australia, Sydney Morning Herald, The Age, Australian Community Media, Seven West Media, and others (Meade, 2020). The overwhelming support for the legislation proved that mainstream news organisations rely heavily on social media and thus we cannot regard platforms such as Facebook as direct challenge to traditional media even though the latter is also true.

Despite these developments especially the relationship between traditional media and alternative media as outlined above, mainstream media is still the main contributor of hard news especially in developing countries such as South Africa. In sub-Saharan Africa, Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) is still limited because of poor developed infrastructure which has led to "uneven spread of the internet and social media platforms" (Couldry et al., 2017, p. 5; Wasserman, 2007). Due to these problems, this thesis is

mainly concerned with mainstream print media coverage of service delivery protests and consequently, social media will be excluded.

1.3 Rationale

This thesis builds on existing literature on mainstream media coverage of service delivery protests in South Africa which show that news reports on these protests tends to be partial and inaccurate because news organisations are only interested in selling their products instead of representing the voices of the poor majority (Radu, Morwe, & Bird, 2012; Sebola, Tsheola, & Molopa, 2014). Studies have found that media coverage of social movements in the country focus exclusively on violence and disruption rather than the underlying causes and in doing so preventing the audience from learning fully about the issues at hand (Magwagwa, 2019; Radu, Morwe, & Bird, 2012).

Mainstream media emphasis on violence associated with service delivery protests is problematic because the function of media is not only to serve as the guardian of public interest, but also, to ensure that the audience has access to a diverse set of perspectives on a particular issue (Friedman, 2011; Wolfgang et al., 2021). Content diversity or the inclusion of multiple and diverse viewpoints in news coverage is often seen as a good indicator and measure of quality journalism (Choi, 2009; Wolfgang et al., 2021). Despite these responsibilities, studies show that mainstream media coverage of service delivery protests in South Africa conforms to the protest paradigm where protesters are often framed as violent, destructive, unreasonable and a threat to the country's economy (Mawokomayi & Dube, 2018). Elsewhere, studies show a similar problem as news coverage of protests tends to emphasise deviance, erraticism and violence associated with protesters (Bishop, 2013). The protest paradigm shows that journalists often pay scant attention to the ideas and ideals that push protesters to action and in doing so preventing full discussion of issues that are raised by activists (Bishop, 2013).

By taking into account existing literature on the protest paradigm and news media coverage of social movements, this thesis will highlight the contradiction between SANEF's conceptualisation of the role of media "as a source of a knowledge which is the property of the entire society" and the actual role of journalists (Friedman, 2011, p. 107). The media portrays itself as a watchdog of public interest and facilitator of public political discussions (Friedman, 2011; Wolfgang et al., 2021). However, journalists are becoming increasingly aware that journalism is driven by market forces and to a large extent, corporate advertisers have a great

influence with regard to how issues are covered and framed in the media (Kruger, 2004). Studies show that news organisations often suffer if their reporting conflicts with the profitability of the larger parent corporations (Herman & Chomsky, 2001; Williams, 2002). This is often solved by removing news stories viewed as damaging to parent corporations by replacing them with those that are thought to be helpful (Williams, 2002).

This process interferes with the normative role of journalism. In South Africa, commercial news organisations are aware that criticising neoliberal policies as the cause of social unrest in the country is a direct attack on advertisers and thus mainstream newspapers opt to emphasise the threat posed by protests on businesses. With reference to some of the processes that lead to the marginalisation of protesters in the mainstream print media. This thesis will explore how the South African media frame service delivery protests. It is crucial to problematise the issue of media coverage of social movements in the country. This is because the mainstream press portrays itself as source of knowledge for all citizens despite accusations that dissenting views voiced by the historically marginalised groups are effectively silenced in the media (Friedman, 2011; Magwagwa, 2019). This thesis will examine whether the mainstream press fulfils its mandate of fair and accurate reporting when covering service delivery protests; or as stated in the literature, there is a contradiction between SANEF's conceptualisation of the role of the press and the way in which the voices of the poor are covered in the media.

1.4 Objectives

The main aim of this study is to examine how the South African mainstream print media frame and represent service delivery protests or dissenting views. The study will also investigate the contradiction between SANEF's conceptualisation of the role of the press as the source of knowledge for the entire nation and the actual way media frame social problems in the country. In other words, the study will examine whether the mainstream press really fulfils its mandate of fair and accurate reporting when covering issues that involve social and racial division such as service delivery protests. To achieve this a content analysis was applied to analyse 603 news articles from 10 English-language mainstream newspapers published in South Africa's major cities. Importantly, media coverage of service delivery protests matters "as it could either amplify the voices of those citizens who have been left on the margins of the public sphere, or further silence them by portraying their protests as illegitimate or undemocratic" (Wasserman, Chuma, & Bosch, 2018b, p. 147).

Due to the claims that mainstream media in South Africa misrepresents the voices of the marginalised groups, this study will examine how media coverage of service delivery protests conforms to the protest paradigm if the claims are indeed reasonable (Magwagwa, 2019). The question of whose voices are privileged in the press will be explored in depth. The focus will be on inclusion or exclusion of the voices of protesters and women. Studies show that political news tends to be dominated by male voices a phenomenon known as masculine beat (Albæk et al., 2014). Thus, it was deemed necessary to analyse the inclusion of female voices in the coverage of service delivery protests. This study will also highlight other concerning problems that can lead to the marginalisation of protesters such the use of terminology, inclusion, or exclusion of the underlying causes of the protests and content diversity in the coverage. Overall, this study will discuss briefly how media coverage of service delivery protests fits within the global debate on media coverage of social movements.

1.5 Structure

The content in this thesis is organised in six chapters. After this introduction, chapter two will provide a literature review on service delivery protests in South Africa. The chapter will discuss media landscape in the country and contextualise these protests before exploring literature on media coverage of service delivery protests, student and labour movements in South Africa and media coverage of social unrest elsewhere. The chapter will also highlight the theoretical underpinnings for this study such as framing theory, the protest paradigm, agenda setting and the propaganda model (hereafter PM). Chapter three outlines the methods used in this study including sampling, frame identification and the coding scheme. The rationale for employing quantitative content analysis will be provided.

Chapter four explores in detail the findings obtained using the quantitative method. To a large extent, the findings show that the voices of the poor are largely excluded in media coverage of service delivery protests. The protests are marginalised, and protesters are effectively silenced because they are not given any chance to articulate their objectives in the media.

Chapter five will provide a detailed contextualisation of the quantitative findings. Here the PM will be revisited to explain some of the possible reasons that might be contributing to the marginalisation and silencing of service delivery protesters in the mainstream media. Chapter six will present the conclusion and limitations of the current study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

This chapter reviews academic literature on mainstream media coverage of service delivery protests in South Africa and presents the theoretical framework of this thesis. Firstly, the chapter will briefly highlight the significance of this thesis by showing gaps in existing literature and how this study fits into established academic literature. Secondly, the chapter will discuss briefly media landscape in South Africa. Thirdly, the chapter will review literature on the evolution of service delivery protests since 1994. This will include some of the main positions put forward by different scholars explaining the potential drivers of these protests. Fourthly, studies on mainstream media coverage of service delivery protests are explored in depth. Scholars argue that media coverage of service delivery protests in South Africa tends to be partial and inaccurate (see Radu, Morwe, & Bird, 2012; Schutte, 2015). However, it is crucial to point out that other protest activities by the poor are also marginalised. Thus, this chapter will not only focus on service delivery protests. It will also show how labour and student movements are portrayed by the media. Further, a brief overview of media coverage of social movements in countries such as the U.S. and Canada will be provided in order to compare the way mainstream media frame activism between developing and developed states. This will be done mainly to see how mainstream media coverage of protests in South Africa fits within the global debate on media coverage of social movements.

Lastly, this chapter will present the theoretical underpinnings for this study. The theories used in this thesis include, media framing, the protest paradigm, agenda setting and the PM. Further, main research questions proposed for this study will be presented. This chapter will show why it is important to study media coverage of protests and marginalised groups in general.

2.1 Significance of study

Before presenting the literature review and theoretical framework, it is important to highlight that studies on social movements in South Africa tend to focus on media coverage of specific service delivery protests (Mawokomayi & Dube, 2018; Radu, Morwe, & Bird, 2012). This thesis will fill this gap by analysing news coverage of these protests on a macro-level. This means that the current study will focus on how media covers service delivery protests in general instead of emphasising certain protests. Another weakness in existing literature is that scholars tend to examine service delivery protests, labour unrest and student movements exclusively without highlight similarities in the way in which these movements are covered in the

mainstream media (Duncan, 2016; Langa, 2017; Schutte, 2015). This literature review will illustrate clearly that these movements cannot be studied exclusively.

Another problem in existing literature is that there are few studies that have analysed media coverage of service delivery protests using a longitudinal approach which focusses on multiple years (Luke, Caburnary, & Cohen, 2011). In other words, current studies are not just limited to certain service delivery protests, they are also limited to very short periods of time such as days, weeks and months not years. For example, Mawokomayi and Dube's (2018) analysis of News24's framing of the 2015 Malamulele service delivery protest is only limited to two months, January, and February. In their analysis of discourses of service delivery protests in South African talk radio shows, Day, Cornell, and Malhreb (2021) limited the scope of their research to an eight-month period, March 2019 to October 2019. Studies that have employed the longitudinal approach tend to focus on hotspot provinces and changes in service delivery protest trends not media coverage of these protests (see Alexander et al., 2018; Nyar & Wray, 2012). This thesis will fill this existing gap in literature because the scope of the current study is not limited to one year or certain service delivery protests, but these protests in general over a six-year period. Specifically, this thesis will illustrate how media frame service delivery protests in South Africa instead of focusing on individual protests.

In terms of theory, this thesis will be one of the few studies that have linked mainstream media coverage of service delivery protests to Herman and Chomsky's propaganda model (see Herman & Chomsky, 1988). The PM is very useful because it explains why media tends to delegitimise counterhegemonic views especially those raised by the marginalised groups in a society. To a large extent, existing literature is concerned mainly with media coverage of service delivery protests and framing (Mawokomayi & Dube, 2018; Radu, Morwe, & Bird, 2012; Wasserman, Bosch, & Chuma, 2018a). Some few studies have broadened the scope by including theories such as the protest paradigm and agenda setting (Magwagwa, 2019; Pointer, 2015). This thesis will fill the existing gap in literature when it comes to the use of theory by broadening this scope even further. This means that the focus of the current study will not be on media coverage and framing solely but also the protest paradigm, agenda setting and the PM. This thesis will take into consideration some of these missing pieces in existing literature on media coverage of service delivery protests.

2.2 Media landscape in South Africa

South African news media environment is pluralistic and diverse in terms of print, broadcast, and online media (Kupe, 2014). Compared to other African countries, South African media system is largely owned by commercially-driven-private companies independent from the state (Kupe, 2014). The country's community, national and regional newspapers including radio, and television stations seem to cater to the needs of the entire nation (Kupe, 2014). However, this diversity is deceptive and questionable because media environment in the country is highly unequal and this can be linked back to British colonialism, and later, apartheid where the press and radio were used to legitimise "social class relations of domination and subordination" (Duncan & Reid, 2013; Govenden & Chiumbu, 2020, p. 33; Kupe, 2014).

Print media has gone through different stages of transformation since the end of apartheid in terms of ownership changes and de-racialisation of newsroom, but the way media operates is still "rooted in apartheid-like economic and ideological rationalities" (Chiumbu et al., 2018; Radebe & Chiumbu, 2022, p. 89). The print media landscape is dominated by few media conglomerates (Kupe, 2014). Scholars note that four media companies dominate the print media sector: Media24, Times Media Group, Caxton, and Independent Media (Daniels, 2013; Daniels, 2014; Kabwato, 2017). In those mainstream newspapers that will be analysed, Media24 publishes (*Daily Sun* and *City Press*), Times Media Group (*Sunday Times*, *Business Day*, *Daily Dispatch* and *The Herald*) and Independent Media (*Cape Times*, *The Mercury*, and *The Star*) while "*Mail and Guardian* sits alone in its stable" under the media house, Mail and Guardian Limited (Kabwato, 2017, p. 11; Paremoer, 2012).

Similar to the print media landscape, the television broadcasting sector is dominated by few key players such as the MultiChoice Group (operating DStv), SABC (public broadcaster owned by the government) and e.tv (owned by Sabido Investments) (Abiolu, 2017; Daniels, 2014; The Multichoice Group, 2022). The problem with this concentration is that large print media houses have been accused of anti-competitive conduct and for setting barriers making it difficult for small newspapers to print and distribute their material (Paremoer, 2012). In the print media sector, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated this anti-competitive behaviour from large firms because the introduction of lockdowns early in 2020 impacted advertising revenue. The publisher of *The Citizen*, Caxton, reported a 60 percent drop in revenue because of the sudden decline in mainstream newspaper circulation (Finlay, 2020). Even before the start of the pandemic, newsprint circulation has been declining especially free newspapers such as

Isolezwe (Finlay, 2017). However, mainstream print media is still relevant and regarded as more credible because of the proliferation of fake news on the internet, and thus, studying mainstream media coverage is crucial (see Finlay 2020). The following section will return to service delivery protests by providing a brief context of these protests.

2.3 Service delivery protests: Context

Studies on protest movements in South Africa show that the country has experienced widespread social unrest attributed to failures in service delivery which began to increase from 2004 (Gouws et al., 2010; Kotze & Tylor, 2010; Marais, 2008; Nleya, 2011). According to Alexander (2010) analysts agree that protests for better provision of basic service date back to 2004. The first service delivery protests were recorded in Harrismith, Free State and Diepsloot, Gauteng between August, and September 2004 (Booyesen, 2007; Matebesi, 2018). Mkhize (2015) shows that since 2005, service delivery protests have been increasing sharply at about 10 percent per annum. For example, between 2005 and 2006, 5 082 protests related to poor service delivery were recorded in the country (Nene, 2016). However, between 2014 and 2015 this number had increased to 14 740.

As the result of this unprecedented number of service delivery protests, some analysts regard South Africa as the protest capital of the world (Mawokomayi & Dube, 2018; Selmeczi, 2015; von Holdt & Naidoo, 2019). This means that the levels of urban unrest in the country are arguably greater than anywhere in the world, making South Africa one of the least peaceful countries in the globe (see Alexander & Pfaffe, 2014). Connolly (2013) asserts that there is a possibility that the country is moving towards a state of fragility. These unrests suggest that South Africa share some characteristics with failed states even though the country's democratic institutions have not collapsed completely. One of these characteristics is the gradual weakening of the state-society contract (Conolly, 2013). Citizens are angry and frustrated because they feel like the government does not listen to their demands (Rao & Wasserman, 2015). Communities engage in collective action in an attempt to make their voices heard because the country's public sphere is dysfunctional as the result of weak state-society contract (see Wasserman, Bosch, & Chuma, 2018a; Wasserman, Chuma, & Bosch, 2018b).

The weakening of the state-society contract in South Africa is explained further by Heller (2009) who notes that the establishment of formal democratic institutions in the country did not secure a space that could enable the previous subordinate groups to voice their concerns in

order to influence public policy. This includes mainstream media's failure to offer adequate representation to the majority of poor citizens (Reid, 2020). Consequently, the country's democratic institutions are exclusionary in nature and according to Connolly (2013) this is the reason they are contested and undermined. It is important to note that despite this exclusion, South Africa's Constitution which was enacted in 1996 states clearly in Section 195, clauses d and e that "people's needs must be responded to, and the public must be encouraged to participate in policy-making" (Mpehle, 2012, p. 215). However, Pithouse (2007) argues that these protests are about "citizenship understood as the material benefits of full social inclusion as well as the right to be taken seriously when... speaking through community organisations" (as cited in Alexander, 2010, p. 25). This shows that the current democratic institutions in South Africa still excludes the majority of the poor despite the country's vibrant Constitution which guarantees their inclusion in policy making processes.

Due to the high instances of protest as the result of social, political, and economic exclusion of the previously subordinate groups, it is reasonable to argue that South Africa is a fragile state. A fragile state is described as a situation where "state structures lack political will or capacity to provide the basic functions needed for poverty reduction, development and to safeguard the security and human rights of their population" (Connolly, 2013, p. 89). The country is unable to deal with unemployment problems which according to Banjo and Jili (2013) are the main reasons young people join service delivery protests. For example, in Wesselton township, Mpumalanga, they found that 90 percent of the interviewed respondents engaged in collective action because they were unhappy with job opportunities (Banjo & Jili, 2013). Employment can reduce poverty and it is a responsibility of a state to ensure that job opportunities are created. However, South Africa is unable to tackle this problem because of corruption which undermines the capacity of the state institutions to deal with poverty.

Rampant corruption in the country has led to the deterioration of the system of local government (Gouws et al., 2010). In other words, local democracy is failing, and this is supported by "the increasing marginalisation of local communities" (Mbazira, 2013, p. 252). The fragility of state institutions as a result of mismanagements have undermined government ability to tackle problems associated with rapid urbanisation such as "the increasing inequality in urban infrastructure conditions" (McFarlane & Silver, 2017, p. 125). This explains why service delivery protests are concentrated in most urbanised provinces such as Gauteng and Western Cape as opposed to Northern Cape and Limpopo (see Akinboade, Mokwena, &

Kinfack, 2013; Akinboade, Mokwena, & Kinfack, 2014). To some extent, the concentration of service delivery protests in urban areas also means that government policies aimed at empowering the historically disadvantaged groups have failed to materialise (Sparks, 2011).

This problem is explained well by Roelofse (2017) who notes that “despite the policies of Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) of the new government, vast numbers of black people are still living in poverty and in areas lacking basic services” (p. 2). Urbanisation or the movement of black people from the former Bantustans to the cities has corresponded with the establishment of informal settlements and consequently public discontent. However, it is important to note that service delivery protests are not only occurring in South Africa. Dissatisfaction with government policies and performance is the common problem facing the majority of states today (Breakfast, Bradshaw, & Nomarwayi, 2019). Service delivery protests specifically occur in those states “where public service delivery remains a challenge” (Mamokhere, 2019, p. 1). For example, in 2012, Yemen witnessed protests which resulted to road closures because citizens were demanding increased electricity supply (Mamokhere, 2019). In India and Pakistan, citizens protested against prolonged power cuts (Akinboade, Mokwena, & Kinfack, 2014). This is an illustration that “there are similarities in the triggers of protests from one country to the next, namely relative deprivation of needs or services such as water... housing *and in this case electricity*” (Breakfast, Bradshaw, & Nomarwayi, 2019, p. 110).

These events were all about improved public service delivery which protesters in South Africa are still fighting for since 2004. This thesis has noted that in South Africa, service delivery protests started to increase from 2004 when municipalities began to realise that they were unable to cope with “the growth of informal urbanisation in cities such as Cape Town” (Kotze & Tylor, 2010; McFarlane & Silver, 2017, p. 126). However, these protests are not new even though they only started to intensify between 2004 and 2005 where “at least 15 protests were taking place each day” (Nembambula, 2014, p. 149). Service delivery protests can be traced back to the apartheid era (Alexander, 2010). Roelofse (2017) notes that policies of separate development which resulted in the establishment of Bantustans were problematic because they fuelled the political struggle for control of resources, and this is still evident today. The promotion of Bantu Self-Governing Act of 1959 gave some autonomy to traditional leaders and thus the absence of government oversight fuelled corruption which is the main problem in rural areas even today (Roelofse, 2017).

Chiwarawara and Masiya (2018) argue that protests which occurred before 1994 are different from the current service delivery protests. Time and context in which pre-1994 protests took place are the main cause of this difference. However, they point out that “there is a continuity of the protest phenomenon, which has somewhat similar repertoires as those which occurred in the period, pre-1994” (Chiwarawara & Masiya, 2018, p. 57). Selmeczi (2015) notes the persistence of the idea of ungovernability which paralysed the apartheid government in the 1980s. An example of this tactic today includes pre-planned blockades of main roads by service delivery protesters. Twala and Koetaan (2006) highlight the continuity of the culture of toyi-toyi which was the main driver of the attacks on councillors and state-owned buildings during the state of emergency in 1985. Lau, Seedat, and Suffla (2010) acknowledge the continuing culture of violence in contemporary South Africa especially the militant style of tactics employed by service delivery protesters. They show that the way these protests are policed resemble the treatment of protesters by the apartheid state. The current government is heavily reliant on violence as a means of conflict resolution (Lau, Seedat, & Suffla, 2010). This includes the increasing use of rubber bullets by the South African Police Service (SAPS) to disperse protesters. Duncan (2020) argues that SAPS respond aggressively towards protesters because these protests are increasingly framed as a threat to domestic stability and national security.

In most cases, the government fails to establish peaceful negotiations with poor people and the elected leaders tend to rely on the same tactics that were used by the apartheid government to deal with protesters such as the criminalisation of these protests. This problem is explored well by Nene (2016) who notes that government argument is that protests are driven by certain individuals “who use people’s genuine concerns for their personal agendas against the government” (p. 20). However, the reviewed literature on service delivery protests in South Africa show that these unrests are genuine.

For example, van Rooyen and Pooe (2016) show that service delivery is poor in the country because local municipalities are poorly governed and dysfunctional. “Dysfunctionality... includes role confusion and conflicts among political office bearers” (van Rooyen & Pooe, 2016, p. 143). These problems have led to poor communication between municipality officials and ordinary citizens and consequently high level of community distrust in local municipalities. Mashamaite (2014) argues that some municipalities in the country are under immense pressure and are struggling to deliver basic service to their communities because of financial

mismanagement and corruption. For Paller (2013) poor South Africans are experiencing democratic disillusionment because their lives have not improved since 1994. This is emphasised by Tsheola, Ramonyai, and Segage (2014) who note that the country's globally celebrated democracy is failing because it "has not translated into lived experiences of democracy for the majority of the poor" (p. 399).

The argument presented by the scholars above show that government allegations that service delivery protests are driven by opportunistic individuals are not convincing. Citizens continue to participate in service delivery protests to express their dissatisfaction with the political system (Lancaster, 2018). The thesis will now focus on media coverage of these protests and the key point here is that service delivery protests are not driven by opportunistic individuals. These protests can be viewed as a direct response to the current political and economic order disadvantaging the poor majority in the country.

2.4 Service delivery protests: Press coverage

Literature on service delivery protests in South Africa show that mainstream media coverage often fails to report on the underlying causes and motivations that drive these protests by focusing exclusively on acts of violence associated with protesters (Duncan, 2016; Friedman, 2011; Rodny-Gumede, 2015). Haller and Holt (2019) argue that in general, mainstream media, especially Western media tends to "distort information that does not fit a politically correct agenda" (p. 1665). Studies note that groups that are viewed as too extreme by the mainstream media are often condemned and this includes political activities or protests that pose threat to the status quo (Boyle & Schmierbach, 2009; Nygaard, 2021). Chiumbu (2016) argues that this form of coverage in South Africa, and other African countries is largely driven by the "continuity of colonial forms of domination after the end of colonial administration" (p. 418).

The continuation of this coloniality is evident in Mawokomayi and Dube's (2018) study on the 2015 Malamulele service delivery protest in South Africa, which shows that mainstream newspapers such as News24 framed protesters as a threat to the country's local and national economy. Instead of reporting on the causes of the protest, the press focused more on violence such as looting of shops and how other people's lives were threatened by the protest. Radu, Morwe, and Bird (2012) also highlighted a similar problem in their paper because they found that media coverage of service delivery protests demonises and dehumanises poor people by highlighting only the damage caused by protesters. The media also relies on official sources

instead of interviewing protesters and this is a problem for Radu, Morwe, and Bird (2012) because such coverage is partial, narrow, and devoid of context or the root causes of service delivery protests.

According to Sebola, Tsheola, and Molopa (2014) the exclusion of the voices of the poor is mainly a result of the recent reordering of the relationship between the state and media. They also point out that stories about protests in the main newspapers such as *Sunday Times*, *Mail & Guardian*, and *Business Day* are not authored by poor people themselves. Instead, stories about the situation of the poor and service delivery “are written on behalf of the voices of the poor by journalists who are not so poor, with limited lived experience of the conditions in informal settlements and rural South Africa” (Sebola, Tsheola, & Molopa, 2014, p. 112). These journalists do not have enough knowledge about the areas and people they write about. This is explained well by Legodi (2020) who notes that in informal settlements, service delivery protests take place daily. However, they attract media when violence erupts or when they are viewed as worthy of coverage “when moving towards the elections” (Legodi, 2020, p. 76).

These problems, especially media focus on newsworthy protests or those that involve violence have not only led to the marginalisation of protesters but also under-counting and under-estimation of the real frequency of protests in the country (see Nyar & Wray, 2012). Similar to other problematic protest monitors such as SAPS and the Municipal IQ (MunIQ), media coverage of service delivery protests “give an exaggerated impression of the extent of violence and disruption associated with protests” (Alexander et al., 2018, p. 35). The lack of alternatives to violence in media coverage of protests is very concerning because Duncan (2016) shows that the police can use news reports to justify the need for greater policing resource and thus promote the use of violence as a means of conflict resolution instead of proper negotiations.

As the watchdog of society, Radu, Morwe, and Bird (2012) “argue for the media to offer alternatives to violence... by *emphasising* efforts that seek to prevent or end the violence” (p. 5). An example of alternative to violence includes media attempts in giving voice to all parties involved in conflict such as municipality officials and protesters instead of solely relying on official sources (Radu, Morwe, & Bird, 2012). Media reliance on officials as sources of information during service delivery protests undermines the freedom of expression and the right to receive information necessary for meaningful opinion formation (Duncan, 2014; Radu, Morwe, & Bird, 2012). This is because official accounts about protests tend to privilege violence by focusing on damage caused by protesters and thus downplaying the root causes of

protests because organisers are rarely interviewed by journalists to articulate their opinions (Radu, Morwe, & Bird, 2012). The idea of alternatives to violence is more about socially responsible media, a media that goes beyond just reporting about violence such as looting, vandalism and destruction caused by protesters. The media as a dominant force in society focus more on efforts that seek to prevent violence. For Radu, Morwe, and Bird (2012) the media can achieve this by adhering to standards of professional journalism when covering social issues and this includes “listening and dealing with all sides of the story *while* ensuring that facts are not distorted” (p. 40).

Extensive coverage of violence such as the burning of tyres and blocking of roads during service delivery protests tends to promote the misconception among the public that these protests are inherently violent. Reports on violence or barricaded roads in this case can even escalate conflict because they do not promote peaceful resolution and discussion except warning the public about roads to avoid (Radu, Morwe, & Bird, 2012; Wasserman, Chuma, & Bosch, 2018b). Importantly, the notion of alternatives to violence has some limitation because Friedman (2011) shows clearly that mainstream commercial print media in South Africa only “cater for middle class readership... and the freedom it seeks to guard is that of the *suburban* middle class” (107). The reason for this is that during transition, the main structures of the press were not fully transformed to better reflect the social geography of the country (Sparks, 2009). Consequently, commercial media is still largely dependent on white readership in general and white economic elite who still dominates big businesses according to the Johannesburg Stock Exchange statistics (Govenden, 2022; Sparks, 2009). The views of the protesters are excluded because the mainstream press has no economic interest in the poor segment of the population. Like other young democracies around the globe, media transformation in South Africa has gone hand in hand with continued focus on suburban audience (Wasserman, Bosch, & Chuma, 2018a). The exclusion of the poor in the mainstream media is problematic because the inclusion of marginalised voices “provide greater opportunity for social cohesion, for problem solving and for better informed citizenry” (Reid, 2020, p. 186).

However, the mainstream media is unable to fulfil this crucial role because the continued focus on an elite audience has resulted in a situation where protest organisers are rarely seen as people with ideas by the media. For example, Pithouse (2007), shows that “academic and NGO experts *are often* called upon to explain the mysterious politics of the poor” on behalf of marginalised voices and thus undermining the importance of inclusive media diversity (cited in Wasserman,

Bosch, & Chuma, 2018a, p. 369). This problem is explained further by Friedman (2011) who notes that press coverage of unrest in South Africa is not different from the approach employed by the media when reporting on disturbances during the colonial period and later during the apartheid era. Before 1994, protest movements were rarely featured in the mainstream press and when covered they were often depicted as violent and mysterious set of events led by primitive people (Friedman, 2011). According to Barnes (2018) the exclusion of protesters in the media makes it difficult for activists to highlight serious problems such as sanitation injustices because their efforts are constantly undermined by those whose voices are always amplified by the media. Barnes (2018) refers specifically to the way in which poo protesters in Cape Town, 2013 were mistreated after throwing human faeces from porta potties in several public spaces such as the Cape Town International Airport and national freeway.

For Robins (2014a) toilet wars, or poo protests created an instant media spectacle because images of open toilets in the press produced “responses of shock and shame...from ordinary citizens” (p. 104). However, Robins (2014a) notes that these images failed to generate enough empathy and support from the public because protests in the country are routinely represented as spontaneous, unruly collective action by the mainstream media. For example, Barnes (2018) argues that the media focused on the main leader’s individual psychological motives behind the poo protests instead of highlighting the unhygienic conditions caused by poor and inadequate sanitation services in informal settlements.

The mainstream media did not only fail to highlight that the poo protest was a struggle to improve sanitation in the country’s most disadvantaged communities (Colvin & Robins, 2017). The media also overlooked serious problems such as the argument by the World Health Organisation (WHO) that “inadequate local sanitation facilities *is* a key driver of women’s risk for physical or sexual assault, *because* travel to and from toilets exposes them to waiting perpetrators of violence” (Gonsalves, Kaplan, & Paltiel 2015, p. 2). For example, in some areas in Khayelitsha, Western Cape, where the so-called open toilets are still a norm, Gonsalves, Kaplan, and Paltiel (2015) found that approximately 50 percent of women who use outdoor toilets were assaulted in 2013 on their way to or from toilets.

It is important to acknowledge that media images of open toilets played a significant role in forcing political parties and the state to take the matter of sanitation seriously (Overy, 2013; Robins, 2014b). However, media coverage also focused extensively on the behaviour of faeces flingers and the negative impact of such acts on the country’s tourism sector (Robins, 2014a;

Baxter & Mtshali, 2020). Extensive coverage of the throwing of faeces at Cape Town International Airport obscured the real problems that the protesters were trying to raise because the act only triggered panic and disgust among the middle class and thus no support (see Baxter & Mtshali, 2020). The media paid more attention on the negative aspects of the protest and as the result the real sanitation problems faced by poor communities were excluded in the coverage. This includes insecurities faced by black women who are forced to use open toilets and public toilets. The failure by the media to highlight sanitation problems during the poo protests was one the reasons the protesters were poorly understood (see MacFarlane & Silver, 2017).

This thesis acknowledges that the media played a crucial role in informing the public about the issue of open defecation and open toilets in some areas in Cape Town's informal settlements. However, media coverage focused more on the negative aspects of the poo protests and thus downplaying the real issues that the protesters were trying to raise. Barnes (2018) argues that the media was concerned about the motives behind the protests, and it covered speculations that these protests were driven by individual motives to delegitimise the Democratic Alliance (DA) while promoting the African National Congress (ANC) in the province. These unnecessary allegations which were covered extensively in the media, undermined efforts by activists to highlight sanitation injustices (Barnes, 2018). The politicisation of the poo protests by the media deemphasised the real problems faced by poor people such as the fact that 2.6 percent of all death in South Africa can be attributed to unsafe water, sanitation, and hygiene (Govender, Barnes, & Pieper, 2011; Lewin et al., 2007).

2.5 Press coverage of student and labour protests in South Africa

Apart from the marginalisation of service delivery protests in the country by the mainstream media, other protest activities such as student and worker's protests often receive negative coverage. Langa (2017) notes that during the #FeesMustFall movement in 2015 and 2016, media provided extensive coverage of the violent incidents associate with the movement without giving enough context about the grievances of the students. The depiction of the #FeesMustFall movement as violent in the media justified a statement by the Higher Education Minister, Blade Nzimande that the "protests entail a very dangerous culture of entitlement by smaller grouping of students engaging in vandalism and thuggery" (Konik & Konik, 2018, pp. 575-576). What is important here is that negative media coverage diluted the message that students were trying to send which "was clear that the costs of higher education were too high

and unaffordable for the majority of the poor black students” (Langa, 2017, p. 6). Daniels (2020), notes that it is not easy to challenge the dominant narratives promoted by the mainstream media because alternative media such as community media is not only at the bottom of the hierarchy in terms of visibility but also has fewer resources to sustain itself. Community media tend to depend on the same sources of income or advertisers as the mainstream media due to financial constraints. Consequently, this leads to further marginalisation of the voices of the poor because these advertisers are usually in favour of the status quo and generally, are against decolonial discourses promoted by protesters.

The lack of vibrant alternative media in South Africa does not affect service delivery protests and student movements only but also protests by the marginalised working class. The Marikana Massacre, 2012, where at least 34 protesting mineworkers were gunned down by the South African police is a case in point. In the days leading up to the massacre, the mainstream news media according to Rodny-Gumede (2015) displayed a bias towards official explanations of the event and thus neglecting alternative views especially of those of protesting mineworkers. In an analysis of whose voices were prioritised by the mainstream press in the days leading up to and shortly after the massacre. Duncan (2013) found that out of 153 news articles she analysed, only “one showed any attempt by a journalist to obtain an account from a worker about their version of events” (p. 6). The primary definers of the Marikana events in press coverage included businesses such as banks and risk assessment companies, Lonmin management, politicians, and independent experts (Duncan, 2013). The voices of the miners who accounted for merely three percent were virtually excluded.

Schutte (2015) notes that the media did not even question the official position that the strike was violent and had to be contained. The media focused on the negative aspects of the strike such as the alleged consultations between the striking mineworkers and *sangomas* or traditional healers prior to the unrest (Hlabangane, 2018). Consequently, mineworkers were framed by the media as predisposed to violence because of their use of *muti* (traditional herbs and medicine) which they believe could protect them against police weapons. During the Marikana Commission of Inquiry, du Preez (2015) shows that this argument was used to prove that it was the mineworkers who started violence. The problem with this kind of sensational reporting is that the media ended up neglecting the real causes of the strike. This includes the marginalisation and exploitation of mineworkers by their employers who pay them low wages,

growing inequality, poverty, and lack of proper houses in the mines (Angus, 2015; Graham, 2016; Power & Gwanyanya, 2017).

The way in which the Marikana unrest and #FeesMustFall movement were covered by the mainstream media show that it is not only service delivery protests that are marginalised by the media but any actor that seems to challenge the current socioeconomic order. Protests by women challenging gender inequality and patriarchy receive similar treatment in a form of anti-feminist backlash (see Daniels, 2020). Unlike service delivery protests, women's movements are not framed as violent in the mainstream media. Research by Media Monitoring Africa (MMA) shows that women's voices are underrepresented because issues raised by women are effectively side-lined in mainstream narratives (Lubisi, 2019). Apart from the exclusion of women's voices in the media, the MMA research shows that even children's voices are also absent in the mainstream media. According to the MMA report, in Africa, children make up 35 percent of the total population, however, they merely account for 10 percent of news coverage and their voices make up only one percent of news stories (Mohale, 2022). This is just an illustration that mainstream media does not only marginalise protests challenging the capitalist system or status quo but also other vulnerable groups such as children. However, this thesis is mainly concerned with social movements and women's marginalisation and thus other groups will be excluded due to the limited scope of this research.

2.6 Studies on media coverage of social unrest elsewhere

Thus far, the reviewed literature has illustrated that mainstream media tends to overlook the fundamental causes of social discontent when covering protests by the poor in South Africa. The irony of this is that the media covers "ratepayer's revolts by white suburban residents...far more extensively, and report in detail on the grievances of the dissenters and their view of the world" (Friedman, 2011, p. 112). This problem is not unique to South Africa as scholars elsewhere have found that historically marginalised groups are generally misrepresented in the mainstream media when they try to challenge the status quo. For example, in his paper on the 1960s and 1970s American Indian protests, Baylor (1996) argues that activists who were fighting for the respect of indigenous rights were framed as militant. News television channels such as NBC News and CBS News focused exclusively on violence and break down of law and order despite the fact these movements were not a threat because at the time, American Indians represented less than one percent of the U.S. population (Baylor, 1996).

Similarly, in their analysis of visual frames during the 1990 Oka Crisis in Canada, Corrigan-Brown, and Wilkes (2012) found that indigenous people, Mohawk who were protesting against the expansion of a golf course in what they regarded as their ancestral land were depicted in newspapers as violent, irrational and illegitimate. Kilgo and Mourao (2021) highlight a similar problem because they argue that mainstream media in the U.S. tends to delegitimise collective action against police brutality toward African American. The media use frames that emphasise confrontations between protestors and the police and often there is a focus on the disruption caused by protestors (Kilgo & Mourao, 2021). Protests on race issues especially those that relate to black and indigenous people are generally delegitimised and trivialised by the media (Kilgo & Harlow, 2019).

The significance of these studies is that they show clearly that protests that are intended to challenge the prevailing power structure often receive negative media coverage (McLeod & Hertog, 1992). In other words, complaints by protesters that mainstream media fail to convey their causes as they would like are not unreasonable (Smith et al., 2001). Another important aspect about these studies is that they support Myers and Caniglia's (2004) point that "relying on mass media sources for information *about protests by the marginalised groups* inevitable produces a simplified, distorted, and incomplete pictures of the world around us" (p. 538). The main cause of this distortion is that reporters tend to portray protests in a way intended to appeal to their target audience (Smith et al., 2001). The problem with this form of reporting is that the real issues that protesters are trying to raise become even less important to those who are reporting on public protests (see Smith et., 2001).

It is important to question media coverage of social movements because the rejection or acceptance of these movements by ordinary citizens largely depends on mass media's treatment of protesters (McLeod & Hertog, 1992). However, as noted, media tends to exaggerate violence associated with social unrest by "emphasising intense *and violent* outbreaks *while* ignoring mild ones" (Myers & Caniglia, 2004, p. 538). This leads to a distorted view of protests not only among the public but also policymakers (Myers & Caniglia, 2004). It can be argued that the misrepresentation of social movements in the media increases the likelihood of public and possible, government rejection of the problems raised by protesters. This means that media can escalate conflict between protesters on the one hand and non-participating citizens, and government on the other (see Acayo & Mnjama 2007; Gilboa, 2009; Hussain & Siraj, 2019). Instead of contributing to the conflict, this thesis argues that media coverage of social unrest

could offer alternatives to violence by emphasising efforts that are related to non-violence (Radu, Morwe, & Bird, 2012). This includes extensive coverage of the steps taken by both or one of the conflicting parties to prevent or end violence. Media focus on violence such as looting and damage to property increases tensions between non-participating citizens and protesters and this leads to the overall demonisation of protesters. Further, this may fuel violent protests when protesters feel their issues are marginalised.

To a large extent, the reviewed literature shows that mainstream commercial media in South Africa adheres to the liberal-democratic orthodoxy of media freedom (Wasserman, Chuma, & Bosch, 2018b). In this context, this means that the mainstream press tends to marginalise all protests with ideas that seem to challenge the capitalist system within which commercial media companies depend on for economic survival (Mawokomayi & Dube, 2018). The problem with media's adherence to the liberal orthodox is that the press often ends up aggravating tensions and conflicts when covering service delivery protests because those who challenge the system are largely marginalised (see Wasserman, Chuma, & Bosch, 2018b).

However, it is important to note that there are some factors that might be contributing to the way in which mainstream media is covering service delivery protests. These factors are explained well by framing theory, the protest paradigm, agenda setting and the PM. The first three theories, namely media framing, the protest paradigm and agenda setting point out how media coverage of protests may lead to the marginalisation of protesters. On the other hand, the PM states explicitly why media tends to marginalise protesters. The PM is very different from the other theories since the model deals mainly with why media coverage of social movements is often one sided. This thesis will explore these theories in depth below.

2.7 Framing theory

Some of the main factors that may contribute to the marginalisation of social movements in the mainstream media are illustrated well by the theory of media framing. According to Entman (1993) "to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text in such a way as to promote a particular definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and or treatment recommendation for the item described" (as cited in Weaver, 2007, p. 143). The most important attribute about media framing is that studies acknowledge that news making is inherently subjective because journalists and news editors tend to select frames that promote particular interpretations (Entman, 2007; Jacobs, 2014). In other words,

frames that are often emphasised by journalists and news editors are those that are likely to shape and alter the interpretations and preferences of the targeted audience (Entman, 2007). Frames that are selected promote certain ideas over others and they encourage the intended audience to think in a particular way.

In news coverage of social movements, media framing becomes a problem because only those issues that are selected by the media are regarded as highly salient by the audience (Betus, Kearns, & Lemieux, 2020). This includes the violence perpetrated by protesters which is often highlighted in the mainstream media. The real causes of service delivery protests become of secondary importance to the audience because the media lack interest in grassroots South Africa and thus the main drivers of these protests are excluded (Friedman, 2011). Frames emphasised by the media are powerful in influencing public discussions of unfolding events and issues (Betus, Kearns, & Lemieux, 2020). The exclusion of the main drivers of service delivery protests in press coverage means that public discussions of unrest are often centred around police intervention to stop violence instead of possible solutions to the issues raised by the protesters.

Jacobs (2014) notes that journalists are aware of these biases; however, in most cases they are required to construct news and select frames based on the needs of news agencies and consumers. In the South African case, the literature review above has shown that newspapers emphasise episodic frames when covering service delivery protests. This is because mainstream commercial media in the country is largely dependent on affluent suburban audience who are only concern about the impact of these protests on business activities (see Sparks, 2009). Episodic frames only provide information such as when, where, and how an event or protest occurred (Staniland & Smith, 2013). News often fails to report on thematic frames by including issues such as historical, social, and economic causes of service delivery protests.

Media use of episodic frames have led to a situation where service delivery protests are mainly covered to warn the suburban audience about potential hotspots, areas, and roads to avoid instead of informing them what drives these protests (Wasserman, Chuma, & Bosch, 2018b). What is important to highlight here is that profit making goals influence the way service delivery protests are framed by the mainstream media. In other words, media dependency on affluent audience in South Africa means that major newspapers often find themselves in a situation where they are required to provide news stories that are consistent with their

audience's political viewpoints (see Branton & Dunaway, 2009). The economic relationship between the suburban audience and mainstream press is arguably one of the reasons protests are often framed negatively.

2.8 The protest paradigm

Apart from framing theory, some scholars argue that social movements are marginalised because mainstream media coverage of these movements conforms to the protest paradigm (Coombs et al., 2020; Ismail, Torosyan, & Tully, 2019). According to Coombs et al. (2020) “the protest paradigm is an explanatory framework used to understand how mainstream media cover social protests” (321). The theory states that news media tends to represent protests and activists as threatening, deviant, and useless (Ismail, Torosyan, & Tully, 2019). This is often achieved by foregrounding the spectacle, action, and tactics instead of the substance of the protest. The problem with media's conformity with the protest paradigm is that the general public tends to condemn protests based on media portrayal of the protesters (Ismail, Torosyan, & Tully, 2019).

Scholars have identified a number of distinct components of the protest paradigm used in the mainstream media to delegitimise social movements and protesters (Coombs et al., 2020; De Cillia & McCurdy, 2020). This includes media focus on lawlessness associated with protesters, negative impact of these protests on national economies, extensive coverage of public disapproval and opposition to social movements, media reliance on official sources when reporting on protests and dramatization of demonstrations (De Cillia & McCurdy, 2020). Gil-Lopez (2020) notes that mainstream media adheres to the protest paradigm because the role of the media is to maintain the status quo. Protest groups that hold viewpoints intended to challenge the interests of the elites often receive unfavourable media coverage (Gil-Lopez, 2020).

This problem is explained well by McCluskey et al. (2009) who argue that under the protest paradigm news is used “as a force of social control... to protect the power and authority of political and business institutions” (p. 335). In this case, this is one of the reasons news coverage of protests emphasises violence such as the conflict between the police and protesters rather than the concerns raised by protesters (see McCluskey et al., 2009). Bishop (2013) notes that protest groups that lack money and other resources are marginalised even worse than those that are well resourced. Under the protest paradigm, activists leading less resourced protests

groups are portrayed as deviant and erratic and out to create havoc. Friedman (2011) shows that in South Africa, ratepayers' revolts by suburban residents are covered more extensively than service delivery protests because the former's views of the world and grievances are usually highlighted in news reports.

This comparison is very useful because journalists pay less attention to the ideas and ideals that compel service delivery protesters to action (see Bishop, 2013). In other words, the comparison shows that under the protest paradigm, when poor people challenge the status quo through collective action, they are automatically interpreted within the sphere of deviance. According to Hallin (1986) the sphere of deviance is "a rhetorically defined place where journalists and public officials' position *under resourced groups* challenging public consensus on an issue" (as cited in Bishop, 2013, p. 3). It is important to emphasise that well-resourced protest groups are well represented in the mainstream media. The persistence of the protest paradigm in news coverage of social movements and "the resultant biases... compromises normative notions about objective journalism and its role in providing a fair marketplace of ideas" (Boyle, McLeod, & Armstrong, 2012, p. 128). Under the protest paradigm, this thesis has shown that the notion of objectivity does not exist because mainstream media is mainly concerned about maintaining the status quo and this is one of the factors that contributes to the overall marginalisation of protesters.

2.9 Agenda setting

Another important theory which explains some of the factors that may lead to the marginalisation of protesters is the idea of agenda setting. Agenda setting "proposes that issues highlighted in the media become the issues considered most important by the public" (Muddiman, Stroud, & McCombs, 2014, p. 215). This is very important because the literature review has illustrated that extensive news coverage of violence associated with service delivery protests foregrounds violence as the main problem, and this leads to the overall rejection of the key issues raised by protesters. The reason for public rejection of the protesters is mainly because of the "second-level or attribute, agenda setting *which* occurs when the way in which media covers issues becomes the way in which citizens think about issues" (Muddiman, Stroud, & McCombs, 2014, p. 216). Media emphasis on certain issues goes beyond influencing salience placed on those issues by the public. The literature review has highlighted that media coverage can even cause violent conflict in some cases (Gilboa, 2009).

This problem is explored further by Joseph (2014) who argues that the way “media shape agenda by means of placement, tone and repetition” can increase tension and conflict (p. 226). Importantly, negative portrayal of protests “may *also* narrow the policy choices available to public officials” (Joseph, 2014, p. 226). This is because media focus on violence risks promoting the idea that protests are inherently violent (Duncan, 2014a). For example, instead of addressing the key social and economic issues raised by protesters, the government may focus more on protecting private property by increasing police personnel because policymakers pay close attention to news reports (Duncan, 2014a; Joseph, 2014). On the contrary, mainstream media can also play a key role by promoting peaceful resolution in contexts of both local and international conflicts (Joseph, 2014).

The idea of agenda setting does not only apply to protests but also politics in general. For example, Hopmann et al. (2012) notes that media coverage of certain issues as important can influence the party choices of voters. During elections political parties often try to influence the media agenda (Hopmann et al., 2012). Attempts by political parties to influence media agenda show that media coverage of events can be subjective and favour certain groups in conflict situations. With regard to protests, this problem makes it necessary to ask questions such as “whose agenda is served when a journalist treats a particular story from this angle and not that one?” (see Shaw, 2007, p. 61).

It is important to problematise this question because studies reviewed show that mainstream media in South Africa portray service delivery protests as violent. Depicting these protests as violent is one sided and undesirable because “heavy concentration on a few items” or violence pushes more important issues out of the audience sight (Shaw, 2007, p. 61). One of the issues downplayed by media’s emphasis on violence is the simple fact that to a large extent, protesters have legitimate reasons that push them to engage in collective action such as feelings of deprivation, illegitimate inequalities, and feelings of injustice about the state of affairs (Mawokomayi & Dube, 2018). The three theories, media framing, protest paradigm and agenda setting explain the ways which media covers events. In this case, they show how news coverage of protests end up contributing to the marginalisation of protestors. However, they do not expand on why news media prefers to frame events from certain angles than others. The PM was included to address this problem.

2.10 Herman and Chomsky's propaganda model

The PM proposes “that news media coverage is systematically shaped in favour of elite, state and corporate interests” (Thompson, 2009, p. 73). For the PM money and power enable dominant groups to get their messages across the public (Herman & Chomsky, 1988). Mainstream media play a key role in legitimising the views of the most dominant social actors because media environment is structured in a way intended “to control dissent and steer public action towards the interests of the ruling elites” (Freedman, 2009, p. 59). The PM shows that the societal purpose of the mainstream media is to defend the social, economic, and political interests of privileged groups (Freedman, 2009). This argument is similar to Friedman's (2011) conclusion that South African mainstream press plays no watchdog function because the only freedom and property it seeks to safeguard is that of the middle class.

Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky proposed five filters influencing media coverage of events. However, this thesis will discuss only the first three namely, ownership, advertising, and sourcing (Herman, 2000). The first filter, “size, ownership, and profit orientation of mass media” highlights the concentration of commercial media companies (Herman & Chomsky 1988, p. 3). Setting up a television station or newspaper company requires a considerable amount of capital, and this means that main news corporations are owned and run by few individuals (Bergman, 2018). The problem with this is that small newspapers tend to depend on their bigger counterparts because of their limited resources (Herman & Chomsky, 1988). During social unrest, such as a service delivery protest, top media corporations provide information to the lower tiers of the media and thus they define the news agenda (Herman & Chomsky, 1988). As already noted, media conglomerates such as Naspers are capitalist institutions who tend to marginalise groups that seem to challenge the capitalist system (Mawokomayi & Dube, 2018). According to the PM, this means that newspapers that rely on News24 for breaking news about service delivery protests will tend to be more negative since Naspers is mainly concerned about the impact of these protests on business activities.

The second filter concerns advertising as the main source of income for news corporations (Fuchs, 2018; Herman & Chosmky, 1988). According to this filter “working class and radical *newspapers* suffer from political discrimination from advertisers” (Herman & Chosmky, 1988, p. 16). This is because many firms are unwilling to sponsor news companies they regard as damaging to their interests. Large corporate advertisers are unwilling to fund newspapers that criticise corporate activities such as the issue of environmental degradation (Herman &

Chomsky, 1988). In this context, the PM means that many newspapers in South Africa are not interested in investigating the real causes of social and labour unrest since this might clash with the interests of their advertisers. For example, the reviewed literature showed that during the Marikana Massacre, the media failed to highlight the continued exploitation of mineworkers by their employers who pay them low wages (see Angus, 2015; Graham, 2016; Power & Gwanyanya, 2017).

The third filter involves sourcing which is the “reliance of the media on information provided by governments, business and experts funded and approved by these primary sources and agents of power” (Herman & Chomsky, 1988; Mullen, 2010, p. 676). The literature review has illustrated that service delivery protesters are rarely seen as people with ideas by the mainstream media and instead experts are often interviewed on behalf of protesters. Mainstream newspapers exclude the voices of marginalised groups mainly because of economic reasons. Herman and Chomsky (1988) note that “the media need a steady and reliable flow of the raw material news” (p. 18). Due to the daily news demands that journalists are required to meet, the media tends to depend on credible sources such as state departments, business corporations, trade groups and other news corporations i.e., inter-media-agenda setting (Cui & Wu, 2017; Herman & Chomsky, 1988). These entities meet the demands of news organisations because they provide reliable and steady flow of information (Herman & Chomsky, 1988).

Government and corporate sources are generally viewed as credible because they are recognisable (Herman & Chomsky, 1988). However, protesters or protest leaders are not often known and thus it is costly for journalists to obtain information from these groups since they need to verify such information. This problem is explained well by Fisherman (1980) who argues that “newsmakers are predisposed to treat bureaucratic accounts as factual because news personnel participate in upholding normative order of authorised knowers in the society” (as cited in Herman & Chomsky, 1988, p. 19). Unlike information from protest leaders, this means that official accounts are treated as factual, and they are reported as facts without background verifications. Information from state departments lowers investigative expense whereas material from protesters may require background checking and costly research (Herman & Chomsky, 1988). In this case, the PM explains why service delivery protesters are marginalised in mainstream media. On the other hand, framing theory, protest paradigm and agenda setting

emphasise how mainstream media coverage of service delivery protests may contribute to the marginalisation of these protests.

In brief, this theoretical framework has illustrated that there are several main factors that may contribute to the portrayal of social movements in the mainstream media as deviant and violent. Framing theory has shown that media's tendency to select and emphasise certain issues over others is one of the main reasons that often lead to one sided coverage of social movements. This is because issues highlighted in the media become the main agenda or are regarded as most important by the public. The protest paradigm on the other hand claims that news media has a tendency to represent protests as threatening which means the threat posed by protestors to other people's lives become the main concern for the public. Consequently, this undermines the key issues that protestors are trying to raise.

The PM highlights that marginalised groups are silenced in the media because of economic constraints such as media's dependency on large corporate advertisers. These advertisers are reluctant to sponsor newspapers that engage in serious criticism of corporate activities. Because of this dilemma it is reasonable to argue that mainstream newspapers in South Africa often find it difficult to blame certain corporations for the ongoing social unrest because these companies might withdraw patronage. These issues will be explored in detail in the subsequent chapters.

2.11 Research questions

The main objective of this thesis is to examine how the South African mainstream media frame service delivery protests in the country. Studying media framing is very important because mainstream media does not only provide reliable information about unfolding events but can also influence the way these events unfold and end (Gilboa, 2009). The way media frame political disputes for example can escalate violence (Gilboa, 2009). During the Rwandan Genocide in 1994, Hussain and Siraj (2018) argue that the media played a very big role in the killing of opponents (Tutsis) because they were framed as a threat to national security. Mourao and Chen (2020) show that during the 2013 protests in Brazil, mainstream media coverage was unfavourable toward the unrest and this in turn prolonged the conflict by justifying police brutality against protesters. The mainstream media focused on vandalism, looting, trespassing, lawlessness and blocking of streets (Mourao & Chen, 2020). Media coverage of the protests authorised, indirectly the police to use excessive force to deal with the threat posed by the so-

called rioters and this downplayed the need for peaceful negotiations between protesters and the government officials.

On the other hand, the way mainstream media frame political conflicts can reverse violence by forcing “policymakers to take actions they otherwise would not have taken” (Gilboa, 2009, p. 98). According to Zia and Syedah (2015) in serious conflicts such as the Rwandan genocide, media has a potential to “act like mediator and create pressure on the governments to address brewing and existing conflicts” (p. 165). In the South African case, media can facilitate negotiations between local municipalities and protesters by showing that the use of excessive force by SAPS when dealing with service delivery protests is illegitimate (Duncan, 2016).

Zia and Syedah (2015) show that media “has the potential to control the minds of readers or viewers” (166). Media messages or the way news frame events such as service delivery protests in this case has the potential to influence the attitudes and behaviour of non-protesting citizens. The problem with framing is that it is always easier for the media to foment conflict than resolving it (Gilboa, 2009). Thus, because of the likelihood to escalate conflict, one of the political function of media in democracy is to ensure that audience has access to diverse set of viewpoints to minimise partiality in coverage and the potential of stirring conflict (Wolfgang et al., 2021). News can be considered balanced when coverage emphasise content diversity (Wolfgang et al., 2021). Content diversity refers to the inclusion of the views of all conflicting parties in news coverage in order to deescalate conflict or dispute.

However, the literature review has illustrated clearly that when covering protests, mainstream media in South Africa tends to marginalise protesters and thus contributing to the conflict. In most cases, the media focuses on violence when reporting on service delivery protests creating the impression that these protests are inherently violent (Duncan, 2016). Police use media reports to justify their heavy-handed response to service delivery protests and this practice undermines the need for peaceful negotiations. Studies show that service delivery protests often turn violent in response to police brutality (Duncan, 2016).

Apart from police brutality, Bosch, Wasserman, and Chuma (2018c) show that service delivery protesters resort to violence such as barricading roads and burning tyres to attract print media attention. Activists in South Africa believe that “mainstream media is not interested in the problems of the poor *because journalists* only pay attention when protests take a violent turn” (Bosch, Wasserman, & Chuma, 2018c, p. 2166). According to this argument, it seems like mainstream media in South Africa is contributing to the culture of violence instead of

promoting peaceful negotiations between protesters and local municipal officials. For example, community activists argue that media only “report about what happened during the protest, not about the real issues” such as why communities engage in protests (Bosch, Wasserman, & Chuma, 2018c, p. 2161).

Due to this ambiguous relationship between service delivery protesters and mainstream media in South Africa. It is important to examine the role of media in facilitating peaceful resolution to service delivery problems facing local municipalities in the country. This study is guided by the following main research question (*RQ*):

RQ1: How does mainstream print media frame service delivery protests in South Africa?

However, because the literature review on service delivery protests has illustrated that media coverage of social movements tends to marginalise protesters. The following secondary questions were designed to examine these claims:

RQ1.1: Are the voices of the protesters included in news coverage of service delivery protests?

RQ1.2: Is there any evidence of the so-called masculine beat in press coverage of service delivery protests?

RQ1.3: What are the top terms used to describe service delivery protests in the press?

RQ1.4: What are the main underlying causes of the protests according to the press?

RQ1.5: How diverse is the coverage in terms of content, sources, and viewpoints?

Chapter 3: Methodology

To analyse mainstream media coverage of the ongoing service delivery protests in South Africa, this study employed quantitative content analysis as the main method. According to Berelson (1952) quantitative “content analysis is a research technique for the objective, systemic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication” (18). The benefit of the method is that it offers greater potential to generalise (Hesmondhalgh, 2006). Instead of digging deep into the meanings of a particular text, quantitative content analysis allows a researcher to analyse large amounts of information simultaneously (Hesmondhalgh, 2006).

Quantitative content analysis does not represent text in its entirety but identifies key features of the text deemed important for a particular study (Chuma, Bosch, & Herman, 2017). The method relies on generalisation to make an argument and an example of its application include studies “about representation of immigration in the press as a whole, rather than just in *The Sun*” (Hesmondhalgh, 2006, p. 138). Importantly, the main purpose of this study was to analyse media coverage of service delivery protests in South Africa and thus quantitative content analysis was suitable for this task because the focus is not on individual protests but service delivery protests as whole. Further, the quantitative method is crucial for this study because the focus is not on one particular daily or weekly newspaper but a number of different dailies and weeklies.

Apart from generalisation, quantitative content analysis was chosen for this study because of its focus on manifest content or “elements that are physically present and countable *in a text*” (Neuendorf, 2017, p. 31). Manifest analysis looks at obvious and straightforward aspects of a text and this makes quantitative content analysis more objective compared to other methods of inquiry (Neuendorf, 2017). This is explained well by George (2009) who points out that the value of quantitative content analysis “is that it offers the possibility of obtaining more precise, objective and reliable observations about the frequency with which given content characteristics occur...” (p. 144). Studies show that the method is nonintrusive and thus “does not suffer from researcher demand bias” especially when compared to other direct methods of inquiry such as in-depth interviews which are likely to yield biased responses (Duriau, Reger, & Pfarrer, 2007, p. 7; Kolbe & Burnett, 1991).

Even though quantitative content analysis is regarded as “a systemic procedure for obtaining precise, objective and reliable data” (George, 2009, p. 144). The method has some serious drawbacks because it tends to prevent the researcher from analysing latent meanings of selected texts. This problem is explained well by Chuma, Bosch, and Wasserman (2017) who point out that quantitative content analysis is only useful for “identifying general patterns of media coverage of selected text, *and as the result, cannot* represent the selected texts in their entirety” (p. 97). The method makes it difficult to consider theoretical perspectives because of its focus on specific observable elements such as the appearance of a particular word in a news article (Kolbe & Burnett, 1991; Potter & Levine-Donnerstein, 1999). In general, quantitative content analysis is less flexible compared to other methods of inquiry and its exclusive concern with manifest meanings makes it difficult to interpret and contextualise data when making coding judgements (see George, 2009).

Stokes (2013) points out that news coverage “is one of the most ideological loaded elements of the media” (p. 144). This means that it was difficult to analyse those articles that required more interpretation to unpack “deeper meanings embodied in the text” (see Duriau, Reger, & Pfarrer, 2007, p. 6). The quantitative method also complicated the process of making coding judgements concerning unobservable concepts such as negative, positive, and neutral news stories (see Neuendorf, 2017). It was not straightforward to categorise a news article as negative or positive without being subjective because quantitative content analysis is only useful for quantifying observable features of a large number of texts (Deacon et al., 1998; Neuendorf, 2017). However, despite these drawbacks the method is still the most practicable for the analysis of service delivery protests on a macrolevel. To deal with the shortcomings of the method, the discussion chapter will provide a detailed contextualisation of the quantitative findings.

3.1 Sampling

A total of 603 news articles from 10 mainstream English-language newspapers published in South Africa’s major cities were coded. All news stories analysed were randomly selected from two online databases, namely, LexisNexis Academic (Nexis Uni) and SA Media – via Sabinet Reference. News articles from both online databases were retrieved using the keywords, service delivery protests. The selected time spanned over a six-year period starting on 15 January 2016 and ending on 12 August 2021. This extended six-year period was chosen mainly to enable the researcher to look across a large number of news articles on service delivery

protests. Importantly, this was crucial for generalisation and for analysing quantitative content analysis findings (see Hesmondhalgh, 2006). All newspaper articles that were included in the sample, were analysed using Luke, Caburnay, and Cohen (2011) longitudinal approach. Longitudinal content analysis allowed the researcher to look at the data “across long periods, without examining each and every year in the period” (Lacy et al., 2001, p. 837). Table 1 illustrates the number of news articles analysed for each newspaper across the selected time period.

Table 1: *Number of News Articles Analysed*

Newspaper	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Subtotal
Business Day	14	15	12	15	0	4	60
Cape Times	0	10	13	20	12	7	62
City Press	0	0	0	0	4	5	9
Daily Dispatch	0	6	6	12	21	17	62
Daily Sun	0	12	19	20	12	6	69
Mail and Guardian	0	14	21	23	4	13	75
Sunday Times	0	9	11	9	7	6	42
The Herald	0	13	15	18	7	12	65
The Mercury	0	12	12	20	14	0	58
The Star	0	37	17	17	18	12	101
Total							603

Analysed newspapers were purposely selected to reflect the country’s print media diversity. These newspapers are published in different provinces in South Africa, they include dailies, weeklies, and tabloids and they are targeted to different readers. The notion of print media diversity was very important to consider because “in South Africa, the richest 10 percent hold 71 percent of the wealth, while the poorest 60 percent hold just seven percent of the wealth” (World Population Review, 2021). The problem with this is that mainstream, commercial print media tends to cater for middle-class readership by neglecting the poor segment of the population (Friedman, 2011). Therefore, it was deemed necessary to include newspapers that are specifically targeted to those who live in townships to neutralise this bias.

The selected newspapers included, *Business Day* (n = 60), *Cape Times* (n = 62), *City Press* (n = 9), *Daily Dispatch* (n = 62), *Daily Sun* (n = 69), *Mail and Guardian* (n = 75), *Sunday Times* (n = 42), *The Herald* (n = 65), *The Mercury* (n = 58) and *The Star* (n = 101). These newspapers are published in three South African provinces, namely Western Cape (Cape Town), Eastern Cape (East London and Gqeberha), KwaZulu-Natal (Durban) and Gauteng (Johannesburg). They “... span a spectrum of the South African print media” (Chuma, Bosch, & Wasserman,

2017, p. 97). Different provinces were included to analyse the majority of main service delivery protests that took place between 2016 and 2021 across the country.

As noted, newspapers in South Africa tend to target different audiences and thus it was important to mix those that cater mainly to the middle class such as *Sunday Times*, *Business Day*, and *Cape Times* with those that cater to the working-class consumers such as *Daily Sun* and *The Star* (Ndlovu, 2015). “Geographically, the headquarters of the big media institutions are found in big cities... *not* in the villages, where 40 percent of South Africans live” (Ndlovu, 2015, p. 119). Due to this problem, two newspapers in those that were selected are published in the Eastern Cape in East London and Gqeberha respectively. The rationale behind this decision is that these newspapers, *Daily Dispatch* and *The Herald* were likely to have covered service delivery protests that might have occurred in small towns such as Makhanda (previously known as Grahamstown) or Qumbu. The inclusion of these newspapers was crucial because this study is about mainstream media coverage of service delivery protests in South Africa and the focus is not on individual protests which means protests in small towns are important as those that occur in major cities.

3.2 Frame identification

According to Potter and Levine-Donnerstein (1999) media frames can be identified either inductively or deductively. Researchers operating in an inductive mode do not rely on established literature when identifying frames and thus “there is no identifiable theory that guides the design of a coding scheme” (Potter & Levine-Donnerstein, 1999, p. 264). The advantage of identifying frames inductively is that the approach allows the researcher to position manifest analysis findings in some general context instead of leaving percentages or counts at descriptive level (Potter & Levine-Donnerstein, 1999). The approach is flexible, and the researcher is able to move beyond the observations themselves (Potter & Levine-Donnerstein, 1999). This means that the approach enables the researcher to interpret manifest analysis findings and thus it is very useful when examining the relationship between coded variables.

In contrast to non-use of theory, studies that utilise the deductive approach derive frames theoretically “from the literature and code them in standard content analysis (Matthes & Kohring, 2008, p. 265; Potter & Levine-Donnerstein, 1999). The approach relies heavily on established frames such as conflict frame, economic consequences frame, responsibility frame,

morality frame, and human interest frame etc. (Matthes & Kohring, 2008). Selected frames, for a study are usually known beforehand and, in most cases, they tend to “suit the topic currently under investigation” (Matthes & Kohring, 2008, p. 262).

When identifying frames, the deductive approach was used as the main method in this study. The rationale behind this is because the approach allowed for the identification of frames beforehand and this was crucial for eliminating emerging frames during the coding processes. However, it is important to highlight that the method has some drawbacks and one of them is that “deductive studies are limited to already established frames” (Matthes & Kohring, 2008, p. 262). The method is inflexible, and it is hard to rely on it when analysing evolving issues such as service delivery protests. Due to these problems, the inductive approach was used to supplement and to deal with the weaknesses of deductive approach.

As noted, the deductive approach was adopted mainly to eliminate the emergence of new frames during the coding processes. However, it became apparent “that frames continue to emerge as the research task continues” (Linstrom & Marais, 2012; Magwagwa, 2019, p. 39). Consequently, the inductive approach was used for the identification of newly emerging frames (Matthes & Kohring, 2008). The inductive approach was also useful for the contextualisation of service delivery protests because it was assumed that the South African media might “use different frames to those identified in previous framing studies of protest in the U.S. and United Kingdom (UK)” (Pointer, 2015, p. 43). Unlike the rigid deductive approach, the inductive method allowed “greater flexibility to discover new frames that were not identified in the initial coding scheme” (Chong & Druckman, 2007, p. 108). Greater flexibility was crucial for contextualisation of service delivery protests and for the interpretation of manifest analysis findings.

The following frames were derived deductively from the literature on media framing of social movements. However, because these studies were not about South African social movements but U.S. protests and European migrant crisis. The inductive method was used to contextualise the identified frames. These frames included:

1. Status of voice: “Refers to the authority attributed to those who speak” (Chouliaraki & Zaborowski, 2017, p. 622). In this context, this refers specifically to the inclusion or exclusion of gender such as male and female, and gender pronouns (i.e., he, she, his and her etc.).

2. Collectivisation frame: The depiction of service delivery protesters “as a statistical percentage *or as a group* where one is indistinguishable from another” (Chouliaraki & Zaborowski, 2017, p. 116).
3. Human interest frame: “This frame brings a human face or an emotional angle to the presentation of an event, issue or problem” (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000, p. 95).
4. Violence frame: This frame occurs when news stories on service delivery protests focus exclusively on violent protesters, or the potential for violence and destruction as a means of capturing audience interest (Boykoff, 2006).
5. Riot frame: Similar to the violence frame, this frame centres around the disruptive impact of service delivery protests in South Africa (Kilgo & Mourao, 2021). The frame emphasises deviant and disruptive behaviour of protesters especially the use of violent tactics such as burning of tyres, arson and vandalism or destruction of private and public property.
6. Confrontation frame: This frame “focuses on protesters and their encounters with the opposition, including confrontations with governmental officials and the police” (Kilgo & Mourao, 2021, p. 4).
7. Debate frame or legitimising frame: these frames occur when journalists “treat protesters as a legitimate entity” (Kilgo & Mourao, 2021, p. 5). In this case, this includes media coverage and contextualisation of the complaints, objections and demands made by service delivery protesters.
8. Inconvenience frame: This frame emphasises the disruption of traffic flow as the result of service delivery protests and the resultant public aversion towards these protests (Di Cicco, 2010).
9. Economic consequences frame: This frame focuses on how service delivery protests are disastrous for South Africa’s economy because protesters tend to target freight trucks for example (see Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). Torching freight trucks affects food security in the country and in the region as whole.
10. Thematic frame: Thematic frames place the occurrence of service delivery protests in some wider context such as broader social, economic, and historical background of these protests (Staniland & Smith, 2013).
11. Episodic Frame: Episodic frames focus more on the specifics concerning the occurrence of service delivery protests. Media coverage tends to emphasise questions such as

when, where, and how a protest occurred, usually with no general evidence or contextualisation (Staniland & Smith, 2013).

Thematic and episodic frames were used as the main frames in this study and thus all other frames were treated as secondary or as subcategories. For example, riot and confrontation frames are episodic in nature because they give no context of the protest. However, debate and legitimising frames are thematic because they contextualise why people are protesting by stating the grievances, goals and agendas pursued by protesters (see Kilgo & Mourao, 2021). Frame identification is very useful because it explains how the media promote certain viewpoints over others (Jacobs, 2014). All frames that are identified in this study will show those elements and perspectives that are made more salient by the mainstream press when covering service delivery protests.

3.3 Coding scheme

The codebook was mainly designed deductively, and all frames identified were coded using a Google Form which was used as a coding sheet to reduce manual coding errors. All identified frames were coded based on their brief and full definitions provided above (see MacQueen et al., 2009). Each frame was coded as yes if present in a news article and no if absent (see Joshi, 2017).

The unit of analysis was an individual news report including editorial and opinion pieces. Opinion pieces and editorials were included because their “form is less constrained by journalistic norms and routines, and *they have* a stronger potential effect on public policy” (Takahashi, Freedman, & Witsen, 2017, p. 64). Opinion pieces contribute to the stream of main ideas and viewpoints, and they are often used strategically by newspapers to promote certain perspectives (Rhodenbaugh, 1995; Takahashi, Freedman, & Witsen, 2017). Therefore, it was deemed useful to analyse editorials and opinion pieces with main news reports during the coding process.

For each news article, coding was done for provinces in which the protests took place, news sources, gender of the main actors, terminology, newspaper name, name of journalist, year of publication, news headline, salience, and solutions prescribed by the media for the problem. However, some of these categories were not included in the final results because of the limited scope of the current study. The coded data was analysed using Microsoft Excel after being

exported from Google Forms and therefore the results and conclusions were drawn from the two software.

All selected news articles were analysed in their entirety. However, photographs were excluded because the majority of news articles contained no accompanying photographs especially those that were retrieved from the online database, LexisNexis Academic (Nexis Uni). The categories, sources of information and terminology were coded inductively for contextualisation purposes. This means that the two main categories were derived from existing literature, however subcategories or variables such as the police for the sources of information were coded as they emerge during the coding process. The rationale behind this decision was to ensure that only those actors that play a major role during service delivery protests were included. This includes protesters, the police, government, non-protesting citizens, and municipal officials among others. In other words, the police or municipality officials play a crucial role during service delivery protests because they are likely to be interviewed by the media and thus, they are the main sources for press coverage.

The following chapter will present the quantitative content analysis results in detail. As already illustrated, quantitative content analysis focuses more on manifest content and countable elements of a text. Because the quantitative method does not go beyond the countable elements of a text to explain its deeper meanings (see Pointer, 2015). The discussion chapter will provide a comprehensive contextualisation of the quantitative findings. It will focus on the latent or contextual meanings of the quantitative findings. The chapter will take into consideration problems such as the financial or economic constraints that journalists in South Africa are working under. In general, the discussion chapter will be essential for the contextualisation of the findings as quantitative content analysis does not allow deep analysis and interpretation of the research outcomes.

Chapter 4: Findings

4.1 Manifest analysis

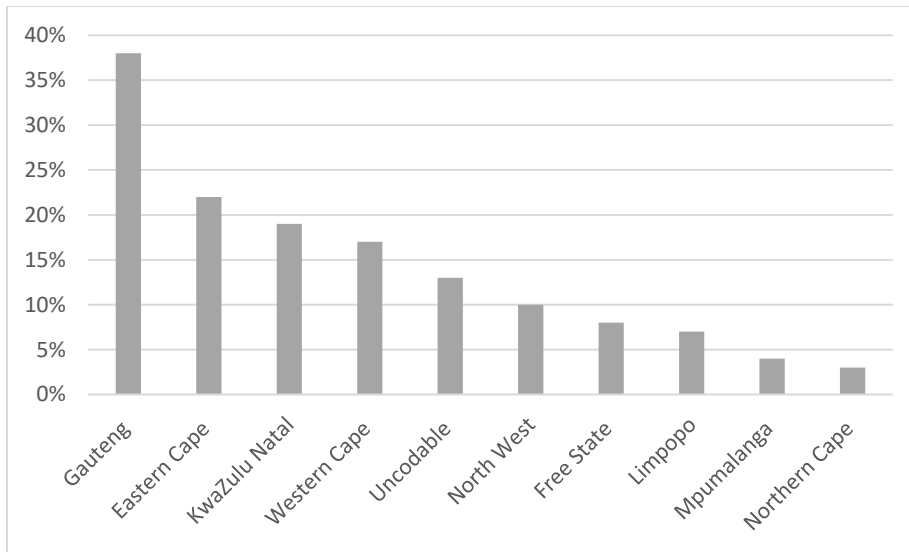
This chapter presents the quantitative findings obtained from the analysis of 603 newspaper articles on service delivery protests in South Africa between 2016 and 2021. One of the objectives of this thesis is to examine how mainstream media coverage of protests in the country fits within the global debate on media coverage of protests. Studies in countries such as Brazil and the U.S. show that media coverage of protests conform to the protest paradigm where protesters are often portrayed and framed as less legitimate, deviant, threatening and impotent (Kim & Shahin, 2020; Lee, 2014).

The chapter will begin by comparing hotspot provinces shown by other studies between 2004 and 2012 with those that are constructed by the author between 2016 and 2021. This will be followed by findings on news sources, gender, human interest frame, collectivisation frame, terminology, debate frame, inconvenience frame and economic consequences frame. The following chapter will provide a contextual discussion explaining the quantitative findings in detail.

4.2 Hotspot provinces

Between 2004 and 2012, studies show that Gauteng followed by Western Cape experienced most service delivery related protests compared to other provinces (see Akinboade, Mokwena, & Kinck, 2010; Akinboade, Mokwena, & Kinck, 2013; Alexander, 2014). In Western Cape, Mpehle (2012) notes that this increase in protests was caused by poor financial management and lack of funds needed for service delivery. Figure 1 shows hotspot provinces obtained from the analysed newspaper articles between 2016 and 2021.

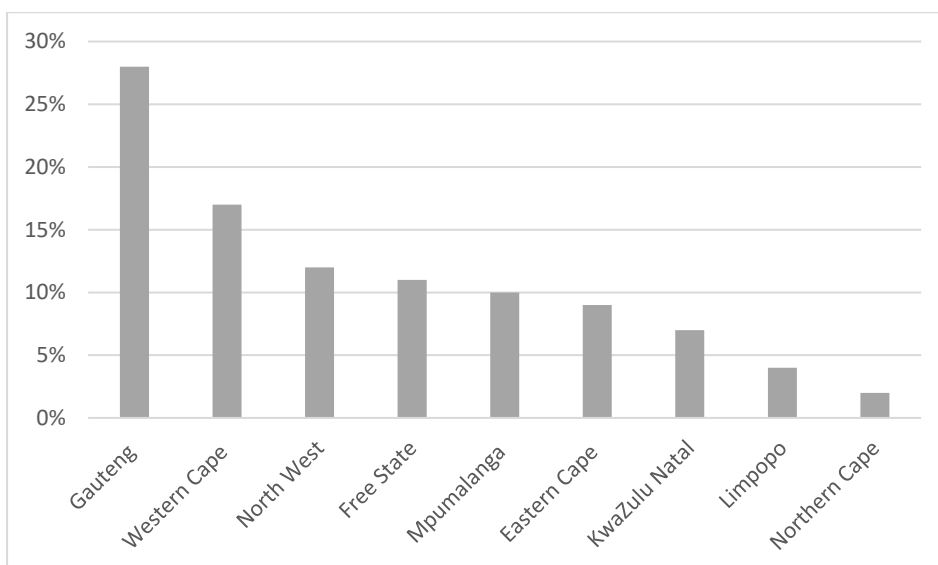
Figure 1: *Service Delivery Protests by Province, 2016-2021*



Note. Source; author's own illustration.

According to the data in figure 1, Gauteng at 38 percent is still a very volatile province because of high incidents of service delivery protests that took place between 2016 and 2021. It is important to note that protests in Eastern Cape, 22 percent and KwaZulu-Natal, 19 percent have increased surpassing Western Cape, 17 percent. Figure 2 illustrates the number of service delivery protests by province between 2004 and 2012 provided by the MunIQ, 2012 (see Akinboade, Mokwena, & Kinck, 2014).

Figure 2: *MunIQ, Service Delivery Protests by Province, 2004-2012*



Note. Source; (Akinboade, Mokwena, & Kinck, 2014, p. 12).

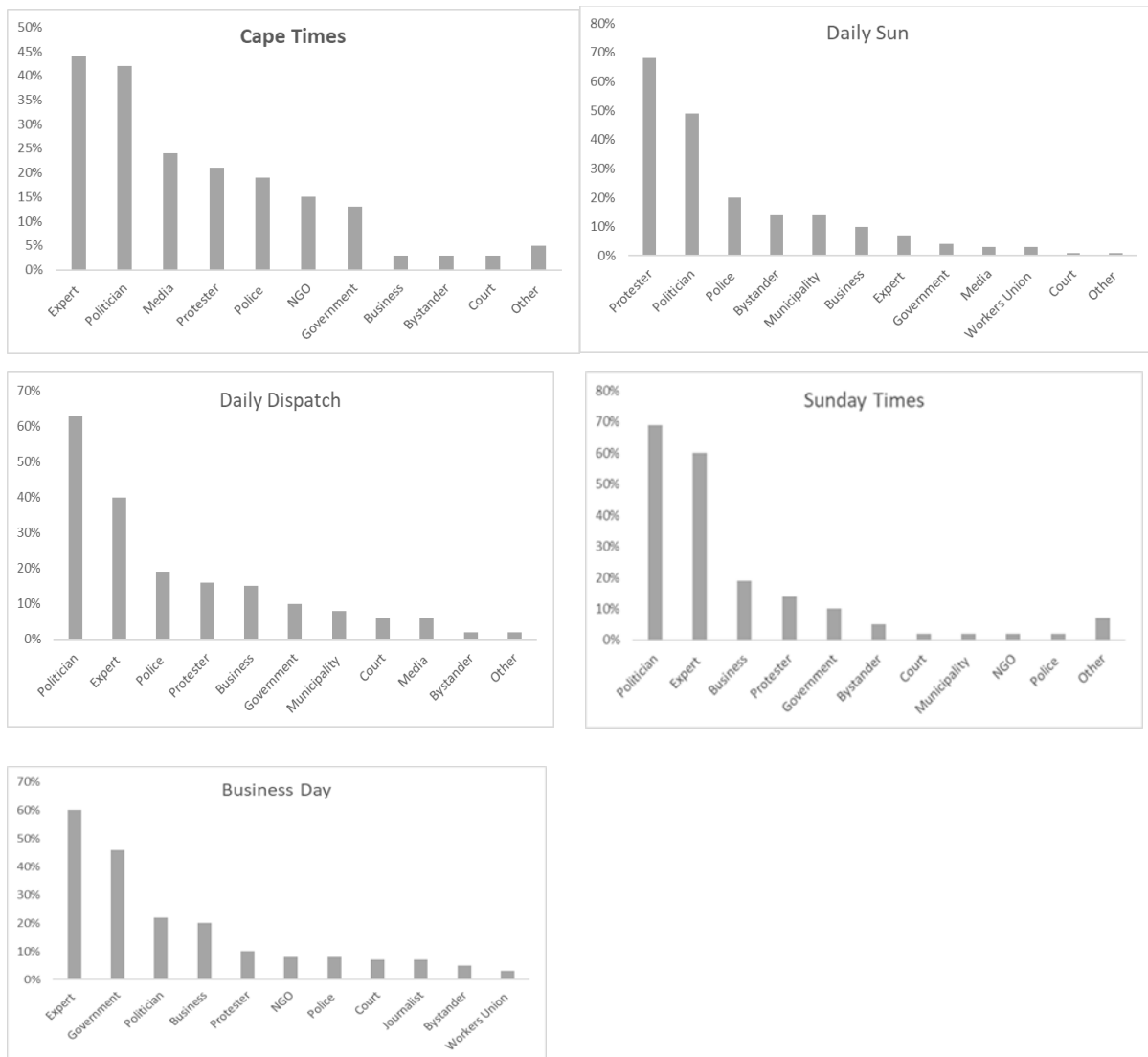
Figure 2 was included for comparison purposes and the main takeaway is that Gauteng is still the worst hit province. On the other hand, Northern Cape has continued to experience few service delivery protests than any other province. For example, between 2004 and 2012, only two percent of the reported service delivery protests occurred in the province (Figure 2). Between 2016 and 2021, three percent of these protests took place in Northern Cape (Figure 1). Future studies on service delivery protests can look specifically at why Gauteng witness more protests compared to other provinces such as Limpopo and Northern Cape. Further, studies on these protests can also investigate why Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal have overtaken Western Cape as service delivery protest hotspots.

4.3 Main actors in news coverage of service delivery protests

According to Kiss (2016) “in every media coverage it is essential who is asked or permitted to articulate their opinion in their own voice” (p. 60). Main actors or voices in media coverage play a key role in shaping news agenda (Chuma, Bosch, & Wasserman, 2017). For Hall et al. (2013) news sources such as statements by key spokesmen, are primary definers of news. However, as noted in chapter two, the protest paradigm and the PM show that news “sources are subject to gatekeeping processes, both in terms of identifying them as sources in the first place as well as the actual content they make available to journalists” (Chuma, Bosch, & Wasserman, 2017, p. 100). Thus, it was crucial to examine the question of who speaks in the South African mainstream press.

The first two sources quoted directly in selected news articles were coded to determine “which voices are given salience and which ones are left out” (see Chuma, Bosch, & Wasserman, 2017, p. 100). Five different newspapers were randomly selected from the total of 10 newspapers. The newspapers included *Cape Times*, *Daily Sun*, *Daily Dispatch*, *Sunday Times*, and *Business Day*. The findings are illustrated in figure 3.

Figure 3: Main Voices in Press Coverage of Service Delivery Protests, 2016-2021



The findings from the five newspapers above show that experts, government officials, the police, politicians, media organisations, business groups such as banks and risk assessment companies are the primary definers of news. Across the five newspapers, the first three main sources that were quoted mostly included these actors. As the graphs show above, protesters were generally marginalised because they were not included within the first three main quoted actors except in *Daily Sun*, 68 percent. Importantly, *Daily Sun* usually targets the working-class consumers and this is the possible reason the voices of protesters are included substantially compared to other newspapers (Ndlovu, 2015). Table 2 shows the frequencies of

main voices from the remaining five newspapers, namely, *The Star*, *The Mercury*, *The Herald*, *Mail and Guardian* and *City Press*.

Table 2: *Frequencies of Main Voices in Press Coverage of Service Delivery Protests, 2016-2021*

Categories	Frequency
Politician/ Political Party	173
Expert (academic, think tank etc.)	149
Protester	53
Government	41
Police	39
Business	33
Bystander/ Non-Protesting Citizen	23
Journalist/ Media Organisations	22
Municipality	18
Court	13
NGO/ Civic Society Organisation	12
Workers Union	2
Other	4
Total	582

Note. Data from *The Star*, *The Mercury*, *The Herald*, *Mail and Guardian* and *City Press*.

Table 2 illustrates further that politicians and experts are the primary definers of news during service delivery protests. Protesters are mainly excluded, and this form of coverage conforms to the protest paradigm. The protest paradigm and the PM claim that media tends to rely on official sources when covering controversial issues such as protests (see De Cillia & McCurdy, 2020; Herman & Chomsky, 1988). The findings in figure 3 and table 2 show that the press when covering service delivery protests rely on the so-called credible sources such as the police, business groups and government departments.

To answer *RQ1.1: Are the voices of the protesters included in news coverage of service delivery protests?*

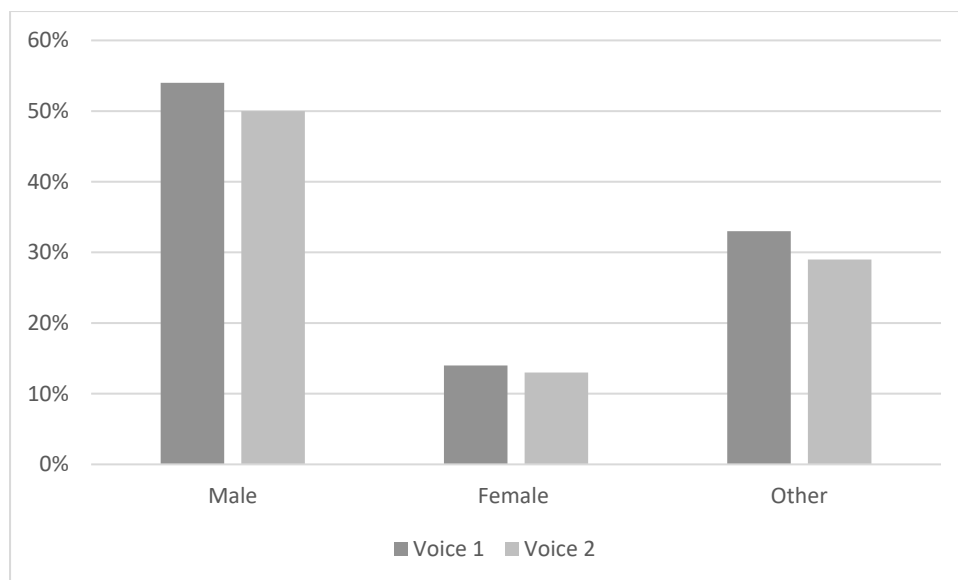
According to the findings, experts, government officials, the police, media organisations, business groups and politicians have access to media agenda because they constitute a great portion of direct quotes. Protesters are largely excluded except in *Daily Sun* where they are quoted more than any other actor. In short, views and perspectives raised by credible sources

such as experts become the primary definers of news during service delivery protests and therefore these sources set the agenda for the media.

4.4 The status of voice

According to Chouliaraki and Zaborowski (2017,) the status of voice “refers to the authority attributed to those who speak *in news coverage*” (p. 622). Specifically, this refers to the inclusion or exclusion of gender, names, profession, age, and age group of quoted main actors. To analyse the status of voice, this study focused firstly on gender. The gender of the first two main voices quoted in the articles was coded and the findings are illustrated in figure 4.

Figure 4: *Gender of the Main Voices in the Press, 2016-2021*



The findings in figure 4 show that the press during service delivery protests rely heavily on male voices (V1 = 54%, V2 = 50%) compared to female voices (V1 = 14%, V2 = 13%). It is also important to note that a majority of main sources in news articles were quoted without mentioning their status. This included anonymous actors and institutions in cases where no particular individual was named. Thus, the category, other (V1 = 33%, V2 = 29%) represented all anonymous voices and actors whose gender was not stated in the stories.

The findings on gender are consistent with earlier research. Studies show that media coverage of political events such as service delivery protests in this case tend to be dominated by male sources because “political news is a prime example of a masculine news domain in which female journalists are traditionally a minority” (Albæk et al., 2014, p. 37; Chuma, Bosch, & Wasserman, 2017; Freedman, Fico, & Love, 2007). This male dominance in political news also

known as masculine beat “has been linked to gendering of journalistic content” (Albæk et al., 2014, p. 37).

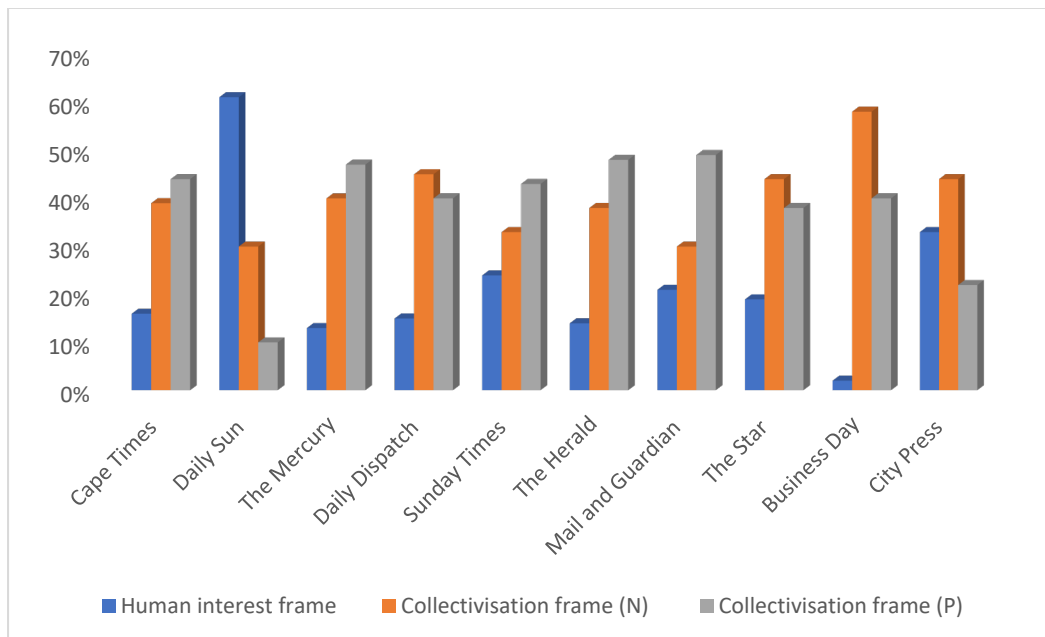
To answer *RQ1.2: Is there any evidence of the so-called masculine beat in press coverage of service delivery protests?*

The findings in figure 4 have illustrated that there is evidence of masculine beat because male voices during service delivery protests constitute the majority of quoted main sources in the press. This means that men are often asked to provide commentary more than women during these protests.

Apart from gender, the status of voice was also analysed using the human interest frame and collectivisation frame. These frames were used to analyse the status of voice for protesters only and thus all other actors were excluded. As noted in the method chapter, the human interest frame “brings a human face to the presentation of an event, issue or problem” (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000, p. 95). This frame applied when the names, gender, profession age and age group of protesters were included. Names of protesters were used in those articles that emphasised how protesters were affected by the issues that they were trying to raise. Thus, articles that used the human interest frame were generally sympathetic towards protesters.

On the other hand, the collectivisation frame or simple collectivisation referred to the absence of human interests frame especially when protesters were depicted as a statistical number. This frame portrayed protesters as a group and all those things that distinguish an individual such as name and gender were omitted. This frame was often employed in those articles that were negative towards protesters and service delivery protests in general. The findings for both the human interest frame and collectivisation frame are illustrated in figure 5.

Figure 5: Human Interest Frame and Collectivisation Frame in Press Coverage, 2016-2021



The findings show that the press tends to collectivise protesters when reporting on service delivery protests. In all newspapers except *Daily Sun*, the collectivisation frame was employed more than the human interest frame which means that the majority of news articles analysed were generally negative towards protesters or service delivery protests. 61 percent of the total news articles analysed from *Daily Sun* employed the human interest frame, making *Daily Sun* the most positive newspaper towards protesters. In four newspapers namely *Business Day* (58%), *Daily Dispatch* (45%), *The Star* (44%) and *City Press* (44%), the collectivisation frame (N) was used in a way that was very negative. Most articles from these newspapers showed protesters as a group of violent mob, vandals and looters and the human interest frame was completely excluded.

The remaining five newspapers namely, *Mail and Guardian* (49%), *The Herald* (48%), *The Mercury* (47%), *Cape Times* (44) and *Sunday Times* (43) also employed the collectivisation frame (P). However, these newspapers were generally positive towards protesters even though they failed to name individual characteristics of protesters such as gender or profession. The majority of articles from these newspapers contained information about protesters that was likely to generate feelings of sympathy and compassion among readers. However, press coverage of service delivery protests is generally negative because all newspapers except *Daily Sun* used the collectivisation frame more frequently compared to the human interest frame. This form of coverage conforms to the protest paradigm which suggests that “the news media

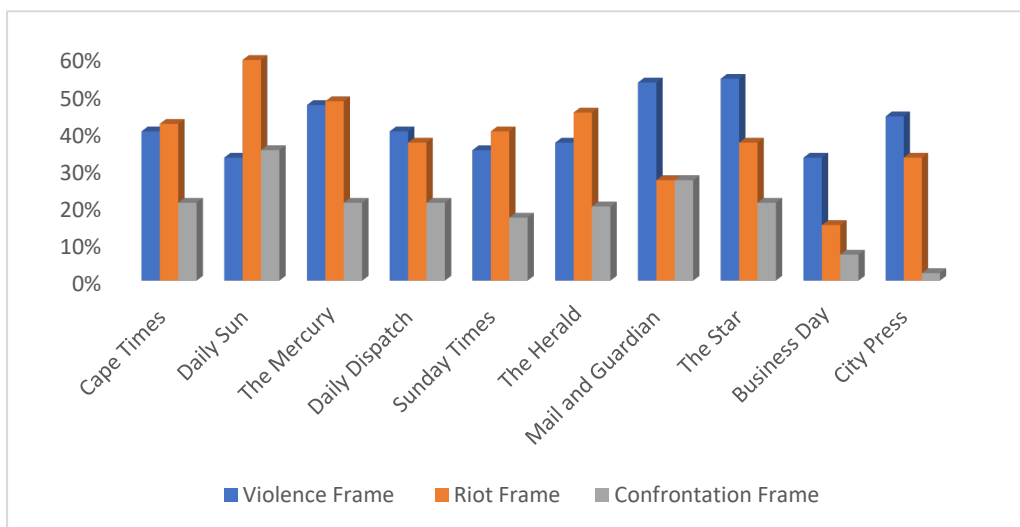
tends to depict social protests as deviant and threatening...” (Ismail, Torosyan, & Tully, 2019, p. 174). The press achieved this by foregrounding the collectivisation frame which was more negative compared to the human interest frame.

4.5 Terminology

According to Duncan (2014b) analysing the use of terminology in mainstream media coverage of unrest is very crucial because concepts may point to the opinions, prejudice and even ideological position of the speaker, journalist, news editor or newspaper. Consequently, news articles were coded for use of vocabulary or lexical choice. However, the focus was not on latent meanings of certain concepts but frequency and manifest meanings of these terms. Selected terms were grouped under three broad frames namely, violence frame, riot frame and confrontation frame. These frames are episodic in nature because they do not offer contextualisation of issues at stake during protests. The violence frame included use of the words, violent service delivery protest and violent protest (see Boykoff, 2006). On the other hand, the riot frame encompassed use of the following terms, damage to property, burning of private, personal, or public property, destruction, and vandalism (see Kilgo & Mourao, 2021).

Lastly, the confrontation frame focused on the mentioning of statements such as police clash with protesters, police fired tear gas or rubber bullets, protesters clashed with non-protesters and racial tensions (see Kilgo & Mourao, 2021). The findings are illustrated in Figure 6.

Figure 6: *Top Terms used to Portray Service Delivery Protests in the Press, 2016-2021*



Five newspapers namely, *The Star* (54%), *Mail and Guardian* (53%), *Daily Dispatch* (40%), *City Press* (44%) and *Business Day* (33%) emphasised the violence frame more than the two

other frames. These newspapers described service delivery protests as inherently violent. The other five newspapers, *Daily Sun* (59%), *The Mercury* (48%), *The Herald* (45%), *Cape Times* (42%) and *Sunday Times* (40%) foregrounded the riot frame more than the other frames. The focus was mainly on destruction caused by service delivery protests on private and public property.

The confrontation frame was not used frequently as the other two frames except in *Daily Sun* where the frame (35%) was used more than the violence frame. *Daily Sun* focused exclusively on the riot frame by using words that emphasised the destruction of property and the confrontation frame where the clashes between protesters and the police were foregrounded. This is not surprising because tabloid newspapers are often accused of “utilising a classic newspaper tactic that allow them to profit from sensational, attention-getting details without being held responsible for them” (Harris, 2006, p. 146). The use of the three frames in the press conforms to the protest paradigm which states that news tends to “emphasise tactics, action and spectacle rather than substance of the protest” (Ismail, Torosyan, & Tully, 2019, p. 174). The theoretical framework has pointed out that studies on agenda setting show that issues highlighted in mainstream media often become the most salient issues to the public (Muddiman, Stroud, & McCombs, 2014). It is therefore reasonable to argue that violence and riot emphasised by the press during service delivery protests become the main concern for non-protesting citizens.

To answer *RQ1.3: What are the top terms used to describe service delivery protests in the press?*

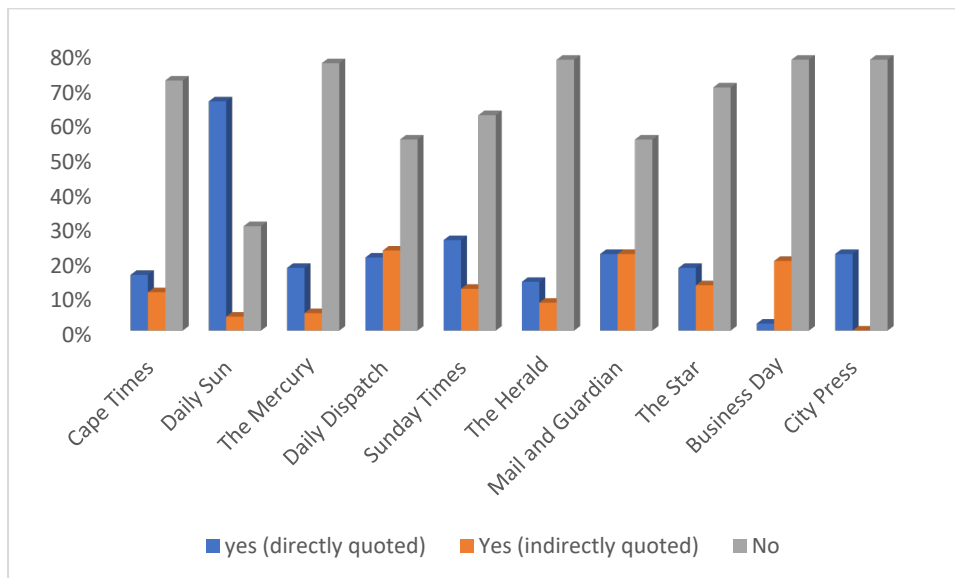
The main terms that were used to describe the protests included violent service delivery protests, damage to property and clashes. These terms tended to delegitimise these protests because they overshadow the main causes of service delivery protests in South Africa. Further, because media can prolong conflict, it is not clear whether the three episodic frames contribute to peaceful resolution of service delivery protests or justify the use of force by police when dealing with these allegedly violent protests.

4.6 Debate frame and legitimising frame

Debate frames or legitimising frames are thematic in nature because when used in news coverage of protests they contextualise the complaints, objections and demands made by service delivery protesters (see Kilgo & Mourao, 2021). They are often used “when

journalists... treat protesters as a legitimate entity” (Kilgo & Mourao, 2021, P. 5). The Debate frame was coded to determine whether the issues raised by the protesters were included in the coverage or not. An article was coded as no if the issues raised by protesters were not mentioned and yes if protesters were quoted directly or indirectly articulating their demands and goals. The findings are presented in figure 7.

Figure 7: *Debate Frame, 2016-2021*



As the findings in figure 7 show, most articles analysed did not prioritise the debate frame. This includes articles from *Cape Times* (72% of the total articles), *The Mercury* (77%), *Daily Dispatch* (55%), *Sunday Times* (62%) *The Herald* (78%) *Mail and Guardian* (55%), *The Star* (70%), *Business Day* (78%) and *City Press* (78%).

Importantly, the majority of articles from *Daily Sun* (66%), quoted protesters directly articulating their demands and issues they were trying to raise (i.e., prioritised the debate frame). *Daily Sun* is a tabloid newspaper, and the thesis has discussed that the newspaper targets black working-class audience; therefore, we can link this trend to the paper’s main target audience (see Ndlovu, 2015; Wasserman, 2009).

At the beginning of the chapter, this thesis showed that the main sources of information for *Daily Sun* were protesters. When comparing these findings, there is a correlation between main voices in the coverage and the debate frame. If protesters constitute a large number of main voices, their issues are likely to be covered and thus the majority of articles will prioritise the debate frame as *Daily Sun*. However, if protesters are largely excluded as sources of

information in favour of elite voices such as the police or government officials. The majority of articles are likely to exclude the debate frame and these findings are showing the persistence of this problem.

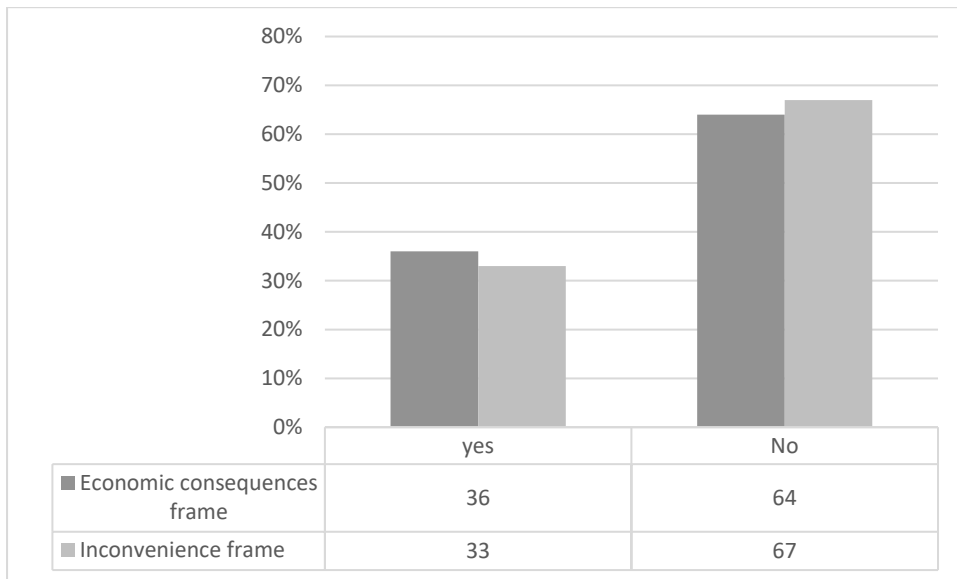
The findings show once again that press coverage of service delivery protests conforms to the protest paradigm. The exclusion of the debate frame means that protesters are treated as an illegitimate entity because violence associated with these protests is covered more than the main grievances and issues raised by protesters.

4.7 Inconvenience frame and economic consequences frame

Studies that have explored the inconvenience frame show that media coverage of protests tends to emphasise the inconvenience caused by protesters to other people's daily life (Di Cicco, 2010; Xu, 2013). In the U.S., the media tends to focus on the negative impact of protests such as the disruption of automobile traffic (Di Cicco, 2010). According to Wasserman, Chuma, and Bosch (2018b) in South Africa, reports on radio news bulletin often warn "listeners... *of* barricaded roads to avoid instead of informing them" about the real causes of service delivery protests (p. 149).

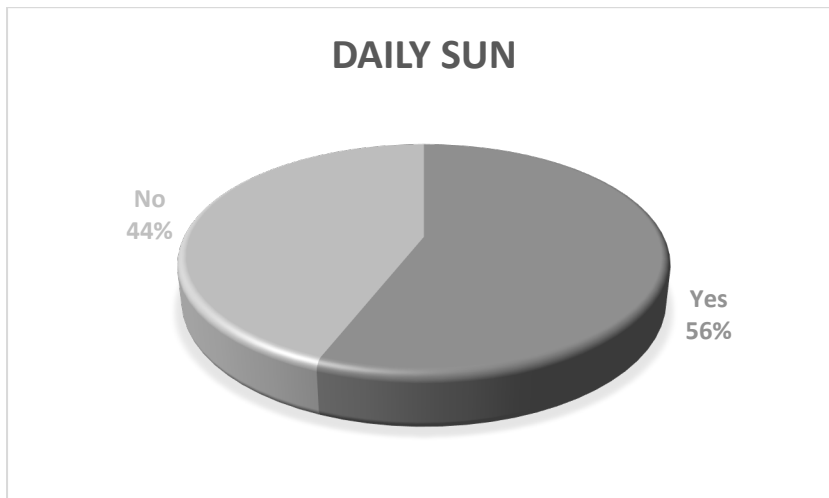
On the other hand, when the economic consequences frame is employed, studies show that the media tends to highlight the impact of protests on commerce such as the cost incurred by businesses as the result of protests, looting of shops and disruption of the supply chain (Di Cicco, 2010; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). These frames are episodic, and they conform to the protest paradigm because they delegitimise protests when employed. To examine the inconvenience frame and economic consequences frame, each news article was coded as yes if the frames were present and no if they were absent. The findings are illustrated in figure 8.

Figure 8: *Impact of Service Delivery Protests on other People’s Daily Life and Economy, 2016-2021*



To analyse the inconvenience frame, the leading question was, does the article mentions road closures, disruption of traffic flow or barricaded roads to avoid. As figure 1 shows, 67 percent of the analysed articles excluded the inconvenience frame. Whereas only 33 percent emphasised the frame. Generally, these findings mean that articles from all different newspapers did not focus on the inconvenience frame as suggested by studies on protests in South Africa and other countries such as the U.S. However, when analysing these newspapers individually, it was only in *Daily Sun* where this frame was emphasised (see figure 9).

Figure 9: *The Proportion of News Articles that Emphasised the Inconvenience Frame in Daily Sun, 2016-2021*



56 percent of the total articles from *Daily Sun* emphasised the inconvenience frame whereas 44 percent did not. Tabloid newspapers tend to rely on sensationalism such as violence and celebrity scandals in order to sell (Harris, 2006). Theoretically, this is one of the reasons most articles about riot and road closures as the result of protests are from *Daily Sun*.

To examine the economic consequences frame, the leading question was, does the article mentions the impact of service delivery protests on the country's economy. Similar to the inconvenience frame findings, 64 percent of the articles analysed did not emphasise this frame whereas 36 percent did (see figure 8). When looking at newspapers individually, the results were the same which means none of the newspapers analysed actually emphasised the economic consequences frame.

Contrary to what is suggested by studies on media coverage of protests. The findings show that South African mainstream press did not emphasise the inconvenience frame and economic consequences frame between 2016 and 2021 when covering service delivery protests. However, these findings are not conclusive and thus future studies can expand the sample by adding more newspapers and focus exclusively on these frames. This is because for online newspapers such as News24 this is not always the case and none of the online news publications were included in this study.

4.8 Summing up the quantitative results

The quantitative findings have illustrated how mainstream media in South Africa frame service delivery protests. Similar to media coverage of protests elsewhere, analysed news articles have shown overwhelmingly that mainstream media coverage of service delivery protests conforms to the protest paradigm.

In terms of news sources, the protest paradigm and the PM point out that media tends to depend on official sources such as state departments when reporting on controversial social issues (Herman & Chomsky, 2001; Jarrar & Akter, 2018). The findings have illustrated that during service delivery protests, mainstream press rely heavily on experts, government officials, the police, politicians, media organisations and business groups. The voices of the protesters are largely silenced compared to these credible sources. Protesters were only quoted in *Daily Sun* as the main sources. The inclusion of their voices is crucial because if they are excluded, it means their grievances, demands and the real causes of service delivery protests are likely to be neglected by policymakers.

Apart from news sources, the press also adhered to the protest paradigm by collectivising protesters. Protesters were largely framed as an indistinguishable group of violent mob, vandals, and looters. This was worsened by the use of terminology emphasising violence, destruction and clashes between the police and protesters. The majority of analysed articles largely excluded the debate frame or issues raised by protesters. For example, one news article read “angry Port Elizabeth residents set alight an ambulance during a service delivery protest” (Mehlwana, 2020). However, the entire article did not mention any causes of the protest except a detailed description of how the ambulance driver and his crew saved their lives and how the Public Order Policing (POP) was dealing with the situation (see Mehlwana, 2020). Most articles framed the protests in this way by excluding the debate frame or real causes of service delivery protests and in doing contributing to the marginalisation of the poor majority in the country.

The following chapter provides a discussion contextualising the quantitative findings. The chapter will look at some of the possible reasons mainstream press tends to emphasise episodic frames when covering service delivery protests or why the press often adheres to the protest paradigm. This will include economic constraints that journalists in South Africa are working under which are explained well by the PM.

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1 Contextualisation of the quantitative findings

This chapter will explore the quantitative findings in detail by providing some of the reasons that might be contributing to the marginalisation of women and protesters in the mainstream media as illustrated in the previous chapter. It is essential to problematise the issue of marginalisation and silencing of certain groups in the media because the role of journalists is to serve the public's interest by producing news that reflects diverse viewpoints and perspectives so that citizens can make informed decisions (Wolfgang, 2021). Mainstream media in South Africa has not lived up to this normative goal of journalism.

The voices of protesters in the mainstream media are largely excluded and journalists “tend to neglect to report on the underlying causes and motivations that drive protests in South Africa” (Rodny-Gumede, 2015, p. 360). The media focus exclusively on violence and thus creating an impression that these protests are “unwarranted, unorganised and made up of angry mob out to create havoc” (Rodny-Gumede, 2015, p. 360). Due to its failure to represent the views and perspectives of the poor, Hlabangane (2018) argues that mainstream media is active and complicit in obscuring the misery experienced by the majority of marginalised people in the country.

The aim of this chapter is to contextualise the quantitative content analysis findings by highlighting some possible reasons contributing to the silencing of the dispossessed and marginalised in mainstream print media. The findings have shown that women's voices in the media are underrepresented. Therefore, this chapter will not focus solely on the exclusion of services delivery protesters but also the absence of female voices in the press.

5.2 Women in media

The findings in the previous chapter have illustrated that women's voices are largely excluded in media coverage of service delivery protests. Mainstream media in South Africa rely heavily on commentaries provided by men during these protests. Albæk et al. (2014) argue that women are often excluded in media coverage of political events because political news is traditionally dominated by males, and therefore, female journalists are a minority. This masculine dominance has been linked to gendering of journalistic content. For example, in their study on media coverage of the State of the Nation Address in 2015 (SONA2015), Chuma, Bosch, and

Wasserman (2017) found that on average, voices by male politicians constituted 75 percent of the total news sources while female voices constituted merely 18 percent. Over the years, research by MMA has illustrated a similar problem. In an analysis of media coverage of gender-related issues during the 2011 Municipal elections, the MMA found that only one percent of the stories covered were about gender (Media Monitoring Africa, 2014). In a report on media coverage of COVID-19 between July and September 2020. The MMA found that information about the virus such as infections and recoveries was mainly communicated by male government officials, 80 percent, compared to females, 20 percent (Namumba & Bird, 2020).

Elsewhere, a study by a British sociologist, Jeremy Tunstall on “Westminster lobby correspondents published in 1970 found that only two out of 109 lobby correspondents were women” (Albæk et al., 2014, p. 37; Nimmo, 1973). Overall participation of women in the journalistic profession has risen, however political reporting is still dominated by males in countries such as the U.S., UK, Denmark, Germany, and Spain (Albæk et al., 2014). Studies note that even though women constitute a majority of undergraduates in mass communication and journalism programs. Female reporters are less likely to be assigned political news in newsrooms and in most cases a considerable number of editors are males (Freedman, Fico, & Love, 2007).

This bias is the main reason women’s voices are often excluded in media coverage of political events such as service delivery protests. Apart from male experts or politicians, the press tends to interview male leaders and organisers of service delivery protests. The problem with this is that these protests are not merely about the delivery of services but also issues that affect poor women disproportionately compared to men such as the issue of intimate partner violence and violence against women in general (Isaacs, 2016; Wasserman, Chuma, & Bosch, 2018b).

Statistics show that South Africa has one of the highest cases of intimate partner violence in the world and in 1995 studies noted that “as many as five women were estimated to be killed each week by an intimate partner” a problem which has not ended (Isaacs, 2016; Jewkes, Levin, & Penn-Kekana, 2002). The exclusion of female voices during service delivery protests have led to underrepresentation of these problems in the mainstream media. Print media tends to focus on extreme cases of physical violence and underrepresent those that are deemed not newsworthy such as intimate partner violence and rape cases often raised by women involved in service delivery protests (Isaacs, 2016). The inclusion of female voices in news coverage of these protests is crucial because “messages conveyed by the media largely determine whether

or not female survivors speak out about their abuse and the nature of the assistance women receive from the public, criminal justice system and the health sector” (Isaacs, 2016, p. 492).

Isaacs (2016) argues that women are excluded in the mainstream press because their participation in social unrest is not viewed as newsworthy in terms of drama, action and conflict needed by news organisations to keep their audiences captivated. Traditionally, women in the media are often “depicted as weak and passive individuals who are nurturing caregivers to their family... whereas men are positioned as superior, practicing dominance, and holding power over women” (Isaacs, 2016, p. 492). The findings in the previous chapter have illustrated this problem as female experts and female protesters were rarely asked to comment on service delivery protests compared to male experts and protesters. The exclusion of the voices of poor women in the media during service delivery protests perpetuates stereotypes and myths such as the belief that rape victims are responsible for their own rape (Isaacs, 2016). This is because women are barred from raising their main concerns during these protests which are not merely about the delivery of services but also the rampant violence against women.

In townships such as Khayelitsha, Site C, poor people who live in shacks are still using communal toilets. The literature review chapter has noted that approximately 50 percent of women who use communal toilets in Khayelitsha were assaulted in 2013 on their way to or from toilets (Gonsalves, Kaplan, & Paltiel, 2015). The WHO has pointed out that “inadequate local sanitation facilities is a key driver of women’s risk for physical or sexual assault...” (Gonsalves, Kaplan, & Paltiel, 2015, p. 2). Unfortunately, the exclusion of the voices of women in the media means these problems are still going to continue unnoticed. These challenges show that service delivery protests are not merely about the top-down rollout of basic services but also daily challenges that black women face in South Africa.

Leopeng and Langa (2020) show that poor women in townships are struggling to voice these issues during service delivery protests because “notions of dominating masculinity and what it means to be man continue to reign in Africa, and within South Africa men still account for the majority of socio-political... and *in this case*, media discourses” (p. 673). Women voices are excluded because media tends to “privilege the discourse of hegemonic masculinity” often viewed as more newsworthy compared to the voices of women who are generally portrayed as homemakers (Leopeng & Langa, 2020, p. 673). According to Buiten and Naidoo (2013) the silencing of women voices in the mainstream press has led to the normalisation of gendered violence and “acceptance of the abuse of power by men” (p. 198).

Maluleke and Moyer (2020) note that the marginalisation of women's participation in social movements is not new because even before the end of apartheid in 1994, their involvement in protests such as the 1913/14 anti-pass campaign in Bloemfontein was generally overlooked by the media and male leaders. For them, this silencing and marginalisation will continue unless the silences of the past and silences kept by older generations are confronted (Maluleke & Moyer, 2020). In other words, the exclusion of women's voices in media coverage of service delivery protests is just a continuation of the internalised resistance to women's involvement in political issues.

On the other hand, the exclusion of the voices of elite women such as experts have illustrated that the argument that even "women parliamentarians are rarely treated by the media in the same way as their male counterparts *is reasonable*" (Byerly & Ross, 2006, p. 44). The failure by the press to report the views of female politicians, judges and business leaders contributes to the lack of recognition by the public "that women do in fact occupy significant roles in society" and thus are not merely victims of serious crime as often overrepresented by the media (Byerly & Ross, 2006, p. 40). The cause of this patriarchal framing of news stories can be directly linked to the near absence of female owners and managers of mainstream media organisations (Bosch, 2011). The dominance of male figures as senior editors and owners of news organisations has meant that "the status quo continues to subjugate women" (Blumell & Mulupi, 2020, p. 2).

It is essential to question the absence of women in the media mainly because those who are afforded the opportunity to speak "shape ideal types about who is suitable to be a leader or expert on current events" (Cukier, Elmi, & Gagnon, 2019, p. 2). In this context, the overrepresentation of male voices reproduces the stereotype that politics is unarguably a male sphere. The problem with this is that the exclusion of female voices in the mainstream media tends to worsen existing gender inequalities. In his speech in 2001 on World Press Freedom, former President of South Africa, Thabo Mbeki made it clear that "it is the core right of all people to have access to media that expresses their opinions, and which adequately reflects their life experiences and aspirations" (Rabe, 2002, p. 153). However, the quantitative findings have illustrated that the country is still far from this ideal.

As noted, it is not only women who are marginalised in the mainstream press but also service delivery protesters in general. The previous chapter has illustrated that protesters are marginalised and misrepresented in the mainstream press due to media's adherence to the

protest paradigm when covering service delivery protests. The main possible reasons for the persistence of this problem can be explained well by the PM.

5.3 The application of the propaganda model in the South African context

The quantitative findings have shown that protesters are largely misrepresented, marginalised, and silenced in the mainstream press. When covering service delivery protests, the press relies overwhelmingly on the voices and views provided by experts, politicians, government officials and the police and thus alienating the real people behind these protests. The quantitative findings have also highlighted that media coverage of service delivery protests conforms to the protest paradigm and consequently the press tends to foreground episodic frames such as the violence frame, riot frame and confrontation frame. Service delivery protesters are often collectivised in the press and the underlying causes of these protests are largely excluded (i.e., thematic frames).

This thesis argues that the marginalisation of protesters in the media can be linked to the constraints that journalists in South Africa are working under. These constraints are explained well by the three filters of the PM, namely ownership, advertising, and sourcing. As already discussed in the theoretical framework chapter, the first filter, media ownership and profit orientation of media firms point out that news organisations are large profit seeking corporations owned by few wealthy individuals (Herman & Chomsky, 1988; Lukin, 2013). Media ownership or concentration in South Africa is a main problem. As noted, this is because the media landscape in the country is dominated by few media powerhouses such as Naspers, Times Media Group, Caxton, Independent Media and Hosken Consolidated Investment among others (Ndlovu, 2015).

Mawokomayi and Dube (2018) argue that these media conglomerates tend to marginalise service delivery protests because of the direct threat they pose on the capitalist system within which these corporations are thriving. This problem is explained well by Chiumbu (2016) who points out that “like other media conglomerates elsewhere these... companies operate within the logic of market fundamentalism that privileges profit maximisation” (p. 422). Media concentration and lack of alternative media in the country have led to a situation where the mainstream commercial media only serve as a platform for political and business elite at the expense of the marginalised voices (Chiumbu, 2016). For Chiumbu (2016) the silencing of protesters in the mainstream press is part of the attempts intended to legitimise liberal

capitalism by forestalling any critique of the system. Serious criticism of the liberal economic order threatens the survival of the commercial media and thus mainstream newspapers marginalise a whole range of ideas and images that threaten their profit margins (Mawokomayi & Dube, 2018). This is done by emphasising frames that delegitimise service delivery protests and through the selection of sources that promote elite views such as statements from government departments and experts.

Importantly, some studies blame the liberal economic order for these protests. This includes neoliberal initiatives such the pressure from big foreign corporations that the South African government must privatise some municipal services such as water and electricity to promote efficiency (Mayher & McDonald, 2007). According to Mayher and McDonald (2007) despite the impracticality of privatisation when taking into consideration the socioeconomic conditions of many South Africans, the mainstream print media support this neoliberal discourse on privatisation. The position taken by the media on privatisation of municipal services is “constraining the possibilities for alternative opinions to be heard or policies to be developed” (Mayher & McDonald, 2007, p. 445). Journalists and editors within the mainstream South African press who support service delivery protesters and anti-privatisation positions are silenced because they are required to toe the line (Mayher & McDonald, 2007).

To return to the first filter, the concentration of media ownership in South Africa is limiting the role of alternative media and consequently content diversity in news reports on protests. This problem is explained well by Herman and Chomsky (1988) who point out that media ownership and concentration affect the way news is gathered because dominant news organisations tend to work with other top tier news organisations by sharing news information to cut the costs. This phenomenon is known as intermedia agenda setting and it affects the way events are covered because journalists “tend to let their reporting decision be guided by the coverage of their peers at other news outlets” (Harder, Sevenans, & Van Aelst, 2017, p. 277).

In this context this means that protesters are largely marginalised in the press because there are few news organisations that opt for thorough investigations when service delivery protests occur. Instead, large media corporations circulate news information among themselves and later share this information with smaller media organisations or alternative media. This problem is captured well by Anton Harber’s observation that “fewer media houses in *South Africa* are doing the hard work of investigative journalism” (Finlay, 2018, p. 3). In short, protesters are silenced in the press mainly because of the dominance of few media corporations

who are reluctant to criticise the current liberal economic order within which these organisations depend on for survival. Journalists, managers, and editors are “subject to sharp constraints by *media* owners and other market-oriented forces” (Herman & Chomsky, 1988, p. 14). Media ownership and concentration affect news choices and in the South African context this determines how services delivery protests are covered in the mainstream press.

The second filter that contributes to the marginalisation of protesters involve advertising as the primary source of income for news organisations (Lukin, 2013). Herman and Chomsky (1988) argue that without support from large corporate advertisers, newspapers are not financially viable. Importantly, radical newspapers and those that engage in serious criticism of corporate activities often “suffer from the political discrimination of advertisers” (Herman & Chomsky 2001, p. 268). In South Africa, this is one of the reasons mainstream newspapers are supporting the neoliberal discourse on privatisation without questioning its likelihood of worsening service delivery protests (see Mayher & Macdonald, 2007). Activists have long been blaming liberal economic strategies adopted by the government since 1994 as the main cause of service delivery protests (Kotze & Taylor, 2010). This includes the shift from the social-based Reconstruction and Development Program (RDP) to the more economic sustainable Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) strategy (Matlawe, 2019).

However, the analysed newspaper articles failed to link these protests to the increasing economic inequalities in the country as the result of liberal macroeconomic policies. Jacobs and Johnson (2007) note that mainstream “media in South Africa have remained very supportive of the GEAR proposals, particular in the way it removes certain key economic policy issues from the public realm and from political debate within the democratic process...” (p. 142). This thesis argues that mainstream newspapers are constrained by the demands of their advertisers who are mainly interested in selling their products and who have vested interests in the liberal economic policies adopted by the South African government.

In South Africa, mainstream media is dependent heavily on advertising as the main source of income (Duncan, 2013). Because the wealth in the country is still highly racialised, the press tends to target the affluent white audience (Duncan, 2013; Wasserman & De Beer, 2005). This upper income bracket group attract advertisers and arguably, it is only concerned about the impact of service delivery protests on private property and businesses (see Duncan, 2013; Friedman, 2011). Not surprisingly, the quantitative findings have illustrated that the press foregrounds episodic frames when covering service delivery protests. These frames include the

violence frame and riot frame where the press emphasises vandalism and looting of shops. Thematic frames such as the underlying causes of these protests are largely excluded mainly because the target audience is not interested in the causes. This bias is explored well by Mayher and Macdonald (2007) who note:

Since advertising is typically the largest source of revenue for print... media companies, it is in the interests of these media firms to create an ideological medium conducive to market-oriented growth... by ensuring market-friendly content within which advertisers would want to promote their products and services. Editors and journalists who share this market ideology are more likely to be hired and to have their material published... (p. 446)

Due to this dilemma, it is reasonable to argue that mainstream newspapers in South Africa often find it risky to blame privatisation of municipal services and certain corporations for these protests because corporate advertisers might withdraw patronage. To avoid unnecessary financial costs, the mainstream press in the country suppresses all ideas and images that seem to challenge corporate interests especially the issues raised by protesters. This complex relationship between, advertisers, affluent audiences and the mainstream press has meant that media companies often find it difficult to link these protests to problems such as the fact that the richest 10 percent control 71 percent of the country's wealth whereas the poorest majority only hold seven percent (World Population Review, 2021).

The importance of advertising show that media transformation in the country "have gone hand in hand with a continued focus on elite audiences" (Wasserman, Chuma, & Bosch, 2018b, p. 147). Even though the transfer of ownership has led to transformation of the media industry at boardroom level, market forces determine whose voices are included and whose voices are excluded in the press (Chiumbu, 2016). The findings in the previous chapter have noted that those who are excluded in the media are the real people behind service delivery protests. The reason for this exclusion is mainly because poor people or protesters attract few advertisers needed by media companies to stay afloat. Consequently, the media tends to silence the radical positions raised by the poor. In other words, the mainstream press continues to cater for the middle-class readership in order to meet the demands of corporate advertisers who tend to discriminate working class papers (Friedman, 2011; Herman & Chomsky, 1988).

With regard to *RQ1.4: What are the main underlying causes of the protests according to the press?*

The second filter, advertising, has illustrated that the underlying causes of these protests are of secondary importance to the target audience. Instead of conducting thorough investigations into the underlying problems, the press emphasises episodic frames. Theoretically, this is because these investigations are likely to upset corporate advertisers whom the press depend upon to remain afloat. The affluent audience is only concerned about the impact of these protests on businesses and therefore the views of protesters, and the underlying causes are generally excluded in the mainstream print media.

The third and last filter that contribute to the silencing of service delivery protesters involve media reliance on business, government, and expert sources (Lukin, 2013). The quantitative findings have highlighted that the press privileges the voices of the experts, politicians, and government officials. The voices of protesters are largely excluded, and this is very problematic since they are the one behind these protests. This form of exclusion can be linked to cost considerations because taking information from credible sources such as government departments reduces investigative costs whereas information from protesters who are considered less credible requires careful checking and costly background research (Herman & Chomsky 1988).

Another problem is that news organisations cannot afford to station reporters and cameras at all places where breaking news are likely to occur (Herman & Chomsky, 1988). In the South African context, there are few reporters placed in townships where these protests often take place mainly due to high levels of crime and violence against reporters. Reports on the state of journalism in South Africa show that in provinces such as KwaZulu-Natal, journalists appear to be working in dangerous and hostile environments because they are attacked by the public during service delivery protests (Finlay 2018). Consequently, journalists tend to obtain information from the police and municipal officials when service delivery protests take place.

However, this is not a valid excuse for the silencing of protesters in the press. For example, in his paper on state of South African journalism, Ndlovu (2015) points out that 90 percent of journalists he interviewed between 2013 and 2014 from Cape Town noted that newspapers they worked for had reduced travel funds to cover stories in places outside the main city by 88 percent. This means that protesters are not just marginalised because they are hostile towards journalists but also because mainstream newspapers are not allocating enough funds for journalists to cover events in the townships. In general, when important news occur in townships, mainstream news organisations tend to fund investigations into events that interest

the elite while neglecting those that are relevant to the poor majority (Wasserman, 2010). The voices of the protesters are not important to the elite audience and thus are excluded in favour of violent actions that threaten businesses. This is what Wasserman (2010) refers to when he notes that “media’s drive for profits make *journalists* beholden to the demands and interests of a social and political elite” (p. 245).

To answer *RQ1.5: How diverse is the coverage in terms of content, sources, and viewpoints?*

The three filters, namely, ownership, advertising and sourcing are constraining the diversity of news content in media coverage of service delivery protests. Media ownership and concentration in the country is limiting the role of alternative or working-class newspapers. Media dependence on advertising has meant that issues that are opposed to the views of the elite audience such as anti-privatisation campaigns are largely excluded in the press. On the other hand, the established way of identifying sources such as the reliance of the media on the so-called credible sources has barred the inclusion of alternative views in the coverage of these protests. Due to these constraints, media coverage of service delivery protests is one-sided and thus does not offer diverse viewpoints and perspectives (See Wolfgang et al., 2021).

Chapter 6: Conclusion

The main objective of this thesis was to analyse how the South African mainstream media frame service delivery protests. The thesis also examined whether the South African mainstream print media fulfils its mandate of fair and accurate reporting when covering service delivery protests; or as illustrated in the literature, there is a contradiction between this normative role of journalism and the way in which marginalised voices are represented in the media. Further, the thesis looked at how media coverage of protests in South Africa fits within the global debate on media coverage of social movements mainly in developed countries.

The reviewed literature has shown that the political function of journalism in a democracy is to ensure that citizens have access to a diverse set of viewpoints (Wolfgang et al., 2021). A pluralistic media landscape enables citizens to exercise their basic human rights (Duncan & Reid, 2013). Media diversity “provides citizens with diverse information on matters of public and political importance, apart from the dominant positions of government and or mainstream worldview” (Duncan & Reid, 2013, p. 483). In countries such as South Africa with continuing class, race and gender disparities, the societal value of a diverse media landscape is that it ensures that a multiplicity of viewpoints enters the public domain (Duncan & Reid, 2013).

Besides the importance of media diversity, journalism is often seen as an integral part of a democracy because journalists are required to watch not only over the judiciary, government, and parliament (Leonard, 2014). They are also expected to hold into account corporate and financial interests by ensuring that they respect the law while participating actively in conflict prevention and resolution (Leonard, 2014). Malila (2019) notes that the information provided by the media such as news reports about environmental degradation “equip citizens with the knowledge they need to become active and engaged in public life” (95). Because of these responsibilities and the value of the media in a society. The mainstream press in South Africa view itself as a source of unvarnished knowledge for all citizens (Friedman, 2011).

This view is echoed by the South African Press Code which states that:

The media exist to serve society. Their freedom provides for independent scrutiny of the forces that shape society and is essential to realising the promise of democracy. It enables citizens to make informed judgement on issues of the day, a role whose centrality is recognised in the South African Constitution.... *Further*, the media... take care to report news truthfully, accurately, and fairly... (Retief, 2019, pp. 3-4).

However, the quantitative findings have illustrated that South African mainstream print media does not live up to the Press Code because news coverage of dissenting views raised by the poor through service delivery protests is not accurate or fair. The media landscape in the country is not diverse but dominated by few big players including Naspers, Caxton, and the Independent Group (Leonard, 2014). Media organisations are not interested in investigating corporate activities such as the contribution of big companies to these protests especially those that are lobbying for the privatisation of municipal services (see Mayher & MaCdonald, 2007). In simple terms, there is indeed a contradiction between the normative or theoretical role of the mainstream media in the country and the actual way in which news organisations act.

This thesis has pointed out that the voices of the protesters are effectively silenced in the mainstream press while official sources tend to constitute a majority of the total sources. This problem occurs despite the acknowledgement by SANEF and the Press Code that discourses which recognise diversity are necessary in the press (Duncan & Reid, 2013). The marginalisation of the voices of the protesters including those of women in the press have shown that media can reproduce and reinforce certain discourses and normative views of the world as commonsensical (Kitis, Milani, & Levon, 2018). The mainstream media has achieved this by silencing and discrediting the voices of the protesters in favour of the supposedly rational views provided by official sources such as experts, government, and the police.

This means that the mainstream media in South Africa is not playing any role in encouraging civic engagement which can be measured by analysing content diversity in news coverage (Duncan & Reid, 2013). The media is predominantly active in normalising dominant viewpoints over those that are viewed as irrational often raised by the marginalised groups. In their work, Marx and Engels (2001) have alluded to this problem when they argue that the ruling class such as experts and business interests “regulate the production and distribution of the ideas of their age... *and* thus their ideas are the ruling ideas of the epoch” (p. 9). In the South African context, the marginalisation of the views raised by the poor is exacerbated by the highly unequal media environment which has meant that media products tend to follow money and consequently levels of wealth determine an individual’s ability to influence media agenda (Duncan & Reid, 2013; Kruger, 2004). What is problematic about this is that the Press Code acknowledges explicitly that the media exists to serve society and it is in the interest of the media to ensure that news coverage reflect diverse perspectives.

However, the findings have noted that service delivery protesters are not only silenced in the press. Media coverage of the protests conforms to the protest paradigm where protesters are largely collectivised by treating them as a violent indistinguishable mob and therefore denying their individual characteristics. The media also emphasised episodic frames by highlighting the irrational behaviour associated with the protesting mob instead of foregrounding broader social, economic and historical problems faced by protesters i.e. thematic frames (Malila, 2019). These episodic frames included the violence frame, riot frame and confrontation frame. They portrayed protesters merely as a threat to private property and businesses instead of showing the real problems faced by the majority of the poor in the country. The exclusion of the debate frame in the coverage of the protests also tended to worsen this problem as protesters were rarely interviewed by journalists to voice their main objectives and demands.

When reporting on protests, this thesis has shown that mainstream newspapers have a tendency to emphasise violence and the threat posed by service delivery protests on businesses and private property. Mainstream media dependence on private corporations as main sources of income could be one of the factors that influence media's attitude and reporting. Commercial media in the country is largely dependent on advertising, and the media landscape in general is dominated by few large news companies who tend to marginalise groups that seem to challenge the capitalist system within which these corporations are thriving (Mawokomayi & Dube, 2018). This problem is captured well by Tomaselli (1997) who points out that the media environment in the country is tightly managed with highly regulated advertising and there is a complex relationship between the commercial mainstream media and other capital formations.

Today, this relationship between mainstream media and corporate advertisers in South Africa has been complicated by the advent of large multinational social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter (Dugmore, 2018). These platforms have not only attracted audiences away from local content but their ability to deploy algorithms for targeted advertising have led to the decline of income for South African media houses and consequently job losses for journalists (Daniels, 2020; Dugmore, 2018). Facebook and Google are able to target narrow audience subsets based on demographics and this is a very reliable form of marketing for advertisers (Dugmore, 2018). In this context, this means that mainstream newspapers often find it hard to criticise capitalism and private companies for the ongoing social unrest in the country because advertisers are no longer dependent on traditional media and thus can easily discriminate any radical or working-class paper. This problem is explained clearly by Rumney

(2010) who noted that journalists as well as editors are aware of the negative effect of commercial pressures on news production. The Covid-19 pandemic and the subsequent lockdown regulations have worsened this problem. Lockdown measures have fuelled the use of social media worldwide and consequently decline in newspaper circulation in countries such as South Africa which have resulted not only to mass retrenchments and job losses but also mass migration by large corporate advertisers to digital platforms (Daniels, 2020; SANEF, 2020). Media houses that engage in serious criticism of corporate activities run the risk of losing their main source of income and this is one of the factors newspapers in South Africa are reluctant to investigate the root causes of services delivery protests.

Even community newspapers are aware that they have to “find a balance between serving local preferences and assuring their survival in the broader context of a predominantly capitalistic society” (Rau, et al., 2008, p. 101). This thesis argues that these economic considerations are the main reason protesters and poor people are marginalised in the press. Newspaper managers have come to know that advertisers do not sponsor radical newspapers, and this problem has forced small and emerging newspapers targeting black audience to abandon their initial radical ideologies. These newspapers are trying to fit into the existing commercial income generation models instead of devising their own methods of achieving financial sustainability and this is the reason protesters are marginalised even in the so-called working-class newspapers such as *Daily Sun* and *The Star* (Rau et al., 2008). The relationship between commercial media and other business interests including the mining industry and banks have also led to the absence of left-leaning voices in the media especially those of trade union movements (Harber, 2014).

Similar to service delivery protesters, the views raised by trade unions are often radical and arguably a threat to the media’s economic survival. This is supported by the findings which suggest that the press tends to marginalise a whole range of images and ideas that seem to challenge the current liberal economic system by focusing more on confrontation, riot and violence frames. It is important to highlight that the argument presented in this thesis on marginalisation of service delivery protests in the media is not absolute. This study is only trying to show that mainstream media in South Africa does not fulfil its mandate of fair and accurate reporting when covering protests. The Press Code and SANEF have acknowledged that the media exists to serve society and thus journalists always strive for truth by reflecting a multiplicity of voices in news coverage of events (Retief, 2019). However, in practice, the

media only serve certain interests while favouring elite viewpoints instead of promoting diverse news content.

The findings have shown that Friedman's (2011) argument that commercial media in South Africa sees the world through the eyes and ears of the middle class is not far-fetched. For Wasserman, Chuma, and Bosch (2018b) the main reason for this problem can be linked to media transformation in the country from 1994 which has gone hand in hand with continued focus on elite audiences. Instead of complete transformation, the mainstream media in the country has undergone processes of elite continuity and elite renewal (Wasserman, Bosch, & Chuma, 2018a). This means that the real individuals and groups who benefited from media transformation includes the black middle class and white owned media conglomerates who continue to privilege white audiences (Sparks, 2009). The real losers were or are the South Africa's black underclass, now trapped in poverty and consequently not viewed as valuable audience by the media because they attract few advertisers (see Sparks, 2009).

Overall, the findings have illustrated that the way mainstream media frame service delivery protests in South Africa falls within the global debate on media coverage of social movements. This debate is based on observations and studies which have found that "the mass media have an identifiable lens or paradigm through which they report protest movements" (Mawokomayi & Dube, 2018, p. 41). This phenomenon has been dubbed the protest paradigm which shows that the media tends to depict protests as dangerous, destructive, and violent and therefore giving the impression that lawlessness often dominate the terrain of protest movements (Mawokomayi & Dube, 2018).

Such depiction especially the focus on violence is problematic because media coverage of protest movements is essential as "it is only through the media that the public comes to know about the protests and issues surrounding them" (Mawokomayi & Dube, 2018, p. 39). This is often the case in developing countries such as South Africa where access to alternative media such as Twitter is determined by extreme social inequalities marked by race (Wasserman, 2007). Another problem with media's focus on violence is that this practice tends to discourage policymakers from considering the issues raised by protesters. Mainstream media coverage of issues and events has a great influence on policymaking and decision making because journalists are able to focus public attention on particular topics at the expense of others (Akintola, Lavis, & Hoskins, 2015). This process can force decision-makers to take actions they otherwise would not have taken (Gilboa, 2009). However, since the media is concerned

mainly with violence when covering service delivery protests in this case. It can be argued that policymakers prioritise the need for greater policing resources to deal with the level of threat posed by protesters (see Duncan, 2016).

This means that media coverage of service delivery protests often ends up contributing to the ongoing conflict between local municipality officials and the poor majority. Because the media ignores the genuine concerns raised by the poor, “protesters use violence to attract the media and so grab the attention of government to their plight” (Daniels, 2016, para. 3). Even activists believe that mainstream media in South Africa only report about what happened during a protest instead of covering the real issues raised by protesters (Bosch, Wasserman, & Chuma, 2018c).

The use of episodic frames is concerning because the media is expected to participate actively in conflict prevention and resolution (Leonard, 2014). However, such practice is not new as media has been accused of fuelling violence by fomenting ethnic hatred in serious conflict situations such as the Rwandan Genocide of 1994, the Kenyan post-election crisis in 2007 and the xenophobic violence in South Africa (Hadland, 2010). Like Radu, Morwe, and Bird (2012) this thesis argues that media coverage of service delivery protests in South Africa should offer alternatives to violence. Instead of emphasising violence, the media can focus more on efforts that have been taken to prevent and end the violence. This includes actions taken by the government and local municipality officials to solve service delivery backlogs. Further, the media can also provide suggestions while giving voice to all parties involved in conflict such as municipality officials and protesters instead of solely relying on official sources (Radu, Morwe, & Bird, 2012).

In conclusion, media focus on violence when covering service delivery protests tends to fuel conflict between protesters and government or local municipalities. Instead of worsening an already volatile situation, the media can play a very crucial role by offering alternatives to violence and focussing more on positive actions taken by both conflicting parties to solve service delivery problems while giving suggestions.

6.1 Limitations and future research

This study was conducted to analyse mainstream print media coverage of service delivery protests in South Africa over a six-year period, 2016-2021. The findings have shown that protests by the poor are largely marginalised in the mainstream press. However, because the

sample size for this study was very large, the findings were based on generalisation and thus individual years were not studied in detail. Instead of relying on the longitudinal approach, future studies can reduce the sample size and focus more on individual years and subtler details. For example, studies can look at why Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal have overtaken Western Cape as hotspot provinces for service delivery protests.

There are some categories that were coded but not included due to the limited scope of this study such as news headlines, salience, solutions prescribed by the media for the problem, name of journalist and year of publication. Future studies can include some of these categories and this include for example an analysis of the diversity of news writers, the tone of news headlines and years with most protests. Future studies can also carry out in-depth interviews with journalists with particular focus on how they respond to the accusations against media as noted in the literature review chapter.

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