

Digitally Witnessing Police Brutality

A Mixed Method Analysis (Interview and Thematic Analysis) on How Young Adults Manage their Instagram Usage to Protect their Mental Health.

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ABSTRACT

Over the years, police brutality content has toured the world. Those injustices have given rise to movements such as Black Lives Matter, raising awareness of fatal police violence as an urgent public health issue (Schwartz et al., 2020). Nowadays, police brutality is made more visible due to new technologies and social media. Videos, images and written accounts of violent encounters between police and racialised people have ignited social media. As Campbell and Valera (2020) explain, Black people are three times more likely to be killed by police than White people and five times more likely to be unarmed when this happens. Due to the rise of social media usage and a rise in police violence, it seems sensible to study it. A correlation was found between police brutality and mental health, suggesting that police brutality be treated as a public health issue (Bor et al., 2018). In this study, mental health will be resumed to feelings of anger and fear; however, it may go beyond those two aspects of mental health as the research continues. Research has been conducted on mental health and police brutality; however, some have not examined it with social media. This study investigates young adult consumers' usage of Instagram to protect their mental health when confronted with police brutality content. Cultivation theory and intersectionality will be used as theoretical frameworks to answer the research question and sub-questions. With cultivation theory, this study will demonstrate how older theories and theoretical concepts can be helpful in today's changing media landscape. Looking at intersectionality in combination with cultivation theory is essential to have a better picture of the impact of being exposed to police brutality content on Instagram; data reveals that differences in consumer attributes and social backgrounds are essential in the cultivation process. In-depth interviews with ten respondents, five of whom are from marginalised communities and five of whom are White. Thematic analysis will be used to examine the interviews. In conclusion, the different chapters demonstrate that the racial backgrounds of each interviewee played a role in finding similarities and differences among them and bringing nuances to people's usage of Instagram and the content consumed on police brutality. Reinforcing what was previously found in previous research but also introducing news nuances.

KEYWORDS: *police brutality, social media, cultivation, intersectionality, coping mechanism*

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1. Introduction

During the first lockdown, while I was on Instagram (on February 23, 2020), friends shared videos of the murder of Ahmaud Arbery – a Black American man – killed while jogging. Months later, I saw the video of a police officer kneeling for 9 minutes and 29 seconds on the neck and back of George Floyd, killing him. Seeing these images made me sad, angry and scared. These events generated attention and unrest on social media, leading to movements such as Black Lives Matter and protests. Over the last decade, the Black Lives Matter movement has raised awareness of fatal police violence as an urgent public health issue (Schwartz et al., 2020). For some racialised people, the police symbolise White power, racism and repression, which is often reflected in today's society.

Police brutality against people of colour is not new. However, it is more visible because of new technologies used to record the violence and amplify it – international – reaches through social media to seek justice. In recent years, videos, images, and written accounts of violent encounters between police and racialised people – mainly Blacks and men of any race or ethnicity – have ignited social media. There are various reasons for these encounters, including the thought that race plays a role in these encounters. According to Campbell and Valera (2020), Black people are three times more likely to be killed by police than White people and five times more likely to be unarmed when this happens. They also argue that the victims are usually demonised and portrayed as criminals after the killings, justifying their deaths and shifting the blame from law enforcement. As Fryer (2016) states, police violence disproportionately affects minorities, especially Blacks because they are more likely to experience violence in their interactions with the police. With the rise in social media usage and a rise in police violence, it seems sensible to study it.

In their study, Bor et al. (2018) found a correlation between police brutality and mental health, suggesting that police brutality be treated as a public health issue. Furthermore, they add that the observed mental health spillover effects of police killings of unarmed Black men could result from perceptions of threat and vulnerability, lower beliefs about one's own worth, activation of prior traumas, and identification with the deceased, among others. Leading to negative mental health effects such as anxiety, fear, depression, psychological stress. Mental health is a complete state of physical, mental, and social well-being, in which the individual's capacity and the person's socio-environmental context must be taken into account (Britannica, 2021). For this paper, mental health will be resumed to feelings of anger and fear; however, it may go beyond those two aspects of mental health as the research continues. Much work has been done on these topics but not together. Plus, there is much less research on police violence, racial trauma, and social media.

Previous research has been conducted on mental health and police brutality; however, some

have not examined it with social media, such as Bor et al. (2018) and Campbell and Valera (2020). Others have examined it with social media but focused on Twitter and Facebook, such as Williams (2022). Other research focuses only on Black (young) women, such as Williams (2022), and some only on Black (young) men, such as Motley et al. (2020). Few, if any, have examined the impact of police brutality on the health of both sexes simultaneously. Other research has focused solely on Black students, such as Campbell and Valera (2020). In conducting this study, academic gaps will be filled by:

- 1) focusing on Instagram;
- 2) studying men and women simultaneously, and
- 3) studying young White adults and young adults from minority groups simultaneously.

Minority groups refer to an “ethnically or racially distinct group that coexists with but is subordinate to a more dominant group” (Britannica, 2019), such as Asians, Arabs, Blacks, and Hispanics, among others. It is essential to highlight that some Hispanic people prefer to be referred to as Latino or Latina.

It is relevant to examine this topic socially because social media is a large part of young adults’ lives. Secondly, as Campbell and Valera (2020) state, there is an urgent need to understand how this affects different communities. Furthermore, adding White young adults is also a way to understand how those outside minorities are affected or not; and, if so, how and what strategies they employ. Thirdly, as Williams (2022) argues, understanding the impact of these images can help people, institutions, and communities to learn how to support them. Therefore, this study will build on and develop previous research.

It thus leads to the research question: *How do young adults (18-34) consumers of Instagram content on police brutality against minorities, especially Blacks, manage their Instagram usage to protect their mental health?* To help me answer this research question, I will use sub-questions:

- 1) *What do the young adults experience when engaging with police brutality content on Instagram?*
- 2) *How do people cope with the content on Instagram?*

This thesis is separated into different sections. Firstly, the theoretical framework is divided into the literature review and the concepts. The former situates the topic within the academic debate. A literature review is necessary to show what has been done on the topic, illustrate the gaps in the debate, and understand how this research will fill these gaps. The latter will look at the concept of cultivation theory and of intersectionality, which will provide this research with much-needed theoretical orientation. Secondly, in the methodology section, data collection will be further explained, which will be done through interviews.

Moreover, this data will be analysed through thematic analysis, and ethical issues will be highlighted. Arguments will be given to explain why these methods best suit the study. Next, the results sections will be followed discussing the different themes. Lastly, a discussion on the findings will conclude the study.

2. Theoretical Framework

Two analytical and conceptual tools are used to answer the research question and sub-questions. George Gerbner's (1919-2005) concept of cultivation theory will first be introduced. This study uses cultivation theory to examine how exposure to police brutality images via social media affects and impacts young White adults and young adults from minorities. Kimberly Crenshaw's (1989) concept of intersectionality will then be introduced. Those concepts will demonstrate how older theories and theoretical concepts can be helpful in today's changing media landscape society. However, before introducing the concepts, this paper will look closely at what has been done and said on the topic.

2.1 Overview

2.1.1 *Police Brutality*

Police brutality against racially and ethnically targeted groups is an understudied form of racism; these acts of aggression have become the focus of public uproar and, as a result, have gotten increased attention from media sources and political campaigns (Bryant-Davis et al., 2017). "Police brutality occurs within the context of police officers possessing privilege and often assumed justification for their actions as they have sworn to protect and serve the community" (Bryant-Davis et al., 2017, p.853). Police brutality "can range from witnessing police violence against another person, racial micro-aggressions such as being called a racial slur by a police officer to threat of harm, physical assault, or even murder" (p.855). It is a pattern of unjustifiable, unwarranted racial profiling, death, bodily injury, or harassment that is persistent or recurring. Young, non-White, male, and/or impoverished people are more likely to be treated with force, regardless of their behaviour.

As Williams (2022) indicates, the visualisation of police brutality against Black people on social media can potentially induce racial trauma in Black people; and this trauma is higher among young social media users whose brains and identities are still developing. He also indicates that previous research has found that watching police brutality on the Internet harms young Black individuals. Moreover, most college students learn of incidences of police brutality through social media. Most of them expressed anger, frustration, despair, and loss after viewing such photos – according to a study on the impressions of police brutality videos on college students of colour. Nägel and Lutter (2021) highlight that alongside sociological and psychological literature addressing police brutality, some theories attempt to explain the abuse of minorities by police officers as the result of a 'cop culture' which reinforces institutional racism. Research has shown that Blacks were more likely

than Whites to believe they had been victims of racial profiling. Plus, Hispanics were more likely than non-Hispanics to believe they had experienced racial profiling (Gabbidon & Higgins, 2008), making Blacks and Hispanics more likely than Whites to be racially profiled. Bryant-Davis et al. (2017) add that racial and ethnic minorities, particularly Blacks, Latinos and Arabs/Muslims, are stereotyped as violent criminals. Thus, even if they are not seen engaged in criminal activities, police officers – who have adopted these prejudiced ideas – are more inclined to believe that they are dangerous.

Regarding the Arab and Muslim communities, the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, had a significant impact on the police and many ethnic groups' interactions – especially with the Arab and Muslim communities – which rendered their interactions even worse (Khatib, 2018). Because of the Middle Eastern background of the 9/11 terrorists or the Brussels attacks of 2016 – among others – racial animosity – that had previously targeted minorities such as Blacks and Latinos – was now also directed at Arab and Muslim people. Plus, the media representation of this community played a crucial role in people's perception of them. Their negative portrayal has been as severe as stereotyping Hispanics, Blacks and Asians. Therefore, as with any targeted ethnic group, this negative picture has resulted in animosity and inequitable treatment of Arabs and Muslims (Khatib, 2018).

2.1.2 Social Media

In their study, Motley et al. (2020) concluded that exposure to videos of real-life incidents of community-based violence (CBV) resulted in three types of emotional responses: sadness, anger and fear. Plus, using social networking sites (SNS) has been found to adversely affect well-being indicators such as self-esteem, stress, and depression in young adults (Ho & Ito, 2019). Carr and Hayes (2015) define social media as “Internet-based channels that allow users to opportunistically interact and selectively self-present, either in real-time or asynchronously, with both broad and narrow audiences who derive value from user-generated content and the perception of interaction with others” (p.50). They connect millions of people in a short time worldwide; they can serve as a meeting place for groups with common interests. Social media are also used to share information and news, with some people covering the news themselves by posting photos or videos of news events. Social media empowers audiences to participate in the media themselves and even create and share their content online, changing the power balance between the providers and audiences, going from an audience being passive to being active. The information spread from social media allows people to experience whatever is happening indirectly. Cheng et al. (2016) explain that, for example, in the case of a disaster, even if people are not in the disaster area, its report encourages some people to take action. People frequently rely on media information to comprehend their surroundings, amplifying the media's influence. Besides, Motley et al. (2020) argue that recording and uploading real-life

videos to social media can elicit negative emotional responses for some. In addition to social and political issues, social media serves as a place where conversations about race intersect with many issues (Anderson, 2016).

2.1.3 Stress, Trauma and Trauma-induced Effects

For decades, the adverse psychological and emotional effects of racism and racial discrimination (e.g., anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and race-related stress) have been well-known and researched. According to Carter et al. (2017), trauma and stress are frequently interchanged across disciplines to characterise the biological, psychological, and social interactions resulting from external events (stressors). In their articles, Carter et al. highlight Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) definition of stress and Pearlman and Saakvitne's (1995) definition of trauma. Stress is a person's assessment of an event as positive, negative, undesirable, and/or taxing, requiring adaptation or coping. When coping or adaptation fail, one experiences stress reactions which can intensify. However, how much stress affects a person is determined by his or her specific features and predispositions (Carter, 2007). In contrast, trauma is a more extreme form of stress that causes a person's ability to cope with being overwhelmed.

Carter et al. (2020) give two definitions of trauma. They use the term to refer to it as one is about a physical injury, while the other is about unpleasant experiences that cause adverse emotional and/or mental health problems. On the other hand, traumatic stress refers to stress caused by emotional distress rather than a life-threatening event or set of events as the primary stressor (Carter et al., 2017). Carter et al. (2005) draw on Norris's (1992) definition – presumably broader – to argue that a traumatic incident is described as any event the individual perceives or experiences as shocking enough to cause intrusion, numbness, or arousal symptoms. Researchers discovered that persons with traumatic stress reactions have three fundamental symptoms that can manifest in various ways (e.g., cognitive, affective, behavioural), which will be addressed later.

The subjective character of stress, trauma, and traumatic stress adds to the complexity of such experiences. One person may find a stressful or traumatic incident or condition, while another person experiencing the same or comparable experience may not (Bryant-Davis & Ocampo, 2005; Carter et al., 2020). Researchers have also discovered that people of colour have higher rates of traumatic experiences than the overall population. Carter et al. (2005) and Carter (2022) highlight that studies found that despite higher rates of exposure to stressful life events, Whites report less perceived stress associated with life events than people of colour. In contrast, others have found that Whites report less perceived stress associated with life events than people of colour despite higher rates of exposure to stressful life events. As stated by Carter et al. (2005), research suggests that

while Whites are more exposed to stressful life experiences, their social position appears to cushion the impact of those events.

Before establishing the race-based traumatic stress concept, there was no clear link between an encounter with racism and its symptoms (Carter, 2007; Carter et al., 2017). According to Carter (2007), an emotionally painful, sudden, and out of one's control racial encounter causes reactions, some of which overlap with PTSD symptoms (such as arousal or hypervigilance, intrusion or re-experiencing, and/or avoidance or numbing) and others that are unrelated to PTSD (such as processing and understanding race and racism). It can result in a race-based trauma stress injury (i.e., emotional pain after an encounter). Racial trauma can be defined as “the events of danger related to real or perceived experience of racial discrimination, threats of harm, injury, shame, and humiliation; in addition, it is witnessing harm to other people of the same race because of actual or perceived racism” (Williams, 2022, p.2). Comas et al. (2019) add that racial trauma accumulates psychological and physiological effects such as nightmares, flashbacks, and hypervigilance to threats. Racism is emotional and psychological abuse and can be traumatic. In today's society, racism often takes the form of 'daily mini traumas' – such as micro-aggressions – experienced by marginalised people. There are two kinds of racism: individual racism (e.g. being followed in a store because of being from a particular ethnicity) and institutional racism, also known as systemic racism (e.g. political and ideological racism buried in the practices and institutional cultures such as not providing medical assistance to people because of their colour).

Those affected put forth a significant mental effort to cope with it. Therefore, exposure to and witnessing racial violence online does not minimise the potential impact of racial trauma since racism can result in psychological and emotional reactions that can be traumatizing (Williams, 2022). Due to the exposure and witnessing, the symptoms may be most common among the Blacks who identify with the victims and perceive these encounters as racist and discriminatory (Campbell & Valera, 2020). This stems from a long history of violence and destruction directed at the marginalised body – such as war, enslavement and genocide for which their descendants continue to suffer the consequences – and the public display of it. This is known as intergenerational trauma or historical trauma. A failure to truly grasp the emotional, psychological, and, to some extent, physical impacts of racism on its targets may be a significant contributing element to the problem of racism and its influence on the mental health of its targets (Carter, 2007). As Campbell and Vera (2020) highlight, it is still unclear whether people of colour approve or disapprove of the videos' publicizing, how they feel and respond to them, for how long after watching them and their reactions.

An individual's ability to recognise racism depends on the person's racial identity. Carter et al. (2017) highlight that individuals need to have an "internally" determined racial identity status to

have a subjective experience of race-based interactions related to concerns of racism. “Therefore, peoples’ awareness of the role of race becomes an important factor in understanding and evaluating race-based trauma” (p.31). As a result, to determine whether contact with racism resulted in race-based trauma, it would be essential to know whether the person who was exposed was able to recognise the experience as such. Carter et al. (2005) claim that people's judgments of an incident as racist affect psychological stress reactions and mental health outcomes. Therefore, the fact that a person finds a racist incident stressful qualifies racism as a stressor.

Moreover, Carter (2007) adds that it is necessary to consider within-group racial disparities – while studying the effects of racial discrimination – and not to treat members of racial groupings as monolithic or mentally similar in terms of their experiences and knowledge of racism. Racial groups have diverse socio-political histories that influence individual and group social perceptions. Combined with one's personality, these histories interact with one's family and community systems, influencing an individual's typical response to environmental stress.

Bryant-Davis (2007) have provided multiple definitions for race-based traumatic stress. He defines it as

- (a) an emotional injury that is motivated by hate or fear of a person or group of people as a result of their race;
- (b) a racially motivated stressor that overwhelms a person’s capacity to cope;
- (c) a racially motivated, interpersonal severe stressor that causes bodily harm or threatens one’s life integrity; or
- (d) a severe interpersonal or institutional stressor motivated by racism that causes fear, helplessness, or horror.

(p.135)

Race-based refers to experiences of racism and racial discrimination, although it is possible to have a race-based experience that is not associated with racism. It is essential to mention that a stressor can be severe or traumatizing without requiring physical touch. Theories point to the fact that race-based traumatic events can affect people – regardless of ethnicity – cognitively, affectively, somatically, relationally, behaviorally, and spiritually. Cognitive effects may include difficulty concentrating, remembering, and focusing. Affective effects may include numbness, depression, anxiety, grief, and anger. Somatic complaints may include migraines, nausea, and body aches. Victims may show suspicion of members of the dominant group or, in cases of internalised racism, distrust of their own racial group members in interpersonal relationships. Victims may begin to self-medicate by abusing substances or other self-harming behaviours. Victims' spiritual confidence in God, humankind, or both may be questioned.

Moreover, there is evidence of race-related traumatic stress, which manifests as intrusive thoughts, hypervigilance, and avoidance, according to Bryant-Davis (2007). The race-based trauma

theory points out the psychological consequences of interpersonal or institutional traumas motivated by racial devaluation. Given people's many identities, Carter (2007) recognises the need to look at race-based trauma in the context of their lives. He uses Carlson's model on traumatic stress to recognise that race-based stress events are frequently non-physical but occur over the life span and recur in many situations and contexts. For Carlson, traumatic stress involves three elements. The first element, as stated earlier, refers to the subjectivity assessment or perception of an event seen as damaging. Some experiences are traumatic because of how emotionally painful they are or involve the threat of emotional pain. The second element is that the event is experienced abruptly in its occurrence. The third element is that the event is experienced as uncontrollable. It is a type of protection to believe one has some influence over occurrences. Race-related trauma experienced by people of colour is not related to a singular event; but is a result of multiple emotional injuries and traumas (Williams, 2022). There are likely reactions, coping responses, and efforts to adapt to the race-based encounters.

2.1.4 Healing and Coping Mechanisms

As stated earlier, people confronted with race-related stress events put much effort into coping with it, whereas for some, trauma causes a person's ability to cope with being overwhelmed. One might employ various coping mechanisms in the face of racism to adapt, respond, and cope with race-based traumatic stress. Forsyth and Carter (2012) define coping as "efforts to manage external or internal demands that exceed one's resources" (p.128). Coping can include a wide range of cognitive and behavioural activities from problem-focused to emotional-focused; however, many elements influence coping efficacy, including the type of stressor, personal resources, culture, and social contexts (Noh & Kaspar, 2003). Problem-focused coping mechanisms include personal confrontation, seeking support and taking formal actions.

In contrast, an emotional-focused coping mechanism includes emotional distraction, avoidance, hypervigilance or numbing and anger expression (Brondolo et al., 2009; Miller et al., 2020; Noh & Kaspar, 2005; Wolfers & Utz, 2022). Forsyth and Carter (2012) highlight that one study found that Blacks use different coping mechanisms to deal with non-racial and racial stressors than Whites (Plummer & Slane, 1996). Another study found that Blacks use different coping strategies – to deal with racial discrimination – than Whites and Asian Americans (Sanders Thompson, 2006). However, in their study, Noh and Kaspar (2003) highlight that passive coping – such as keeping it to oneself or accepting it as a fact of life – appeared to be the most harmful among minorities and Whites. In this study, I observed that instead of seeking medical or mental health help, individuals were more likely to utilise active coping mechanisms.

Polanco-Roman et al. (2016) point out that scholars have discovered elements that may influence active rather than passive coping mechanisms, such as racial and ethnic identities, racial socialisation, and messages acquired by one's family regarding one's racial group. Those coping mechanisms can occur offline and online. Miller et al. (2020) claim that "social media allow those practices to be carried on in the online sphere as a way to cope with both online and offline forms of discrimination" (p.248). Moreover, they argue that social media can be an extra tool for dealing with race-related events because it can provide all the above types of coping that can be used offline.

Regarding racial and ethnic identity, Miller et al. (2020) maintain that individuals might make sense of their experiences by perceiving racism as a collective rather than a personal attack, maintaining their self-esteem and preventing distress. For Black people, racial and ethnic identity is extrapolated online; they experience and share a collective identity. Next, concerning social support, Miller et al. claim that it appears as received and perceived support. The former is when an individual receives material, physical kinds of help. In contrast, the latter believes that a person has a social network that may be utilised when the need arises. Individuals can use social support to contextualise discriminatory experiences, form bonds with people in similar situations, and reduce the harmful impacts of stressors. Racially underrepresented people tend to not share their experiences with anyone other than those within their immediate support systems, such as friends, family and spouses. Digital affordances such as comments, likes, retweets, and favourites can be perceived as social support for social media users. Social networks promote a sense of security and connectedness. Members of communities are also coping by becoming activists in their communities, whether by filming and uploading videos to raise awareness or by supporting others through protests (Bryant-Davis et al., 2017). Lastly, confrontation and anger expression is conceptualised as a feeling of distress or displeasure; they can be expressed verbally or through aggressive behaviour. Social media allows Black people to share footage of police misbehaviour, brutality against them and other racist incidents. However, social media is not neutral; opposite ideologies tend to collide.

Another strategy that Wolfers and Utz (2022) add is self-distraction. Self-distraction is a flawed coping mechanism when one can readily change the circumstances, such as better preparation. As Brondolo et al. (2009) state, it is essential to mention that different methods of coping may be required at various times; "in anticipation of potential exposure to ethnicity-related maltreatment, at the time of exposure, following the episode, and when considering longer-term implications of persistent or recurring exposure" (p.66). More research is needed into how racist targets cope with their encounters, the effectiveness of particular help-seeking and coping tactics compared to others, and if specific coping mechanisms are better for promoting well-being than others (Carter & Forsyth, 2010; Polanco-Roman et al., 2016). One of the most challenging aspects of

healing from racial trauma is that racial wounds do not have time to heal since they occur on an ongoing basis within a socio-political and socioeconomic context (Comas-Díaz et al., 2019). As Donaldson (2021) emphasises, several coping models describe how racial minorities respond to racism, the literature on coping mechanisms for race-based trauma and stress still has some substantial gaps. Most academics recognise this gap and, even when seeking to fill it, acknowledge that more research is required. Specifically, more inclusive, detailed, and race-specific coping mechanisms and frameworks must be created.

2.1.5 *Black Activism*

As Williams (2022) points out, “minorities see their image reflected through the perspective of messages designed by and for the majority” (p.677) intended to reveal injustices to a broader audience as evidence; although racialised social media users are more likely to encounter and create race-related posts than their White counterparts (Anderson, 2016; Williams, 2022). Of the Black social media users, 24% say they primarily see race-related content; a post regarding race on social media is more likely to be seen by Black social media users (68%) than Whites social media users (35%). Furthermore, 28% of Black users create posts about race compared with 8% of White users (Anderson, 2016). For example, Twitter has spawned a powerful network called ‘Black Twitter’. Posting and sharing things about race on these platforms is much more common among Black users. Brock (2012) found that 9% of online Whites used Twitter whereas 25% of online Blacks used Twitter; Blacks use Twitter disproportionately more than any other demographic group even though Twitter is disproportionately not black. The ‘Black Twitter’ “can be understood as a user-generated source of culturally relevant online content, combining social network elements and broadcast principles to share information” (Brock, 2012). It allows Black people to discuss the social realities, collectively share interests and experiences, and influence complex cultural conversations online, making it a potent force that has significantly impacted political and social transformation. Williams (2015) also adds that using Twitter by African-Americans and Blacks draws attention to social justice concerns and inequities and leads to cultural discussions regarding art, entertainment, and representation. Black people also use this social platform for resistance and revolution.

Brock (2012) highlights three elements of the Black discursive style on Twitter:

- 1) the use of a culturally relevant hashtag (cultural-specific);
- 2) the network’s participation by either commenting or retweeting (homophily);
- 3) a viral spread to reach the trending status (propagation).

‘Black Twitter’ revolves around hashtags, a user-created meta-discourse. It was initially used to filter and organise tweets on a particular topic; but quickly evolved into an expressive modifier to

contextualise the tweet (Brock, 2012). Brock claims that the hashtag's evolution is why 'Black Twitter' was discovered, giving rise to the Black Lives Matter hashtag (#BLM) – created by three Black queer women: Alicia Garza, Opal Tometi, and Patrisse Cullors. Other Black users use the platform to engage in social justice activism and interact with their community. Hashtags and trending topics filtered Twitter to recognise topics of interest and who was creating them. Whether they talk more or less about race (in their daily lives), this type of content remains a common component of Black users rather than White ones. White engagement is rarely understood as a component of their identity; instead, we are taught to think of it as something 'people' do. As Brock (2012) states, even while using the same functions and apparatus, 'Black Twitter' disrupted this engrained understanding by highlighting how culture impacts online discourses through external observation and internal engagement. Furthermore, an unintentional effect of the media is that they may be exposed to trauma due to witnessing video footage of police brutalisation of Black people. Williams (2022) points out that Allissa Richardson (2020) states that "footage becomes more powerful than a lynching postcard in that it terrorises potentially a larger audience of Black distant witnesses and reifies ideas of White supremacy for international audiences" (p.6).

According to Brock (2012), Twitter's mechanism curates content, allowing users to create individualised information environments centred upon specific topics and persons of interest. He also argues that Twitter's affordances – its minimalism and malleability – contributed to the Black Twitter phenomenon. He explains that most social media follow the patterns of widgets, applications, photo galleries and advertising, whereas Twitter stands out from these patterns with its simplicity. Twitter uses short messages; only 140 characters can be used. According to Jack Dorsey, former CEO, the goal is to make it so simple that people do not even think about what they are doing. People enter something and send it, requesting people to be as open and transparent as possible about the process. He also argues that the characters' limit encourages performativity and creativity within the boundaries of time and space. The exposure of 'Black Twitter' via the trending topic algorithm—and the subsequent othering of those conversations—led to the framing of Black Twitter as an intervention in 'White public space'. As Brock highlights, in those 'White public spaces', Whites are invisibly normal, and in which racialised people are visibly marginal. Therefore, 'Black Twitter' rather than a Black online public is best understood as a public group of distinct Twitter users. Contemporary forms of activism have not only been utilised to cope with this type of trauma, but they have also sparked a movement to examine police actions in communities and draw attention to their long-term consequences.

2.2 Concepts

2.2.1 Cultivation Theory: An Overview

Cultivation theory, which examines the impact of media messages on audiences, is an appropriate theory to apply in this study to investigate the research issues. *Cultivation theory* is a mass media theory founded by the media scholar George Gerbner (1919-2005) in the mid-1970s. The theory was applied to television which Gerbner saw as a means of maintaining social norms and as the 'new state religion' (Morgan et al., 2015) as the transmitter of our cultural values (Romer et al., 2014). Gerbner decided to focus on television because television practically monopolised people's cultural engagement and public discourse. Whereas radio, newspapers, films, and other mid-century mass media – before the Internet – all played lesser, more specialised roles once television gained centre stage. Cultivation theory is a continual, dynamic, ongoing relationship that does not have a unidirectional flow but a gravitational one (Cheng et al., 2016; Gerbner, 1998). It analyses the impact that media messages have on an audience (Williams, 2022) due to the recurrent and extensive usage of mass media. However, Gerbner's theory was not limited to effects alone; in addition to those effects, he was also concerned with media institutions and messages. His theory did not manipulate exposures or messages but recognised people's media exposure patterns in their daily lives.

Moreover, Williams (2022) points out that social and mental motivation push people to choose the content they consume, which can therefore influence cultivation and lead to several repercussions such as, for example, desensitization to violence (Stein et al., 2021). The theory provides a valuable framework and structure for analyzing people's social media usage. Williams (2021) states that cultivation aspires to comprehend the repercussions of living in a culture saturated with mass media messages. This can be accomplished by applying cultivation theory to social media.

In their articles, Williams (2022) and Morgan et al. (2015) highlighted Gerbner's six important and essential viewpoints to understand the impact and appeal of television. First, television requires more time and attention than any other medium. Second, there is no waiting or planning for television. Television invites itself into people's homes and requires them to select the content that will be watched all the time, defeating other media that could need a little more activity or selection from the audience. Third, television viewing does not necessitate literacy, making it more accessible to people of all educational levels and literary abilities. These three perspectives, taken together, explain that television is a disseminator of a centralised, pervasive 'stream' of messages that serves as the precursor to the feed of content that we now see routinely on social media accounts and pages. Fourth, how important it is to study the totality of all television genres as a structured narrative flow containing messages that serve to share common societal ideas – shaping the entire

value system, which includes ideologies, beliefs, images, and perspectives. It does not make sense to study content or the impact of one type of program in isolation from others. Fifth, Gerbner highlights the importance of television as an intergenerational storyteller. Unlike other forms of media, television simultaneously tells stories to children, parents and grandparents. Sixth, Gerbner spotted that minority groups involuntarily view representations of themselves created by and for the dominant group, and who gets to tell the stories is arguably even more relevant in today's explosive digital media world. Gerbner's recognition is essential in this study since images of police brutality against Black people are not captured and enhanced for Black audiences; instead, they are meant to expose the injustices to a broader audience as proof of anti-Black violence committed by the state (Williams, 2021). Therefore, based on these statements, the theory tries to capture the broad ramifications of this new medium and its message system. In particular, the theory was designed to reflect the assumption that television viewing is a relatively nonselective activity (compared to how other media are used) as well as an emphasis on aggregate patterns of messages to which entire communities, and not necessarily individuals, are exposed over time (Morgan et al., 2015).

However, Potter (2014) points out that cultivation appears to flourish at first glance based on the size of the literature it has generated. However, the cultivation theory's heuristic value looks less favourable when looking at the literature for completeness and relevance. Plus, Potter also points out a few studies where scholars reject some of Gerbner's claims. These rejections concern two things: a shift from a macro focus to a micro focus; and a shift of emphasis from the locus of meaning in media messages to the locus of meaning in receivers. Regarding the movement from macro to a micro focus, Gerbner accepted the micro-level but argued that it was outside the limitations of his theory. Researchers have shifted their focus from using television viewing as a predictor for cultivation to more micro-measures of exposure. It means that the evidence for cultivation will be more attributable to the exposure to violent content than the total television exposure – which the researchers have confirmed. Regarding the shift of meaning locus from messages to receivers, Gerbner argued that "he was not concerned with how different individual and group selections and interpretations of messages take place" (Potter, 2014, p. 1022). Thus, Gebner recognised those differences and variations in the interpretations of messages but was not concerned about those variations in interpretations, which will be considered in this paper. Instead, cultivation focuses on the dominant meanings presented to the public through the mass media.

In response to those critiques, Gerbner extended his concept into two parts in which cultivation can operate: the resonance and mainstreaming effect (Gerbner, 1998; Morgan et al., 2015; Potter, 2014; Williams, 2022). On the one hand, the 'mainstreaming' phenomenon – which has been examined more frequently and thus comprises multiple definitions – explained by Mosharafa

(2015) is that television essentially reflects the cultural mainstream of society. Due to the diversity of such groups' cultural, social, and political circumstances, there are differences among audience groups. By imposing one trend on television – the mainstream – such differences are minimised, if not wholly eliminated. Potter (2014) sees the phenomenon as a commonality of perspectives that television tends to promote and develop. Another definition is that mainstreaming means that heavy viewing may override differences in perspectives and behaviour that result from other factors and influences" (Morgan et al., 2015, p.682) – suggesting that television viewing might bring people together who are usually very different in their cultural, racial, educational and socioeconomic backgrounds (Callanan & Rosenberger, 2016).

On the other hand, resonance focuses on viewers' direct experience. Gerbner claims that "people whose lived experience aligns with what they see on television are influenced by the content they view" (Williams, 2022, p.3). Therefore, "those with more direct experience will be more affected by television viewing than those with less direct experience" (Cheng et al., 2016, p.755). Resonance occurs when what one sees on television coincides with one's lived reality; giving the viewer a 'double dose' of messages from everyday experiences, mass media and social media (Morgan et al., 2015; Potter, 2014); thus, amplifying it. The example Potter gives is that people who live in dangerous high-crime areas and watch much television are exposed to crime twice as much as those who do not. Therefore, these people should exhibit a higher degree of resonance effect from the mass media and social media exposure because those exposures resonate with their real-world environment. However, different racial groups would have varied experiences in their respective communities. They would also have different encounters with the police. Hence, these diverse life experiences can enhance or mitigate the impact of the media on people.

The mainstreaming effect predicts that media will have a more significant impact on individuals with less direct experience. Moreover, the resonance effect, on the other hand, suggests that people with greater direct experience will be more affected by the content they watch. The two effects appear to contradict one another at first glance. This is purposeful and intended to depict the non-unidirectional character of the cultivation process (Cheng et al., 2016). Hence, in the cultivation process, the viewer's life experience is a vital moderating component; although people in all demographic categories watch more or less television, there are significant differences in terms of sex, age, wealth, education, race, and other demographics and social characteristics. Thus, in today's highly mediated societies, where media information has become a vital part of our daily experience, this interplay between mainstream and resonance effects is fundamental, which leads us to the next idea.

Williams (2022) and Morgan et al. (2015) point out that scholars argue that this concept

should not only be applied to television – which was a new medium at the time – but that it can and should also be applied to social media and digital content viewed on mobile screens. Looking at Gerbner’s six criteria that explain the impact and appeal of television, we can also apply them to social media, specifically Instagram:

- 1) Instagram requires more time and attention since people consume everyone else’s content.
- 2) There is no waiting or planning for it since Instagram invites itself into people’s homes; however, it can require more action and selection.
- 3) It does not necessitate literacy.
- 4) It is essential to look at the different types of content.
- 5) Instagram is not an intergenerational storyteller.
- 6) Minority groups can also involuntarily view representations of themselves created by and for the dominant group.

Instagram may not fit all the criteria, but it is still worth looking at. Morgan et al. (2015) argue that there is nothing new about new communication technologies. However, Nevzat (2018) highlights that the Internet’s ground-breaking arrival drastically altered communication paradigms: people spend much time on the Internet, and what they see there shapes their world’s perception. For at least 100 years, modern media has been in a near-constant state of alteration and evolution. Although the way we now receive our “stories” (whether fiction, news, or reality programs) has changed, along with how we consume them, we tend to forget that important aspects of their content arguably have not.

Morgan et al. (2015) also enhance that now, digital media is the newest disruptor of the status quo, even though we have already gone through many of the new features that these technologies appear to offer. New technologies amplify cultivation – instead of attenuating it – as audiences have access to more of the same content delivered differently. Therefore, this theory can and should be applied to social media as it is ubiquitous in people’s lives, especially young people. To highlight that, the Pew Research Centre (2011) stated that the majority of Americans, 72%, use at least one social media network; 84% of adults aged 18 to 29 use social media, and 77% of Black American adults are on a minimum of one social media site. For Europe, numbers are not as specific as in the United States. According to Eurostat (2021), nearly nine out of ten young people in the EU, who were between the ages of 16 and 24, used social networks (87%). Social media influence people’s perceptions, affecting their behaviour. This theory seeks to understand the ramifications of living in a culture dominated by mass media messages, and this can be accomplished by applying this theory to social media. Plus, this theory will provide a structure for analysing the use of social media by young Black and White adults; furthermore, it considers the context in which they consume

content – which makes the theory very essential.

With this theory, this study will demonstrate how older theories and theoretical concepts can be helpful in today's changing media landscape. The application of cultivation to social media networks can help us understand the impact of viewing repeated violence on social media in a contemporary era. Therefore, this theory is of interest and relevant for this study since the context in which the interviewee watches content on police brutality will be taken into consideration when looking at how those content shape their behaviour. As discussed above, the content consumed by the interviewees may or may not resonate and thus impact their attitudes. It may have an impact in the long-term and short-term. In addition, with this theory, through the interviews, it would be useful to explore how long the interviewees interacted with content on police brutality on Instagram. Plus, understand the long-term and short-term effects; and whether it plays a role in people's coping strategies – in using Instagram – to protect themselves. Moreover, to better understand how and why they experience what they experience when viewing this content.

2.2.2 Intersectionality: An Overview

While previous research in the cultivation paradigm assumed that media effects were homogeneous across all audiences, empirical data reveals that differences in consumer attributes and social backgrounds are essential in the cultivation process. Therefore, it is essential to look at Crenshaw's (1989) theory in combination with the cultivation theory to get a complete picture of the impact of the exposure of police brutality content on Instagram on young Black and White adults.

The black feminist Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the concept of intersectionality in 1989. She sees intersectionality as a prism to understand various problems and a metaphor for understanding how multiple forms of inequality or disadvantage sometimes compound themselves. Intersectionality, she argues, helps recognise the created obstacles that sometimes are not understood within conventional ways of thinking about anti-racism, feminism, or any social justice advocacy structures (NAIS, 2018). It looks at how race, gender, sexual orientation, and class interact to shape the multiple dimensions of Black experiences and identities. Representations, Crenshaw argues, will be the product of the intersection of narratives about race, gender, class, and sexual orientation even when one of those identities seems to be predominant. Crenshaw's concept shows that identities form continuously at the place where categories of identity meet, focusing on what it means to have both a race and a gender at the same time. Everyone has an intersectional identity. Thus, Crenshaw's work reveals that the consequences of intersectionality are more significant when someone must confront multiple subordinated categories at once.

With intersectionality, we acknowledge that the content's impact differs whether the person

is Black or White; from the upper or lower class; a woman, a man, non-binary or transgender; the person is educated or not. Plus, to better understand the impact of police brutality on young adults and thus understand what strategies people use to protect themselves from these types of content when using Instagram, taking into account their age, gender, class, race, and status, among others. As Carter (2007) claims, the function of social structures must be considered when understanding stress and stress reactions. Many stressful events occur in the context of social structures or systems of social stratification, such as socioeconomic status, race, and gender. They are frequently linked to a person's position within that structure. It could be that depending on someone's race or gender, for example, they consume different content or use different strategies, or police brutality affects them differently. Moreover, depending on their background, some people exposed to stressful situations or events can adapt and cope effectively with them while others may not. Callanan and Rosenberger (2016) reiterate that how media messages are received is influenced by one's place in a social structure; nevertheless, responses are similar among members of similar socio-demographic strata.

3. Methodology

As a media researcher, not a psychological one, this study takes media studies to approach the mental effects of viewing policy brutality online and coping mechanisms, not medical or clinical. Two qualitative methods are used to answer the research question: first, in-depth interviews as a method of data collection and its research design, and second, thematic analysis as a method of data analysis. Qualitative analysis fits the research question as this method “emphasis on the individual and the role that context and relationship play in forming thoughts and behaviours” (Roller and Lavrakas, 2015, p.1). As they argue, absolute truth is impossible with qualitative research due to the interactive, personal and interpretive approach; instead of truth, we strive to gather information from which valuable knowledge can be gained.

As Flick (2009) states, qualitative research is particularly relevant to studying social relations because of the pluralisation of life. “Rapid social change and the resulting diversification of life worlds are increasingly confronting social researchers with new social contexts and perspectives” (p.12). Therefore, deductive methodologies are failing due to the diversification and differentiation of life, so inductive techniques are increasingly used in research.

3.1 Data Selection

3.1.1 *In-depth Interviews*

According to Roller and Lavrakas (2015), interviewing is central to most qualitative research designs. Interviewing some portion of the population under investigation is vital, whether as the sole mode of data collection or as a complement to ethnographic or multi-method research. The qualitative research in-depth interview differs from these other types of interviews in two key ways: the interview's goals and the interviewing technique. Guest et al. (2012), Johnson (2001), and Roller and Lavrakas (2015) argue that an in-depth interview looks for meaning-making; it seeks deeper information and knowledge – beyond the basic facts of who, what, when, and where – from a small number of people in a target population. In-depth interviews are about “gaining a rich, nuanced understanding of the “thinking” (i.e., motivation, interpretation, expectations, fears) that drives behaviour and attitude formation or otherwise leads to other consequences of research interest” (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015, p.51). It also allows interviewees to expand on some of their responses; as researchers, we examine the different nuances of meaning. In addition, it allows us to understand better different aspects of the same topic, which makes this method very flexible. The method is how “the personal is made public” to the researcher, and the data is then used to tell a story about a

person or phenomena (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015). Another aspect that makes the method flexible is that during the fieldwork, the research design can be modified and adapted to measure the research question being studied more precisely. Roller and Lavrakas (2015) state that it can range from “making in-the-field determinations of the questions to ask or direction to take when investigating a case, to abandoning the prescribed research design altogether, based on unanticipated revelations during the data collection phase” (p.6). The in-depth interview is an effective method to help researchers probe the ‘how’ and ‘why’ of participants’ experiences, giving us a glimpse into how people think they think.

An in-depth interview is built around the interviewer-interviewee relationships, and the intense and individualist nature of its qualitative research makes this method the most personal one (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015). The interview design can take the form of three formats: structured, semi-structured and unstructured (Guest et al., 2012; Lune & Berg, 2017; Roller & Lavrakas, 2015). The structured interview is formal and rigid, making it the most restrictive of all formats. In contrast, the semi-structured and unstructured formats are more flexible, with the unstructured format being the most freewheeling. Roller and Lavrakas (2015) stress that the difference between the three formats is the power the interviewer exerts in the process, which allows the participant’s voice to be heard. Therefore, for the interview design, semi-structured interviews were chosen as this format is conversational in nature; it encourages an exchange, a real conversation between the interviewer and interviewee. Semi-structured interviews are shared experiences between the interviewer and interviewee, encouraging back and forth dialogue; therefore, the interview guide and interview questionnaire (*see appendix A*) were always considered to ensure that relevant issues and questions are covered. After conducting the interviews, as a researcher, if more information was needed, any necessary follow-up took place through text messages with the participants and were added at the end of the participant’s interview.

All interviews started with the description of the study, an oral informed consent to participate, and a question regarding their demographic information, which included:

- 1) gender (male, female, transgender, non-binary),
- 2) race or ethnicity (i.e., Black, White, Latin, Arab/Muslim, Asian, Other),
- 3) age (between 18 and 34),
- 4) socioeconomic status (i.e., high, middle, low),
- 5) the highest diploma obtain (i.e., high school, bachelor, master, other).

However, as the interviews progressed, the order of the questions was changed, some questions were modified, or follow-up questions were asked to clarify interviewees’ responses if the answers or the particular circumstances of the interviewee warranted it, or the direction of the interview was

briefly changed. Thus, allowing participants to have their voices heard encourages a two-way dialogue and interviewees' possibility to answer freely and openly. Plus, in-depth interviews for sensitive subjects are very effective since people are more likely to participate in one-on-one studies rather than group discussions and gain rapport, ensure confidentiality, and provide a safe environment (Guest et al., 2012; Roller & Lavrakas, 2015). In addition, as Guest et al. (2012) state, interviewees may be less concerned about upsetting others or answering in the "correct" or socially acceptable manner. Lastly, conducting one-on-one interviews allows the researcher to go beyond the content of an interviewee's response; it also pays close attention to the tone and body language.

However, this method also has challenges and limitations. Roller and Lavrakas (2015) point out that the interviewer can potentially bias the information collected, and this is due to personal characteristics (age, race, gender, among others), personal values or beliefs, or other factors. It must therefore be taken into account when interviewing. I should be cautious while asking questions during the interviews to not push for specific answers, wanting nothing more than to accurately share their powerful words in a manner that may resonate with many. Plus, follow-up and probing questions will encourage the interviewee to elaborate responses, but not in a manner that could be construed as requesting a specific approved substantive response (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015). Another aspect is the power dynamics within the interview, which can be seen as a one-way dialogue by which the interviewer rules the interview (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015). Therefore, to avoid that, I made the most of social engagement by asking thoughtful questions showing that I was paying attention to the interviewee, knowing when to remain silent, and allowing the interviewee to speak freely using indirect probes. Guest et al. (2012) define indirect probes as "those that keep the interviewee talking and encourage further explanation without asking another question" (p.187): simple affirmations such as a smile, "mm-hmm", or "yeah", which then thus acknowledge the interviewee's response and encourage the interviewee to continue. Plus, to overcome the power imbalance between the interviewee and interviewer, I revealed some aspects of my identity and background so that the interview is more reciprocal and more or less on the same level. Plus, also allowed participants to view and edit their interview transcripts if they wanted to.

3.1.2 Participants

Using a purposive sampling approach, participants were solicited through social media: Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Facebook groups. Eligibility criteria for participating in the study were that participants were required to be young adults, either White or people that are racially underrepresented in society – such as Blacks, Arabs/Muslims, Hispanics, Asians, and others. Living in the Netherlands or Belgium; aged 18-34; a man, woman, non-binary or transgender. Usually,

research focuses on the Black-White racial divide and omits major racial or ethnic groups, and thus parts of society, such as Hispanics or Arabs/Muslims; hence the choice to go beyond the Black-White racial divide.

Plus, young adults were chosen because, as mentioned earlier, the visualization of police brutality on social media can potentially induce racial trauma, which is higher among young users whose brains and identities are still developing. Other selection criteria were that they should have a basic understanding of what police brutality is and its impact on minority groups; if they have been directly or indirectly (online or in-person) confronted with police brutality. If a family member or friend has been a victim of police brutality, and if they use it frequently or daily, and understand social media. It is essential to mention that it would be difficult to gather people's experiences if they did not have relevant experience with the above criterion to answer the research question. Participants were solicited by posting through social media: Instagram, Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn pages, and through a Facebook group (ESN), in which the topic was explained and shown the selection criterion (*see appendices B and C*). Plus, the people who encountered the template – with all the criteria– were free to share it on their social networks. Individuals could freely reach out to me; therefore, they voluntarily participated in the interviews. We know that stories of police brutality are shared and circulated across multiple platforms such as newspaper outlets, news and social media; for each interviewee, it was through social media that they first encountered such content. On average, most participants spend two to three hours on social media except for one who spends eight hours because social media are also her working tool. The result section will further elaborate on the interviewees' social media usage.

Moreover, each interview could be conducted either in English or in French. Therefore, when reporting results, this interview will be translated. Based on the thesis's methodological guidelines, between 10 to 15 people had to be interviewed, and 10 participants were interviewed; from the ten interviews, one was conducted in French. Before conducting the interviews, building rapport with each recruited interviewee through messages before the scheduled interview was essential. The preliminary conversation helped create a more "personal" interviewer-interviewee relationship to facilitate the open dialogue during the interview stage. Roller and Lavrakas (2015) claim that an early personal exchange with the interviewee also lends legitimacy to the study, which aids the interview process and enables the interviewee to feel at ease – delivering precise, thoughtful, and reliable data; especially when the interviewee and interviewer do not see each other. Also, looking at whether participants fit the criteria selection was necessary while building rapport. Next, each participant was given a date and time that the interviewee and interviewer decided to do the interview.

Interviews can be conducted in various ways: telephone, online, face-to-face and more. Two interviews were conducted on the telephone for the research because the interviewees were uncomfortable showing their faces as it was a sensitive topic for them. Four interviews were conducted via Zoom/Teams because it was impossible to meet face-to-face, and four were conducted face-to-face in a safe and neutral environment (a classroom). With Zoom or Teams, it was still possible to catch the non-verbal and visual cues; however, we had one or two technical issues for one of the interviews. The interviews ranged from 30 minutes to an hour and were recorded to ensure participant responses' clarity, facilitate each interview's transcription, and reduce bias. At the end of completing all interviews, Otter.ai's and Trint's transcription software were used to transcribe the data verbatim. Each transcription was reviewed to confirm the accuracy of the questions and responses. As Hatter (2020) points out, qualitative data aims to answer the research questions by understanding the data collected. In addition, transcribing the interviews allows the researcher to search for themes, find patterns, and dive into the data. The recordings will be kept for the duration of the master's thesis and no longer than necessary.

3.2 Data Analysis: Thematic Analysis

After conducting the interviews, it is necessary to analyse the data collected during the interviews. Therefore, the interviews were examined and summarised using thematic analysis and inductive coding. The most common qualitative data analysis method used in social, behavioural, and health science is inductive thematic analysis (Guest et al., 2012). The thematic analysis goes beyond counting words and phrases but focuses on discovering and defining both implicit and explicit ideas (themes) inside the data. Reading through textual data, detecting themes in the data, coding those themes, and then understanding the structure and content of the themes are all part of the process. Seidman (2005) also argues that the most convenient way of analysing interview data is by organizing the data into categories. As Guest et al. (2012a) point out, thematic analysis is still the most useful in capturing the complexities of meaning within a textual data set. As Braun and Clarke (2006) highlight, the advantage of thematic analysis is its flexibility. It is a method that identifies, analyses, and reports patterns and themes found in the data.

The researcher looks for common threads, patterns, and linkages between the categories referred to as themes. Therefore, in addition to presenting individual profiles, as a researcher, I can then present and comment on thematically structured extracts from the interviews as part of the data analysis. It is essential to keep labels tentative during the marking and labelling process since locking the categories too early can lead to dead ends; as Seidman (2005) highlights, one of the

categories will turn out to be helpful. As the researcher reads and marks interview transcripts, new passages that appear to be related to the same category will appear. On the other hand, some categories that appeared promising early in the process would fade away. New ones might appear. Categories that appeared to be separate and distinct will merge. Others may be in limbo almost until the study's conclusion.

To help identify the themes, Atlas.ti software was used to identify themes. This kind of software does not do qualitative analysis itself or automatically as SPSS does. It is more similar to a word processor in that it does not write the text for someone but makes it easier for the researcher to do so (Flick, 2009). The different themes found can be seen in the table in the appendices (*see appendix D*). The elements in the right column were the 28 initial codes, and the elements in the left column are the merged themes into the final themes. To name certain categories, words were taken from the original 28 codes that could broadly express what was happening in that category.

3.3 Ethics

Transparency and honesty are the most critical aspects of the interview process. Research must abide by ethical guidelines to safeguard participant information and confidentiality. Their consent to participate in this process was given orally by each participant. The oral consent form describes all the information about this study, such as the objective, researcher's information, interview time and their rights. The participants were informed about the interview process and the different steps, ensuring that they understood that their participation was voluntary and made clear that each participant had the right to withdraw from participating in the study and declined to answer any questions at any moment of the process.

Nevertheless, participants were encouraged and had space to ask questions to feel more comfortable. The fact that the interviews will be recorded and that the recording will only be used by me – the researcher – and will not be shared with anyone else was disclosed to the participants. If a participant expresses discomfort or is unwilling to answer a question, I will not push for an answer, as this is against their well-being and comfort. When presenting the results, participants' confidentiality and privacy were guaranteed to them by excluding their actual names and using P for the participant, 1,2, etc. for the order in which interviews were conducted, followed by a letter code for the race: W for White, and M for minority group; and a letter code for gender (M/F), (i.e., P1MM); as Hatter (2020) did for her work. During the initial selection process and before the interview, the participant was given a thorough explanation of the ethical procedures. Lastly, because of topic's sensitivity, at the end of each interview, I redirected the participants to a kind of hotline – *BetterHelp* – where they

can talk with licensed, professional therapists to protect their mental health, and the platform is available all around the world.

4. Results

Table 1 describes the demographic characteristics of the study participants. Interviews have shown that the participants comprised eight women and two men. Of those eight women, four are Whites; and the other four are part of the minority group. Of the four women who are part of the minority group, two self-identified as Black, and two self-identified as Arab. Regarding the men, both are part of a minority group, one Black and the other Latin-American. All participants are part of the middle-class group, and most have their highest diploma obtained as a bachelor’s degree. In contrast, one man has a master’s degree, and the other man has a high school diploma as the highest diploma obtained. Participants are either living in The Netherlands or Belgium. Or lived in Belgium and then in The Netherlands or the other way around. The oldest participant is aged 29 years old, and the youngest participant is aged 20 years old.

Through the interviews, four major themes emerged from the data. Those codes are understanding of concepts; social media usage and content exposure; the acknowledgement of the emotional impact; and participants’ coping mechanisms. During transcriptions of results, intersectionality will be operationalized. The results will mostly be shown and grouped depending on gender, race, and age, among others.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Participants.

Variable	Number (n)
Age (years)	
18	0
19	0
20	1
21	2
22	1
23	2
24	1
25	1
26	0
27	0

28	0
29	2
30	0
31	0
32	0
33	0
34	0
Gender	
Female	8
Male	2
Transgender	0
Non-binary	0
Race/Ethnicity	
Black	3
White	4
Latin-American	1
Arab	2
Socioeconomic Status	
High	0
Middle	10
Low	0
Highest Diploma Obtained	
High School	1
Bachelor	8
Master	1
Place of Residence	
Belgium	6
The Netherlands	4

4.1 Understanding of Concepts

At the start of the interview, each participant was asked what race, racism, and police brutality meant to them. Thus, they were also asked to reflect on their experiences and encounters with racism and the police. Depending on their background or the environment they came from,

people experience and view things differently than others. The context and thus their understanding will make sense of what is seen as racist or not, or what race and police brutality mean or do not mean, which can thus explain how police brutality content impacts individuals.

4.1.1 Race

Regardless of age, race or ethnicity and gender, most participants understood and saw race more or less the same way, bringing nuances to the concept. Most see race as mainly being the categorisation of people. Regarding women, for example, for P2MF, the race is categorised under two lenses: On the one hand, she states that her understanding of it is "...through, like, the very stereotypical lens with regards to what people look like". On the other hand, "...through um the understanding that, yeah, let's say race is a phenotype. So basically, based on what people look like, but also Yeah, their features...". Participant eight understands race as "the number of characteristics that have been used to um sort of separate people euh into groups and categories. And specifically, some of those categories have been um oppressed and um marginalised within that context". Participant four also argues that race is about years of social categorisation, putting people into boxes; society separates people. However, contrary to the second and eighth participant, for her, race can also include cultural, background and historical elements other the fact than just being about the way people look. The third participant agrees with participant four that she understands race culturally, like a religion but also habits, food, and the skin colour factor.

The fifth participant also understands race as a category, even though she found it strange to categorise people based on their skin colour. She argues that race can be helpful but also should not be applied. She states that:

...it is just strange to me to put people into boxes based on their skin colour. So, for that reason, I would think race or the term race is kind of not very useful. But on the other side, I also think it can be useful because obviously, your skin colour and the category that you fit into kind of influence your daily experiences and the way you are treated. So, I'm kind of divided between, should we step off race? Or should we continue to look into it? Because I do think, that obviously, there is a big difference in the way people are treated based on their race.

Two participants see and understand race as something different from previously stated. On the one hand, a participant claims that race has to do with the country someone lives in; she states that "if you go deeper, it has nothing to do with the countries because we created the countries ourselves. But um, for me, in my head, a race is basically, uh, from which place you were born in...or which place your parents are born in..." She even gives an example for herself; in her case, her mom

is French, and her dad is Moroccan; therefore, she perceives herself as Moroccan, French, and Dutch since she was born in the Netherlands. On the other hand, participant seven sees race as something utterly different from the others. She understands it as something that tells us a lot about our history and people's living conditions; plus, that race can explain a lot about different phenomena, discrepancies, and why some people can be found in that realm and others or not.

Regarding men, P1MM also sees race as being a category of people. He states that: "I don't know for me it does not make any difference to the human being whether they are White, Black, etc. so I do not really pay attention to it." ("Je sais pas pour moi, ça ne change rien à l'être humain qu'ils soit blancs, noirs, etc. Donc je ne calcule pas trop ça). The ninth participant recognises race as a mix of what was said previously. He asserts that:

Race? I think race has a lot to do with the way you look with things that you can notice based on physical appearance that relates to a specific geographic um location basically. Because you were born there or your family, or maybe even before them, your ancestors. But you can trace some physical characteristics that identify you as having a past from that geographic location. Although. It is very complicated as well because it is very diverse.

Moreover, he adds that: "sometimes you may judge somebody just on the way they look and end up being completely wrong, or maybe it is someplace near or something like that". All these various definitions show that race is not a simple matter.

4.1.2 *Racism*

As a Black man, participant one sees racism as something that happens daily for him; but he did not want to elaborate on that matter. The second participant, also Black, comprehends how the world is constructed. She claims that it is:

the way people with any sort of colour are automatically in an inferior position within structures, and whether its social structures, economic structures um there is always an understanding that, that particular races are viewed in a negative light based on the stereotype. And based on how far away they are from whiteness, generally. The worst they are treated. So, I think racial racism and racial discrimination is, I don't know, like very ingrained, and so I understand that as... Yeah, just uh unequal treatment of people that have melanin.

As a Black woman, she also explains that she had experienced racism several times. There are generally two kinds of racism: explicit – which not necessarily happens often – and implicit racism – which can be felt and seen more often. P10MF also shares this view. P2MF explains that racism is

ingrained in minority groups because, in some situations, people from minority groups must be a certain way and act a sure way not to make White people uncomfortable. Making those groups aware of their race more than they already are. Here is an example of explicit racism that happened to her:

I was at a beach in Cape Town. And the lifeguard kicked us off the beach because it was a "White beach" ...the lifeguard kicked us off because it was a White beach because it was in a White area...because of how wealthy and rich the houses are. And when we tried to explain that he can't do that, he basically threatened to call the police, and he called us like a very derogatory term in South Africa. I don't think it means something anywhere else. Um, basically just told us that we don't, our taxes don't pay for stuff in Cape Town, only White people pay taxes. So, it is like, explicit racism, but also, just so much un-education, because this person wasn't a White person that was doing it, it was another black person.

Another example of implicit racism – which she identified as implicit racism – but this time from the tenth participant, she explains that it happened during primary school:

I was playing with White girls, and at some point, I remember we went into a fight and, and they were just like pulling my hair and stuff like that...At some point, I went to the teacher to say, "Hey, like, that's what is going on, and I don't like it". And they were like, "Oh no, you are mistaken; they are just playing with you". And like when this happened to them, for example, or I just pushed them or whatever. Like then I was being punished. Which was really unfair.

The eighth participant view racism as “the act of marginalising ... and systemically oppressing people ... that have a certain race”. She insists on the fact that it is systemic by repeating the word. It is embedded in our world in every societal institution and is present in everyday life. She has heard or witnessed racist talk and commentary but no extreme form of racism. Like the explicit example of the second participant, the sixth participant defines racism as inequalities, when someone can do something that another person cannot do based on where they come from or their race. She was confronted with racism when she did the University of Applied Sciences in the honours program. She felt like people were not looking at her the same way as the others, so she was the only Moroccan person of colour. Thus, she always felt like she had to work harder than the others. The seventh participant views racism as being something raw, violent, synonymous with terror, and she is terrified of it. Like the other participants, she suffered implicit and explicit racist acts. For example, when being at the airport, she is treated differently because of her skin colour and daily racist acts that she calls micro-aggressions. Furthermore, she adds that:

...once you start identifying, um let's say tropes of micro-aggressions, and things like that, and uh when you start seeing those things, repeatedly um in your life and with the way people behave with you, it's really weird. Especially I feel like when you are yourself, let's say, moving up in the social ladder or developing yourself in your life.

As a White woman, the third participant sees racism as not accepting and judging someone because of their race (religion, skin colour, habits, among other things); not accepting the differences even though those should be put on the same pedestal. She has never witnessed racist acts but heard racist jokes when surrounded by White people, and she explains that they generally do not know where to draw the line between what can be said and what cannot, going back to implicit racism. Another White participant, P4WF, explains for her racism is when people create hate, or have aggressive behaviours toward another person of a different racial group, because of their appearance and thus assuming that the person belongs to another racial group than the person. She has witnessed many times racist acts, mainly against Asian or Black people. Even her coming from Greece – and being White – has been confronted with racist acts in the Netherlands. The fifth participant also maintains that racism is the discrimination of people based on their skin colour, ethnic background, or religion. She explains that she is from the Flemish part of Belgium and has friends of colour and that many people assume that they do not speak Flemish or assume that they are part of the lower class, for example.

Another example is that she hears derogatory comments toward women with headscarves when she takes the bus. Nevertheless, she also sees it in Belgian politics with parties supposed to be from the left – such as the Socialist Party Vooruit. Racism can be seen everywhere and every day. Lastly, the eighth participant defines racism as:

oversimplifying the identity of somebody based on how they look and assuming things that go beyond, uh, where they are born. So, assuming personality, assuming certain behaviours, uh assuming certain type of values that that person has based on the way they look. And also assuming a position of superiority like saying, I'm this way, I come from this place, I look like this, uh and if the other person looks differently, it means that I'm better and I deserve something more um, and I feel like I can judge entire cultures on this. The clearest matter is what happened in the United States with White and Black people. It was just a position of superiority and because they had a different skin colour, and they were worth less than me. (P9MM)

Furthermore, he has witnessed much racism. For example, when it happened in his country of origin, Columbia, people made racist comments in the form of jokes and did not see the matter. However, he says it would be unacceptable if people did that in other countries. Moreover, he also witnessed

structural racism with an underrepresentation of Black people or indigenous people.

4.1.3 Police Brutality

All participants agree that police brutality always involves violence or extreme acts of violence, and each of them brought nuances to the term. For participant one, as a Black man aged 20, it is an everyday thing. It does not shock him to hear and see police brutality since he and his friends are confronted with it. He insists that it has become commonplace; he does so by repeating the word multiple times. Stating that “...when you are African, you have more chance, on a simple control, you have more chance to be hit” (“on va dire que quand tu es Africain t'a plus de chance, sur un simple contrôle tu as plus de chance pour te faire taper”). Or even stating that “...if you are black. You are black or Arab and you are young. Pffff. You don't stand a chance. Being controlled...Black or Arab from Brussels. At some point you will get a slap in the face” (“si t'es noir. T'es noir ou arabes et en plus t'es jeune. Pffff T'as aucune chance. Étant contrôlé...Noir ou arabes de Bruxelles. A un moment tu vas ramasser une tarte...”). Insisting on the fact that the Belgium police are great bandits. Bryant-Davis et al. (2017) explain that people that have experienced and/or witnessed police brutality are taking steps to avoid those encounters – such as not making sudden moves and speaking calmly – but even with those actions, young people are still being brutalised. Participant one agrees with this statement as during the interview; he explains that when young people are being controlled and start talking to the police, police officers will tell them that they should go to the garage, which means police officer will beat them. Plus, he explains that police officers “will do everything they can to fuck you up”.

The second interviewee explains that police brutality is about the police using unnecessary force against a person, taking everything too far. Involving a power dynamic since she explains that they think they can do this as they are law forces, above lambda citizens. She states that:

...police brutality is...physical violence as much as I can show...they must use the power in a non-physical way police brutality, just like goes way too far with the physical violence where the basic just assaulting people under the name of the law.

P9MM also explains that he “relates it very closely to just police abuse in general...I mean, brutality itself of just abusing their power, taking people into custody without reason, making people suffer without reason, and just abusing their power”.

Like six other participants, P2MF associates police brutality with race and non-White people, especially with Black people. The power dynamic is understood as White inflicting pain on black bodies; “this would never happen to a white body”. Plus, for her and the eighth participant, being the oldest interviewees, police brutality cannot be dissociated from crowds. Both recall having a direct

experience with police during a peaceful protest. They explain being in a vicinity where rubber bullets and tear gas were thrown at crowds, and people were also being pushed. All of that happened around them but not at a super close distance. Two women out of 8 associate police brutality with not only physical violence but verbal brutality as well; for example, the third interviewee, P3WF, explains that verbal brutality can range from sexist, racist comments to being unfriendly. The worst case of police brutality for her is physical acts, touching or hitting someone without it being in self-defence.

From the interviews, when hearing the words police brutality, it seemed clear that most of the cases referred to came from the United States, especially George Floyd's story, rather than cases in participants' respective countries of origin or where they are living. However, one of the female Arab respondents also mentioned police brutality in Israel and Palestine. For one of the White woman interviewees, George Floyd's case was the first time she was confronted with police brutality – whereas the other White women had been confronted with it before this case – since, in Belgium, she found that people are not confronted by it in the media. However, she feels that it also probably happens in Belgium, such as micro-aggressions of Black people by the police or ethnic profiling. For the fourth participant, she states that “if you are a police officer, **no matter what**, you should be able to manage your behaviour and your anger. And be **very** rational on how you react”. The words put in bold are the word she put emphasis on. Plus, she emphasised on that in adding that

...I think there is no excuse even if you would say, I think there's nothing in the world you could possibly say to someone that would make them. I don't know either hit you or even like shoot you with a gun. You know. There's nothing that can actually excuse this kind of behaviour....

For one of the female Arab interviewees, what came to her mind was hate, unfairness, history, and no accountability – insisting that there is always a violent element, whether physical or verbal. Her cousin had an experience with the police; however, she claims that in this case, police officers needed to use violence because her cousin was being violent towards the police officers. They were thus using force in self-defence. P7MF, the other Arab woman, explains that she had an indirect verbal experience with police brutality:

With a friend one night, we were a few young people. I think we were around 16 or 17 at the time, and we're all in a parking lot, smoking jays, whatever...And some cops came, and at that moment in time, my friend had the jay in his hands and he had just that one last, you know, bits of hash, so he could roll another jay afterwards. Once cops arrived, my friend was really um, cooperating, if I might say. Directly said, okay, this is what I have, you know, and I only have this. And the cops decided to call his

parents still, and when my friend had his dad on the phone, you could clearly hear the dad saying, you know, come home, and I'm gonna, I'm gonna punch you and I'm gonna be violent towards you, you know. But then I remember my friend, just like, you know, finishing, ending the call and the policeman laughing and saying, "oh, you are going to have fun tonight".

Which she found very violent that a police officer is happy that someone will get beaten up. She also explains that she had heard more or less the same experience from friends, but the outcome was different because those people were White. In this case, they had a bag of weed, and the police officers only took the bag and let them leave; as she states: "...because one is Medhi and the other one is Remy"; again, relating everything to race.

4.2 Social Media Usage and Content Exposure

As stated earlier, on an average, 2 out of 10 participants spend between 30 minutes to an hour on social media, whereas 7 out of 10 participants spend two to three hours on social media, and one participant spends eight hours on an average due to her work. From the interviews, it seems clear that the respondents use Instagram as their primary social media. However, there are different platforms they use besides Instagram. There are multiple reasons for that, which will be explained later on. On the one hand, the youngest male interviewee, P1MM, aged 20, also uses Snapchat. On the other hand, the oldest male interviewee, P9MM, aged 29, also uses Reddit, Twitter and LinkedIn. For the youngest, he uses both platforms because both are communication apps where he can discuss with his friends; however, he also uses Instagram to promote his or his friends' music. On the other hand, the oldest also uses Reddit when he wants to learn new things because the platform allows discussion in a way that other platforms do not. He defines it as more of a debate, and political platform, whereas he sees Instagram as an entertainment platform. Concerning LinkedIn and Twitter, he only uses them for work.

Regarding women participants, the platforms that came back the most – in addition to Instagram – were Facebook (6 out of 8 participants), Twitter (4 out of 8 participants), TikTok (3 out of 8 participants) and WhatsApp (3 out of 8 participants). Plus, one or two persons are also using LinkedIn, Messenger and YouTube. Most use Instagram for its simplicity, ease of use, its visuals, the variety of content – such as the possibility to find news information – it is a younger audience, the fact that it is a communication application and that everyone is using it. P6MF added that she is more comfortable using Instagram since she has a private profile which means that the people following her – to whom she accepted the friend request – are the only people accessing her content. P2MF

and P10MF they explain that they do not use Facebook as much as before because, for them, the platform is more for their parent's generation, and they do not want them to see what they are doing with their life; thus, do not post nor interact with the platform content. Hence their preference is to use Instagram more instead of Facebook. For WhatsApp and Messenger, the women that use those platforms explain that those are communication channels. For the other platforms, no explanation was given.

A significant number of respondents explain being more active than passive on Instagram. Regardless of gender, age and race, five interviewees are active (P1MM, P4WF, P6MF, P9MM, and P10MF), whereas three are more or less active (P3WF, P5WF, and P7MF), and two consider themselves more as passive users (P2MF and P8WF). The active users use the platform similarly; they usually talk with friends, share – mainly personal things – and re-post things. The fourth respondent explains that she is very active, specifically regarding liking posts, whereas the sixth participant is primarily active on stories. The last participant is more detailed in her active use of social media; she explains that she is active when posting things on her feed or stories; it happens more per period. Sometimes she will be super active and stop posting for several days. However, to comment post, she rarely does unless it is her friend's post. P10MF defines herself as more of a liking, posting and re-sharing person. The more or less active users describe that when active, it is only when talking to their friends or rarely commenting on friends' posts. One of them does not like to post about her personal life; therefore, if she posts something, it will not be about her life. In contrast, one explains that she does not post often, but it happens that she does; it is only if she sees friends she has not seen for a long time or if she goes to a special place. Moreover, if she posts stories, they will mostly be related to work. Further in the interview, she even defines herself as a 'stalker'. The passive users post and share content once in a while.

Not every participant mentioned their non-emotional feelings when confronted by police brutality content on Instagram, only 8 out of 10. However, for those who did, regardless of gender, P1MM and P3WF used Instagram for the same amount of time. However, the female participant (P3WF) adds that it can fluctuate depending on her mood since sometimes she might avoid watching this type of content and sometimes she might want to look for information. However, this does not impact significantly her time spent on Instagram. Four participants mentioned that those videos come out of nowhere; and are generally confronted with it when the video has gone viral. Thus, people get "bombarded" with this content. One participant, P4WF, adds that this happens because of how Instagram's environment functions and because it is during those moments that people get very active thus making the video go viral.

Two participants agree that there are two types of content: one made mainly for White

people and Black people. P2MF, a Black female, elaborates and states that:

... I think some of the basic posts that are made are just like to White people like hey, guys, let's start from scratch. Because also it is like a lot of work. So, I think when things peak is the best time to try and get through to White people to be like, yeah, this is what's happening....

Thus, content for White people is made for their awareness. However, she feels that this type of content is also geared to Black people because, firstly, the content directed to them is more helpline posts or tips on if people get arrested. Furthermore, secondly, because of Blacks' engagement with that type of content; making Black people more confronted with police brutality content. This second element reinforces what Anderson (2016) stated. For him, racialized users are more likely to encounter and create race-related posts than their White counterparts; a post related to race is more likely to be seen by Black social media users (68%) than Whites social media users (35%). The last thing mentioned by women is their different takes on Instagram. Regardless of their race, most of them mentioned talk about Instagram being a double edge sword because it can be an entertainment platform but also a platform where atrocities are circulated. One minute, people enjoy themselves and the other minute, people are exposed to something traumatizing.

Another thing P8WF mentions is that everything is amplified with social media and sensationalized, and it can thus be detrimental to one's mental health. Plus, for some, this type of content should not be allowed, and there should be a distinction between the news and the entertainment content people get on the app. For P7MF, the fact that everything is subject to performativity and should be idealized and aesthetic on Instagram – whether it is on sensitive subjects or not is really disturbing for her; we are “slaves” of those kinds of platforms for her. The way they use and see Instagram thus also influences how they will be impacted when confronted with police brutality content.

4.3 Acknowledgement of the Emotional Impact

From the interview, it seems clear that the impact that police brutality content on Instagram has on people – regardless of their race – is emotional. As seen previously, interviewees either had direct experience or indirect experience (family members, friends, or videos) with the police. As Bor et al. (2018) state, people's mental health – who are not directly related to individuals killed by police – may be impacted. A significant number of respondents, if not all, expressed fear, anger, sadness, impotence, frustration, and trauma. However, for most of them, other feelings were added to the previous one. Here, the results are mainly grouped depending on gender and race.

For P3WF, being confronted with police brutality content, she felt uncomfortable because a White person inflicted that upon a Black person. Sadness was another recurrent feeling she felt because, as an emphatic person, she could feel what the victims – in this case, George Floyd – could feel. Lastly, she was sad about humanity. For her, those feelings did not go as far as being traumatic; as she states, she could continue her day without really being impacted by it. On the other hand, for P4WF, she found being confronted with that type of content traumatising; and states that:

...imagining you know how traumatising it is for someone just by seeing this. Imagine actually being the person that it's getting abused, at the moment, and I think that's what. Really gets, you know, stuck with me. Imagining how, you, you cannot really recover if something like this happens to you. I think, you will like. If I would, I could only, only imagine what that would feel like. And I think it would be very, very hard for me to even like, you know, trust people when I go out or, you know, like. If I would wanna, I don't know, travel or go to a football match and then I would not be scared that somebody might. Just, you know, find me threatening or come to me for, for absolutely no reason. So again, I can only, only imagine how, how you can keep doing things after getting mistreated like this.

As P4WF, P8WF claims that this type of content is also traumatising for her; and that as coming from a privileged perspective, the way she is traumatised is different from how minorities are traumatised. For example, she will never fully understand the trauma and stress of a Black person. P4WF also explains that she has cried got upset, and was frustrated and disappointed because she cannot understand how a human being could do such things. The disappointment also came from people's reactions to that type of content.

P5WF describes that being in contact with police brutality content renders her anxious, makes her feel stressed, and she has a hard time getting those images out of her head. At the same time, she feels that seeing those images does contribute to anything; she knows that it is happening, but she cannot do anything about this issue at her level. Regardless of their race, this feeling is shared with the seventh participant; she feels powerless. Plus, P5WF is scared that people minimise her feelings, and she is also scared to overreact from time to time; some women of colour share this fear of people minimising other's people feelings. She does not feel entitled to feeling sad, angry, and/or frustrated because the chances that she – as a privileged White woman – finds herself in George Floyd's boots are minimal, but that she also hurts other people by feeling that. Being aware of being a privileged woman does not mean that she cannot feel how she feels (i.e. angry, sad, anxious).

Regarding women of colour, fear is one of the most prominent emotional feelings impacts

that impact them. Participant number two asserts that she can be mentally exhausted and feels off and intimidated when confronted with police brutality face-to-face and on videos, which is why people of colour should be aware of their rights, according to her. As Bryant-Davis et al. (2017) states, young people, tend to know and learn to recite their rights to challenge unjustified harassment and violence perpetrated against them by police officers. Moreover, the lack of human dignity – with raw footage of people being harassed and killed – makes her angry (such as for the sixth participant); she cannot believe such things happen. This content is beyond overwhelming; it is triggering for her, emphasising the word triggering by repeating it several times. The fact that everyone is talking about it; the amount of violence done on Black and Brown bodies; the complete disregard for people’s privacy and dignity (which P10MF agrees with). Nevertheless, the exertion of power over someone who is not in a position of power; the lack of trigger warning; and the fact that if that were to happen to a White man, his face would have been blurred are the elements that render her feel triggered emotionally. The seventh participant adds to that same thought, the degrading and humiliating element of police brutality.

Like P4WF and P8WF, the sixth participant finds those content traumatising; the fact that many people a re-sharing the videos and that she does not know the motive behind people’s sharing those videos (i.e. because it is trending) is one of the main elements of her trauma. She further explains that people share the different videos but do not understand what is happening, like her. Furthermore, she explains that she does not share them because she does not fully understand what is happening. For another participant, the police brutality content brings her fear because she then thinks that this could happen to her uncles and little brothers. However, it is also stressful, traumatising, and triggering. She states that this content

...resonates also with history, Black people's enslavement and stuff like that...This always impact us until now, like with the racism and stuff like that, it still has an impact now and it's not going to disappear soon... It's just like seeing people dying, being treated not has a human being. And yeah, also the fact that people are recording, I mean sometimes it's good because then way more people are aware that this kind of stuff are happening to marginalised people. But at the same time, it's just like it's too much because there is a person behind that but also families....

In contrast, to women, the male participants are more withdrawn with their feelings, which only reinforces the idea that **men’s performativity include that they should be strong**; however, one shares some of the women’s feelings. The youngest explains that he has had several encounters with the police, stating that he personally does not care, which can be translated into indifference. The oldest, on the other hand, does not see police brutality content as being traumatic. He has not

noticed long-lasting consequences but creates a feeling of frustration, resignation, and impotence – such as some of the female participants –; emphasising impotence by repeating it multiple times. Working in NGOs, he has learned to detach himself from those feelings. As mentioned earlier, some people may find something traumatic whereas others will not; this may have to do with someone's environment and/or background.

4.4 Participants' Coping Mechanisms

Some of these coping mechanisms described by participants are similar to the techniques mentioned in previous sections, such as avoidance, numbing, and perceived social support. But also activism, keeping it to oneself and using digital affordances. However, those are new affordances. However, from the interviews, new coping mechanisms also emerged. The interviews made it clear that participants coped either by using multiple strategies simultaneously or at definite times. After the analysis, the study highlighted that the two Black women were those to use the most coping mechanisms, implying that they are the ones most affected by police brutality content. The study also highlighted that most participants started using those coping mechanisms when George's Floyd cases went viral – mainly by its end.

From the interviews, it is clear that there are several tendencies. Women – depending on their race – will privilege using one coping mechanism more than the other, or some will share the exact mechanisms but sometimes for different reasons or use it in different ways. For example, concerning White women, some, such as P3WF, would prefer to some extent to avoid looking at videos of police brutality and instead read about it. Whereas P5WF avoids watching the videos because already reading about it makes her sick and watching the videos does not arrange the situation. She further explains that people must put boundaries for themselves, and this is what she does by avoiding it. It is better to control what you want to see than to be subjected to it. Therefore, to avoid it, she uses one of the digital affordances of Instagram, which is the possibility to report content so that it does not appear on her feed anymore or that similar content does not show on her feed. Alternatively, she avoids content by scrolling really fast through her feed until she comes across something different; or by deleting her apps and reinstalling them at some point.

The two Black women and the two Arab women also use avoidance as a coping strategy, with one being the oldest (P2MF). Being the oldest female and thus having more experience, she decided to create two separate accounts, one personal (as she calls it) and one dedicated to more activism content and accounts. Therefore, when she wants to avoid being in contact with police brutality content, she will go on her personal account but can still go to her other account when she wants to

and depending on her mood. So, if her anxiety is high, she will tend to avoid her “activist account” so as not to fall into her spiral. For the Black participant, when a video appears, she will firstly watch it in its entirety, but if she sees it a lot on her friends’ Instagram pages, she will try to avoid it as much as possible by scrolling real fast. Plus, now that the platform started to put grey banners – that people have to accept before being able to see the video – before any violent video also helps her avoid the content. The youngest man repeated several times that he was avoiding police brutality content because it was too close to his reality. They avoid that type of content because, as Gerbner (1919-2005) illustrated with his theory, what people see on social media can resonate with people’s lives, which is their case.

P6MF, one of the Arab interviewees, explains that to avoid that type of content, she will avoid using Instagram and go on TikTok and YouTube, thus, distracting herself. However, when she sees too many videos of police brutality, she finds it difficult to distract herself. Other participants, although they found that Instagram harms people’s well-being, mental health, distracting oneself can also be a helpful coping strategy. For example, P3WF would look at Instagram’s reels to brighten up her day because people can find light and funny videos, permitting people to get away from reality. P4WF would look for specific hashtags but did not mention which ones. Others will go on TikTok only or listen to music because of the anxious environment Instagram creates.

Another frequent strategy used is social support seeking. All the women and the oldest man use that strategy. The oldest woman explains that she looks for support at any time, even when there are peaks and none. Plus, most participants explain that when looking for support, they talk about it with friends from the same racial groups, whereas three exchange a bit on police brutality content with people outside their racial groups, such as P4WF, P10MF, and P9MM. White female participants explain that it is easier to talk with people from the same racial group because one explains that when she posts something, it is usually directed toward people from her racial group, so, White people. Another one (P5WF) explains that that way, she can vent away her emotions, but it happens that sometimes she does not reach friends, and she does not know why. P8WF adds that talking with White people creates collective awareness of what is happening to minority populations. Women of colour explain that when talking with people from minority groups, they do not have to explain or justify what they are going through; to a certain extent, all have been confronted with racism their entire life, which is comforting. Their past resonates with each other’s, and they thus feel less alone and understood. For Bryant-Davis et al. (2017), people of colour usually look for familial support because, it is an integral part of coping. After all, as they state., “the family unit can provide a support against the experiences of invalidation experienced by ethnic minority individuals” (p.862). However, P10MF explains that she does not really talk with friends or family members and usually keeps what

she is feeling to herself; but the few times she talked with friends – even though it was not for a long time – she felt relief and felt less angry.

Next, digital activism as a coping strategy is used by all racial groups but mainly by White people. Some people of colour follow pages created by Black people or share some posts such as P2MF, but only to a certain extent. At some point, they usually need to disengage – such as the last participant, a Black woman – whereas White people will usually dive into it. P10MF explains that she disengaged with digital activism because, as she states, it was too much of it and was not helping her well-being because she started to get angrier. Plus, she does not want to put another burden on herself on top of what she already has. It is not her place to educate White people on the matter; she adds that with all the resources – books, Internet, among others – in our society, White people can find what they are looking for by themselves. Therefore, she had to stop.

Moreover, few Whites explained that they were sharing posts to bring awareness or participated in ‘Blackout Tuesday’ to show their support to the minority communities. From the interviews, a conclusion was found that people of colour who usually share things tend to put a trigger warning message before posting since they know how police brutality content can be traumatic, triggering for some underrepresented racialized people. Another strategy associated with it is getting more informed, which from the interviews can mainly be associated with Whites. By getting more informed, they better understand of what is happening and the different perspectives on the matter. One explains that to get the information, she goes beyond social media because social media are only good as a starting point for her. She states that she “feels like a huge portion of...your own education on current topics has to come from somewhere else because social media can be very good at introducing you to a certain topic, especially if you've never heard of it”.

Concerning the effectiveness of those coping strategies, all respondents agreed that those mechanisms are only effective in the short-term rather than the long-term, with one stating that it could last less than a day. One explains that it is because of the changing pace of Instagram that makes it very difficult for some people to keep up with the platform. P7MF adds that even if people do not use social media, those phenomena (racism, police brutality, discrimination) can still be encountered in real life. Plus, participants also agreed that they were more likely to use the same strategies if another peak was to come since those worked well for them. However, P10MF, a Black woman, mentions that she will certainly try to talk more with people because she feels less alone and less angry. A White woman will also try in the future to avoid contributing to the spreadability of this content because it can be exceedingly hurtful to some people, and she will do that by avoiding sharing videos. It is also essential to mention that some apply the same coping strategies to other events but also use those strategies at different times of police brutality. Lastly, 8 out of 10

mentioned that their background played a role coping with that type of content. Plus how they were impacted. For example, P6MF and P7MF explain that for them talking to people about how they feel comes naturally. Whereas P4WF explains that coming from a family that did not express their feelings or talk about problematic situations, she was always the one initiating conversations, not with a successful outcome, which thus pushed her to talk about her emotions.

5. Conclusion

This paper aimed to examine how young adults (18-34), consumers of Instagram content on police brutality, manage their Instagram usage to protect their mental health. Sub-questions were used to answer this research question. Those sub-questions were looking at the experience young adults had when engaging with police brutality content on Instagram and how they cope with the content to protect themselves. The main conclusion readers can get from this study is that race and people's experiences and impacts have a complicated relationship with police brutality. The different chapters themselves demonstrate the variety of individuals that resonates with them. The racial backgrounds of the different interviewees played a role in finding similarities and differences among them and bringing nuances to people's usage of Instagram and the content consumed on police brutality; and thus, the impact those content consumed had on them. Through the paper, different patterns and trends emerged. Some discoveries confirmed what earlier literature and study had revealed; however, the findings challenged previous assumptions, arguments and theories.

People's understanding of race, racism, and police brutality; highlighted that race is central to the phenomenon of police brutality. Race significantly impacted participants' understanding of what was meant by police brutality, as well as how and why the content of police brutality affected them. Most participants can recall instances of racism and online material depicting police violence that they have seen. It is clear that these experiences stick with people because some of these occurrences happened years ago. When talking about the emotional impacts of the police brutality content on participants, we found that women were more open than men. Men and women mainly were impacted in the same way – to a certain extent. However, nuances were brought due to their characteristics and experience. Respondents reinforced that fear, anger, and sadness were the predominant elements.

In contrast, the interview brought new insights – sometimes regardless of gender and race – such as people feeling impotent, powerless, triggered, and overwhelmed, among others. With marginalized people being more impacted by it than the White respondents. The interviewees' social media use and coping strategies were also nuanced, with the emergence of new strategies. It is crucial to notice that one does not exclude the other in the coping strategies.

During the research process, limitations were encountered. The interpretation of these results needs to take limitations into account. For instance, given that the sample consisted of ten interviews, the results could not apply to the larger emerging young adult population. Plus, not all marginalized populations were taken into account. Another limitation was the use of older theories. Applying a more contemporary theory to this research topic could be more interesting as it is more in

tune with the time. Despite the limitations, there were some strengths. Our knowledge of mental health and social media has been broadened. Secondly, the research improved our grasp on how to conceptualize racial discrimination as a form of traumatic stress. Thirdly, the sample was quite diverse regarding the small size sample.

Regarding further research, the manner minorities people' death – especially Black Death – is disseminated, shared, and monetized on social media platforms needs to change. The widespread dissemination of material on police brutality fosters an environment prone to trauma. Therefore, more investigation is needed. With the research, is clear that police brutality is an imperative and important problem – it is now time to implement and work towards concrete solutions, especially long-terms solutions for marginalized population. In taking into account people's emotions, we can gain a better grasp of how society views and values certain issues. Moreover, according to Donaldson (2021), there is a severe lack of medical and professional approaches that help victims of racism deal with their traumatic experiences and there is a serious lack in the research on racism as a traumatic stressor. Further investigations should be focused on the regulation of police brutality content – as well as violent content – giving the users the possibility to not see or engage with such content.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Guide and Questionnaire

Structural part	Questions
<p style="text-align: center;">Introduction/Icebreaker</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Presenting myself - Introduce topic - Oral informed consent - How the interview will be divided
<p style="text-align: center;">Part 1: Demographic information</p>	<p>Tell me about yourself:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Age - Gender - Race/ethnicity - Socioeconomic status - Education level - Where the person lives
<p style="text-align: center;">Part 2: Concepts</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How do you understand, and perceive race? - What does racism entail for you? - Have you had experiences of racial discrimination, with racism? Does it happen often? Where and when did it happen? What happened? - Have you witnessed any racist acts? - What does police brutality entails/means to you?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Have you ever had a direct experience with the police? - Have you ever had an indirect experience with the police? (videos, or if see someone in the street subject to police brutality, or family/friends) - What were your reactions when you learned about it? / How did seeing that impacted you? How did you feel?
<p style="text-align: center;">Part 3: Social media</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do you use social media? - If yes which ones? - Which one do you use the most? (if multiple) - Is there a reason behind that? - How long do you spend on social media per day? - Use social media affordances, such as liking, posting, re-share posts, comments?

**Part 4: Mix of the two previous
part**

- Are you often confronted with police brutality content? Or from time to time when the video goes viral?
- Which feeling occur to you?
- If had a direct or indirect (friends/family) experience does it impact you the same way as when you look at it in a video?
- Are the feeling stronger, lower, or the same when it happens?
- Which elements of the videos made you feel that way?

- When confronted to this type of content, what do you do?
- Is it effective? Do you notice a difference?
- Do you use social media more or less when confronted with this type of content?
- Do you reach out to friends?
- Are you talking to people from the same racial group as you or from another racial group?
- Do you always talk with other people? If yes, do you

	<p>notice a difference when talking about it and when you do not?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- When looking for support, did people minimise your experience, feelings?- Do you think that some of the content on police brutality is made and is for White people?- Do you think that the way you use Instagram has to do with your previous experiences with racial discrimination, racism?- Do you use social media as a way to distract yourself from that? If yes, to which one will you go and why? (if use multiple social media)- Do you use the same strategies when another content appears? Or do you adjust them?- Do you use the same strategies then when it first happened?- Would you say that your experiences with racism and discrimination influences your social media use?- Do you see a difference with coping strategy of your friends and yours?
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do you think that your experience/background impacts the way you react? - When did you develop the coping mechanisms? - Your thoughts and the desensitization of Black bodies - Are the strategies effective on the long-term?
<p>Part 5: Closing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Thank you - Any questions?

Appendix B: Criteria Selection (in English)




Criteria

- Aged 18-34 years old, living in Belgium or in the Netherlands
- Men, women, non-binary, transgender
- People from racial minority groups and White people
- Basic understanding of what police brutality is and its impact on minority groups
- If you have been a victim or a witness (online or in-person) of police brutality or seen videos about it
- If a family member, friend or acquaintance has been a victim of police brutality
- Use frequently/on a daily basis Instagram

If you wish to participate and are interested in the topic you can contact me (the whole process will be anonymous). The interview will last between 30min to an hour

Appendix C: Criteria Selection (in French)



Critères

- Agés de 18 à 34 ans, vivant au Benelux (Belgique, Pays-Bas ou Luxembourg)
- Hommes, femmes, non-binaires, transgenres
- Personnes appartenant à des groupes raciaux minoritaires et des personnes blanches
- Compréhension de base de ce qu'est la brutalité policière et de son impact sur les groupes minoritaires.
- Si vous avez été victime ou témoin (en ligne ou en personne) de brutalités policières, ou vu des vidéos à ce sujet
- Si un membre de votre famille, un ami ou une connaissance a été victime de brutalité policière.
- Vous utilisez fréquemment/quotidiennement Instagram.

Si vous souhaitez participer et que le sujet vous intéresse, vous pouvez me contacter (l'ensemble du processus sera anonyme). L'interview durera entre 30 minutes et une heure.

Appendix D: Codebook

<p>Understanding of concept</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Race - Racism - Police brutality
<p>Social Media Usage and Content Exposure</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Usage - Content exposure - Downside - Different sides of Instagram - Different types of content - Follow - Aestheticisation - Connection between real life and movies - Need to see these content - Experience, background/Examples
<p>Acknowledgment of the Emotional Impact</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Feelings - Impact - Impact of the reaction from others - Elements that make someone feel the way they feel - Powerlessness/helpless - Agency - Experience, background/Examples
<p>Participant's Coping Strategies</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Coping strategies - (Lack of) understanding - Control - Consequences of the coping strategies - Effectiveness

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Explanation behind the use those coping strategies (why)- Mood- Others' strategies- Noticing differences (when using them and when not)- Experience, background/Examples
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