How the Black Lives Matter movement mediates digital activism practices on Instagram towards cases involving police brutality

Multimodal Critical Discourse analysis of online activism practices on the platform Instagram

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Abstract

In recent years activist groups are increasingly relying on digital platforms to amplify political goals. Accordingly, scholarly attention has been paid to the various practices of mediation through hashtags, sharing, liking, engaging with followers, and posting. Thus, social media platforms afford participation and creation of an alternative public space for the amplification of messages. From its inception, the Black Lives Matter movement has been connected to the digital sphere and made its goal to combat racial violence across the globe. Social movements like Black Lives Matter have used social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter to disseminate hegemonic discourses about police brutality and reinforce counter-discourses of police brutality Specifically, this study focuses on selected Instagram posts that address cases of police brutality from the Black Lived Matter movement and corresponding user-generated content from the years 2020-2022. The scholarly research on digital activism practices of the Black Lives Matter movement via the platform Instagram and the creation of counter-activist narratives through visual affordance provides the analytical focus of this study. This dissertation seeks to provide an answer to the research question: *How does the Black Lives Matter movement mediate digital activism practices on Instagram towards cases involving police brutality?* To conduct this research, this study employs the method of multimodal discourse analysis to analyze Instagram posts addressing police brutality. The study adopts a combination of the following theories: hashtag tagged activism practices, networked public and affective solidarity, to shed light on the dominant understandings of digital activism practices that rely on textual affordances of digital platforms. Thus, showing that in the case of the Black Lives Matter movement. Instagram can be used to disseminate knowledge about racial violence and to construct counter-discourses of police brutality. The results of the analysis identify seven patterns of discursive practices enacted by the Black Lives Matter movement and their followers that together amplify the creation of alternative narratives of police brutality. Namely, demands for justice, killer cops, and mobilization of anger and grief to build awareness of systematic police brutality. The findings of this study contribute to the emerging social movement research on the Black Lives Matter movement and the affordances of the platform Instagram for their digital activism practices. The study concludes that Instagram as a platform shows significant potential for discursive resistance and dissemination of knowledge around police brutality.

KEYWORDS: *hashtag activism, mediated activism, counter-discourse, affective solidarity, networked-publics*

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1. Introduction

In 2013 the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement was founded by Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors and Opal Tometi in response to the acquittal of Trayvon Martin's murderer, George Zimmerman (Black Lives Matter) The group harnessed the power of social media to organize protests and to amplify social consciousness of anti-Black racism across the United States. Since its beginnings, BLM has grown into a national network with a shared vision: ending police brutality (Mundt et al., 2018). Through social media platforms such as Twitter and Instagram, the movement's core messages about racism against black Americans gained support both in the US and internationally.

The group's response to police brutality showed potential for the creation of collective identity and networked activism through the knowledge production of various hashtags (Brown et al., 2017). Especially through the platform Twitter, usages of #Blacklivesmatter allowed to establish a distinct group identity and solidarity when the individual becomes part of the collective (Brown et al., 2017). As suggested by Brown et al. (2017) event in response to police brutality in the United States provided an opportunity to examine the role of social media in collective identity formation. As seen in the contextualization of the Black Lives Matter movement particularly the trending of the #BlackLivesMatter on Twitter and Facebook contributed to the spreading of the movement and forming of digital networks of people (Brown et al., 2017). The social media activism enacted by the group was a major reason why the deaths of Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, and Freddie Gray, among many others, became international news (Jackson et al., 2020; Brown et al., 2017). Especially in the case of Trayvon Martin, the #TrayvonMartin appeared in more than three million tweets generated by nearly two million unique users creating a narrative and networked public that lasts highlights the systematic killing of Black people (Jackson et al., 2020).

In 2020, the death of unarmed George Floyd, killed by a white police officer Derek Chauvin, gave new momentum to the movement through the #icantbreathe and #BalckOutTuesday which enabled the global network of activism combatting police brutality (Coscarelli, 2020; Okri, 2020). However, this time, the more visual platform Instagram was utilized instead of Twitter, which has been predominantly texts based. In modern social movements, it is often an incendiary photo or video that galvanizes the public's support for a social justice issue (Brown et al., 2017; Edrington & Gallagher, 2019; Marsh, 2018; Neumayer and Rossi, 2018). The topic of this dissertation concerns the Black Lives Matter

movement's digital activism through the platforms Instagram. This dissertation builds on the argument that the visual affordances of the platform Instagram are key for the spreading of the movement's narratives around police brutality. The use of hashtags #SayHisName and #SayHerName is further examined to shed light on the networked activism that is enacted by the group through various hashtags to combat police brutality. This type of hashtag activism is crucial and relevant in enacting change and spreading the awareness of the systemic racism and killings of Black people all around the world (Carney, 2016). Since the initial popularity of 2020 and the worldwide discussion and actions it sparked, BLM has shown its importance at the forefront of contemporary activism. Thus, these transformative dimensions of solidarity in online spaces and especially in online activism is relevant to examine further.

By focusing on the platform Instagram this dissertation offers the analysis of visual and textual elements of online activism, which have often been enacted through the platform Twitter in the context of the Black Lives Matter movement. Moreover, the method of multimodal critical discourse analysis and theoretical dimensions of hashtag activism, networked public and affective solidarity are applied to the selected Instagram posts to offer a nuanced reading of the dynamics of the practices of the movement.

1.1 Research Questions

The main aim of this dissertation is to showcase how the social media platform Instagram is utilized by the Black Lives Matter movement to create a counter-discourse of police brutality. Specifically, this study operationalizes the scholarly perspectives relating to alternative narratives and hashtag activism (Yang, 2016) to understand the ways the key hashtags of remembrance #SayHerName and #SayHisName contribute to the spread and creation of the counter-discourse on police brutality. Moreover, this study makes use of the theory of affective solidarity (Hemmings, 2012) to illustrate better how emotions can be mobilized through hashtag activism and help create solidarity in online spaces, illustrating the further political potential for the social movements spreading of messages. In addition, the theoretical perspective of networked counter-publics is utilized to showcase how the discourse of police brutality is constructed by the Black Lives Matter movement and the corresponding user-generated content. To develop the research focus of this study, BLM is selected as a research case to examine how digital activism can contribute to the construction of counter-discourses of police brutality and this way contribute to the fight against racial violence. Accordingly, the following research question is posed: *How does the Black Lives*

Matter movement mediate digital activism practices on Instagram towards cases involving police brutality?

The process of mediated activism is a complex notion but can be rereferred to as a process where communication and media intervene in meaning-making processes. Moreover, the processes of mediation have been further aided through social media platforms and are closely linked to the amplification of political messages (Dumitrica & Felt, 2020; Williams, 2020). To guide this multifaceted process the theoretical dimensions of affective solidarity and hashtag activism help to break down the processes of mediation. Therefore, the following sub-questions are created to guide the analysis:

- How does BLM use hashtag activism?
- How is affective solidarity generated by the BLM?
- How does BLM create awareness of police brutality through networked publics?

The process of mediated activism is closely linked to the communicative affordances of social media platforms and in the case of political activism to the idea of hashtag activism. Hashtags show a further narrative potential for the creation and spreading of counter-discourse through online spaces (Yang, 2016). The theoretical perspectives of alternative narratives can also be linked to hashtag activism and especially the spread of counter-narratives by posting online. The theory of affective solidarity is utilized to show how emotions such as anger and grief are connected to hashtag activism and enable the solidarity that connects BLM to its followers, who have their own experiences of police brutality, thus this ties together the last theoretical perspectives of networked counter-publics when emotional affect is circulated within networks of people. This way it creates awareness of police brutality and counters the existing media narratives of police brutality.

1.2 Research Designs

The method of multimodal critical discourse analysis as outlined by Machin and Mayr (2012) is used in the given research to analyze how BLM mediated their core narratives of police brutality through the platform Instagram. This method comprehensively examines how discourse is produced through textual and visual elements of the analyzed Instagram posts from BLM's official Instagram page and the corresponding user-generated content. The sample consists of 90 posts relating to police brutality combining the post made by the Black Lives Matter movement and the user-generated posts that feature the key hashtags of remembrance #SayHisname and #SayHerName. The size of the sample was chosen to ensure

the depth of the analysis process. In the process of data collection, a purposive sampling method was utilized to determine which post would be chosen to be part of the dataset (Sarsted et al., 2018). The more detailed sampling categories and methodological tools of multimodal critical discourse analysis are assessed further in the methodological section.

1.3 Academic and Social Relevance

The present study seeks to examine the construction of counter-discourses of police brutality via the platform Instagram. Moreover, the case studies of social media activism have been predominantly focused on the textual affordances of the platform Twitter (Alfonzo, 2021; Xiong et al., 2019). Especially scholarship about the origins of the BLM focuses on Twitter and the spread of hashtags for combatting police brutality (Brown et al., 2017; Carney, 2016; Davidjants & Tiidenberg, 2021). This more traditional focus on the textual elements does not encompass the whole range of ways images can be utilized for activist narratives (Neumayer & Rossi, 2018). Thus, the present research seeks to fulfill this academic gap.

Case studies done on other social movement groups have illustrated the potential of Instagram for the narration of political messages by combining visual and textual rhetoric (Davidjants & Tiidenberg, 2021; Yuen & Tang, 2021). Research conducted on BLM and visual representations of political graffiti highlight the importance of images in aiding the narratives of police brutality and the further construction of counter-discourses of police brutality (Cappelli, 2020; Edrington & Gallagher, 2019). Thus, the potential of Instagram for BLM is important to examine in connection with mediated activism practices.

At a social level, the research focus of this study can help to uncover how creating alternative narratives in online spaces can contribute to the dissemination of knowledge around systemic police brutality and racial violence. The potential role of social media platforms for enacting systemic change is crucial since these platforms are utilized by people in their daily lives. Moreover, as police brutality persists in many countries this research remains important since it can contribute to the existing scholarship related to the Black Lives Matter movement and shares insights into the ways discourse can shape our social reality and perceptions of systemic racial violence.

1.4 Overview of the thesis structure

The introductory chapter of this dissertation proved a brief overview of the contextual background and theoretical approaches that are utilized in the analysis process. In the next chapter, key theoretical perspectives are outlined, followed by a discussion of the analytical concepts that build on the theories of mediation, hashtag activism, networked counter-publics, and affective solidarity. The third chapter explains the methodological approach of multimodal critical discourse analysis, analytical framework, and process that are used to interpret the findings. The chapter is accompanied by a critical reflection on the method's trustworthiness. The results of the analytical process are then presented in the fourth chapter together with a detailed discussion of the main findings and answers to the four sub-questions supported by extracts from the selected Instagram posts. Finally, the conclusion synthesizes the findings by providing an answer to the main research question and the theoretical and societal implications of the results. Lastly, limitations and future lines of research are suggested.

2. Theoretical Framework

This chapter introduces previous studies that focus on BLM and the relevant theoretical concepts that guide the analysis process. Following the context of this study, first, an overview of the Black Lives Matter movement and its digital activism is offered. This is followed by an outline of previous research on activism practices on the Instagram platform. In addition, the theoretical concepts guiding the analysis process, including narrative forms and counter publics, are outlined; followed by media activism and hashtag activism. Finally, the theory of affective solidarity is discussed in the context of online activism.

2.1 Contextualization of the BLM movement and social media activism

In this section, the Black Lives Matter origins will be discussed in connection with social media platforms and scholarly work to contextualize the present research better. The Black Lives Matter movement began as a response to a court case of Florida vs. George Zimmerman in 2013. The killing of Trayvon Martin and the verdict of Zimmerman sparked an outrage, which led Alicia Garza, one of the founding members of the movement, to write a series of social media posts on Facebook about the racial violence that Black people face in

America (Chase, 2018). Garza's close friend Patrisse Cullors shared Garza's sentiments on her Facebook by adding the #blacklivesmatter, which led Cullors to urge people for direct action to protect black bodies from police brutality (Chase, 2018). These calls for action characterized the start of the Black Lives Matter movement. Then, a conversation about police brutality, racial violence, and inequality emerged through social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. It spread rapidly but remained predominantly in the online sphere (Chase, 2018).

As stressed by Chase (2018), at the end of 2013, the movement became the center of a national conversation. A significant turn to mobilization happened in 2014 when the killings of Michel Brown, Darren Wilson, and Eric Gardner gathered people to protest across the country (Chase, 2018). The conversation was amplified by social media platforms and traditional media outlets alike (Chase, 2018).

More and more people included the #BlackLivesMatter in their posts. Other hashtags emerged in connection to the killings, such as #HandsUpDontShoot and Eric Garner's last words #ICantBreathe, which were echoed by the killing of George Floyd in 2020 (Chase, 2018; Cornell & Schachter, 2020). Since its grounding days, Black Lives Matter has consistently maintained a position in the public eye. Due to its prominent social media presence, its cause for fighting racial injustice has spread across the globe (Chase, 2018).

2.1.1   Black Lives Matter and the discourses of racial injustice

Studies on discourses of police brutality have found that mainstream news representation primarily supports official police narratives of instances where Black victims are killed by the police (Roychoudhury, 2022). Utilizing the social media platform Twitter following the deaths of Michael Brown and Eric Garner in 2014 represented a more extensive discourse on a race across the US (Carney, 2016). The cases of police brutality made many turns to Twitter to share their thoughts. Carney (2016) discusses these dynamics of power relations of dominant discourses of race in the US and discovers how BLM amplified a counter-discourse that challenged the dominant ideas of race in the US.

Furthermore, Carney (2016) connects traditional sociological theories with critical race theory, highlighting the emergence of social media as a new public sphere in which knowledge production is constructed by discourse - drawing on Habermas's ideas of the public sphere in which access to information enables access to participation. Considering contemporary discourses on race and that the #BlackLivesMatter and the #AllLivesMatter represent two different truths, The #BlackLivesMatter actively opposes the dominant "color-

blind discourse of the #AllLivesMatter movement, which insists that police brutality has nothing to do with skin color and instead portrays police as victims of violence. The color-blind discourse assumes that all people are essentially equal and will be treated equally and that racism will disappear. This makes it unacceptable to talk about racial issues and the views of marginalized minorities, which leads to a denial of any experience of racism (Stokke, 2021). Those in power are blind to other discourses produced by more marginalized groups, which connects the ideas of Foucault's power-knowledge relationships discussed further in the methodological section of this study (Carney, 2016; Hall et al., 2013).

Furthermore, critical race theory has shed light on the dialectical resistance between oppression and resistance of People of Color (POC) on social media platforms. The national discourses that do not view race as the primary reason for police brutality are countered by POC on social media (Carney, 2016). In the case of the Black Lives Matter movement and its supporters, Twitter acted as the central platform on which these debates were conducted. Unlike traditional media, which has shaped hegemonic perceptions of race in the United States for passive audiences, social media allows people to actively engage and shape discourse (Carney, 2016). Thus, this dissertation seeks to examine the potential of Instagram as a platform for shaping discourse around police brutality and its potential use as a media outlet for shaping hegemonic perceptions of police brutality.

From its inception, the Black Lives Matter movement has been connected to the digital sphere. The movement is distinguished by the absence of traditional hierarchies, instead consisting of networks of people (Mundt et al., 2018). Furthermore, Ince et al. (2017) focus more on how the public interacts with the movement, offering a broad reading of the audience that shapes the movement's meaning through social media platforms.

Social media platforms served as a tool for the Black Lives Matter movement to build direct, personal relationships within the community and with other Black Lives Matter activists, creating a network of people fighting racial injustice (Mundt et al., 2018). With the immense value of sharing personal ups and downs, movement ideals, and event coordination with other people supporting the movement, social media acted as a tool for these mobilization efforts (Mundt et al., 2018). Furthermore, due to the accessibility that social media provides, networks of people and external resources spread beyond the movement's core members to regular social media users (Mundt et al., 2018). In this way, the movement can leverage the online audience built through its Facebook and Twitter accounts, organize events, share information, and mobilize people to take action in the streets. Most importantly,

social media enables the creation of narratives about racial injustice in the United States (Mundt et al., 2018).

As Mir and Zanoni (2020) point out, "Black Lives Matter" represents three simple words with a powerful connotation to recommit to the cause of racial injustice. In 2020, the killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis sparked the largest protest against racial violence in the United States. They demonstrated the importance of the Black Lives Matter movement and the need to examine its digital activism practices more closely on various social media platforms. To understand the creation of an alternative discourse through dialectical resistance on social media platforms, as intended by this research, the concept of hegemonic discourse must be further contextualized to understand the dynamics of power and knowledge production, particularly in the case of the Black Lives Matter movement and countering hegemonic representations of mainstream media.

2.1.2 Hegemonic Discourses

The concept of hegemony explains how dominant ideologies are expressed through discourse. Hegemony is created when the viewpoint expressed through discursive strategies is accepted by the public as the dominant interpretation and becomes pervasive to the level that it is considered a commonsense knowledge of the world (Coombs & Holladay, 2012; Motion & Leitch, 2007). For example, the dominant mainstream media representations of police brutality become normalized and taken as common sense. Thus, it leaves room to contest knowledge production that challenges the hegemonic positioning of discourse as seen in the case of the Black Lives Matter movement in online spaces (Foucault, 1972).

As stressed by Hughey (2015) the hegemonic knowledge productions of police brutality operate through the emphasis on guilt and crime, which legitimize the dominant meanings of racialized violence. Through mass media representations Black and POC people are portrayed as criminally threatening (Dow, 2016). These hegemonic narratives may influence the hegemonic understanding of racial violence (Durham, 2022). The police employ both color-conscious and colorblind ideologies, that contribute to the hegemonic knowledge production on an institutional level (Hughey, 2015). Thus, by constructing Black communities as a threat to the society the hegemonic knowledge of racial violence is constructed from the premise of protection. Thus, as discussed by Carney (2016) this results in a color-blind approach that denies the experiences of Black communities of racism, racial profiling, and racial violence perpetrated by the police.

In the next sections, social media activism is explained, especially within the social media platform Instagram, which is the primary focus of analysis in the given research. The following section defines Instagram activism, and the subsequent section illustrates further the affordance of the platform for online activism.

2.1.3   *Contextualizing social media*

Social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram allow people to follow one another based on similar interests and share their opinions with the world (Edrington & Gallagher, 2019). New media platforms are changing the terrain of social movements even more rapidly since communication and information systems have been through historical sources of power and counter-power (Edrington & Gallagher, 2019). First, the basic definition of social media is offered by Kapoor et al. (2018):

> Social media comprises various user-driven platforms that facilitate the diffusion of compelling content, dialogue creation, and communication to a broader audience. It is essentially a digital space created by the people and for the people. It provides an environment conducive for interactions and networking to occur at different levels (for instance, personal, professional, business, marketing, political, and societal) p.531.

This basic definition characterizes the activities that various social movements can enact through social media platforms. As discussed in the previous section, BLM has been traditionally characterized by the social media platforms Facebook, and Twitter (Chase, 2018). However, research on other social media platforms and activism shows the potential of Instagram in aiding the activism agenda of many groups. In recent years, scholarly attention has examined Instagram's potential to spread activist agendas (Ledford & Salzano, 2022).

As stressed by Ledford and Salzano (2022), amid the renewed calls for Black Lives Matter activism and spreading health guidelines during the global COVID-19 pandemic, users of Instagram found it fitting for advocacy and activism. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Instagram played an essential role in disseminating information online by utilizing various message frames and hashtags (Priadana & Tahalea, 2021). In their study examining hashtag activism and the information spread of #covid19 in Indonesia, Priadana and Tahalea (2021) found that the importance of hashtags and images related to relevant information

about the virus had the potential to disseminate misinformation. By conducting social network analysis, they examined the connectivity of people through specific hashtags. They discovered how people could connect and create networked activism by sharing information through posts and hashtags (Priadana & Tahalea, 2021). Thus, the affordances of Instagram for online activism will be discussed further in the next section. This dissertation seeks to illustrate how the affordances of the platform Instagram mainly its visuality and combination of hashtags contribute to the spreading of awareness of police brutality. The specific hashtags #SayHerName and #SayHisName connect the different users with the BLM content and contribute to the spreading of their activism around police brutality.

2.1.4 *Affordances of Instagram for online activism*

In their research, Davidjants and Tiidenberg (2021) examined how contemporary activists narrate the remembrance of the Armenian Genocide via the platform Instagram. They highlight how activist memory narration often combines different communication modes such as visual, textual, and oral (Davidjants & Tiidenberg, 2021). Thus, while Facebook and Twitter allow the visuality of a photo video, these platforms are predominantly textual. However, Instagram is perceived as a platform that affords high levels of visuality (Davidjants & Tiidenberg, 2021). More research conducted on social movement studies and Instagram reveal further the importance of the platform for social movements. Examples of the Anti-Elab movement in Hongkong, Fridays for Future, and #Metoo are a starting point for research for networked activism where visual documentation creates solidarity that aids the spread of political narratives (Nikunen, 2018; Petterson-Salahuddin, 2022; Yuen & Tang, 2021).

Images have played a central role in social movement communication as highlighted by Neumayer and Rossi (2018) since the visual documentation can be used as a tool for creating perspectives and narratives of social movements. This is due to the emotional attachments they create as argued by Cappelli (2020). Especially protests images have a likelihood to enable the identification of racial violence (Crowder 2021). When posted on social media images can influence political behavior (Crowder, 2021). Bringing together the scholarship on emotions, social movements, and racial appeals to understand how visual images on social media can influence emotional responses, which in turn contributes to whether white people view racial issues as important. Thus, the feelings of guilt associated with the issues of racism were amplified by viewing Instagram posts that addressed these issues (Crowder, 2021).

Against this backdrop, in 2020 Darnella Frazier's video of George Floyd marked the second wave of the movement on the platform Instagram (Chang et al. 2020). As further highlighted by Richardson (2020) pictures and videos have an outsized role in Black movement-building and by utilizing digital platforms people can use these visual affordances of the platform as a tool for political testimony to fight systemic racial violence. During the protests in 2020, especially the visual centering of George Floyd was found to be influential in creating awareness of the issues of police brutality (Chang et al., 2020). The death of an individual Black man became a center point that builds into a larger movement, thus contributing to the second wave of the BLM movement and their protests (Chang et al., 2020). These visual affordances are key to the BLM movement's activism and especially for the remembrance of the victims. As argued by Edrington & Gallagher (2019) specifically, images are important because they help others see in a collective way, which makes the experiences of racial violence shared. Thus, this dissertation examines further how visual centering of the victims aids the creation of awareness of police brutality and is utilized by the BLM to create a counter-discourse of police brutality. As seen through these examples of the potential of Instagram as a platform for activism, this study aims to focus predominantly on the specific affordances the platform offers for social movements due to its reliance on the post in the form of photos that can effectively aid the more textual elements of activism. The next section will discuss mediated activism as the first analytical concept that guides the analysis process.

2.2 Mediated activism

Digital media activism can be characterized as a form of political engagement that addresses both fixed and mobile devices, including hacktivism, hashtag activism, and open-source advocacy (Treré & Kaun, 2021). Mediation refers to how communication and media intervene in meaning-making processes (Dumitrica & Felt, 2020). As argued by Raymond Williams (2020), media should be analyzed through three types of transformation that appear in the context of mediation. First amplification of political messages through media, traditional and digital. Second, duration relates to direct physical resources to store media, such as audio recordings. Third, alternative symbolic production extends the conventional use or transformation of physical objects as signs, the development of writing, or graphics and the means of their production. Mainly social media helps amplify political messages and increase mobilization for social movements. Simultaneously, these digital media technologies are

integral to preserving the histories of social movements for internal identification (Treré & Kaun, 2021).

Mediation can be seen as both social and technological. When it comes to activism, the theoretical dimension of mediation as ecology explores how social media, in combination with older media channels, often non-digital media, are used by activist groups to enact their activism (Dumitrica & Felt, 2020). The integration of social media in these civic engagement processes has created new narratives about what citizens can and should do. Even as media change, the mediation process remains shaped by the political, social, and economic structures within which it occurs (Dumitrica & Bakardjieva, 2018), which means that social media platforms are not to be simplistically reduced as replacing traditional media outlets but rather described as a hybrid system of old and new media logics interacting together. New ways of citizen engagement through social media platforms bring alternative engagement and diffusion of knowledge that is not represented by the mainstream media (Dumitrica & Bakardjieva, 2018). In the digital age, media engagement often centers on the individual using social media platforms (Dumitrica & Bakardjieva, 2018). Individuals then form a community for a common cause, promoting media engagement (Dumitrica & Bakardjieva, 2018). Thus, it becomes a starting point for media activism (Dumitrica & Felt, 2020).

Narrative forms will be further discussed in the subsequent section since they contribute to the alternative symbolic meaning-making discussed by Treré and Kaun (2021) and Williams (2020). Furthermore, as illustrated by Dumitrica and Felt (2020) creation of new narratives meditated through social media platforms. This dissertation seeks to utilize the theoretical perspectives of mediation as characterized by Dumitrica and Felt (2020). Especially the amplification of political messages through the platform Instagram and the alternative engagement diffusion of knowledge around police brutality. The next section highlights further the potential of the platform Instagram for the creation of alternative narratives and examines the dynamics of hashtag activism practices that are closely connected to the practices of mediation.

2.3 Hashtag activism and Narrative forms

Narrative is the primary medium through which experience is represented, remembered, and shared with others. It tends to unify experience in an abstract linear form. The degree to which this is done is designated narrative form (Wagoner, 2008). Narratives are everywhere and shape how individuals and collective actors make sense of the world (Forchtner, 2020).

As Barthes (1975) argues, the narrative is always present in all places and societies. Ultimately, through narratives, people make sense of the words and position themselves in time (Abbott, 2002). Through narratives, people also constitute their social identities (Forchtner, 2020). The power of narratives for social movements has been widely recognized. This processual nature of social movements has a causal movement toward confrontation, and certain narratives become powerful drivers of social movements (Griffin, 2003; Steinmetz, 1992).

As described by Tombleson and Wolf (2017), hashtags activism describes networks of social media messages that use a common hashtag term with social demand. Unlike traditional forms of activism or "offline activism," digital activism allows movements to spread beyond a small region globally (Kent, 2013). The #BlackLivesMatter social movement was a direct result of the hashtag on the social media platform Twitter. Hashtag activism has a distinctive narrative character due to the multiplicity of connected hashtags. These become an outlet for multiple personal stories connected through hashtags, which creates a collective narrative (Yang, 2016). Hashtags are one of the key affordances of social media, connecting people in networks. They allow public participation as a reaction to global events (Giaxoglou & Döveling, 2018). Hashtag activism could be characterized as a discursive protest on social media united through hash-tagged words, phrases, or sentences (Yang, 2016).

Ultimately, hashtags encourage audience participation when people share their posts with the same hashtags. In the case of BLM, the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter carries a narrative power and agency when many people engage with it through Twitter and other platforms. It has become intertwined with many other hashtags that raise awareness of the cases of police brutality, such as #SayHisname, #SayHerName, #NoJustivenopeace, #JusticefotGeorgeFloyd, and many more. They become a part of a collective creating a larger narrative and discourses (Campbell, 2005). Narratives are powerful tools for building collective identity and understanding the meaning-making practices within discourse (Forchtner, 2020; Gavriely-Nuri, 2017). Recent research on hashtag activism through the platform Instagram has shown the potential of visual representations of hashtag activism (Kim et al., 2020). As highlighted by Kim et al. (2020), there has been a dramatic increase in social media posts in photo form and hashtag activism. Thus, this dissertation will further focus on the narratives of text and how activist messages are amplified through images of the victims of police brutality. Therefore, the next section examines the theoretical perspectives of visual narratives in social movement research.

2.4 Narratives forms, images, and social media activism

As suggested by Neumayer and Rossi (2018), social movement research has traditionally been hesitant to focus on visual social media data from protests. Their research addresses the important role of images in social protests, which is one of the main focuses of this dissertation. The circulation of images is characterized by power and decency imbalances, which can amplify certain messages over others due to pre-establishes legitimacy. A good example of this is the traditional media depictions of the Black Lives Matter protest that often showcase violence and the more peaceful representations shared by the movement's supporters (Brown et al., 2017). However, sharing alternative images can lead to a challenge in power over the representation of visual narratives (Neumayer & Rossi, 2018). Especially the symbolic representation of "injustice" through pictures is powerful in social movement narratives (Olensen, 2016). Images of victims of police violence and protesters that were attacked by the police become iconic representations of unjustified violence by authorities (Olensen, 2016). Narratives of police injustice are supported by images that directly bear witness to police violence (Neumayer & Rossi, 2018).

As illustrated by Edrington and Gallagher (2019), the circulation of images of the victims of police brutality and the circulation of images of police officers enacting physical force on the bodies of Black citizens make racial injustices visible and transform citizens into activists. This was crucial for the Black Lives Matter movement's mobilization efforts and the creation of alternative narratives of police brutality (Brown et al., 2017; Edrington & Gallagher, 2019). Cappelli (2020) highlighted in her research examining political protest graffiti and the Black Lives Matter movement. She found that graffiti as a visible form of rhetoric provides a democratizing space to enable people to articulate their narratives. Visual rhetoric has substantial power to communicate ideas and influence public debate. Images work as a multimodal tool for communicating and disseminating ideas (Cappelli, 2020). Images carry rhetorical functions that contribute to the contemporary discourses about race, thus linking the potential of images to the research conducted in this dissertation (Edrington & Gallagher, 2019). By combining the amplification of messages through images as suggested by Neumayer and Rossi (2018) and the ideas of Edrington and Gallagher (2019) that focus on how images can contribute to making racial violence such as police brutality visible. This dissertation will examine further how images of the victims can contribute to the narrative constructions of police brutality, namely the discursive representation of injustice in the mediated activism of the Black Lives Matter movement. Thus, the next section will examine

further how alternative narratives enable collective identity formation and their creation of networked activism.

2.5 Networked counter-publics and collective identity formation

Continuing with the concept of "publics" as proposed by Eyman (2015), networked publics are defined as those publics that come about through online processes. Online information systems provide the material, communicative, and social means for the existence of a public sphere. It is created by implementing a network that defines the parameters of a public sphere's agency and its specific communicative possibilities (Eyman, 2015). Therefore, networks are a collection of people, technology, and social norms that arrange subjects into structures and define parameters for their interaction that actively shape people's social reality (Eyman, 2015). The rhetoric spread through hashtags used by BLM is spread through a network of users and the BLM members, which aligned with the idea of a digital network of resistance in which individuals become political subjects. As stressed by Alfonzo (2021), this networked structure with self-motivated forms of grievance sharing has been leading to Digitally Networked Action (DNA). Social media platforms offer great opportunities for online activism and the emergence of digital counter-publics (Hellsten et al., 2021). They have the potential to challenge the dominant narratives of societies and drive social change (Downey & Fenton, 2003). Nasrin and Fisher (2021) have examined to what degree collective identity can be facilitated in digital spaces. The notion of collective identity has been central to theories of social organization (Barandiaran et al., 2020).

As technological development has increased rapidly in recent years growing body of research focused on collective meaning-making and identity in virtual spaces has emerged (Nasrin & Fisher, 2021). It is characterized as an individual's cognitive and emotional connection with a broader community, category, practice, or institution (Nasrin & Fisher, 2021). As argued by Melucci (1996), collective identities can be multidimensional. He describes collective identities as networked and interactional, an active relationship between actors who interact, communicate, and influence.

The communication channels of collective identity formation, such as digital technologies, are constitutive parts of the network of actors' relationships (Melucci, 1996). As stressed by Castells (2009), a growing body of research shows how social transformation is associated (not determined) with the extension of digital technologies into an increasing number of activities and spheres from economic, political, and social. Thus, this extension of

digital technologies has fundamentally changed the information and communication modes and in connection to them social phenomena such as collective identity formation, action, power, culture, or politics (Castells, 2009).

As highlighted by Barandiaran et al. (2020), new forms of collective identities are emerging with the help of digital technologies. This means how traditionally defined identities are connected to digital networks of people (Barandiaran et al., 2020). What has been examined to effectively cultivate collective identity formation are hashtags (Nasrin & Fisher, 2021). These tags help to spread narrative quicker than traditional media and presuppose a virtual community (Nasrin & Fisher, 2021).

As Tufekci (2019) argued, hashtags promote politics that enable democratic participation, allowing a horizontal and identity-based movement to diffuse information and mobilize around shared grievances. This is further explored by Ince et al. (2017) in their research on social movements and how they articulate grievances and encourage people to accept their arguments. This is enacted through the "movement frame," which connotes the core messages of the movement, such as the Black Lives Matter (Ince et al., 2017). These framing of social issues such as police brutality are shared by users in online spaces, often through hashtags and additional messages, leading to the extension of the movement's original meaning (Ince et al., 2017). The horizontal structure of social media platforms highlighted by Tufekci (2019) allows the spread of core messages and creates content that connects multiple users. Thus, the core idea of social media platforms such as Instagram and Twitter is a decentralized space for creating and disseminating ideas (Ince et al., 2017).

In the case of BLM, Twitter supported this formation of collective narratives (Brown et al., 2017). As Brown et al. (2017) point out, hashtags help form communication networks. They create an orientation structure that allows users to focus on a particular dialogue thread, gain status by following other participants within the hashtag, and retweet messages to show engagement and solidarity (Haenfler, 2004). Therefore, this thesis examines hashtags such as #SayHisName and #SayHerName in more detail to illustrate the communicative network created by the Black Lives Matter movement and its followers concerning police brutality. Through this kind of digital activism, many neglected issues such as sexual harassment, systemic racism, and police brutality can be brought to attention (Clark, 2016). These debates are encouraged via hashtags on social media (Xiong et al., 2019). Hashtags function beyond the categorization of information and contribute to the co-creation of meaning. The use of shared hashtags by minority or activist groups could be considered a strategy for creating a counter-public (Albu & Etter, 2016; Evans et al., 2017).

By combining the theoretical perspectives of networked counter publics as stressed by Alfonzo (2021), Carney (2016), Eyman (2015) and the theories of collective identity building through digital technologies as stressed by Barandiaran et al. (2020) and the affordances of hashtags in aiding the processed of identity building as articulated by Nasrin and Fisher (2021) this research addressed how the #SayHisname and #SayHerName spread in the platform Instagram mediated activism of the Black Lives Matter enable communities to create networked counter publics and collective identity around the shared grievances against systemic police brutality. Furthermore, the shared sense of "oneness" of collective identity formation has effective potential, which is a crucial component for building solidarity among social movements (Schultze & Steward, 2019). In the next section, the theory of affective solidarity will be further contextualized since it is a crucial component in the understanding of how emotions contribute to collective identity formation, networked counter-public, and the creation of alternative narratives of police brutality.

2.6 Affective solidarity

As theorized by Hemmings (2012), affective solidarity was first used in her study of feminist political consciousness connected to the knowledge production of marginalized groups. The affective shift in women's lives typically occurs through the struggle to acknowledge the unequal standing in society can lead to an affective turn. Affective turn happens through strong emotions such as anger, frustration, rage, or grief and thus can be fueled to action (Hemmings, 2012). Hemmings argues how the action followed by affective turns is not guaranteed. However, the affective turn has the potential to do so when multiple women feel these emotions through shared experiences and mobilize together. Thus, effective dissonance happens, the judgment arising from the distinction between experience and the world and can retreat into a non-acceptance. This sense of injustice leads to a desire to rectify that (Hemmings, 2012). As Hemmings (2012) stressed, the affective dissonance, is not only a critique of dominant knowledge production. However, it can move beyond it to form a struggle for alternative values and mutual recognition of affective solidarity. This solidarity is created through a shared experience of oppression and is rather reflexive than essentialist (Hemmings, 2012).

Affective solidarity theory has been linked to online activism. They illustrate how emotions are mediated through social media platforms. Affective styles accomplish an activist agenda and create solidarity between activist groups (Nikunen, 2018). Through social

movements and their collective identity formation, emotional affect has the power to create solidarity between groups (Schultze & Steward, 2019). Solidarity and collective identity can thus be seen as mutually constituting. This affective solidarity is effectively harnessed on social media platforms such as Instagram through sharing, commenting, hash tagging, and reposting content (Vachhani & Pullen, 2019).

As Vachhani and Pullen (2019) and Nikunen (2018) argue, negative emotions such as anger, shame, and frustration have the power to create affect between groups. In the case of police brutality, grief and anger for victims is constructed as an emotional response that supports Black Lives Matter activism (Giaxoglou & Döveling, 2018). The broad body of research examining affect and emotion often uses the two terms (Wilce, 2009, p.22).

Emotions can be viewed as a basic set of universals evolved and adapted in dealing with fundamental life tasks and can be used as a framework to organize emotional practices (Ekman, 1999). Thus, emotions can be viewed as a site of cultural signification, whereas affect refers to embodied intensity cut off from language or reflective consciousness (Massumi, 2002). Reflecting on the latter and the connection of discourse and affect is further theorized by Wetherell (2013), who draws from Massumi's (2002) work on affect and discourse. Building on the idea that discourse and affect are interwoven, especially the embodiment of action, is enacted through these two shaping theoretical perspectives (Wetherell, 2013). Affect and discourse together form a pattern of discursive practices and amplify each other, shaping the social world and being shaped by the social world of the subject (Wetherell, 2013).

Chapter summary

This chapter presents the theoretical perspectives that guide the analysis process. First, a contextualization of Black Lives Matter and social media was undertaken to highlight the importance of social media to modern activism. This was followed by a discussion of previous research on BLM and activism practices via Instagram to highlight the platform's potential for media activism practices. As Mundt et al. (2018) point out, social media served as a tool for BLM activists to create an online community and spread their core messages about police brutality. This digital mediation of political messages, as discussed by Dumitrica and Felt (2020), is part of the new practices of civic engagement and is thus reminiscent of the social and political context in which the mediation processes take place. This alternative engagement and dissemination of knowledge about police brutality create engagement when

individuals share content that promotes a common cause. As shown in the previous chapter, the use of hashtags is beneficial for the dissemination of online messages by activists. As Wolf (2017) points out, the spread of political messages is also increasingly possible through the linking of hashtags on social media platforms. As discussed by Yang (2016), the repetition of these messages by users who identify with the messages disseminated via hashtags is important for the dissemination and creation of collective narratives. Neumayer and Rossi (2018) highlighted the importance of visuality in helping to create counter-narratives due to the emotional connection that images have to users. In the context of BLM, Edrington & Gallagher (2019) and Cappelli (2020) outlined how images can be used as a multimodal tool to articulate narratives about police violence and make racial violence visible. In addition, the proliferation of messages online through hashtags and the process of mediation enables the creation of counter-publics, as discussed by Eyman (2015). The rhetoric of police brutality is effectively disseminated through these networks of people who identify with the core messages when it comes to shared grievances about police brutality, as suggested by Alfonzo (2021). Finally, the theory of affective solidarity put forth by Hemmings (2012) encompasses emotional affect through emotion, which builds solidarity among the network of people and contributes to emotional identification with political messages made visible through images and the sharing of personal stories about police brutality, thus demonstrating the potential for the discursive practices that amplify the messages of BLM activists.

3. Methodology

In this chapter, the methodological approaches of multimodal critical discourse analysis are outlined. In addition, the theory of power-knowledge relations by Michel Foucault is further discussed in connection to discourse analysis. Following, the sampling procedure and data collection are explained. Finally, the validity and reliability of the given research are discussed, and the possible methodological limitations and ethical concerns are considered.

3.1 Critical Discourse Analysis

The decision to use a qualitative research method was made to ensure an in-depth investigation of knowledge production around the topic of police brutality. The decision to

focus on the platform Instagram was made because its visual affordances for knowledge production can be explored in more detail through a multimodal critical discourse analysis than, for example, a quantitative content analysis. Meticulous analysis of individual posts can be conducted using this method, and the more implicit meanings that the data illustrate can be better explored using a qualitative approach.

This dissertation uses the methodological approach of critical discourse analysis to further analyze the discursive constructions of the Black Lives Matter movement in cases of police brutality on the Instagram platform. Critical discourse analysis (CDA) examines how language shapes and constructs meaning as it is shaped by the social actors who create it (Machin & Mayr, 2012). It is rooted in critical linguistics, which reveals how language is used as an ideological tool to present worldviews as natural and reasonable (Machin & Mayr, 2012). The term "critical" in CDA means that language is denaturalized to reveal the kinds of ideas, absences, and taken-for-granted assumptions in texts that reveal the implicit power relations of discourse (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p.4). The choice of CDA as a method of analysis was made to further understand the meaning-making processes of the Black Lives Matter movement and the kind of affective solidarity it generates through the hashtags #sayhisname and #sayhername and the posts that contain these hashtags. This method allows for a better understanding of how discourses around police brutality are constructed through language to generate affective solidarity online.

The following steps were taken to conduct CDA on the selected Instagram posts featuring victims of police brutality. First, the discursive tools used to conduct the discourse analysis are presented (overview in Appendix A). These include connotation, overlexicalization, suppression, structural opposition, and lexical choice/genre (Machin & Mayr, 2012). Connotation refers to the implicit meanings that words represent in the text. Overlexicalization refers to the abundance of certain words and synonyms. These words can be persuasive and have ideological meaning (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p.37). Suppression refers to silence or absence in a text and the more implicit meaning of representations that are not explicitly stated. Structural opposition refers to more self-evident opposites in a text, such as good, bad, young, or old, and can be ideological such as democratic or communist (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p.39). Finally, lexical choice or lexical genre refers to blending informal language with scientific jargon to appear authorial while being on par with the target audience. Imperatives that show authority are considered standard (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 42). These tools are used to analyze the textual data of the sample articles collected. In the next section, the tools of visual discourse analysis are outlined due to their importance in the

visual constructions of meaning in the posts, which are predominantly based on the visual elements of the Instagram platform.

3.2 Visual Critical Discourse Analysis

The meaning of discourse is not only conveyed through text but also through the combination of non-linguistic elements such as images. Through images, many of these implicit power relations and meanings can be revealed (Machin & Mayr, 2012). This is what visual discourse analysis (VCDA) through images offers. Combining visual and linguistic discourse analysis offers a multimodal approach that allows a deeper analysis.

The tools for visual critical discourse analysis are offered by Machin and Mayr (2012) to decode the meaning of discourse. First, it is necessary to examine the objects of the image through connotation and denotation (Machin & Mayr, 2012). Denotation and connotation can be determined by closely examining the objects of the image and the meaning and discourses they convey. Denotation refers to descriptive elements of the images, such as who is depicted in the image. Connotation refers to the symbolic values and ideas represented and conveyed by the image (Machin & Mayr, 2012). As highlighted by Machin and Mayr (2012), the communication of these symbolic values occurs through the objects depicted in the images. At the level of discourse, one must ask what discourses these objects communicate. Second, the objects in the image must be examined to determine what meaning and cultural symbols they convey (Machin & Mayr, 2012). Third, examining the environment of the image is embedded in the discourses or values they convey. The meaning of the environment in which the image communicates general ideas to connote discourses, values, identities, and actions is an essential part of VCDA. Finally, the image's meaning must be examined, i.e., what features are salient in the image (Machin & Mayr, 2012). These could be explained as having a central place in the image's composition. Visual critical discourse analysis will be used to deconstruct further the visual and symbolic meaning of the given example contributions.

3.3 Power-Knowledge relations

As Foucault (1972) stresses, knowledge involves power, and this power is exercised through discourse. Critical discourse analysis allows us to examine elements of power such as "oppression, repression, marginalization, and domination, and to understand, expose, and resist social inequality" (McGregor, 2004; Van Dijk, 2008, p.85). It can be viewed as a method of inquiry that helps make visible how various elements of power constructed at

higher social levels play a role in public opinion that perpetuates the interests of dominant social groups (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). Foucault stresses in his theory of power-knowledge relations how knowledge and power are interconnected in institutional settings (Hall et al., 2013). Knowledge linked to power not only assumes the authority of the truth but also has the power to make itself true. Knowledge is not true in an absolute sense, but rather a truth that is considered authoritative regardless of time, setting, or context (Hall et al., 2013). He gives an example of how our perceptions of crime and sanctions are constructed by discourses and how this can have effects on the sentencing of criminals (Hall et al., 2013. p.49). A crucial component of discourses is the individual that gives meaning to them. According to Foucault discourses produce subjects. The subject becomes the bearer of the kind of knowledge which discourses produce, and they become the object through which the power of the discourse is relayed (Hall et al., 2013, p.55). In the case of the Black Lives Matter movement creating and sharing content related to police brutality. The subjects that emerge are the Black communities who share the experiences of police brutality on a personal level, and the other potential subjects are the White population who want to understand and know more about systemic police brutality. The power-knowledge relations are applied after the multimodal CDA is conducted to ensure the broader social implications of creating counter-discourses about police brutality. The shift in subject positioning and knowledge production related to police brutality is an important aspect to address to illustrate the full scope of the influence of this discursive contestation on hegemonic representations of systemic police brutality.

Critical discourse analysis provides a systematic method for examining the "reinforcement of negative cultural and conceptual stereotypes" and leads the analyst to "explanatory inquiry into how racism and inequality are embedded in language structure and use" (Lederer, 2013, p. 265). The CDA method and VCDA were chosen to further analyze how the Black Lives Matter movement generates affective solidarity and networked publics through #SayHisName and #SayHerName, as this method is appropriate for the visual and textual analysis of the selected Instagram posts. The method is best suited for the present study because the Instagram platform relies on visual images, and visual critical discourse analysis enables the study of implicit meanings conveyed through the images of the posts. By analyzing the captions of the selected posts, the power relations created by the discourses on police brutality can be better identified. The combination of images has an emotional connection to the discourse of solidarity, and in the case of Black Lives Matter, there is a

clear connection to the ideas of power-knowledge relations and the creation of alternative discourses of resistance through the platform (Brown, 2017; Hall et al., 2013).

3.4 Sampling procedure and strategy

The representative sample consists of 90 posts containing the image, and full caption analyzed from the official BLM Instagram page and other users using the hashtags #sayhis/her name. The sample size was chosen to ensure the depth of the analysis process. The purposive sampling method was used in the data collection to determine which posts were selected for the given sample (Sarsted et al. 2018). The categories for sampling were pictures of the victims, the posts were timed between the years 2020-2022 and the months of September and April, they contained the #sayhisname or #sayhername, and they directly referenced police brutality, and the location of the victims was the United States. These categories helped narrow down the sample posts.

Data from 90 posts were collected by entering the hashtags #SayHerName and #SayHisName into the search bar on the Instagram platform. The results were the most recent posts with the specified hashtags, new victims of both genders, and memorials for victims killed by police. The posts that matched the specified sample categories were included in the 90. The collected data were cleaned by comparing the images and captions of the posts to determine the extent to which they were similar or had similar graphics/images or captions. To avoid saturation, new searches were conducted between January and May of 2022 to collect a broad sample of posts without repetition. Data collection would take place over several days to ensure a wide variety. Therefore, this sampling method is well suited for this study because it ensures that each contribution is selected to fit the research question. Regardless, the sampling method has some limitations: the operationalization process and the limited representativeness of the sample since it was not randomly selected. Two posts representing the discursive patterns of the 90 collected posts were organized in a table according to the five discursive tools to structure the data analysis. The posts were numbered from 1 to 2, and the representative quotes and image descriptions were listed under the representative discursive tools. In addition, a graph was made to illustrate the Visual discourse analysis for the visual elements of each post in a second table to assure methodological transparency.

3.5 Operationalization and Analytical frame

This section illustrates the operationalization process in connection to the main research question: How does the Black Lives Matter movement mediate digital activism practices on Instagram towards cases involving police brutality?

This study is broken down into three sub-questions that guide the answer to the main question. Each of these research questions corresponds to the main elements of mediated activism practices in the cases involving police brutality, which are operationalized below. This ensures that all the elements of the processes of mediation are comprehensively analyzed to understand the creation of counter-discourses of police brutality.

Sub-question 1 (SQI): How is BLM using hashtag activism?

Hashtag activism illustrated by Clark (2016), Yang (2016), and Giaxoglou and Döveling (2018) refers to the discursive use of the hashtags #SayHisName and #SayHerName. Hashtag activism is characterized by mediation through digital technologies and the activist agenda of the Black Lives Matter movement through the platform Instagram.

Sub-question 2 (SQ2): How is affective solidarity created by BLM?

Affective solidarity is essentially concerned with the building of solidarity around lived experience through emotions such as anger and grief. These emotions in the process of mediated activism are circulated among users and the Black Lives Matter movement when disseminating knowledge about police brutality through lived experiences of police brutality.

Sub-question 3 (SQ3): How is BLM creating awareness of police brutality through networked publics?

This question considers how the networked public becomes evident through discursive patterns enacted through hashtags, and emotions that are circulated among users and the Black Lives Matter movement. The analyzed discursive patterns created by the BLM are further spread by the users in this networked public, which contributes to the mediation of their activism.

As discussed above, the analytical framework of this study is focused on the process of mediation of the hashtag activism practices enacted by BLM through the platform Instagram and the corresponding construction of counter-discourse of police brutality. This framework further addresses the linguistic elements of the analyzed posts as well as how the visual images of the posts contribute to the creation of discourse as supported by the theories discussed. As discussed in the theoretical framework particularly the theories of alternative narratives and narrative potential of hashtags, as well as the theory of affective solidarity in combination with the theoretical perspectives of identity building and counter publics are

essential to guide the multimodal discourse-analytical process. These theories represented in the sub-questions are paired with the discursive tools of VCDA and CDA to allow methodological transparency to the given research.

For all the sub-questions guiding questions from multimodal discourse analysis are applied. These include the textual elements of the CDA:

- Who or what remains invisible in the text and why?
- What strategies (word connotations, keywords, structural oppositions, overlexicalization, etc.) are employed?
- Which moral subject positions are created and constructed within the discourse?
- Who benefits from this discourse? (Power- knowledge relations)

To further asses the VCDA the following questions guide the identification of denotation and connotation in the posts of the pictures:

- What meanings/discourses do objects in the images communicate?
- What discourses and values do the setting of the image communicate?
- What does the salience of images communicate?

Pairing the theoretical perspectives with these guiding questions uncovers the way the processes of mediation together with the technical tools of discourse analysis enable to uncover how the counter-discourse of police brutality is created. The analytical framework addressed the way hashtags connect posts to a discursive pattern and how emotions that are an integral part of the creation of affective solidarity form discursive patterns among users of the platform and the Black Lives Matter movement.

The immersion of data involved sentence-by-sentence reading of each collected post guided by the analytical framework. The first round of analysis looked at the representativeness of the sample of 90 posts to narrow them down visually and textually to representative discursive patterns that reflected the construction of the counter-discourse of police brutality. The second round of analysis sought to connect each sample as a concise discussion. The next stage of the procedure was to connect the found discursive patterns to identify the discursive practices of BLM.

3.6 Credibility and ethical considerations

In addition, when examining my role as a researcher and evaluating the credibility of given research, reliability and validity must be considered (Silverman, 2011). In evaluating reliability, the transparency of the methodological process provides insight into the steps

taken in analyzing the given posts. Descriptions of the discursive tools, analysis materials, and data make the research process understandable to the reader (Silverman, 2011). In assessing the validity of this study, the observations presented in the data rely on the interpretations drawn from the data and theory (Silverman, 2011).

Qualitative research methods, including CDA and VCDA, are based on the interpretation which entails a possible lack of objectivity. However, scholars have argued in response that objectivity is not the analytical goal of CDA, since analytical choices are necessarily selective and subjective (Fairclough, 2003). This less essentialist notion allows the separation of actual and potential domains of reality. The empirical concerns of knowledge reality recognize that the human experience of the natural world is limited and sometimes mistaken (Fairclough, 2003). This entails that analysis of discourse, texts, images, and meaning is shaped by the social context where the researchers position themselves and cannot establish universal truths. To truly establish methodological trustworthiness in multimodal discourse analysis the analysis is conducted meticulously and systematically to establish the trustworthiness of the findings.

This is done by applying the questions to detect the discursive tools outlined in the previous section. In the first post of analysis discursive connotation is created using the #SayHerName. An example of this is offered here:

The hashtag is embedded in the caption's first sentence "We still #SayHerName, thus connoting the further remembrance of the victims and demands for justice (Brown et al., 2017, Machin & Mayr, 2012). Discursive overlexicalization of "white supremacy" followed by "killer cops" are directly addressed persuading the person reading the caption to ideologically align with the movements purpose of combatting police brutality (Brown et al., 2017). Thus, the Black Lives Matter movement is discursively shifting responsibility to the police officers, the state, and society. Further connotation is offered by emphasizing "justice." The caption is highlighting that the fight is not yet over the justice is undone, which aligns with the common rhetoric of the movement and the counter-discourses of police brutality (Giaxoglou & Döveling, 2018). The discursive emphasis on "rest in power" a version of rest in peace especially used by Black and LQBTQ +AI communities to commemorate those whose death is considered unjust, further connotes the anger and grief felt by the activist and their followers, which have potential in creating affective dissonance and solidarity (Jackson et al. 2020). Lastly, discursively highlighting the name of the victim Breonna Taylor further centers her as a victim of police brutality and connotes the by the police.

Thus, the strong sense of action suggested by Yang (2016) is offered by the #SayHerName. The imperative nature of the hashtag in combination with the message further courage the followers of the Black Lives Matter Movement to seek action. The hashtag carries a narrative power when becoming intertwined with many other posts featuring awareness of police brutality and forming a community around a common cause (Dumitrica & Felt, 2020; Yang, 2016). Thus, a further analysis conducted in this dissertation will illustrate that #SayHerName and #SayHisName carry the potential for co-creation of meaning to create counter publics and contribute to the creation of affective solidarity (Albu & Etter, 2016; Evans et al. 2017; Fraser, 1990, Hemmings, 2012).

In addition to the more textual elements of the caption, the visual critical discourse analysis will be conducted on the image of the post. First, it examines denotative elements of the picture asking the question "Who, what, and how it is depicted here?" There is a clear harmonious color scheme represented in the post (Machin & Mayr, 2012). A picture of a woman is represented in the center of the post drawing the viewer in. The colors of the background are matched with the color of her blouse. She appears with a neutral facial expression, which creates a calming atmosphere. A big caption "Rest in power" is printed above her head as well as the year she was born in 1993 and the day and year she died 13th of March 2020. Thus, giving away that she died young. Underneath her photo written in capital letters is her name, Breonna Taylor. This indicates to the viewers that the victim is Breonna Taylor. Her name is placed in the center of the picture, which draws the viewers' attention. In the left side corner, one can see the official logo of the Black Lives Matter movement, which further connects the post to the movement and given the roots of the movement centering on the victims creates a message to the viewer (Brown et al., 2017).

The second level of visual discourse analysis examines connotation in other words the symbolic representations images convey to the viewer. The symbolic meaning of centering Breonna Taylor connotes the injustice she and many victims face due to police brutality (Brown et al., 2017; Machin & Mayr, 2012). Again, "Rest in power" written in capital letters further draws the attention of the viewer and connotes the unjust death of Breonna Traylor, which is amplified in the previously analyzed caption of the post. The strategic placement of the year she was born, and the time of her death connotes the untimely death of many of the victims of police brutality. ¨ Thus, Black Lives Matter highlights the age of the victims to appeal to the viewer's emotions. The logo of the Black Lives Matter movement represents the kinds of ideas and values the movement espouses. As Mir and Zanoni (2020) point out, Black Lives Matter stands for three simple words with a strong connotation to fight for the cause of

racial injustice. Most notably, their activism against police brutality through the discursive centering on victims that began with Trayvon Martin in 2013 (Chase, 2018).

Thus, the previous section outlining the sampling strategy, analytical frame and operationalization contribute to this. To establish further trustworthiness and transparency of the given research, reflexivity is considered. Expanding the focus from the positionality of the researcher. Assessing the lived experiences and social reality of the researcher that might influence the given research. My interest in this research topic emerged from professional experience and knowledge around topics of racism and racial violence. However, my positioning as a researcher needs to be addressed further. Being a white researcher and my given cultural background allows me an academic distance to the lived experience of police brutality, which needs to be addressed as an ethical consideration to remain respectful to the given research agenda and people who might be personally affected by it.

4. Analysis and results

This chapter presents the main results of the multimodal critical discourse analysis conducted on the finding addressing the three sub-questions

- How does BLM use hashtag activism?

- How is affective solidarity generated by the BLM?

- How does BLM create awareness of police brutality through networked publics?

Tying into the main research question: How does the Black Lives Matter movement mediate digital activism practices on Instagram towards cases involving police brutality? Posts with the hashtags #SayHisname and #SayHerName were presented with more extended captions and an image as a precise discursive construction of counter-discourses on police brutality during the analysis process. Throughout the analysis process, this discursive construction of police brutality was reinforced by the narrative construction of the hashtags. By sharing emotions about the memory of victims from multiple users and posts, a discursive pattern of solidarity was created that has the potential to generate affective dissonance and solidarity.

The hashtags #SayHername and #SayHisName proved instrumental in spreading the awareness of police brutality through these networks of people grieving for the victims. Furthermore, the discussion and findings suggest that activism practices through the platform Instagram have the power to construct alternative readings of police brutality and demand justice for victims by amplifying this counter-discourse. To better structure the analysis and discussion, a table of the most used discursive tools and the discursive patterns of (1) demands for justice, (2) killer cops, and (3) mobilized anger and grief.

Table 4.1- Hashtag activism reinforcing demands for justice

Demands for Justice	*Connotation*	*Figure 4 1. "Rest in power"* *Figure 4.2. "Playing video games with her nephew"*
	Lexical choice/genre	*Figure 4.1 "white supremacy"* *Figure 4.2 "killed senselessly"* *Figure 4.3 "SDPD's use of force and failure to provide medical care killed Jenkins, a black woman, and left her three children without a mother."*
	Overlexicalization	*Figure 4.1 "White supremacy and killer cops"* *Figure 4.2 "Killed senselessly"*
Killer Cops	*Connotation*	*Figure 4.4. "Killed by the police"* *Figure 4.5 "Justice for Amir"*

	Overlexicalization	*Figure 4.4"Killer cops"* *Figure 4.4"Lying cops"*
	Suppression	*Figure 4.6 "KIM POTTER who murdered Daunte Wright"* *Figure 4.7 "Another senseless shooting!!!! Shot an unarmed black man in the back four times!!!"*

Table 4.2 Affective solidarity and mobilization of emotions

Mobilized anger and grief	*Connotation*	*Figure 4.3"She left her three children without a mother" "Remember their story with us,"* *Figure 4.4 "Justice means "Black life"* *Figure 4.6"Another little black boy will grow up without a father"* *Figure 4.9 "Even after more than five years, we continue to #SayHerName- because things haven't changed"* *Figure 4.9 "Sandra Bland would have turned 34 today".*
	Overlexicalization	*Figure 4.2 "Senseless shooting,"* *Figure 4.8"The Murder of 8-Year-Old Babies"* *Figure 4.10 "Joyful and vibrant mother"*
	Lexical choice/genre	*Figure 4.2 "Senseless shooting"* *Figure 4.8 "your killers still have the jobs you paid for which your tax dollars,"*

4.1 Demands for Justice

By focusing on the victims in their Instagram posts and highlighting the injustice they faced, the Black Lives Matter movement creates a discursive pattern of "demands for justice." This runs through the captions and images of the 90 collected posts. It is evident in the strong emphasis on denouncing police brutality and highlighting collective demands for accountability. The important combination of text and images reinforces these demands by putting a face to the victims and creating the necessary emotional appeal that has the potential to build affective solidarity. The discursive representation of victims makes racial injustice visible to the viewer, contributing to the discursive construction of police brutality as previously discussed by Cappelli (2020). This discursive pattern is further reinforced by #SayHisName and #SayHerName through direct calls for awareness of the many victims of police brutality and the commemoration of victims. Moreover, the discursive tools of connotation and overlexicalization appeared most frequently as the guiding tools for the analysis process, as shown in the table above.

As discussed by Griffin (2003), Steinmetz (1992), and Yang (2016), narratives become powerful drivers for social movements. Yang (2016) emphasizes that hashtags have a specific narrative character for social movements, as they can connect stories through shared hashtags and become an outlet for multiple personal stories to be connected into a collective narrative. These two hashtags are used to reinforce the activist agenda of Black Lives Matter and connect similar posts from users in a shared narrative of justice and a network of solidarity, echoing the previous discussion of networked solidarity (Alfonzo, 2021, Brown et al, 2017; Yang, 2016). These hashtags encourage action and have the effect of demanding, appealing, and protesting. Such as: "Continue #sayhername" and "We still #SayHerName" (Figure 4.1 and Figure 4.2) The findings here confirm the ideas of Yang (2016), who suggests that hashtags can express dissent, objection, and calls to immediate action that often challenges mainstream media narratives. Therefore, hashtags have the potential to unleash narrative power when interwoven with many other posts that raise awareness about police brutality and build a community for a common cause (Dumitrica & Felt, 2020; Yang, 2016). The discursive pattern demands for justice further confirms the potential use of hashtags for social movements and the creation of shared narratives that amplify the counter-discourses of police brutality.

Figure 4.1 Instagram post form @*blklivesmatter*

Figure 4.2 Instagram post from @*unheardvoicesmag*

Following examples drawn from the sample of 90 posts illustrate this discursive pattern of "demands for justice" created by the movement through the connecting hashtags #SayHisname and #SayHername. Namely, the placement of victims at the center of their posts and the use of the key hashtags of remembrance.

A good example of the pattern of demands for justice is offered by the official Instagram page of the Black Lives Matter movement. This post (Figure 4.1) is representative of the counter-discourses on police brutality created by the movement and features a well-known victim, which is a discursive tactic of the movement (Cappelli, 2020). The strong sense of action suggested by Yang (2016) is conveyed by #SayHerName. The compelling nature of the hashtag combined with the message encourages supporters of the Black Lives Matter movement to act, as seen in Figure 4.1, which shows Breonna Taylor, one of the well-known victims of police brutality. The same aspect was also highlighted by Cappelli (2020) in the examples of political graffiti and the visual highlighting of victims in cases of injustice. Another example is offered by a post from the account "unheardvoicesmag" (Figure 4.2) which features a picture of Atatiana Jefferson, with a text that emphasizes her early passing due to police brutality. Similarly, the image of the post in Figure 4.1 positions Breonna as a victim of an unjust act of violence.

Further evidence of the demand for justice can be found in the captions of these posts. The first caption discursively focuses on Breonna as a victim, reinforced by the direct reference to justice. Through connotation arises from the emphasis on "justice." The discursive emphasis on "rest in power" is a version of "rest in peace" used particularly by Black and LQBTQ +AI communities to commemorate those whose deaths are considered unjust (*Dictionary.com*, 2020).

The second post caption with Atatiana highlights that she would have been 31 years old today and what activity she was engaged in when the police killed her. The caption illustrates how she was playing video games with her nephew, further emphasizing her innocence and the injustice she faced at the hands of the police. In the following "Because Breonna Taylor's life was taken by white supremacy and killer cops exactly one year ago, we are still waiting for justice" and "Atatiana was killed senselessly by a Forth Worth police officer." This overlexicalization of "white supremacy", "killer cops " and "killed senselessly" is presented through these two examples (Machin & Mayr, 2012). Furthermore, the discursive tool of lexical choice/ genre is also represented through the reference to "white supremacy" and "killed senselessly" when informal language is utilized in both posts to appear on equal footing with the intended audience. In the post featuring Breonna Taylor the hashtag is embedded in the first sentence of the caption, "We still #SayHerName," (@blklivesmatter, 2021) expressing remembrance of the victims and a demand for justice. In the post featuring Atatiana Jefferson, the hashtag is similarly placed within the caption, "Continue to #sayhername" (@unheardvoicesmag, 2021), which emphasizes the remembrance of Atatiana. Thus, the further hashtag #neverforget connotes the remembrance of the victims and the discursive demands for justice.

Discursive demands for justice are further addressed in other user-generated posts under the hashtag and enacted through discursive tools of connotation, overlexicalization, lexical choice, and the genre that demonstrate the potential of building a community around shared grievances as stressed by Alfonzo (2021). An example of this is offered by the user account @cpatsandiego in Figure 4.3 The image of the post depicts Aleah Jenkins, a young woman who was killed in police custody in 2018. Above her head is the text "Justice for Aleah Jenkins," referring to the victim's unjust death. The pattern of demands for justice is constructed through the lexical choices of SDPD paired with her story as shown in the following quote: "SDPD's use of force and failure to provide medical care killed Jenkins, a black woman, and left her three children without a mother." The rhetoric of injustice is further extended by highlighting the unjust actions of the SDPD, the lack of medical care, and the fact that she is a mother, which further appeals to the viewer's emotions. A similar discursive shift of responsibility is presented with the further hashtags #Justice4Aleah and #SayHerName, which relate directly to demands for justice, as suggested by Yang (2016). This connotes the overarching rhetoric of the Black Lives Matter movement.

Figure 4.3 *Instagram post from @cpatsandiego*
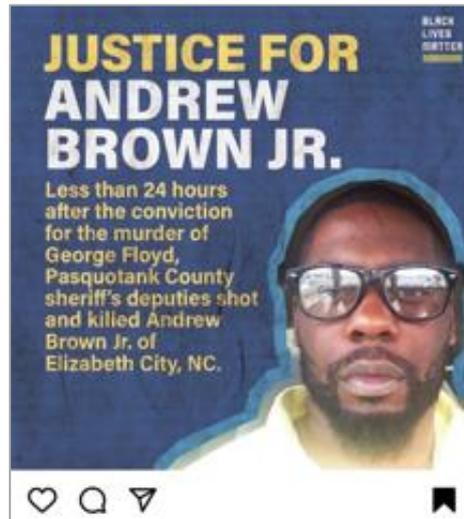
Figure 4.4 *Instagram post from @blklivesmatter*

Another selected post from the official Instagram page of the Black Lives Matter movement in Figure 4., this time using #SayHisName, continues the discursive demands for justice. Corresponding to the other analyzed examples the image of Andrew Brown Jr. is placed in the center of the post. The visual markup follows similar patterns as in Figure. The color scheme is harmonious, the Black Lives Matter logo is visible, and the victim's photo is in the center of the image. The emphasis is clearly on "Justice for," written in capital letters and painted in yellow, which connotes the movement's core message. This is consistent with the visual pattern focusing on victims. The discursive emphasis on "justice can only mean a black life" (@blklivesmatter, 2021) underscores the injustice faced by victims. The movement emphasizes that the core of its work is especially valid when police brutality is present. Another discursive connotation comes from the open expression of condolences for the victim's family.

Thus, lexical choice/genre that mixes technical political language with personal stories of the victim is aimed at getting the person reading the headline to ideologically connect with the movement's goal of fighting police brutality. This is consistent with the core message of the Black Lives Matter movement, as discussed by Cappelli (2020): the struggle against injustice. These captions underscore and confirm Giaxoglou's and Döveling's (2018) findings that the struggle is not over, and justice has not yet been served, aligning with the movement's general rhetoric and counter-discourses on police brutality that demand justice for victims.

This section illustrated how the visual centering on victims, the numerous user-generated posts build around shared grievances about police brutality, and the emotional loss constructed through the personal stories of the victims all work together to enact discursive demands for justice. In the next section, another discursive pattern of "killer cops". This discursive pattern facilitates the accountability of the police, further shifting responsibility to the police officers

4.2 "Killer cops"

The consecutive discursive pattern, "killer cops," is discursively emphasized in Black Lives Matter movement posts and user-generated content that contains the movement's rhetoric. This discursive pattern persuades viewers ideologically identify with the movement and its demands for accountability. What distinguishes this pattern is the active reference to the intentionality of the police officers in cases of police brutality, which shifts the responsibility towards the police. In addition, the emphasis on "killer" underscores the distrust toward police. Thus, it shifts the attention to the systemic problem of police brutality. This pattern is enacted through the discursive tools of connotation, overlexicalization, and discursive suppression.

An example from a post on the Black Lives Matter movement's official Instagram page featuring Andrew Brown Jr. illustrates the overt distrust of police (Figure 4.4). In addition, the caption illustrates the discursive shift in responsibility: "We watch closely and wait for the full truth. Killer cops are also lying cops." This is evident in the discursive overlexicalization of "killer cops," which continues the discursive pattern of shifting blame to the police, coupled with "lying cops" referring to the withholding of information mentioned in the caption. This constructs an overt distrust of the police. The victim's name is associated with the #SayHisName. Discursively using the act of killing instead of shooting shifts responsibility to the perpetrator, which in these cases means the police.

A further example of the "killer cops" discursive pattern is offered by user @slausongirl. Her post, Figure 4.5 shows a picture of Amir Locke, a victim of police brutality. There is a direct reference to justice, as the image of the post is accompanied by the connotation "Justice for Amir," which is consistent with the discursive pattern of the Black Lives Matter movement. The post's caption further highlights the actions of the police: "On February 2, Amir Locke, a 22-year-old Black man, was killed by police in Minneapolis." (@slausongirl, 2022). The discursive emphasis on the act of "killing" holds the police

accountable for their actions and discursively shifts the responsibility to the police officers. The discursive connotation of "killed by the police" is consistent with the discursive pattern of "killer cops." Responsibility for action is shifted further towards society and lawmakers, which is highlighted in the caption.


Figure 4.5 *Instagram post from @slausongirl*

Figure 4.6 *Instagram post form @amplifyingblackvoicesandlives*

Another user-generated post from the account @amplifyinblackvoicesandlives takes advantage of the discursive suppression in the post's caption: "KIM POTTER who murdered Daunte Wright." Thus, the post highlights the act of murdering rather than shooting, making the act's intent even more explicit. In addition, the name of police officer Kim Potter is highlighted in capital letters. Thus, the responsibility for Daunte's death is shifted to Kim Potter. Giving the murderer a name makes the shift of blame more visible. There is an apparent absence of reference to the police. This discursive suppression can be seen in the active avoidance of "police" or "cops." The target audience, which is assumed to consist of black communities due to the title of the page, is nevertheless expected to know the occupation of Kim Potter, who is a police officer.

Another example of discursive suppression is offered by user @janika_elle. Her post features an image of Jason Walker, a victim of police brutality. Discursive suppression is constructed through discursive over-lexicalization, causing these two discursive tools to intersect: "Another senseless shooting!!!! Shot an unarmed black man in the back four times!!!" (@janika_elle, 2022).
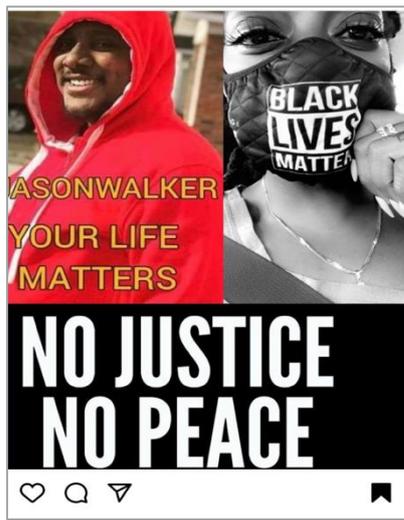
Figure 4.7 *Instagram post from @janika_elle*

Thus, the discursive focus on the shooting and the lack of further mention of the police, accompanied by #SayHisName and #blm, is similar to the discursive construction employed by the Black Lives Matter movement. Further reference to Jason Being unarmed connote his innocence, which further shifts the blame towards the perpetrators. In addition, the image features text with bold letters "No Justice No Peace" in capital letters that further emphasizes the core messages of the Black Lives Matter movement.

This section has demonstrated how the emphasis on "killer cops" contributes to the discursive shift of responsibility towards the police and society. With the emphasis on the act of killing, the shooting, murdering the explicit mention of the names of the police officers involved or their discursive avoidance, and the perceived innocence of the victims the BLM discursively shifts responsibility to police officers, the state, and society. These elements are further enacted by the analyzed user-generated posts. In the next section, the emotional loss is further explored by applying affective solidarity theory, as discussed by Hemmings (2012), to illustrate how emotions contribute to the core narratives of the Black Lives Matter movement and the construction of counter-discourse of police brutality.

4.3 Mobilization of Anger and Grief

Direct reference to the injustice felt by Black communities mobilizes anger and grief, which have the potential to create affective solidarity that is echoed throughout the examples in the sample. As seen in the previous section posts on the official Instagram page of the Black Lives Matter movement demonstrate the discursive demands for justice and "killer cops" that highlight the anger and grief of Black communities (Brown et al., 2017). The last discursive pattern mobilization of anger and grief illustrates the discursive building of

solidarity enacted through the reference of the young age of victims, motherhood, fatherhood, and brotherhood that connote belonging through shared grievances of loss promoting the discursive formation of grief and anger (Hemmings, 2012; Nikunen, 2018). The most common discursive tools detected were connotation, overlexicalization and lexical choice/genre. In several posts, the sense of injustice is linked to the emotions felt by activists and their supporters, which has the potential to create affective dissonance and solidarity (Jackson et al., 2020; Cappelli, 2020). In addition, the visual representation focusing on the victims allows the viewer to put a face to the victims, which appeals to the viewer's emotions (Hemmings, 2012). The connotation of commemoration is strong through the images and the texts that discursively reinforce the hashtags and captions.

The post featuring Andrew Brown Jr. in Figure 4.4 offers a first example of the mobilization of anger and grief. The reference to his murder by police reinforces the anger of black communities. This is done through the discursive emphasis on "shot and killed," which suggests the intent of the police's actions. The denotative elements of the post also contribute to the generation of anger. These are the centering of Andrew Brown Jr. and the yellow color strategically used to convey the critical message of injustice. These visual elements highlight the further potential for emotional mobilization. The caption reinforces the expression of anger by highlighting that: "Justice can only mean black life," (@blklivesmatter, 2021), which highlights the potential for discursive generation of anger through reference to Anthony's unjust death. The corresponding allusion to distrust of the police contributes to this: " Murdering cops are also lying cops," which further reinforces anger towards the police. The direct expression of condolences is a statement of solidarity and expression of grief to his family and loved ones, "Our hearts go out to the Brown family in North Carolina." This indicates the solidarity the BLM constructs towards the Black communities.

The posts featuring Breonna Taylor and Atatiana Jefferson are another example of the discursive pattern of mobilizing anger and grief that corresponds to the building of affective solidarity. As the analysis has shown, the active reference to Breonna's remembrance and the discursive over-lexicalization of "white supremacy and killer cops" illustrates how racially motivated killings are made visible, underscoring the anger of Black communities. The following discursive emphasis on "we are still waiting for justice" reinforces the potential of anger for action. The visual centering of Breonna in combination with "Rest in Power" connotes the unjust deaths of Breonna and many other victims. The post featuring Atatiana Jefferson, which offers another overlexicalization of the "senseless shooting," that also

represents a lexical choice for the intended audience accentuates this anger. The visual centering of Atatiana reinforces the viewer's emotional response.

Figure 4.8 *Instagram post from @indigenousrising*
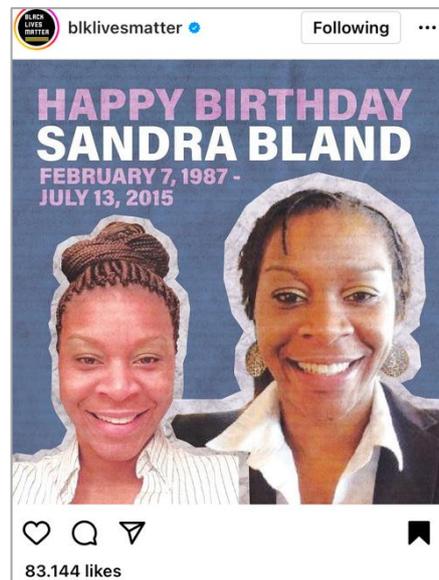
Figure 4.9 *Instagram post from @blklivesmatter*

Another example of the building of affective solidarity through anger and grief emerges through the connotation of young age, which plays a crucial role in many shared posts. As the analysis has shown, the age of the victims also implies the unjust death of the victims. In addition, many posts refer to the active commemoration of the time of the victims' deaths, which appeals to viewers' emotions and contributes to the shared grievances about police brutality. Furthermore, this forms a narrative pattern that circulates throughout the network of user-generated accounts and official accounts of the Black Lives Matter movement, creating an awareness of the systemic problem of police brutality when many victims die young.

This is evident in the posts featuring Breonna Taylor, Atatiana Jefferson, Sandra Bland, and Fanta Bility. First, in the image of Breonna Taylor's post, the connotation of early death is offered, underscoring the core message of the Black Lives Matter movement highlighted in the previous section. Second, the post about Atatiana Jefferson directly mentions her age of death, "Remembering Atatiana Jefferson who would have turned 31 years old today," (@unheardvoicesmag, 2021) combined with November 28, which follows similar wording as the post about Breonna Taylor. In addition, the active process of commemoration is discursively linked to age and date of death. The dates on which victims died are used as memorial days to reinforce counter-discourses to police brutality and mark

critical messages of "never forget," as Brown et al. (2017) discussed. Another post from BLM Instagram featuring Sandra Bland further utilizes her picture in the center and continues the emphasis on her age by placing her birthday and the year of her death in the center of the post. The caption highlight Sandra's untimely death: "Even after more than five years, we continue to #SayHerName-because things haven't changed." By highlighting the lack of change in the system through the commemoration of Sandra, by mobilizing anger and grief around shared grievances of police brutality, the Black Lives Matter movement constructs the experience collectively and communally while highlighting the importance of their work. Similarly, a direct reference to Sandra's age underscores the injustice of her death: "Sandra Bland would have been 34 today." Finally, in the user-generated post from the account @indigineousrising with Fanta Bility, her age is emphasized through the over-lexicalization of "8 years old, murdered by police,"(@indigineousrising, 2021), which contributes to the connotation of the victims' young age. Her significantly younger age and the fact that she is a child add to the emotional loss, similar to the loss of a mother and father. In this way, the victims are commemorated, and awareness of police brutality is strengthened.

Figure 4.10 Instagram post from @blklivesmatter

To further illustrate the building of affective solidarity three posts with Wakiesha Wilson in Figure 4.10 the post with Daunte Wright Figure 4.6 and Aleah Jenkins Figure 4.3 serves as a starting point. These three examples illustrate community belonging by emphasizing motherhood, fatherhood, and shared loss. The post featuring Daunte Wright uses the discursive connotation of fatherhood to appeal to the emotions of anger and grief. The visual representation of Daunte Wright holding his young son appeals to the viewer's emotions. This

quote from the caption refers to the grief and loss of Black communities due to police brutality - namely, the shared experience of many children growing up without a father: "Daunte Wright was a father yall another young black baby boy is left to grow up without his father." (@amplifyingblackvoicesandlives, 2021) The discursive use of "yall" is commonly used in African American colloquial English, and the explicit use of "yall" in the caption highlights the indented target audience (Bailey, 2001).

In the post from BLM's official Instagram page featuring Wakiesha Wilson Figure 4.10 the emphasis on motherhood further constructs belonging and the discursive use of vernacular English "yall" further corresponds to the discursive construction of belonging. The post shows her as a smiling, happy mother of a 13-year-old son. The accompanying caption highlights her as a "joyful and vibrant mother" and emphasizes that she "was" a mother underscores her family's grief and loss. "We remember" highlights the remembrance of the victims and the unjust death of Wakiesha Wilson. The consecutive mother, daughter, niece, and a loved one further amplify the shared grievances of many families that lost their loved ones to police brutality. The further discursive emphasis on the questions her family still has regarding her death underscores the injustice experienced by her family. In the post featuring Aleah Jenkins Figure 4.3 through a discursive connotation of motherhood is employed: "She left her three children without a mother" (@cpatsandiego, 2021). This loss of a mother is discursively emphasized. Thus, the loss of many is implied. Through this emotional appeal, the anger and grief for Aleah's children indicate the potential for further mobilization of these emotions. This is done by encouraging people to remember their story, "Remember their story with us," which further connotes the emotions of the broader community.

Through the anger and grief expressed in the images and captions, these emotions in the individual posts become a sharded pattern of anger and grief that contributes to the building of affective solidarity. Ultimately, the experience of racial violence is universalized through the posts and has the potential to create an affective dissonance triggered by the shared experiences of police brutality among members and larger black communities. This creates a political impetus for change, which in turn has the potential to generate affective solidarity, as discussed by Hemmings (2012). The following section discusses the theoretical dimensions of hashtag activism, affective solidarity, and specifically the last sub-question that addresses, the extent to which the sharing of grievances by people in the network appears to be beneficial for reinforcing counter-narratives of police brutality is explored.

4.4 Discussion

This chapter discusses the following sub-questions:

- How does BLM use hashtag activism?

- How is affective solidarity generated by the BLM?

- How does BLM create awareness of police brutality through networked publics?

To answer the SQ1: How does BLM use hashtag activism? The following theoretical dimensions are considered. The first over-arching discursive pattern that emerged from the data illustrates the discursive demands for justice enacted by the Black Lives Matter movement reinforced by a second discursive pattern of "killer cop," which connotes the shifting of responsibility. The creation of counter-narratives is also possible when hashtags connect users' posts to the core messages of the Black Lives Matter movement (Brown et al., 2017; Griffin, 2003). The narratives of racial struggle and their connection to power and powerlessness are crucial to understanding how emotions come into play in the cultural production of images and discourses. The images of the posts make racial injustice visible, following the previous discussion by Edrington and Gallagher (2019) and Cappelli (2020). Similarly, visual representations of victims in Instagram posts can provide a visual, emotional connection to demands for justice.

To answer the SQ2: How is affective solidarity generated by the BLM? As further analysis illustrates, #SayHerName and #SayHisName hold the potential for creating affective solidarity when combined with the visualization of the victims and the captions of the posts (Hemmings, 2012). From the analyzed posts, a pattern of anger and grief emerges discursively constructed by the Black Lives Matter movement and the user-generated post showing further potential for the creation of affective solidarity. The discursive pattern demands for justice are further amplified by the corresponding discursive pattern mobilization of anger and grief that is felt by victims of police brutality. The results show how the inclusion of images of victims and the centering of the discursive construction of injustice is enacted through the mobilization of emotions such as anger and grief. The emotional affect generated by the movement is vital due to the discursive centering on the victims, which appeals to the viewer's emotions. As discussed by Brown et al. (2017) and Hemmings (2012), the focus on victims can create affective dissonance among Black communities when multiple users share common grievances about systemic police brutality. As discussed in Cappelli's (2020) study of political graffiti, anger has been activated as an emotion in visual rhetoric and participation. The interlinked posts with the hashtags #SayHisName and #SayHerName, in which grief, anger, and the corresponding demands for

justice are discursively constructed in the captions, and the symbolic centering of victims further reinforce the construction of solidarity. In particular, the negative emotions of anger and grief are centered in discursive constructions of police brutality. The following section addresses in more detail the theoretical perspective of networked publics and the awareness creation of police brutality by the BLM. Furthermore, the linkages to Foucault's theory of power-knowledge relations are made to further illustrate the potential of the creation of counter-discourses on police brutality.

4.5 BLM creating awareness through networked publics

SQ3: How does the BLM create awareness of police Brutality through networked publics?"

As discussed by Alfonzo (2021), the networked structure of self-motivated forms of grievance sharing is visible in the hashtag activism of the Black Lives Matter movement and the associated user-generated content around victims of police brutality. The examples of posts presented in more detail in the previous sections are outlined here using the unifying aspects of shared grievances about police brutality, which are evident through the discursive patterns "demands for justice", "killer cops", and "mobilization of anger and grief."

The discursive pattern "demands for justice" and the posts featuring Andrew Brown Jr. Breonna Taylor and Atatiana Jefferson and the pattern "killer cops" and posts featuring Amir Locke and Jason Walker illustrate how the counter-narratives of police brutality are circulated by BLM and the corresponding user-generated content. Through the pattern demands for justice, the shared demand for change is discursively highlighted throughout the networked posts and the further demands of accountability are enacted through the discursive pattern of killer cops that amplifies the shared grievance sharing that contributes to the counter-discourse of police brutality.

The discursive emphasis on the loss of family members at the individual and community level circulates throughout the network of user-generated accounts that employ the narrative of injustice propagated by the Black Lives Matter movement. This is particularly evident in the last pattern of "mobilization of anger and grief". The posts featuring the young ages of the victims in the posts featuring Fanta Bility and Sandra Bland. In the posts featuring Wakiesha Wilson, Aleah Jenkins, and Daunte Wright. The Emphasis on motherhood and fatherhood connects the posts in networked solidarity, which has the potential of spreading the awareness of police brutality.

As Giaxglogu and Döveling (2018) point out, hashtags' "affective proximity" creates a network of solidarity. Through the discursive use of injustice and the associated emotions of anger and grief, the core narrative of the Black Lives Matter movement is created (Brown et al., 2017). Continuing the ideas of Ince et al. (2017), social movements such as Black Lives Matter articulate their core narratives around shared grievances, namely shared experiences of police brutality on an individual and societal level. This encourages people to embrace the movement's core messages while focusing on memorializing victims and their loved ones.

The decentralized nature of social media platforms like Instagram helps connect content created by the Black Lives Matter movement with user-generated posts that reinforce the movement's narratives around police brutality. These narratives are further disseminated through the networked public created by the Black Lives Matter movement and the users who disseminate these narratives in the networked structure of sharing their experiences. Through these discursive patterns, the spreading of counter-narratives among multiple users becomes possible. As discussed in the previous section, the demands for justice that focus on the unjust death of the victims, the killer cops that shift the blame towards the police, and mobilizing anger and grief over shared experiences of police brutality contribute to collective identity formation, as discussed by Barandiaran et al. (2020) and Nasrin and Fisher (2021). Gavriely-Nuri (2017) and Forchtner (2020) highlighted these narratives are powerful tools for building collective identity and understanding the meaning-making practices in discourse. Through the hashtags #SayHisName and #SayHerName, Black Lives Matter posts are linked to related user-generated posts, which has the potential to build awareness of police brutality as users share their experiences. When multiple users reinforce the same message about loss, the consciousness that the Black Lives Matter movement seeks to create is spread and shaped through user-generated content. The collective identity of black communities is constructed around these feelings and experiences of loss, which serves as the basis for collective narratives and discursive constructions of police brutality.

As seen in these examples, the creation of alternative narratives is enacted through the emphasis on the remembrance and the young age of victims imprinted on the images of the posts. These serve as symbolic representations of injustice, as discussed by Neumayer and Rossi (2018), Olensen (2016), and Edrington and Gallagher (2019), when the text is combined with the images of the posts. Further highlighting how images contribute to the narrative construction of police brutality. This allows responsibility for the problem to be shifted to the police and influences narratives about police brutality that denies race as a contributing factor, as emphasized by Carney (2016). The movement and its users repeatedly

construct these widely shared grievances about police brutality, demonstrating the potential to challenge hegemonic media representations of police brutality further. The following section further discusses this link to power-knowledge relations.

4.6 Power-Knowledge relations and counter-discourse of police brutality

Observations drawn from the analysis process illustrate how the Black Lives Matter movement enabled the building of demands for justice, shifting responsibility to the police, and creating solidarity among users who shared their stories of police brutality. The question is: How does all of this relate to the power-knowledge relationships emphasized by Foucault (1972)? The ability of the Black Lives Matter movement to disseminate the hegemonic discourses of police brutality, as emphasized by Carney (2016), namely the color-blind discourse of mainstream media that denies that race is an issue in police brutality, becomes possible through knowledge sharing via the platform Instagram.

Dialectical resistance to police brutality is created through the Black Lives Matter movement's posts with the hashtags #SayHisName and #SayHerName, which connect user-generated posts. The narrative potential of the two hashtags in disseminating counter-discourse against police brutality becomes apparent as users trace the narrative of the movement in their published posts, making racial violence visible to people on the social media platform. Hegemonic perceptions of racial violence are challenged by counter-narratives demanding justice for victims and accountability from police. The possibilities of hashtags, when used by multiple users, allow people to engage and shape the discourse around police brutality, as Carney (2016) discusses when user-generated posts are interwoven with those created by the Black Lives Matter movement.

As Foucault (1972) points out, the power that comprises knowledge is never concentrated in one entity but instead circulates. Social media has unavoidably influenced this circulation of knowledge and power. The visual affordances of the Instagram platform and its corresponding hashtags are used by the Black Lives Matter movement and regular users to disseminate hegemonic knowledge about police brutality. This has the power to challenge the color-blind discourses about the systemic problems of police brutality portrayed in mainstream media. By creating an alternative symbolic meaning through images that evoke emotion in people and through textual elements in the captions that highlight how personal experiences of police brutality should be acknowledged and remembered, the potential for new knowledge production emerges. Ultimately, this constructs a subject's positionings of Black people and hence communities that give meaning to the counter-

discourses of police brutality by sharing their experiences. Furthermore, the creation of a counter-discourse on police brutality shows the potential of constructing a subject-positioning that includes the white population that seeks to understand the dynamics of structural racial violence.

5. Conclusion

The present study explored how the Black Lives Matter movement mediates and constructs its counter-discourse in response to instances of police brutality. Specifically, through theoretical perspectives of hashtag activism and their narrative functions, networked publics, and the construction of affective solidarity, this dissertation demonstrated how mediation occurs using the visual and textual affordances of the social media platform Instagram. This framework provided a starting point for understanding the discourse of police brutality and, more broadly, how knowledge production of racial violence is amplified through social media platforms. As a result, there is a shift in power-knowledge relations that surround hegemonic discourses of police brutality, which deny the issues of race. Ultimately, there is a need for scholars to further recognize the potential possibilities of Instagram for the dissemination of activism practices.

5.1 Answer to the research question and summary of the findings

The present study has set out to answer the research question: *How does the Black Lives Matter movement mediate digital activism practices on Instagram towards cases involving police brutality?* The answer to this question is based on the patterns that emerged through the multimodal critical discourse analysis that illustrated the potential of the hashtags #SayHerNamer and #SayHisName on Instagram. This study concludes that the visual affordances of Instagram, together with the captions, enable the spreading of awareness of police brutality. Thus, allowing BLM and the regular users to co-create a counter-discourse of police brutality that challenges the hegemonic deracialized representations of mainstream media. Based on the findings, the hashtags #SayHisName and #SayHerName demonstrate potential for creating alternative narratives in the processes of mediated activism (Hall et al., 2013; Treré & Kaun, 2021; Williams, 2020).

Moreover, each of the sub-questions targeted a different conceptual perspective and allowed the exploration of meaningful discursive construction. These included (1) demands for justice, that demonstrated how centering the victims and using the core hashtags #SayHisName and #SayHerName contribute to the remembrance of the victims and call to action as suggested by Yang (2016) and Brown et al., (2017). And (2) the pattern of *"killer cops"*, which enabled the discursive shift of responsibility to the systemic problems of police brutality. Then, (3) *mobilization of anger and grief*, which further highlighted the emotions of

anger and grief and their affective potential for the creation of solidarity among Black communities through shared experiences of police brutality online through affective dissonance, as explained by Hemmings (2012). The discussion section further addressed the last sub-question *How does Black Lives Matter create awareness of police brutality through networked publics?* and the potential for awareness-raising of police brutality was found to be constructed through the three discursive patterns that emerged from the findings. Finally, the counter-discourse of police brutality was found to be constructed through these discursive patterns mentioned above. This has the potential to challenge the existing power-knowledge relations, as explained by Foucault (1972) and Hall et al. (2013). Thus, enabling the creation of the counter-discourse of police brutality through the platform Instagram.

5.2 Social and Academic Implications

The multimodal critical discourse analysis conducted in this study
The findings of this study indicate that there is a need to examine the affordances of Instagram as a platform for mediated activism practices. The results suggest that the visual posts combined with hashtags and textual elements aid the spreading of awareness of police brutality, which is aligned with Yang (2016). Most of the analyzed posts featured pictures of the victims, which amplified the emotional identification of shared experiences and showed the potential for the creation of affective solidarity as discussed by Hemmings (2012). This study extends research on digital activism and BLM, as, rather than solely focusing on textual affordance as previous research on BLM, it aimed at centering the visual-based Instagram as a key platform for mediation. Moreover, the social practices of mediation do not change but rather become amplified by the visual representations of the victims and the corresponding emotional attachment to the problem of police brutality. Enabling even stronger identification and alignment with the BLM's core message around injustice, previously suggested by Cappelli (2020). Within that, it is possible to see the potential for activism carried by Instagram. The importance of the creation of a counter-discourse of police brutality through the platforms Instagram is vital for the dissemination of knowledge about systemic racial violence on a societal level, which remains important if violence against communities of color exists.

5.3 Limitations and Future Lines of Research

Further research would require scanning other data besides the posts featuring the #SayHerName and #SayHisName. The sample size of 90 posts could be expanded over a longer time and include more posts to the representative sample by broadening the sampling categories to include other hashtags that commemorate the victims. This would ensure a comprehensive understanding of the discourses and affective solidarity created by BLM since the limited scope of this research does not allow it. Examining the broader discursive representation of police brutality would have required comparison with other traditional media outlets and platforms, which did not fit the scope of this research. Moreover, the present research focused predominantly on the country context of the United States where the movement originated. Thus, the present research could be applied to other countries where the movement spread especially after 2020 to address the full scope of the BLM online activist practices.

Furthermore, the examination of interactivity of the users and BLM could be examined further to truly assess the building of networked publics. Thus, this would require another method than multimodal discourse analysis, which predominantly focuses on narrative and visual elements in the creation of discourse. A suggestion would add network analysis to assess this interactivity or multimethod approach to increase the trustworthiness of the results. Moreover, one of main the analytical concepts used in this research affective solidarity is based on emotions of grief, anger, and frustration, which can be interpreted in a subjective way, which might influence the present research. Thus, the more person-based approach of qualitative interviewing and ethnographic observations online and offline could be used to address the full scope of emotions felt by the activist and the wider Black communities.

The multimethod approach can compensate for the limitations of only using one methodological approach. To establish a person-based approach to the experiences and activism practices around police brutality qualitative interviewing and empirical studies through ethnographic observations could be incorporated to truly capture this in-depth. Through observing and interviewing the research can be taken further from theory to practice and see how emotion, online activist groups, and regular users engage with the movement's messaging and co-create the awareness of police brutality.

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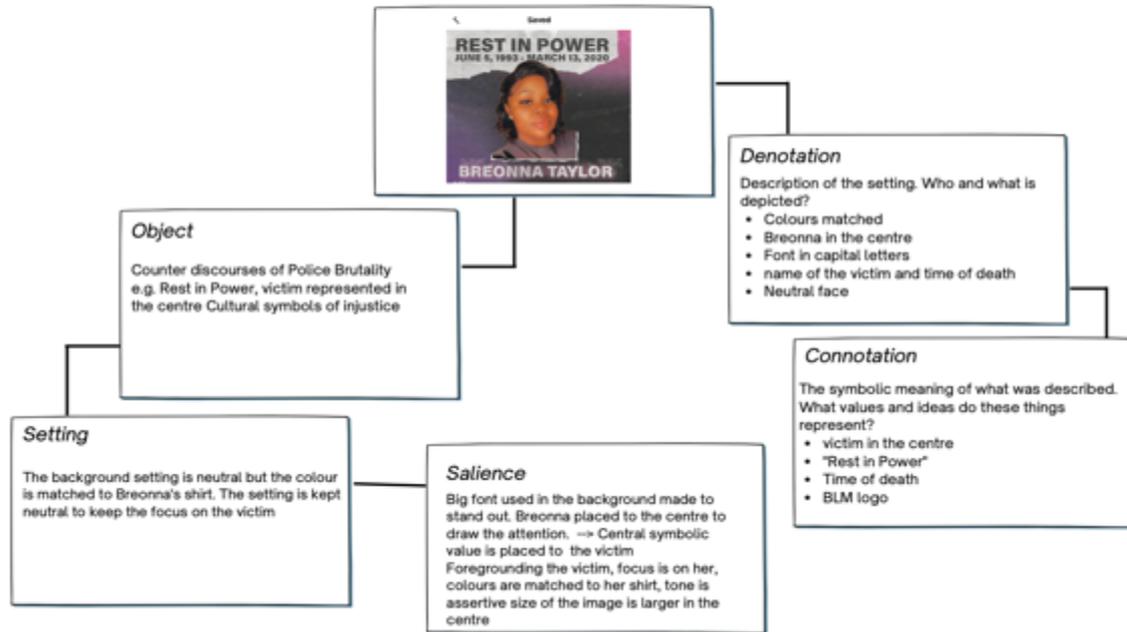https://www.instagram.com/p/CLAMSC-jM6d/

Figure 4.10 Instagram post from [@blklivesmatter] (27 March 2021). #WakieshaWilson was a vibrant, joyful mother of a loving 13-year-old son, Jamael. [Instagram photo]. Retrieved from https://www.instagram.com/p/CM78TNMJy4y
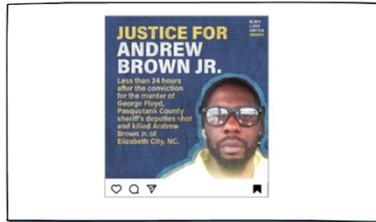
Appendix

A – Example table for CDA

Post number	Connotation	Overlexicalization	Suppression	Structural Opposition	Lexical choice/Genre
1.	*We still #SayHerName* *Breonna Taylor, Rest in Power* *We are still waiting for justice*	*...Breonna Taylor's life was taken by white supremacy and killer cops*			*Black women are surveilled harassed, and victimized by our state and society*
2.	*Justice will never truly be served* *Andrew Brown Jr, say his name* *Justice can only mean Black life* *Our hearts are with the Brown family* *Andrew Brown Jr. say his name*	*Killer cops are also lying cops*			

B - Example of VCDA

JUSTICE FOR ANDREW BROWN JR.

Less than 24 hours after the conviction for the murder of George Floyd, Pasquotank County sheriff's deputies shot and killed Andrew Brown Jr. of Elizabeth City, NC.

Object

Counter discourses of Police Brutality e.g. Rest in Power, victim represented in the centre Cultural symbols of injustice

Denotation

Description of the setting. Who and what is depicted?
- Colours matched
- Andrew Brown Jr in the centre
- Font in capital letters
- name of the victim and time of death
- Neutral face

Connotation

The symbolic meaning of what was described. What values and ideas do these things represent?
- victim in the centre
- "Justice For"
- Juxtapositioning with George Floyd
- BLM logo

Setting

The background setting is neutral but the colour is matched to Andrew's shirt. The setting is kept neutral to keep the focus on the victim

Salience

Big font used in the background made to stand out. Andrew Brown Jr. placed to the centre to draw the attention. --> Central symbolic value is placed to the victim Foregrounding the victim, focus is on him, colours are matched to his shirt, tone is assertive size of the image is larger in the centre