



Framing the Narrative: A Comparative Content Analysis of how South African Mainstream and Alternative Youth Media Reported on the 2015 Student Revolution

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to demonstrate how alternative youth media, particularly online-based news sources, in covering the #FeesMustFall (#FMF) campaign 2015 students protest from October 14, 2015 to October 23, 2015, challenged news framing, while shifting traditional mainstream media's agenda-setting role. In post-apartheid South Africa in 2015, which was dubbed "the year of the student", the history of student politics was significant in what culminated in the hashtag #FeesMustFall campaign, challenging the representation of student protesters in the media. The unprecedented local and international alternative youth media and mainstream media coverage of the 2015 student protests—in print, online and on social media platforms—signaled the impact of the biggest student protests since 1994. The results from this qualitative research sampling online-based news platforms and interviews with journalists for their opinions on the blanket media coverage of the protests, shows a significant paradigm shift in how newsrooms re-examined what would be a silent consensus of framing and agenda-setting as was dictated by alternative youth media.

Keywords: Framing, agenda-setting, mainstream media, alternative media, independent youth media, radical media, student protests, #feesmustfall, counter-narratives

DECLARATION

I declare that this research project is my own work. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Journalism and Media Studies in the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Witwatersrand. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other university. I further declare that I have obtained the necessary authorisation and consent to carry out this research.

Doreen Zimbizi

14 August 2017

DEDICATION

To my parents, Estelle Mnikwa-Ndlovu and Christopher T. Zimbizi, you are my guardian angels.

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

ANA: African News Agency

ANC: African National Congress

ANCYL: African National Congress Youth League

BCM: Black Consciousness Movement

BF: Born-frees

DHET: Department of Higher Education and Training

EFF: Economic Freedom Fighters

EM: Effective Measure

FMF: Fees Must Fall

HBU: Historically-black universities

HWU: Historically-white universities

IOL: Independent Online

JMPD: Johannesburg Metropolitan Police Department

LGBT: Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender

MUT: Mangosuthu University of Technology

OWS: Occupy Wall Street

SASO: South African Students Organisation

SASCO: South African Students Congress

SH: Solomon House

SMN: Social Media Networks

SNS: Social Network Services

SRC: Student Representative Council

SRS: Stratified Random Sampling

RMF: Rhodes Must Fall

TUT: Tshwane University of Technology

UCT: University of Cape Town

UJ: University of Johannesburg

UL: University of Limpopo

UP: University of Pretoria

USA: United States of America

UK: United Kingdom

UWC: University of the Western Cape

VUT: Vaal University of Technology

WFMF: Wits Fees Must Fall

WSUT: Walter Sisulu University of Technology

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Student protests are not a new phenomenon in South Africa. In fact, at different intervals during the country's liberation struggle especially, young people led by either school children or university students have been at the forefront of struggles that have changed the course of history. Most notable among them is the Soweto uprising¹ on June 16, 1976 which laid the foundation for future student resistance in the 1980s, 1990s and on-going protests on South African campuses since then (Reddy, 2003). Stacy Hardy, in *A Brief History of Student Protests*, posits that since the country attained democracy in 1994, South African university students have had more struggles (Hardy, 2016). Hardy notes that in the first two decades of democracy, "there has been wave after wave of student protests, largely at Historically-Black Universities (HBUs)"²: However, Hardy argues that these protests had received little media attention until 2015 when students at the University of Cape Town (UCT) and later students at Wits University in Johannesburg, both Historically-White Universities³ (HWUs), "took issue with the legacy of colonialism, symbolised by the statue of Cecil John Rhodes" (Hardy, 2016).

¹ The Soweto Uprising was a series of protests led by black African school children that began in Soweto and spread across South Africa, triggered by the Apartheid regime's introduction of Afrikaans as the language of instruction under the Bantu Education Act of 1953. Since 1974 the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) and the South African Students Organisation (SASO) had been raising the consciousness among students. On June 16, 1976, 20 000 fed-up students from numerous schools took to the streets in protest. They were met with police brutality, which shocked the world.

² Mainstream media has been accused of ignoring protests at HBUs such as the University of Limpopo (2009, 2011 and 2012); Mangosuthu University of Technology (2009); Tshwane University of Technology (2012 and 2014) and the Vaal University of Technology (2014); Walter Sisulu University of Technology and Western Cape's False Bay College and the College of Cape Town (2012). They were demanding an end to financial and academic exclusion, among others.

³ Wits University, UCT, University of Stellenbosch and other elite varsities in South Africa are commonly known as HWUs. Protests at these privileged institutions always garner more media attention.

“Protests at UCT soon spread to other campuses, underlying youth anger at the legacies of racial discrimination and colonialism, high levels of unemployment and pronounced and increasing income inequality, crystallised into a national movement in October as universities began announcing fee increases in excess of 10.5 percent for the 2016 academic year” (Hardy, 2016).

Hardy claims the South African government was initially dismissive of the student protesters but was later “forced to impose a freeze on fee increases and find emergency funding” (Hardy, 2016). Fast-forward to October 2015, when South Africa was plunged into the most noticeable and intense student protests since 1994. There are several schools of thought about where the 2015 #FeesMustFall movement started⁴. However, what is not disputed is that the protests, which started off as #WitsFeesMustFall on the morning of October 14, 2015, revived student political activism in a way that had not been witnessed in South Africa’s tertiary institutions post-1994 as sporadic protests seemingly evolved into a national movement.

To put the 2015 #FeesMustFall campaign into context, the starting point is a look at several initiatives by students around South Africa. In early 2015, disenchanted students at UCT demanded the removal of colonialist Cecil John Rhodes’ statue. This movement, which later became known as “Rhodes Must Fall”, also demanded a decolonised curriculum and an end to the institution’s outsourcing policy⁵. Meanwhile, the Open Stellenbosch movement at the University of Stellenbosch demanded an end to racism on

⁴ There are several schools of thought on where the student protests started. The Rhodes Must Fall or #RMF started on March 6, 2015 at University of Cape Town with students demanding the removal of the statue of British colonialist, Cecil John Rhodes and the decolonisation of the curriculum. This study however focuses on Wits University in Johannesburg, where a sit-in by students started at 6am on October 14, 2015.

⁵ In 2001, Wits University outsourced cleaners, general workers and security guards to cut costs as South African universities grappled with dwindling government funding. The outsourced workers lost job security and a living wage. Following #FMF 2015, the Wits workers were insourced in March 2017.

its campuses. At the University of Pretoria (UP), the battleground was over language policy which favoured Afrikaans over English. All of these events were eventually overshadowed by the anti-fees protests at the University of Witwatersrand (Wits University) where the proposed 10.5 percent tuition fee hike for 2016 triggered the #WitsFeesMustFall (#WFMF) campaign on October 14, 2015. The fees protest then evolved into a national movement, #FeesMustFall, which later morphed into the #NationalShutdown on October 19, 2015. Under pressure, South African President Jacob Zuma conceded to students' demands, announcing a fee freeze for the 2016 academic year on October 23, 2015.

Badat (2016) posits that the 2015 student protests were a “drastic reminder of unfinished business in higher education and they forcefully placed on the agenda key issues: the decolonisation of the university, the social composition of academic staff, institutional culture, the inadequacy of state funding of higher education, the level of escalation of tuition fees, student debt, and the question of higher education transformation” (Badat, 2016).

During the largely peaceful but distinctive ten-day #FeesMustFall campaign, the students used non-traditional media and communication methods to unite, mobilise and communicate their discontent in one voice. The extensive media coverage of the 2015 #FeesMustFall campaign also sparked public debate on the role of the media in covering protests in post-apartheid South Africa (Jacobs, 2016; Suttner, 2016; Disemelo, 2015). The role of the media in the coverage of student protests has been well researched in the United Kingdom (2010), Canada (2012), and Chile (2011-2013).

This study, titled *Framing the Narrative: A Comparative Content Analysis of how South African Mainstream and Alternative Youth Media Reported on the 2015 Student Revolution*, uses alternative media as a prism to explore its impact and influence in the

2015 #FeesMustFall campaign. Its focus is based on one alternative youth and three mainstream media online-based news platforms located in Johannesburg. The four were chosen because of their proximity to Wits University, as their publishers all fall within a 10km radius from the campus in Braamfontein. The other motivation is that normally such studies tend to focus on national events. The study will also explore whether The Daily Vox, an alternative youth media platform, had any influence in the framing of the protests and the agenda-setting role of the media in general.

As stated earlier, the #FeesMustFall campaign was largely driven by students who used all sorts of media to relate their stories. The protests generated unprecedented media coverage—in local and international mainstream⁶ and alternative youth media⁷. The analysis of this critical and nuanced coverage of the protests by alternative media and the stereotypical traditional mainstream media coverage yielded very interesting results which are discussed in later chapters.

1.2 Historical Background

Documenting the evolution of student politics in South Africa is important to help contextualise the issues raised by students in 2015. South Africa has a long history of student protests including some that predate the country's democracy. The 1976 Soweto uprising, inspired by Steve Biko's⁸ Black Consciousness Movement (BCM), continues to influence today's protesters. Reddy (2003) posits that the 1976 student-led revolt was a

⁶ For the purposes of this study, mainstream media refers to IOL, TimesLIVE and The Citizen Digital, the three online editions of mainstream print newspapers (www.iol.co.za; www.timeslive.co.za; and www.citizen.co.za), respectively.

⁷ Alternative youth media refers to The Daily Vox (www.thedailyvox.co.za) a youth-oriented news platform which students used extensively to tell their own stories during the 2015 protests.

⁸ Steve Biko's Black Consciousness philosophy was invoked by the Wits Fees Must Fall Manifesto. The FeesMustFall movement defined itself, "both philosophically and politically, as a Black Consciousness movement, which seeks to understand the black condition in the university space and the place of blackness" (Wits Fees Must Fall Manifesto, 2015).

backlash against the introduction of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in black schools. However, Lyster traces the roots of this resentment back to the Bantu Education Act of 1953 which enforced racial segregation, condemning blacks to an inferior education (Lyster, 2016). Reddy notes that poor conditions at then HBUs, which he claims the mainstream media ignored, contributed to the politicisation of black students and the emergence of a culture of BCM resistance from the early 1970s. Reddy (2003), also notes that in the 1990s, “students from underprivileged and working class backgrounds did enter universities in significant numbers” but “soon the HBUs complained that they had to increase fees and monitor fee payment more systematically because they did not receive any additional state funding” (Reddy, 2003).

Students responded with regular protests and class boycotts at HBUs such as the University of the Western Cape (UWC) in the 1990s against the exclusion of students in arrears (Reddy, 2003). The fees struggle of the 1990s also raised other issues, such as

- 1) The continued poor quality of education at HBUs in comparison to the HWUs;
- 2) Universities’ failure to decolonise the curriculum sufficiently; and
- 3) Demands for alternative forums of democratic governance and a host of other ideas constituting post-apartheid institutions” (Reddy, 2003).

Reddy laments that by the late 1990s the universities’ rigid stance, together with repressive police action, broke the back of student resistance (Reddy, 2003). Throughout these phases, the common threads have been inequality in accessing education; academic and financial exclusion; and the lack of transformation (Reddy, 2003). He further points out that despite “the significant changes to the country since democracy many of these issues have remained unsolved” (Reddy, 2003). Today many black students from underprivileged backgrounds still encounter hurdles in getting into tertiary institutions mainly because they cannot afford the tuition fees, the main issue that triggered the 2015 student protests (Reddy, 2003).

Jacobs (2016) lays the blame squarely on the governing African National Congress (ANC) party for the post-1994 backlash over unfulfilled promises. Jacobs notes, “The student protests, which engulfed campuses for much of 2015, while limited by its narrow base and focus, gave a glimpse of what it could look like if the black majority turned on the ANC. The party presents a paradox: Dissatisfaction with it and the government are at an all-time high” (Jacobs, 2016). Jacobs also notes that between 1999 and 2003, after the end of the “honeymoon period”, service delivery and social movement protests became synonymous with democratic politics in South Africa (Jacobs, 2016). “By the mid to late 2000s, more sporadic and very violent protests characterised by retaliatory police violence, became ubiquitous” (Jacobs, 2016).

Suttner (2016) makes a similar argument but adds that the 2015 student protests went beyond the educational realm as they offered “a prism through which we can look at post-1994 South Africa and ask troubling questions about the nature of this society” (Suttner, 2016). But Suttner wonders, considering the continuing inequality in South Africa, “Can we say we are living in a post-apartheid society? To what extent do apartheid structural patterns of inequality persist today?”

1.3 Timeline of 2015 #FeesMustFall Protests

The student protests started off as the #WitsFeesMustFall at 6am on October 14, 2015 with students blockading entrances into the main campus of the University of Witwatersrand in Braamfontein, Johannesburg, South Africa. The sit-in was in protest of the proposed 10.5 percent tuition fee increase for the 2016 academic year. A week earlier,

on Wednesday, October 6, 2015, under the banner of the October 6 movement⁹, students, workers and sympathetic academic staff at Wits University had staged a solidarity lunchtime picket demanding an end to the outsourcing of general workers at the institution. But tensions had been simmering on campus since March 2015 when students in the Wits Politics Department went on strike demanding broader transformation under the TransformWITS¹⁰ banner.

1.4 Chronology of 2015 #FeesMustFall Protests

DATE	DESCRIPTION
Wednesday, 14 October	Under the leadership of the Wits Student Representative Council (SRC), Wits University students agree to systematically shut down the university by blockading entrances at 6am to protest the proposed 10.5 percent fee hike for 2016. Lectures and other activities on the Wits campus are suspended. Hashtag #WitsWillFall and #WitsFeesMustfall start trending on Twitter. Wits chief financial officer, Linda Jarvis, releases a statement explaining the reasons for the fee increase. Wits

⁹ The October 6 movement is made up of students, lecturers and workers. According to its Facebook page, the movement’s aim is to end outsourcing of these workers and to ensure that their job security is restored and they are treated with dignity at all universities in South Africa.

¹⁰ At Wits University in late 2014, a group of politics students released a document titled, “Transformation Memorandum 2014” outlining several frustrations with the lack of transformation. TransformWITS also demanded the transformation of the curriculum to reflect their lived experiences as black students of an

	administration applies for a court interdict which requests police help to deal with the protests. Some of the protesting students' demand that Senate House, a key meeting point for the student body, be renamed Solomon Mahlangu House.
Thursday, 15 October	Wits is shut down as the student protests continue. The South Gauteng High Court grants Wits University an interim interdict for police to move onto campus and intervene if requested.
Friday, 16 October	Vice Chancellor (VC) Professor Adam Habib meets with students in the Senate House concourse. After a sit-down with the VC, private security force their way into the Senate House barricading protesting students. The sit-in continues through the night.
Saturday, 17 October	Wits spokesperson Shirona Patel announces via a statement that Dr Randall Carrollissen, the chairman of the Wits Council, and Shaera Kalla, outgoing SRC president, signed an agreement at 6am on Saturday to suspend the 2016 fee increase. The statement added that no disciplinary action will be taken against protesting students or staff members. A council meeting is then scheduled for Sunday, October 18, to address students' grievances. Wits announces that the university will remain closed on Monday 19 October, "to allow council to report to University Assembly by noon". Students proclaim a "historic victory" but continue holding rallies under the #FeesMustFall banner. Mass media focus intensifies and the hashtag #FeesMustFall goes viral.
Monday, 19 October	Wits Council announces via the website, the cancellation of

	<p>the previously agreed on University Assembly. Council blames the students for this change of plan. Wits SRC's call for a #National Shutdown is heeded by students on campuses. This is communicated via Twitter, Facebook and other online platforms, by-passing traditional media. The hashtag starts trending and goes viral. Meanwhile, at the Wits blockade, a driver of a small van tries to force his way through a group of students and workers on Empire Road, one of the main arteries in the City of Johannesburg. His car is flipped over by some of the protesters and he sustains a minor head injury. Social media goes into overdrive on the story with images of the incident and the story itself.</p>
<p>Tuesday, 20 October</p>	<p>Wits lecturers join the student protest in solidarity as the shut-down continues. Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) Minister Blade Nzimande, at a meeting with university vice-chancellors at Parliament in Cape Town, announces that 2016 fee increases will be capped at an inflation-linked six percent. A task team is set up to investigate the issue of fee increases, and report back in six months. Students reject this resolution and #FeesMustFall and #EndOutsourcing protests continue.</p>
<p>Wednesday, 21 October</p>	<p>Student protestors storm Parliament in Cape Town as Finance Minister Nhlanhla Nene presents his 2015 mid-term budget. In the ensuing chaos, students are teargassed and manhandled by riot police. Several students are arrested and later charged with treason. Nzimande is booed when he tries to address the students. President Jacob Zuma slips out of Parliament amidst the chaos. Nationwide protests</p>

	continue and students add new demands, which include a fee increase freeze for 2016 and insourcing of workers at tertiary institutions.
Thursday, 22 October	Wits University and University of Johannesburg (UJ) students march to Luthuli House, the ANC headquarters in downtown Johannesburg and hand over a memorandum to the party's secretary general Gwede Mantashe, telling him "the honeymoon is over". They demand no fee increases in 2016, free quality and decolonised education and an end to outsourcing.
Friday 23, October	President Zuma meets with vice chancellors and student leaders at the Union Buildings in Pretoria. Wits SRC members skip the meeting. Angered by Zuma's decision not to address students, a small group of protestors set mobile toilets on the lawns of the Union Buildings on fire around noon. Riot police and helicopters move in to disperse the protesters with rubber bullets and teargas. Just before 3pm Zuma announces the fee freeze. Chaos ensues as police and a small group of students are involved in running battles. Students on the ground go on Twitter and Facebook to tell their side of the story, with photos, live-streaming and videos of the "situation right now". Messages of solidarity are relayed from London, the United Kingdom (UK); Sydney in Australia, and New York and other parts of the world.

Table 1: Chronology of 2015 #FeesMustFall Protests Source: www.sahistory.co.za.

1.5 Other Notable Global Protests

Student protests are a worldwide phenomenon. In 2010, students clashed with police in London, in the UK, over the government's plan to increase fees three-fold to more than 9 000 pounds (Cammaerts, 2013). The "Chilean Winter" student protests in 2011-2013, saw more than 500 000 people protest in support of high school and university students' demands for greater subsidies to address the inequality between private and public education (Cabalin, 2014). In Canada, university students in Quebec embarked on class boycotts and protests in 2012 against a proposed steep fees hike, which would result in an overall increase of 75 percent over five years (Despinage, 2015). Kenya, Ivory Coast and Burundi similarly experienced intense student protests in 2014 which resulted in the shutdown of several university campuses.

The above are a few examples of students fighting social injustice, with grievances including unaffordable tuition fees, better access to quality education and improved curricula. South African universities have experienced similar discontent over the years. The media coverage of these protests has been mixed in tone.

1.6 Rationale of Study

The ability of protesters to communicate their messages effectively depends on how they are portrayed in the media. The rationale for this study is therefore to explore how online-based alternative youth and mainstream media reported on the #2015 FeesMustFall campaign and the impact new media had on the coverage. This study is important because despite the large body of work on mainstream media coverage of protests in general (Gitlin, 1980; Small, 1995; Boykoff, 2006; Agnone, 2007; King, 2011; and Lee, 2014), this researcher could not find any studies comparing how online-based alternative youth media and mainstream media cover student protests.

1.7 Problem Statement

This study did not set out to investigate the impact of social media on the media coverage of the 2015 #FeesMustFall campaign. However, a preliminary sample showed that new media, especially social networking sites Twitter and Facebook, played a big part in driving the counter-narrative to the negative representation of students' protests. This impact will be discussed further on in this research.

Although Cammaerts, (2013); DeFronzo (2011); and Boykoff (2006) have all researched different aspects of mainstream media coverage of student protests in the UK, Chile, Hong Kong, Argentina and Canada, among others, in South Africa, there exists a gap in literature on how alternative media cover such protests. This is surprising considering the role students have played in the political liberation struggles of many African countries (Nkinyangi, 1991). However, with alternative media moving towards becoming the mainstream, academic research on how alternative media enabled Wits University students to advance their #FeesMustFall campaign and how this provided a counter-narrative to mainstream media coverage, will be invaluable.

1.8 Purpose of the Study

The framing and agenda-setting roles of both alternative and mainstream media in the blanket coverage of the 2015 Wits University protests provide the ideal backdrop for this study. The role of alternative media in the coverage of the biggest story in South Africa in 2015¹¹ takes centre stage because of how this elevated the debates around tertiary

¹¹ #FeesMustFall was voted 2015 Newsmaker of the Year by the National Press Club's Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University on September 9, 2016. The press club's chairperson Tanya de Venter-Bijker said unlike the 1976 protests, the 2015 #FeesMustFall had local and global support, thanks mainly to social media's reach.

education and youth politics. By attempting to answer the research questions below, this study hopes to contribute to the scholarship in this area.

1.9 Research Questions

In order to adequately address the research topic *Framing the Narrative: A Comparative Content Analysis of How South African Mainstream and Alternative Media Reported on the 2015 Student Revolution*, this study attempts to answer the main question:

1. Did new media or alternative media platforms used by students influence the mainstream news framing in any substantial way?

To respond to this question, subsequent questions will be posed:

2. How did the mainstream news media frame the protests?
3. How did the alternative media platforms frame the protests?
4. Can we detect any impact on the mainstream media news agenda by the alternative media platforms? If so, in what way did the use of students' tweets for instance influence the coverage?
5. Did either of these framings divert from normative expectations of how each would frame the protests?
6. Given the above, what can be said about the role of youth media in providing an alternative perspective compared to mainstream media on critical issues such as student protests?

1.10 Conclusion

How the media cover protests and how student protesters, in particular, are represented in the media coverage remains a contentious issue. While media's role in society is that of a watchdog, mainstream media have often been accused of being "biased in favour of the establishment and pre-dominantly anti-protesters, focusing on the spectacular crowding out real debate on the issues" (Cammaerts, 2013). However, Cammaerts found that this apparent stereotype of framing protesters was not as prevalent in his content analysis of

four UK-based right-wing and left-wing mainstream newspapers that covered the student protests in 2010 (Cammaerts, 2013). He concluded that this was because increasingly protesters have found a way to counter these dominant media narratives, mainly through social media driven alternative communication media. In South Africa, Maila (2016) claimed mainstream media was not listening to and distorting messages of protest movements, especially when reporting on protests involving the poor. However, students in 2015 “leveraged alternative media platforms to mobilise fellow students, academics, draw international support and express their own narratives which were ignored by the mainstream media” (Chunylall, 2016).

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the literature that situates student protests in media coverage is reviewed. The framing and agenda-setting theoretical frameworks, as they pertain to this study, will also be presented and discussed in the analysis of the alternative and mainstream media coverage of the 2015 protests. Given that this study is the first to compare alternative and mainstream media coverage of student protests in South Africa, the importance of the historical context will be explored. In addition, the role of alternative media and other new media platforms will add a new dimension to debates in reporting on such social protests such as the 2015 student revolution.

2.2 Background of Student Protests

South Africa has a long history of student protests. Therefore, the natural starting point for this literature review is to investigate the history of student protests in general. The media coverage of protests remains a contentious issue. Under apartheid, school children and university students clashed with the security police over inferior education, with the most iconic protests being the 1976 Soweto uprising. The uprising has been credited with changing the trajectory of the struggle for the freedom attained in 1994. However, students' struggles have continued in post-apartheid South Africa.

According to South Africa History Online (2015), most of these protests at HBUs were led by the South African Students' Congress (SASCO)¹². Students demanded more

¹² SASCO claims to be the biggest student movement in Africa. It organises tertiary students to fight for transformation of the whole system in order to achieve a non-sexist, non-racial, working class biased and democratic education system. www.sasco.org.za/php?include=about/who.html/

financial support; the acceleration of the process of transformation of curriculum; and academic staff composition and change of language and academic policies. HBUs such as University of Limpopo (UL) in 2009, 2011 and 2012; Mangosuthu University of Technology in Durban (MUT) in 2009; the Soshanguve campus of Tshwane University of Technology (TUT) in 2012; Vaal University of Technology (VUT) in 2014; and Walter Sisulu University of Technology (WSUT) in 2012 have been the worst affected by student protests. Wits University, a HWU, experienced protests in 1983, 1994, 2004 which received extensive media coverage. Most of the protests at HBUs turned violent because of the police's heavy-handedness, resulting in injuries, arrests of students and significant damage to property. Critics argue that mainstream media ignored these protests, only reporting on them once they turned violent. The media are also accused of ignoring the root causes of the students' grievances.

This claim was repeated during the 2015 protests, with critics arguing that the coverage of the fees protests only gained traction once they spread to HWUs—Wits University, UCT and Rhodes University (Jacobs, 2015). What made the 2015 #FeesMustFall protests stand out is that they galvanised students nationally around the same issues—opposition to tuition fee increases; a call for a solution to rising student debt; and the continued academic and financial exclusion of poor students (Luescher & Klemencic, 2016). With the relationship between mainstream media and protest movements strained, in 2015 students turned to alternative media and Social Network Services (SNS) such as Facebook and Twitter which enabled them to organise, mobilise and communicate their messages while contesting established mainstream media narratives (Jacobs, 2015).

This shift is important to note because alternative media gave students unprecedented leverage for them to tell their own stories. A content analysis of four online-based news platforms plus interviews with journalists and editors explore the impact of these platforms in creating counter-narratives to mainstream representations of protesters.

2.3 Protest Literature

In transitional societies such as South Africa, citizens use protests to express their frustrations and to speak out when they feel they are not being heard by the authorities. Protest movements have embraced online communication platforms to generate and distribute news much cheaper and to get instant feedback faster without worrying about traditional media. Agnone (2007) and King (2011) argue that these platforms enable protesters to communicate their grievances and achieve desired outcomes without worrying about how they are portrayed by the mainstream media. Researchers have noted that this shift has changed the often complex relationship between protest movements and mainstream media.

Scholars such as Shoemaker, et. al., (1991) and Sobieraj (2011) have been critical of mainstream media for “relegating and delegitimising protests by portraying protesters as deviant, menacing, or ineffective in putting their issues across”. McLeod (2007) notes that mainstream media generally disparage protesters and ignore their roles as protagonists. This “lack of respect”, he argues, “devalues social protests which creates dysfunction and ultimately leads to dysfunctional confrontations” (McLeod, 2007). However, Cammaerts (2013) highlights a shift in this narrative and attributes this to the range of communication opportunities available to today’s protesters. Lee (2014) promoted this protest paradigm shift.

2.4 Theoretical Framework

2.4.1 Introduction

The second section of this literature review discusses the two theories that anchor this study—framing and agenda-setting—and how alternative youth media intersects with both. Using the two theories, this study explores how online-based alternative and mainstream media platforms covered the 2015 #FeesMustFall campaign at Wits

University. While not unique in seeking to disrupt the traditional media's agenda-setting role in their framing of the protest narratives, the catalyst in the coverage of the 2015 #FeesMustFall campaign was the use of alternative and new media platforms as instruments.

2.4.2 Agenda-setting Theory

Mass media dominate how information is received and consumed by audiences. However, as the internet has developed, audiences have been overwhelmed by this rapid generation of information. As a result of this information overload, the media and public agendas have become blurred as news consumers can access information through other sources other than the mainstream media (Fuchs, 2014). These changes in communication have led academics and theorists to explain the media agenda's influence on the public's agenda.

Agenda-setting theory refers to the capacity of the mass media to affect the salience of issues in the public sphere. Simply put, audiences view news that is covered continuously and prominently as being more important than others. Agenda-setting, as a mass media communication theory, is therefore used in this study to determine if the alternative media's popular agenda affected or influenced how South Africans perceived the 2015 student protests.

Exploring the coverage of the 2015 #FeesMustFall using these two theories is vital because agenda-setting is often referred to as first level while framing second-level agenda-setting. Jasperson, Shah, Watts, Faber and Fan (1998) argue that while "the traditional agenda-setting concept attempts to explain only why one issue becomes more important than another issue in the public's mind; it does not explicitly focus on the nuances of coverage within an issue" (Jasperson et, el. 1998). Leading agenda-setting theorist Cohen notes, "The press may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about"

(Cohen, 1963). There is no better way than Cohen's to explain how the agenda-setting theory helps the news consumer in framing their perceptions of events such as the 2015 #FeesMustFall campaign. Newspaper columnist Walter Lippmann pioneered the agenda-setting theory in his seminal 1922 book *Public Opinion* (Lippmann, 1922). Lippmann would feed the media consumer images to frame their perceptions and measure their responses. He soon came to the realisation that what the media set as its agenda did influence the public agenda (Lippmann, 1922).

McCombs and Shaw tested this theory in their coverage of the American elections in 1968, 1972, 1976 (McCombs & Shaw, 1977). They compared the issues that concerned undecided voters against the media agenda. McCombs and Shaw concluded that mass media exerted a significant influence on what voters considered to be the major issues of the campaign (McCombs & Shaw 1977). While McCombs and Shaw's intended outcome was to measure how agenda-setting influenced the public perceptions, their work also pointed to how the messages were framed. Goffman (1974), the father of the framing theory, noted the link between framing and agenda-setting theories, something that was evident in McCombs and Shaw's research on the American elections (McCombs & Shaw, 1977).

2.5 Framing Theory and Frame Analysis

2.5.1 Introduction

Framing theory has become increasingly popular in media analysis research. Frame analysis on the other hand helps researchers define problems, diagnose a course, make value judgments, and suggest remedies (Entman, 1993). In this study, content analysis and interviews with journalists are therefore crucial for researchers to understand the news frames.

2.5.2 Framing and Frame Analysis

The news media are an essential source of information and communication for news consumers because information published daily helps citizens understand events

happening around them. This information is framed in specific ways for specific audiences. Leading framing theorists such as Goffman (1974), Gitlin (1980), Entman (1993), and Reese (2001) all agree that media framing influences the way information is presented and passed to audiences. In *Frame Analysis*, Goffman (1974) describes framing as a “schemata of interpretation that allows audiences to locate, perceive and identify occurrences and life experiences”. Gitlin (1980) notes that framing strategies used by mainstream media greatly influence how the public perceive events like student protests. Gitlin refers to these frames as “persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation of selection, emphasis and exclusion, by which symbol-handlers routinely organise discourse” (Gitlin, 1980, 2003). For Gitlin the media frame “is not a window into the definitive cognitive understanding of an event held by its writer, but an analytical tool used to examine how articles are portrayed by a writer to their audience” (Gitlin, 1980).

Researchers have incorporated the framing theory into the field of protest movements, particularly when doing content analysis. Entman’s definition that “to frame a communicating text or message is to promote certain facets of a perceived reality and make them more salient in such a way that endorses a specific problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or a treatment recommendation”, is used to guide this research (Entman, 1993). Entman explains framing thus, “To frame is to select aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular... casual interpretation, moral evaluation, and/ or treatment recommendation for the item described” (Entman, 1993).

Noakes and Johnston (2005) have used the picture frame analogy as the best way to understand how stories in the media exist within a “frame” (Noakes & Johnston, 2005). This analogy allows attention to be focused on what is relevant and what is not. And because “journalistic norms and practices shape media framing of issues and events”

(Noakes & Johnston, 2005), this was an important observation for this study. Reese (2001) provides context for the research questions asked in this study which analyses media content for frames. Reese argues that these questions help researchers who are looking “behind the scenes in order to make inferences from the symbolic patterns in news texts” (Reese, 2001).

Ashley and Olson’s analysis of the women’s movements in the 1960s concluded that the media engaged in agenda-setting and cherry-picked what to highlight and what to ignore (Ashley & Olson, 1998). Mainstream media framed the women’s protests in a negative way, by “limiting the attention protesters received and pushing them towards the backend of papers” (Ashley & Olson, 1998). According to these researchers, this is particularly important given that journalists have been criticised for failing to provide the larger contexts behind protests and instead cover them in merely the “disorder” and “violence” frames. Mastin, Campo, and Frazer (2005) posit that the media’s coverage of protests often leads to a polarisation of opinion on the issues covered. They also note that this is a direct result of media framing which leads to “pre-packaged interpretations” of these events. Sobieraj (2011); Boykoff (2006); Small (1995); Gitlin (1980); have all noted that mainstream media tend to ignore protest movements and the messages protesters are trying to put out.

2.6 Alternative Media

2.6.1 Introduction

Since this study uses alternative media, particularly The Daily Vox as a prism into analysing the coverage of the 2015 #FeesMustFall campaign, it is important to put the youth-oriented platform’s role into perspective.

Sociologist Patricia Gibbs and media studies Professor James Hamilton's paper *Alternative Media in Media History* is very useful in this regard (Gibbs & Hamilton, 2001). The paper traces the origins of alternative media in the United States of America (USA) in the 1960s during the civil rights movement, as well as in Europe when social and cultural scepticism were rife. The two theorists also note the evolution of alternative or radical media which has become recognisable as a "homogenously umbrella cluster in the last 40 years thus replacing or supplementing more specific designations such as the labour press, feminist press, or underground media" (Gibbs & Hamilton, 2001).

2.6.2 Alternative Media Definition

Scholars such as Traber (1984), Downing (2001, 2007, 2008), Atton (2002, 2007) and Rodriguez (2001) have come close to crystallising the definition of alternative media and its role in bringing formerly marginal voices into the centre-stage of public discourse. The main difference between alternative and mainstream media is in their content, production and distribution. Downmunt, Coyer and Fountain define alternative media as any type of traditional or electronic media used and produced independently by a politically aware population to provide content different to that of mainstream media establishments, (Downmunt, Coyer, & Fountain, 2007). Leading alternative media theorist Downing posits that such media "often aim to challenge existing powers, to represent marginalised groups (such as protesting students) and to foster horizontal linkages among communities of interest" (Downing, 2001). Atton (2002) highlights several features identifiable in alternative media, specifically noting low production costs and the efficient use of new communication technologies.

Alternative media are increasingly using digital media platforms. Protesting, tech-savvy Wits University students used their technical skills to communicate and access information from user generated content websites, internet blogs as well as video streaming platforms. All these are an essential part of online alternative media (Downing,

2001). The Daily Vox (www.thedailyvox.co.za) effectively used these platforms in its coverage of the 2015 student protests.

Scholar Michael Traber, who has experience working in Africa, posits that alternative media adopt “alternate values from those of traditional media by introducing marginalised social actors to become the main protagonists of their own stories” (Traber, 1984). He also suggests that when media is placed in the hands of ordinary people, the media become more useful and relevant to their target communities (Traber, 1984). Media and communications scholar Rodriguez, who prefers to call this radical media, argues that alternative media politically empowers ordinary citizens (Rodriguez, 2001). She argues that when people create their own media, they represent themselves and their communities better. Atton notes that since much of alternative media’s work is “concerned with representing the interests, views and needs of underrepresented groups in society as well as being homes for radical content, alternative media projects also tend to be organised in non-mainstream ways, often non-hierarchically or collectively, and almost always on a non-commercial basis” (Atton, 2002), a description that fits The Daily Vox.

2.6.3 Alternative Media in South Africa

South Africa has a long tradition of an outspoken alternative media. Under apartheid, alternative community media operated non-commercially, often tackling issues and conflicts that mainstream white-controlled media ignored. Switzer and Adhikari (2008), Tomaselli and Louw (1991), Switzer and Jones (1995), Banda (2006), Harber (2008) and Touwen (2011) have all researched the alternative press in South Africa which represented “resistance voices” and played an unusually important role from the 19th Century right up to 1994. Banda notes that alternative media in Africa serve “a specific ideological or political purpose largely because they seem to correlate with some socio-political dissatisfaction among groups of people” (Banda, 2006).

Banda posits that an alternative news medium should have the following features:

- The organisation and content of media should not be subject to centralised political or state bureaucratic control;
- Media should exist primarily for their audiences and not for media organisations, professionals or the clients of media;
- Groups, organisations and local communities should have their own media;
- Small-scale, interactive and participative media forms are better than large-scale, one-way, professionalised media; and
- Communication is too important to be left to professionals (Banda, 2006).

Harber's (2008) argument that alternative media thrives during periods of social and political activism resonates with Mbembe's claim that the 2015 student protests coincided with "South Africa's negative moment" (as cited in Jacobs, 2016). Argues Jacobs, "Though protest and dissatisfaction with the terms of the 'new' South Africa have been brewing for some time, there is a strong sense that the black majority is losing patience with the ruling ANC. The student protests, which engulfed campuses for much of 2015, while limited by their base and focus, gave a glimpse of what it could look like if the black majority turned on the ANC" (Jacobs, 2016).

2.7 Conclusion

This study analyses how alternative and mainstream media report on similar events, even if they are viewed through different journalistic lenses (Rusciano, 2003). Firstly, since framing overlaps with the concept of agenda-setting (Ashley & Olson, 1998) and Cohen (1963) the agenda-setting role of The Daily Vox in the coverage of the 2015 student protests is very important and should be acknowledged. Secondly, the #FeesMustFall campaign generated overwhelming media interest with the youth involved in the protests setting the agenda by generating their own stories and mediating the public debates that ensued. Thirdly, the media storm that followed the protests provided the public with

enough information to make up their minds about whether the students' demands were reasonable or not. Fourthly, the influence of such information ultimately determined the amount of coverage over the ten-day period analysed in this study. Fifthly, through the selection, emphasis, exclusion, and elaboration of the information by the journalists interviewed, the results of this study suggests that the media's framing of the protests was driven by the students, and this helped transfer "the salience of specific attributes to issues, events, or candidates" (McCombs, 1993).

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter explains the research methodology, data collection and analysis processes followed in this study. This is presented in two sections—content analysis and interviews with editors and journalists. It also discusses why the mixed methodology was deemed suitable for this study. Although the researcher did not set out to analyse the use and impact of social media in the coverage of #FeesMustFall 2015, Twitter and Facebook emerged early in the process as important resources, especially for the journalists covering this fast-moving story. However, the tweets were not analysed as part of this research but instead they were used to illustrate how Twitter became both a news source and news-gathering tool for journalists. It also helped the protesters narrate their stories better.

3.2 Qualitative Research

In order to respond to the main and subsequent research questions presented in Chapter 1, John Creswell's qualitative research approach was the most appropriate as it is used "to explore and understand the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (Creswell, 2014). Creswell recommends mixing content analysis of text with data from interviews. Such data is typically collected in the participants' setting and data analysis then "inductively builds from particulars to general themes" which will help the researcher interpret the meaning of the data (Creswell, 2014).

3.3 Selection of Media and Profiles

Four online-based news platforms were chosen for this research. All were selected for their reach; their uniqueness; and their proximity to Wits University in Braamfontein. Although they are all online-based, the daily newspapers they are affiliated to are all

Johannesburg-based, within a 10km radius from the Wits campus and have sections dedicated to local news. The four websites are Independent Online (www.iol.co.za); TimesLIVE (www.timeslive.co.za); The Citizen Digital (www.citizen.co.za); and The Daily Vox (www.thedailyvox.co.za).

According to Effective Measure (EM), in May 2016 South Africa had 22 news websites which attracted more than one million unique browsers. EM is the official traffic measurement partner of the Independent Audit Bureau of South Africa, and provides accurate traffic and demographics statistics for top websites in South Africa, according to www.mybroadband.co.za. EM also tracks statistics for online publishers, showing the total reach of websites based on monthly South African browsers only. All three mainstream media platforms, www.iol.co.za, www.timeslive.co.za and www.citizen.co.za have a national footprint since they are owned by South Africa's top four media conglomerates Independent Newspapers, Times Media Limited (now called Tiso Blackstar) and Caxton and CTP Publishers and Printers which also publish daily newspapers. In 2016, news24.com topped the list of news sites with 13.7 million unique browsers and 325.4 million page views. Placed second was Times Media LIVE at 5.6 million unique browsers and 49.7 million page views, Caxton Digital, publishers of The Citizen Digital, was ranked fifth at 3.7 million unique views and 20 million page views. This figure includes all publications in the Caxton Digital stable. In sixth position was IOL with 2.8 million unique browsers and 22.2 million page views, according to www.mybroadband.co.za (2016). The only alternative media source in this study, The Daily Vox, had 511 251 page views and 200 000 unique visitors per month and a further reach of 150 000 on social media, according to its website www.thedailyvox.co.za.

The above shows the reach and influence of the four online news sources in this study. Below the methodology used to collect and analyse data in this study is presented and discussed.

3.4 Research Approach to Content Analysis

The “power of the news media to set a nation’s agenda and to focus public attention on a few key public issues, is an immense and well-documented influence” (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Media in South Africa are in the midst of a digital revolution¹³ which, according to Dr Glenda Daniels’s 2014 *State of the Newsroom* report, has resulted in steady growth of online audiences and an increasing number of traditional newspapers pursuing “digital first” policies (Daniels, 2014). However, because online research is still fairly new and researchers are still finding their way around methodologies for online research, this study uses the content analysis research technique from print media.

Content analysis allows a researcher to be objective and systematic. It also helps the researcher to fully describe “the manifest content of communication” (Berelson, 1952). Prior (2003) recommends this research method—a mixture of document analysis and data from interviews—as this allows for the “reflection of issues that not only one of the methods would achieve” (Prior, 2003). White and Marsh see content analysis as “a highly flexible research method with varying research goals and objectives” which can be applied in “qualitative, quantitative, and sometimes mixed modes of research frameworks” (White & Marsh, 2006).

A two-pronged approach was used to manually collect data from the four news platforms. Firstly, using key-words, the researcher retrieved stories from the four websites and archives. Key words are important because they narrow down the search to the specific stories. The text of stories was then analysed. Secondly, interviews were conducted with editors and journalists. The information was used to explore how stories were framed and

¹³ State of the Newsroom 2014 is the latest copy available in this annual research series by the Wits Journalism Department. Newspapers have struggled with monetising digital first because of audiences’ reluctance to pay for content they would rather get free of charge. But this has not discouraged newspapers from continuing to push as news consuming patterns continue to evolve.

to determine who set the news agenda in the coverage of the 2015 #FeesMustFall campaign. This was done by assessing the voices or sources quoted in alternative and mainstream stories and the tone of those voices. Here the researcher looked at how the sources quoted in the stories described the protesting students to determine if the comments were supportive of the protesters and their demands (positive); critical or against the protesters (negative); indifferent to their plight (neutral) or mixed in their reactions. The articles were then accordingly coded as positive, negative, neutral and mixed.

The content analysis is “often done to reveal the purposes, motives, and other characteristics of the communicators; or to identify the effects of the content upon attention, attitudes, or acts of readers and listeners” (Berelson, 1952). The non-intrusive and inexpensive nature of content analysis (Neuman, 1997), suits this study. By combining content analysis with interviews, the researcher employs “a systematic, rigorous approach” to analyse data from the stories and interviews (White and Marsh, 2006). On one hand, an in-depth analysis of the news articles was required in order to fully understand the meaning and impact of the student protests. On the other hand, the interviews with journalists and editors fit into Puijk’s (2008) argument that “journalists do not only generate themes and stories”, but also rely on sources, “to promote a theme or a specific cause” which both speak to framing and agenda-setting. Because of the nature of digital interactivity and analytics that flow from it, news organisations gather instant feedback from their audiences (Puijk, 2008).

3.5 Data Collection

The researcher identified a list of key-words and settled on the following “Fees Must Fall 2015”, “student protests”, and “fee protests”. Using these key-words, individual searches of all four news websites and archives were done to get the relevant stories. This technique is important in the study of media messages (Priest, 2010). All the stories were

printed and manually coded. Media frames and common themes were identified by examining the language used to describe the protests and the behaviour of the protesters, police and other actors in the conflict. A number of dominant frames and common themes emerged and were listed and grouped into manageable clusters (Boykoff, 2006, Feffer, 2008). Interviews with four editors and seven journalists were conducted to determine what influenced the news agenda and how the stories were framed in different media.

As a journalist, the researcher knew several of the journalists and editors, which helped with contacts. Consent was sought from selected respondents during the early stages of the research. An introduction letter approved by the supervisor (Alan Finlay) was attached to the list of questions e-mailed to all the respondents stating the purpose and focus of the study. Some respondents chose to respond to the questions by e-mail while others preferred face-to-face and telephone interviews. All interviews were recorded and then transcribed.

3.6 Sampling and Sample Size

Two sampling techniques—constructive week sampling and purposeful sampling—were used in this research to cover the content analysis and interviews, respectively. Krippendorff (1980) posits that sampling is done “to generate a manageable subset of data from a large population or a sampling frame to represent this population”.

He also notes that an ideal sample should be cost-effective as it “is a trade-off between the ease for study and the representativeness of the population” (Krippendorff, 1980). “Thus, content analysis should determine how to define a tangible sampling frame, how to draw a representative sample from the sampling frame, and how large the sample size must, not only be effective but also efficient” (Krippendorff, 1980). Riffe, et al., (1996), Wang and Riffe (2010) have extensively researched the importance of sample size, especially in qualitative content analysis research like this study. Wang argues that an

effective and efficient sample size will save the researcher the cost of analysing too much data “especially the overwhelming online data and simultaneously reduce sample error to maintain reasonable validity” (Wang, 2006).

3.7 Constructive Week Sampling

The constructive week sampling, which is a popular content analysis sampling technique for communication researchers (Stryker, Wray, & Yanovitzky, 2006) was chosen for the first part of this research. Although this study covers ten days of protests “constructed week sampling is more efficient than simple random sampling or consecutive day sampling” (Dougall & Hester, 2011) which could have been used. The stratified random sampling¹⁴ (SRS) technique is also acceptable for this research as it represents slightly more than seven consecutive days of the week. Prasad (2008) recommends that the content analysis sample should specify the research topic and time period it is focused on, which this study does.

This sampling is consistent with traditional print media research. Some researchers have lamented the lack of research around the sampling techniques for online news sources (Prasad, 2008), which is a limitation for this study. Riffe, Lacy and Drager argue that “the overall goal of constructive week sampling is to create maximum sampling efficiency while controlling for cyclical biases” (Riffe et. al., 1996). They argue that too few sampling units may lead to unreliable estimates and invalid results, whereas too many may be a waste of coding resources” (Riffe et al., 1996).

¹⁴ Stratified random sampling is a method of sampling that involves the division of a population into smaller groups known as strata. In SRS, the strata are formed based on members’ shared attributes or characteristics. These subsets of the strata are then pooled to form a random sample (www.investopedia.com/terms/stratified_random_sampling.asp).

3.8 Purposive Sampling

Purposive sampling (for interviews) requires a small sample and targets only those relevant to the subject under study as it saves time and is cost effective (Krippendorff, 1980). In total four editors were interviewed while eleven journalists were approached but only seven responded. In purposive sampling the researcher selects a small sample of people who can best help her understand the research subject (Creswell, 2014). The researcher identified and approached the respondents for interviews based on their involvement in the coverage of the 2015 student protests. This was crucial because the participants had first-hand knowledge of the topic being researched and could therefore give reliable, credible information (Creswell, 2014).

3.9 The Sample

Electronic data searches have several advantages. They save time because of their efficiency in finding relevant text even in non-news sections of the newspaper (Maney & Oliver, 2001). The researcher was able to produce a manageable sample catalogue of 130 articles: TimesLIVE (40); IOL/The Star (40); The Daily Vox (25); The Citizen Digital (25). The articles included news, opinion and editorials, and cartoons.

The articles were catalogued, with each item numbered in the margin. Included in the catalogue were the publication date; the headline of the story; the name of the journalist/writer and sources or voices quoted. This process helped the researcher to identify the dominant frames/agenda-setting influence; to identify the issues discussed (themes); and to establish the tone of the stories which were then coded as positive or negative, neutral or mixed.

Positive stories included articles (and headlines, captions, cartoons) that affirmed the students' struggles for affordable higher education while the negative articles condemned the protesters for their actions. These typically framed the protesters as being disruptive

hooligans who felt entitled to free education. The mixed articles tried to balance the students' demands and whether the government and the universities could afford free tuition for all. The journalists attempted to balance the views of the main protagonists. The neutral articles stated the bare facts, mainly from statements or press releases issued by universities and those who spoke for the students. Below are some of the examples, which mainly manifested in the headlines, photographs used and sources, quoted.

Positive examples:

- *TUT vice-chancellor speaks on Fees Must Fall* in The Citizen Digital on October 23 (Reporter, 2015)
- *#FeesMustFall at UCT: "It's about time the students spoke"*, in The Daily Vox (Pather, 2015)

Negative examples:

- *Video: UJ students join Wits protest, shut down Empire Road* in The Citizen Digital (Tau, 2015)
- *Students refuse to let Mantashe speak* in IOL (Aboobaker, 2015)

Neutral examples:

- *A blanket university fee reduction benefits the wealthy – and slows change* in TimesLIVE (Fourie, 2015)
- *Wits to open next week* in IOL (Makhafola, 2015)

Mixed examples:

- *Wits fees gripe 'legitimate', says Habib* in IOL (Makhafola, 2015)
- *Opportunity amid the crisis* in TimesLIVE (Readers, 2015)

3.10 Selection of Study Period and Rationale

The 2015 #FeesMustFall campaign started at Wits University on October 14, 2015. Over the next ten days the protests spread to other university campuses across South Africa triggering the #NationalShutDown on October 19, 2015. The protests intensified as students took their grievances to the ANC headquarters Luthuli House in Johannesburg and to Union Buildings on October 23, when President Jacob Zuma announced a fee-freeze in Pretoria (**See Table 1 for chronology of protests**). Marches to Parliament, the ANC headquarters and Union Buildings had political significance hence they are highlighted in this research.

3.11 Selection of Participants and Rationale

The selection of interview participants was very important to ensure the study's integrity. The respondents—four editors and seven journalists—were in the frontline of the 2015 #FeesMustFall protests coverage. The editors are all experienced journalists who are knowledgeable of the news production cycles and make crucial news selection decisions all the time. The journalists were young, tech-savvy and identified with the students as some of them were recent graduates being weighed down by student debt, one of the main grievances. They also used their technical skills to boost their work. At least one editor admitted that journalists challenged some of the stereotypical mainstream media narratives and gatekeeping role during the protests because they witnessed events as they unfolded.

Some journalists described 2015 #FeesMustFall campaign as the “first, truly social media-driven” protest event in South Africa. This is evident in the results of this study which show later how new media platforms helped with the disruption of the traditional media's agenda-setting role as students were able to reframe the narratives, especially when they felt they were being misrepresented in mainstream media.

Below the details of the interview respondents in this study are presented.

3.12 Details of the Editors

Full Names	Gender	Online News Source	Job Title	Form of interview
Khadija Patel	Female	The Daily Vox	Founding co-editor	Telephone interview
Dominic Mahlangu	Male	TimesLIVE	Deputy Editor, TimesLIVE	Face-to-face interview
Adrian Ephraim	Male	IOL/The Star	Group Digital Content Editor	Email interview
Devlin Brown	Male	The Citizen Digital	Digital Editor: The Citizen	Email interview

Table 2: Details of Editors

3.13 Details of the Journalists

Full names	Gender	Online news source	Job Title	Form of interview
Aaisha Dadi Patel	Female	The Daily Vox	Senior Reporter	Face-to-face
Pontsho Pilane	Female	The Daily Vox	Senior Reporter	Telephone
Gertrude Makhafola	Female	African News Agency (ANA)	Senior Reporter	Email
Tsholofelo Wesi	Male	The Citizen Digital	Reporter	Email
Mzwandile Khathi	Male	The Citizen	Junior Reporter	Email
Shenaaz Jamal	Female	TimesLIVE	Junior Reporter	Email
Poppy Louw	Female	TimesLIVE	Education	Email

			Reporter	
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Table 3: Details of Journalists

3.14 Significance of the Interviews

In research, interviews are used to gain access to credible information. Interviews can be formal face-to-face conversations with the researcher eliciting information from the respondents (Burns, 2000). This benefits the researcher as she can ask follow up questions to get in-depth responses, and allows some respondents to express their opinions and concerns (Dooley, 2003). Semi-structured interviews, which were used in this study, work as “step-by-step guides that the researcher will use to obtain information from the population” (McLeod, 2014). The face-to-face, telephone and email interviews conducted in this study consisted of several key questions sent out as a guide to the respondents. Qualitative interviews are also “...conversations in which a researcher gently guides a conversational partner in an extended discussion. The researcher elicits depth and detail about the research topic by following up on answers given by the interviewee during the discussion” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). They also note that “qualitative research is not simply learning about a topic, but also learning what is important to those being studied” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

Researchers can use all the above interviewing techniques to dig deeper into important roles played by respondents in a study. This was particularly true for the two journalists of The Daily Vox and other recent graduates who were on the ground during the protests as students and activists at Wits University. Because of these multiple roles, the two respondents brought a different perspective to the narrative with new depth of understanding (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). They also sympathised with the protesters.

3.15 The Interviewing Process

Initial contact with respondents was done via e-mail, SMS, WhatsApp and Twitter. The introduction letter stated the purpose of initiating contact and asked the respondents to participate in the study, which most of them agreed to do. However, journalists at The Star (IOL) were the hardest to pin-down. The education reporter ignored several e-mails, phone calls and Twitter direct messaging. The second reporter, an intern during the protests had by then returned to the USA and several e-mails to her bounced. Two other reporters did not respond. The researcher then approached an African News Agency (ANA) senior journalist (Gertrude Makhafola) who contributed a lot of stories to IOL. ANA is Africa's first syndicated multi-media news service launched in 2015 as a joint venture between Independent Media and the Pan African Business Forum (ANA, 2015). Seven journalists, five females and two males, participated in this study as did four editors—one woman and three men. Once they agreed to participate in the study, a list of questions was then e-mailed to all respondents with deadlines for responses set. For those who preferred telephone or face-to-face interviews, appointments were made and confirmed.

The TimesLIVE editor (Dominic Mahlangu) was interviewed face-to-face while The Daily Vox founding editor (Khadija Patel) preferred a telephone interview because of her busy schedule. Patel had just been appointed the editor-in-chief of the Mail & Guardian newspaper in Johannesburg. The Citizen Digital editor Devlin Brown and IOL's Adrian Ephraim emailed their responses. The Daily Vox journalist Pontsho Pilane opted for a 30-minute telephone interview while her colleague Aisha Dadi Patel's face-to-face interview on campus that lasted 45 minutes. All four interviews were recorded and transcribed.

Analysing data from the content analysis and the interviews was crucial in answering the main and subsequent research questions listed below:

1. Did new media or alternative media platforms used by students influence the mainstream news framing in any substantial way?
2. How did the mainstream news media frame the protests?
3. How did the alternative media platforms frame the protests?
4. Can we detect any impact on the mainstream media news agenda by the alternative media platforms? If so, in what way did the use of students' tweets for instance influence the coverage?
5. Did either of these framings divert from our normative expectations of how each would frame the protests?
6. Given the above, what can be said about the role of youth media in providing an alternative perspective compared to mainstream media on critical issues such as student protests?

3.16 Conclusion

The detailed research methodology discussed above shows the step-by-step processes followed in this study. While the process is labour intensive and time consuming, this was very important in order for the researcher to pay close attention to the issues being discussed. The content analysis and the interviews complimented each other to help the researcher reach the conclusions that are discussed in detail in Chapter Four below.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND DATA ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

In the first section of this chapter the results of the qualitative content analysis of articles in all four online-based news platforms which are part of this study are presented and discussed. This is done to determine how the coverage of the 2015 #FeesMustFall campaign was framed in alternative and mainstream media. This is also done to determine whether alternative media were successful in disrupting the mainstream media agenda and influencing the public's news agenda. The second section analyses the interviews with editors and journalists to gauge both the framing and agenda-setting roles of both media. The two theoretical frameworks discussed earlier—framing and agenda-setting—are used to explore the role youth media played in providing an alternative perspective to that of mainstream media on the critical issues raised by students. This is explained through the analysis presented below.

4.2 Analysis of Data of all Four News Sites

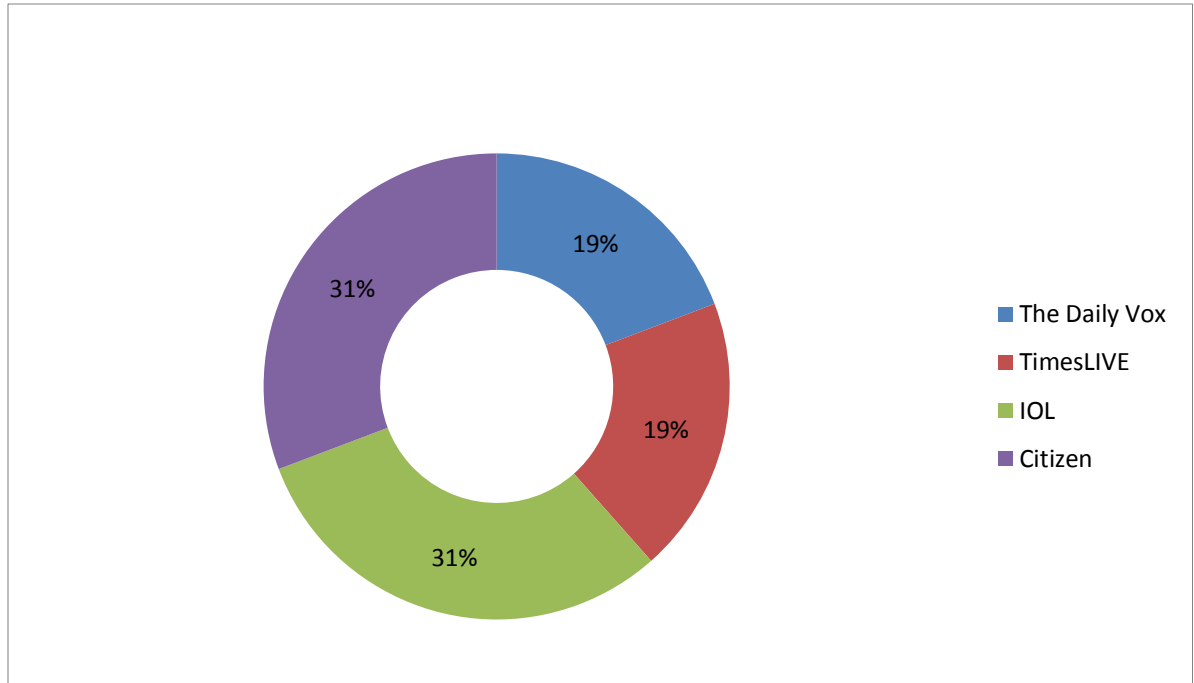


Figure 1—Breakdown of Stories in all Four News Sites

The above pie-chart represents all 130 articles published in the four news platforms during the protests from October 14, 2015 and October 23, 2015. From the sample, IOL and The Citizen Digital each published 40 articles. This represented a split of 31 percent each of the total sample. At 19 percent each of the sample, TimesLIVE and The Daily Vox each had 25 articles published. The pie-chart shows only the articles published online although the news platforms had much more traffic on their Social Media Networks (SMNs) such as Facebook and Twitter which were not part of this analysis.

Data shows that media coverage of the protests rose sharply in both mainstream and alternative media when students heeded the call by the #WitsFeesMustFall student leaders for #NationalShutDown on October 19, 2015. Coverage also spiked during

marches to Parliament in Cape Town on October 21; when students marched to Luthuli House, the ANC headquarters in Johannesburg on October 22; and during the march to the Union Buildings in Pretoria on October 23, 2015. All four dates have political significance because these were marches to the country's seats of economic and political power and the students were demanding to be heard. This is important to note because increasingly in post-apartheid South Africa, citizens who feel ignored have resorted to protests to get the government, business and politicians' attention (Jacobs, 2016).

4.3 Alternative and Mainstream Media Analysis

This section analyses the tone of the articles to establish how the protesters and their supporters were represented in the media. Stories were categorised as being either positive, negative, neutral or mixed in tone (**See 3.9: The sample**). The tone of an article helps to determine whose voices were quoted and if the use of these sources made any difference in the representation of protesting students. The language used is what frames the narratives.

4.3.1 Analysis of Tone of Stories in The Daily Vox

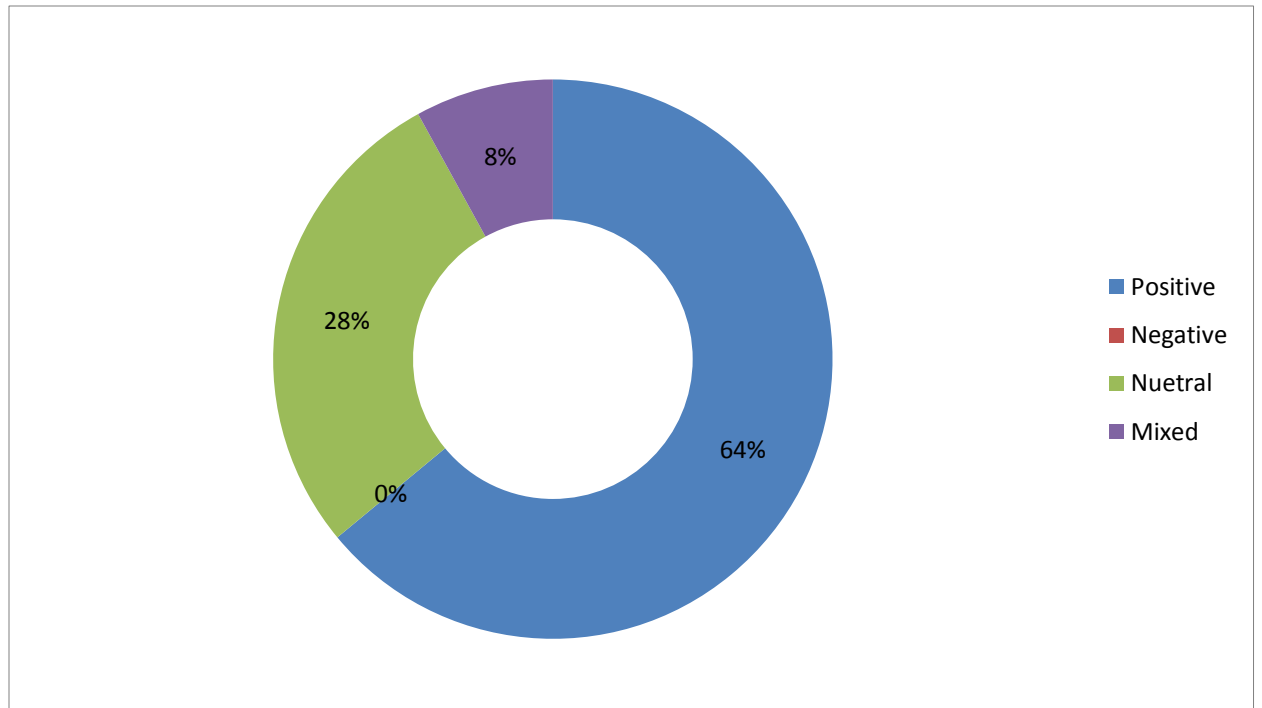


Figure 2—Tone of Stories in The Daily Vox

The Daily Vox, the only alternative news platform in this study, had the highest number of positive articles at 64 percent (**Figure 2**). It framed the students as responsible protesters with legitimate demands. In at least 28 percent of the stories, the platform was neutral in tone while eight percent had mixed tones, an attempt to give both sides of the story. The number of negative stories in this sample was negligible. This is not surprising because in interviews, The Daily Vox’s founding editor (Khadija Patel) and two journalists (Aaisha Dadi Patel and Pontsho Pilane) were unapologetic about being “biased in favour of team underdog”. They prioritised the voices of students in their articles. Dadi Patel and Pilane were Media Studies honours students and activists at Wits during the 2015 protests and had been reporting on the simmering tensions on campuses for months before October 14. (See **4.9: Interview Responses**)

4.3.2 Analysis of Tone of Stories in TimesLIVE

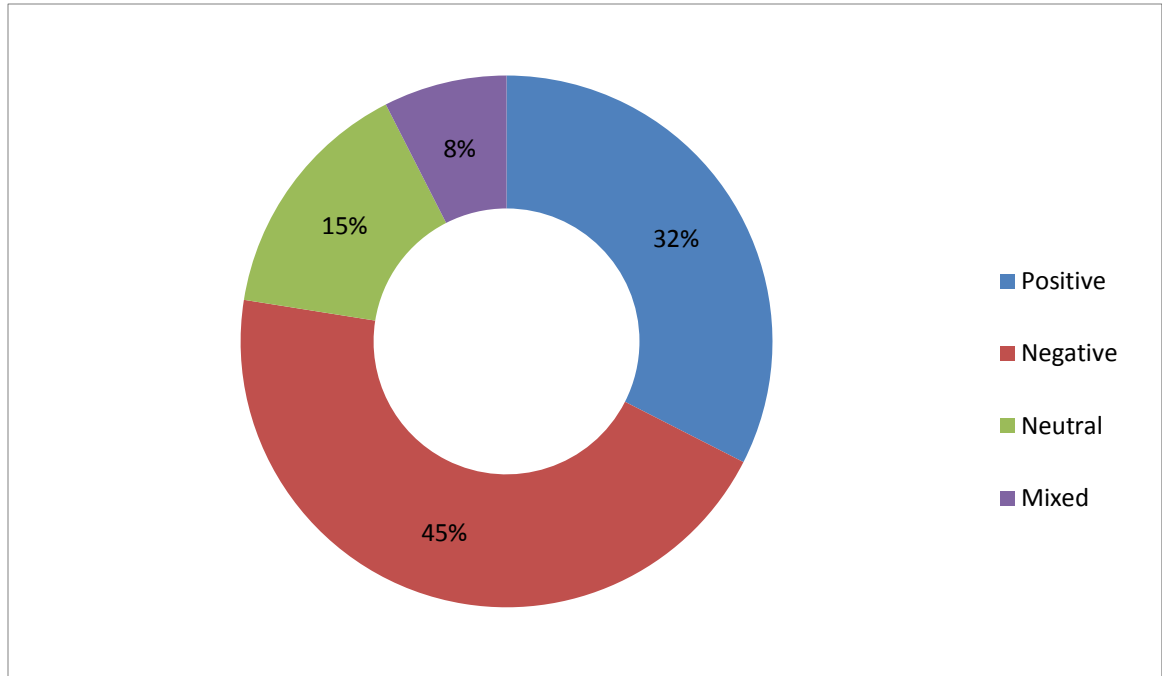


Figure 3—Tone of Stories in TimesLIVE

In TimesLIVE, 45 percent of the stories were negative, condemning the protesters' actions while 33 percent were positive in that they affirmed their demands. Neutral stories made up 15 percent of the total sample with eight percent mixed in their tone. The neutral and positive stories were mainly written by young and sympathetic journalists, some recent graduates still weighed down by student debt. (See **4.9: Interview Responses**)

4.3.3 Analysis of Tone of Stories in IOL (The Star)

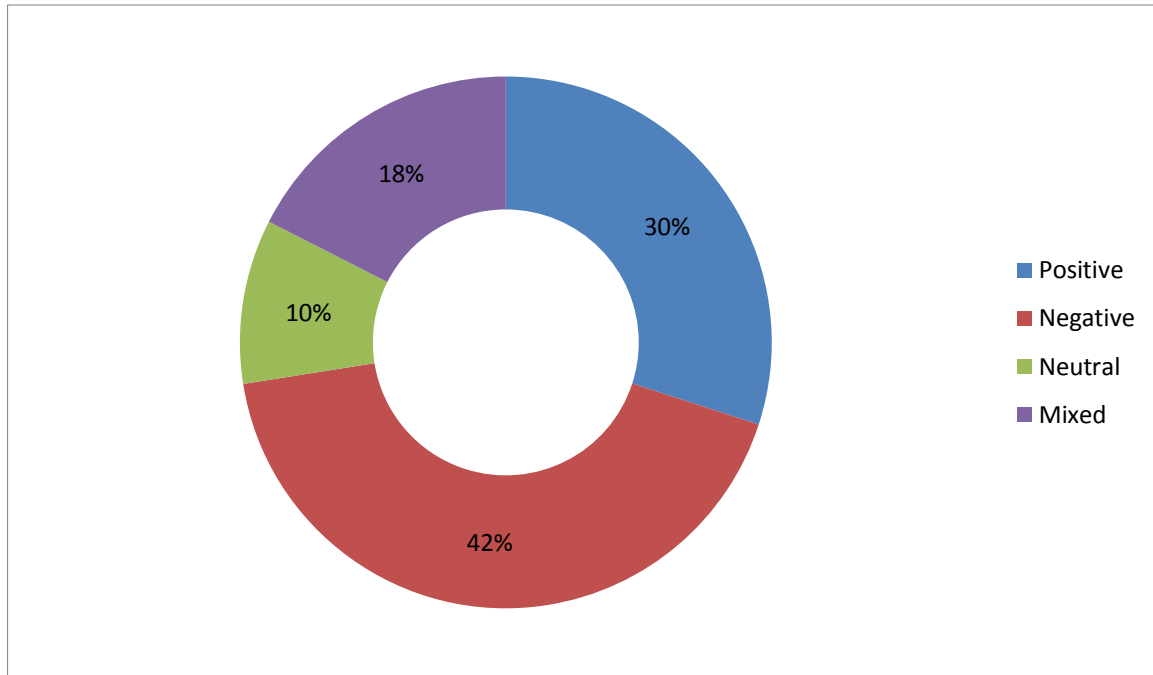


Figure 4—Tone of Stories in IOL (The Star)

IOL, like TimesLIVE, presented the student protesters in a negative tone in 42 percent of articles while the positive stories made up 30 percent of the total. The mixed tone was found in 18 percent of the articles. At least 10 percent of the stories were neutral, meaning that they presented bare facts—either as updates from the university-issued statements or in follow-up stories about scheduled events such as marches. These neutral stories were mostly by the news agency, ANA or by staff reporters.

4.3.4 Analysis of Tone of Stories in The Citizen Digital

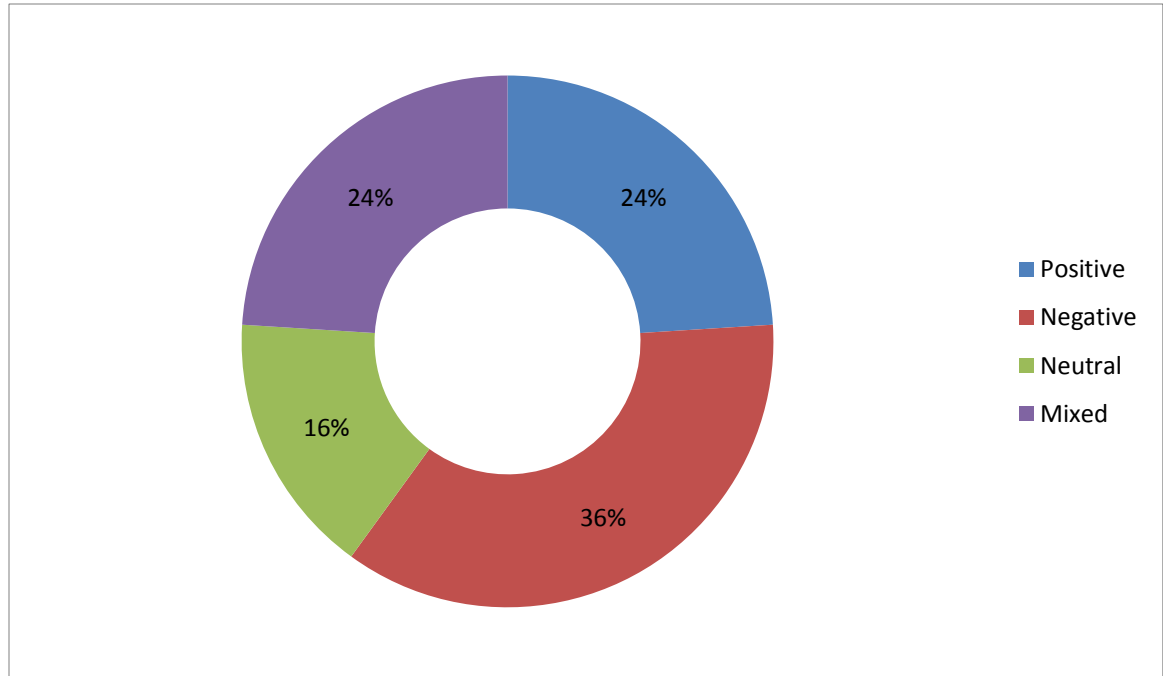


Figure 5—Tone of Stories in The Citizen Digital

The tone of most stories in The Citizen Digital—36 percent—were negative, seven percentage points lower than IOL (See Figure 4). An equal split of positive and mixed stories stood at 24 percent each, with the remaining 16 percent of the stories classified as neutral. Like the two other mainstream news platforms, the tone of articles was less negative because all three mainstream news sites used social media and other alternative new media platforms as sources in their articles. The significance of this shift is discussed in the next section.

4.4 Analysis of Voices/Sources Quoted in all Four

Sources are very important in shaping news audiences' perception of protests and protesters. In a fast-moving story such as the 2015 student protests, these voices helped to

shape the narratives. In analysing the voices quoted in the articles, the researcher found a close link between the tone of the articles and those quoted. It is clear that social media and other online platforms were effective as alternative sources of information for journalists covering the protests. This in turn had a positive impact on the coverage as students used these platforms effectively to relate their own stories as shown by the graphic below (Figure 6).

4.4.1 Analysis of Voices/Sources Quoted in all Four

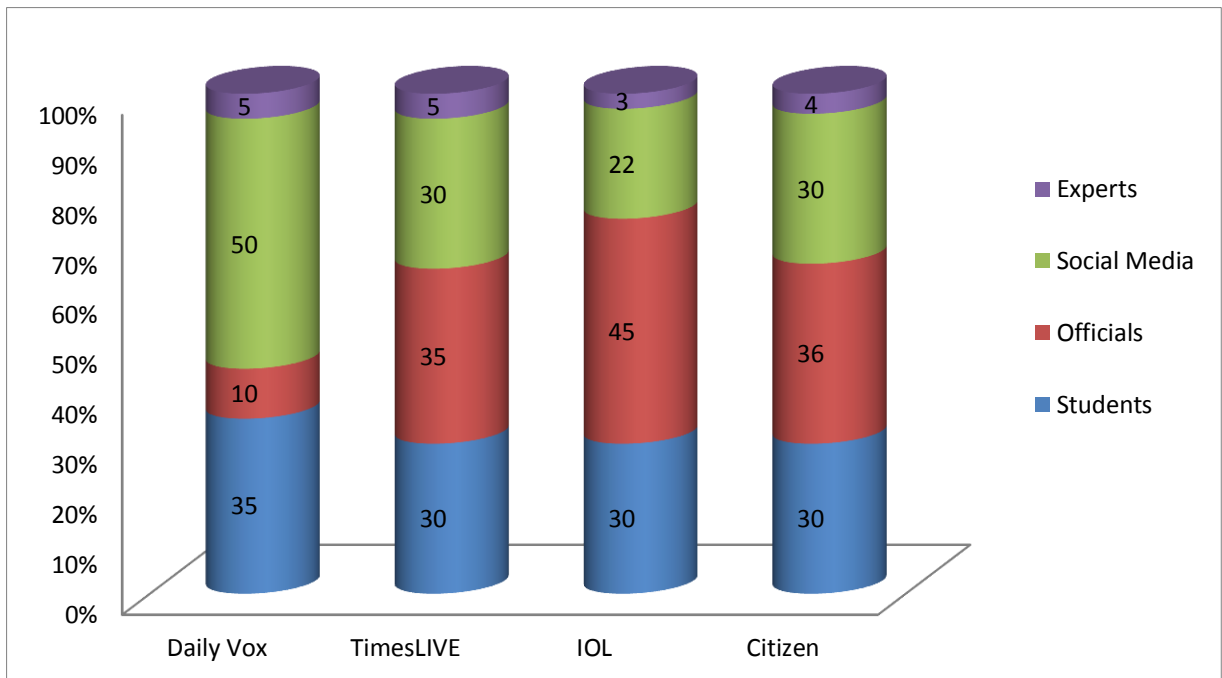


Figure 6—Breakdown of Voices/Sources Quoted

4.4.2 The Daily Vox Sources Quoted

Mainstream media have been criticised for giving official or elite sources preference, letting them speak on behalf of protesters. A further breakdown of sources was necessary in order for the researcher to identify who exactly was quoted in these articles in this sample. The Daily Vox’s stated bias was clear in its coverage (See 4.8: Analysing

Findings). Student voices were very prominent with SRC leaders, students, activists and student journalists quoted the most. Incoming (2016) Wits SRC president Nompumelelo Mkhathshwa, former SRC president Mcebo Dlamini, EFF student command president Vuyani Pambo, student leaders Fasiha Hassan and Shaera Kalla were quoted extensively. This, to the credit of social media platforms students' voices were amplified even more. Based on the above graphic (**Figure 6: Breakdown of Voices Quoted**), in 50 percent of the articles in The Daily Vox students' Twitter timelines and Facebook pages were used as sources while in 35 percent of the stories, students were quoted directly. This makes it 85 percent students' voices, the highest in the coverage of the protests. Official sources, among them Wits vice-chancellor Professor Adam Habib, Professor Andrew Crouch and university spokesperson Shirona Patel—in person and through media statements—were the leading voices. Wits Council chairman Randall Carrollissen, who was deeply involved in negotiations with students, also featured prominently. Several articles were written by academics and experts such as Danai Mupotsa (October 15) and Firdaus Khan (October 15) and former Wits SRC president Mukhove Masutha (October 21). For example Masutha slammed “biased” City Press, a Johannesburg-based weekly newspaper for calling students “hooligans” and “the media’s fixation with isolated incidents of violence” (Masutha, 2015).

The Daily Vox’s more positive representation of students can be largely attributed to its decision to let the students tell their own stories (in quotes and on Twitter).

- For example on October 19 Aisha Dadi Patel @aaishadadipatel tweeted: “Campus Control in solidarity with students. #WitsFeesMustFall.”
- Simamkele Dlakavu @simamkeleD shared a photo of students getting ready to help each other study after protests. “Happening now at #SolomonHouse (sic).”
- Can’t people in power see how desperate (sic) we want education? #WitsFeesMustFall. #Access R10 Million @WitsSRC tweeted: “Female students

in need of sanitary products – we’re stocking up the bathrooms in SH and CB (thanks @Mutondwa_!)”

The storming of Parliament on October 21 provoked a Twitter storm. As students were teargassed and manhandled by the riot police, photos were tweeted. The same was done when students were detained after arrest and when white students formed a human shield between themselves and the police to protect black students. Below are a few examples of the tweets. Although they have not been analysed, they give a sense of students’ responses and their efforts to drive the narrative in a certain direction.

- Rebecca Davis @becsplanb tweeted: “Why are you arresting me?” screamed a student as cops dragged him away from the protest #FeesMustFall.
- Lionel Adendorf @LionelAdendorf wrote: “Chaotic scenes outside #parliament. Police shooting teargas, stun grenades. #FeesMustFall #Students #UCT.”
- Daniella van Heerden (@DanniTweit) caught Higher Education Minister Blade Nzimande on video joking about the protests and tweeted: “Then we start our own movement: studentsmustfall” (The Daily Vox, 2015).

4.4.3 TimesLIVE Sources Quoted

TimesLIVE articles were dominated by official or elite voices which accounted for 35 percent of all quotes. Professor Habib, Wits spokesperson Shirona Patel, union, government officials and political parties’ spokespersons were quoted. Curiously, very few police sources were quoted. It is important to note that as a HWU, Wits University received extensive media coverage of the protests. Despite the anger generally directed at Minister Dr Blade Nzimande, the minister was only quoted a few times. In 30 percent of the stories, TimesLIVE spoke to student leaders and activists, students and their supporters. Wits SRC president Mkhathshwa, outspoken former SRC president Dlamini, EFF student command president Pambo, student leaders Fasiha Hassan and Shaeera Kalla were quite vocal about the heavy-handedness of the police and campus security, especially when protesters were peaceful. However, if you include the 30 percent of

articles accessing voices on alternative platforms, then students make up the majority of voices—65 percent—quoted in TimesLIVE.

For example, on October 14 the first day of protests at Wits University, Zanele Madiba, also known as Queen Doro Boss (@MissMadiba) tweeted: “Current situation at Wits. No Cars can come in or out!! #WitsFeesMustFall, #WitsFees. She included a photo of a student lying at the entrance blockading traffic (Madiba, 2015).

- Wits SRC @Oct 14 @Wits SRC tweeted: “We are also still trying to figure out why upfront payment is almost R10 000” with a photo of puzzled-looking Ministers Fikile Mbalula and Nathi Mthethwa.
- Headlined: *Being intelligent is not good enough if you are poor #WitsFees*, the poster gave a breakdown on the proposed increase for overall fees, upfront, residence and international fees.
- On October 22, academic Pumla Dineo Gqola (@feminist_rogue) and celebrity Maps Maponyane (@MapsMaponyane) also tweeted their support for the protests while Lisa Marie de Beer (@Its_Lisakie) shared cartoonist Zapiro’s “The Revolution Will Be Tweeted” cartoon (TimesLIVE, 2015).

A selection of the above tweets and headlines reveal support for students while a few question Wits management’s actions. TimesLIVE chose to publish a mixture of students, academics and celebrities voices to balance the coverage.

4.4.4 IOL Sources Quoted

In the IOL official sources made up 45 percent of the voices dominated by Shirona Patel, the Wits spokesperson. The university was criticised for issuing statements on its website, especially when students were expecting feedback from officials. Professors Habib and Crouch and Minister Nzimande were the prominent voices. IOL reporters sought out student leaders, activists and ordinary students for comment in 30 percent of the articles. Student leaders Mkhathshwa, Dlamini, Pambo, Hassan and Kalla were all quoted

extensively, as were alternative sources in at least 22 percent of the stories. The IOL mixed quotes from students and alternative platforms made up 55 percent of the voices in articles. IOL used few experts as well and used even fewer tweets. This could be partly because on October 15, in an article headlined *Dear reader, we're closing comments* IOL managing editor Adrian Ephraim wrote that they were closing the comments on online articles with immediate effect.

In the open letter, Ephraim notes, “It is a difficult but necessary decision to make and we arrived at it after careful consideration of all the factors at play” (Ephraim, 2015). Ephraim said while freedom of expression was guaranteed in the Constitution it was never meant to override personal freedoms. “If you are prone to being racist or sexist in your thinking, by all means express yourself on other platforms that may find such behaviour acceptable, but not IOL” (Ephraim, 2015).

On October 14 IOL did acknowledge the impact of social media in the coverage of #FeesMustFall, stating: “Twitter was abuzz with the hashtags #WitsFeesMustFall and #WitsShutDown” (Makgatho, 2015).

One tweet seems to have irritated Professor Habib who said he had not seen the video, but questioned the authenticity of a video allegedly showing students being forcibly removed by police from a Wits entrance. Trey (@TreyZim) October 15, 2015, tweeted: “@Cesc Lukuko: Damn “@Jika Uthi: Wow: (RT @Thisissebzee: Students assaulted at Wits #WitsFeesMustFallpic.Twitter.com/Afoxb5uzrw.”

4.4.5 The Citizen Digital Sources Quoted

The Citizen Digital relied on official sources in 36 percent of the articles. Students and alternative news platforms were quoted extensively at 30 percent apiece, making the voices almost evenly spread. This makes The Citizen closest to The Daily Vox in terms of voices quoted, revealing the impact of alternative platforms in mediating the narrative

in the student protests coverage. Online editor Devlin Brown justified the reliance on students' social media timelines and pages, especially when his journalists could not be on the ground. While the campaign started at Wits University which became the epicentre of #FeesMustFall 2015, the protests were a national story and news organisations had to find creative ways to report on the student movement. Brown gave the example of the protests at UCT on October 20. The article headlined *UCT protesters call for 'white human shield'* provoked a Twitter storm.

The Citizen's Johannesburg-based reporter Tsholofelo Wesi writes, "Today in Cape Town, according to the official Twitter account of the #RhodesMustFall movement, #RhodesMustFall called on white supporters to form a shield around black protesters to protect them from police leaving some with questions and impressing others," adding "the human shield was reportedly effective, although there is no confirmation that police intended to use force" (Wesi, 2015).

The Citizen Digital then published some of the public's Twitter responses below.

- @YonelaKatsha tweeted "So BLACK policemen arrest BLACK students and the only form of protection is a WHITE human shield? WHAT???"
- UCTFeesMustFall-#FeesMustFall. @Madam Ratchet (@Rowry_M) tweeted, "U threatened to shoot the protesters, now that there's a white human shield u retreat?"
- "The white students forming a human shield around black students is a smart strategy which demonstrates how white kids are important"—Mrs Inana Junghans @VWolpedz October 20.

Celebrities were followed and retweeted.

- *Twitter lashes out at Loyiso Gola's 'expensive sneakers' opinion* on October 19, and
- *AKA, Simphiwe Dana told to leave Wits* on October 20.

The observation by the researcher is that at the peak of the student protests, very few in-depth articles were published after October 23, with more articles explaining, critiquing and offering solutions. This explains the absence of expert voices in most articles.

4.5 Dominant Frames in Alternative and Mainstream Media

Scholars and researchers consider media framing a very important part of communication and journalism research. Frames play a vital role as they help news consumers understand events (Earl, McCarthy & Soule, 2004). The picture frame analogy best explains how news articles help audiences focus on what is relevant (Ashley & Olson, 1998) which is crucial to this study. Studies by Boykoff (2006), Feffer (2008) and Pointer (2015) on the framing of protests have concluded that mainstream media frame protests negatively most of the time. This researcher identified a number of prevalent frames but settled on six dominant frames in all four online-based news platforms—the Violence Frame, the Disruption Frame, the Battle Frame, the Social Justice and Rights Frame (Boykoff, 2006), the Chaos Frame and the Solidarity Frame (Feffer, 2008). In this study these six frames represent recurring themes of law and order, safety and security; social justice and human rights; solidarity among the students and how an organised and united student movement challenged the political elite and university establishment. Although the 2015 #FeesMustFall campaign was seen as “leaderless”, the protesters were united in purpose, inspiring, peaceful and well organised. Below, the six prevalent frames, some of which overlap in alternative and mainstream media, are discussed.

4.5.1 The Violence Frame

Dominant in all three mainstream sources—TimesLIVE, IOL and The Citizen Digital—the Violence Frame was presented under the law and order theme. Students were described as “angry, enraged, disruptive, confrontational, unreasonable and ill-disciplined” in all three sources. Below the researcher presents several examples to illustrate this point. These include the “attack” of a white driver at Wits University early

on in the protests; the white students forming a “human shield” at Parliament and confrontations between students and riot police at the Union Buildings.

- In IOL on October 20 the blurb of a photo essay headlined *PICS: SA students revolt* notes, “they [the students] reacted with all the fury of a jilted lover”.

By using the metaphor “the fury of a jilted lover” IOL frames the students as bitter and irrational. A series of photographs show an overturned vehicle, with a student on top of it as well as the bloodied images of the driver. The photo essay does not explain why the driver was “attacked” by the students who are presented as “menacing and violent”.

- In *Violence mars Union Buildings protest* on October 23, 2015, TimesLIVE reports “police firing stun grenades and teargas at violent students” who began “burning tyres, burning one of the trees on the grounds” (Ngoepe, Quintal and Wakefield, 2015). Then the protest “degenerated into violent scenes at a fence erected on the south lawn” although students who came “to protest peacefully were overshadowed by a (violent) minority”.

The article notes that many of the students were wearing branded T-shirts of the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), SA Student Congress (SASCO) and the ANC Youth League (ANCYL). This is important to note because while the students presented their campaign as “leaderless and apolitical”, mentioning the branded T-shirts frames this differently (Ngoepe et. al., 2015).

- TimesLIVE on October 14 ran a “hostage drama” article headlined *Wits fee protest ‘imprisons Zuraida Jardine*. TV presenter, DJ and actress tweets, “*I have been stuck in my car since 11.30am. No way out. Been held captive. We need help... I no longer feel safe. I was mistaken in thinking that this protest was peaceful. We need help getting out of Wits. Please!!! Where are the police??? We are being held here against our will!!! Where is Wits management? Protect your*

damn students and staff! I feel imprisoned. We need help please. Stuck here for 7 hours (against my will, can't get to my kids and I'm called 'dramatic?' The situation feels hopeless! (RDM News Wire, 2015).

This article frames the students as being dangerous and threatening Jardine's life. The story does not provide any context or an explanation of why she was there and how she was rescued. It also does not include comments from the students about what happened.

- In *Protesting Wits students threaten to beat up journalists* on October 20, TimesLIVE quotes a student as saying, "We don't want the media. You guys are painting us bad in front of our parents so we don't want you here."

A News24 reporter claims journalists and photographers were also threatened with assault at the gates of the Wits Medical School. The students are then said to have gone into campus, "where it is believed they intended to disrupt exams" (Chabalala and Wakefield, 2015). This frames students as violent, lawless and disregarding media freedom and the journalists' right to work unimpeded. The student seems to be highlighting the "biased reporting" some students complained about. This article lacks context of what provoked the "threats" by students.

- The Citizen Digital's article on October 20 headlined *UCT protesters call for 'white human shield'*, downplays the riot police's violent reaction to protesters.

The story notes, "The human shield was reportedly effective, although there was no evidence that police intended to use force" (Wesi, 2015). The last part of the sentence frames the students as "over-reacting" in their response to the police, which frames them as being unreasonable. This ignores the state violence of the heavily armed riot police who tear-gassed and arrested students who subsequently faced treason charges.

- The IOL article headlined *Wits prof denies being held hostage* on October 18 is accompanied by a photo of a distressed-looking Wits VC Professor Habib.

Although the vice-chancellor denies being held hostage or against his will, the journalist notes, "He says he was treated with respect, had his phone on him and could

have walked away... but I took a calculated guess and decided to stay” (Makathile, 2015). The writer casts doubt on Prof Habib’s explanation that he was never in danger.

- IOL’s article *Wits management won’t meet with students* on October 19, students are framed as “marching peacefully, singing revolutionary songs with campus security keeping an eye on them” (Makhafola, 2015). This gives the impression that security guards were anticipating violence, contrary to the jovial mood of the peaceful protesters. This framing of students was a recurring theme.

4.5.2 The Disruption Frame

The Citizen Digital framed the students as “irate” as they marched to Luthuli House, the ANC headquarters, on October 22 under “a huge police presence” and “bringing traffic to a complete standstill” in *UJ students join Wits protest, shut down Empire Road* (Tau, 2015). Both Wits and UJ officials are quoted as saying the institutions will remain closed because of “safety and security concerns”. What they are saying is that they are stopping students from disrupting classes and other campus activities.

- In IOL’s *Anger erupts at Wits over fees* also focuses on the safety and security of non-protesting students and academic staff whose lives had been disrupted as “enraged Wits University students blocked off entrances” and “disrupted classes, opened lecture hall doors and chanted struggle songs” (Morissey, Monama and Molosankwe, 2015). This is portrayed as unruly behaviour, notwithstanding the students’ grievances which are not highlighted.
- TimesLIVE in *Wits at a standstill as students strike over fees* (October 14) highlights the students “disrupted access” and “divided attention on social media” (RDM News Wire, 2015).

4.5.3 The Battle Frame

Confrontations between the police and students at the Union Buildings in Pretoria on October 23, 2015 were a major flashpoint. Although this frame is similar to the Violence

Frame discussed above, what is unique about the Battle Frame is that the confrontations are reported as “street battles” between the students and police.

- Graeme Hosken, of TimesLIVE particularly highlights the Battle Frame in the article *Victory for #FeesMustFall students amid dramatic protests at Union Buildings*. He describes how “the running chaos culminated in a final street battle” when Zuma refused to address the students. He blames this on the “hijackers/agitators” who “antagonised” police, setting fire to tyres, portable toilets and pulling down fences surrounding the citadel of government” (Hosken, 2015).
- The Citizen Digital highlights (former SRC leader) Mcebo Dlamini telling ANC secretary general Gwede Mantashe at Luthuli House “the 1994 honeymoon is over”. This implies that the gloves are off, that students are ready to fight for what is rightfully theirs—which is the free education promised both in the ANC’s Freedom Charter¹⁵ and since 1994. By continuously framing Dlamini as “expelled, ex-leader”, The Citizen Digital seems to be questioning his legitimacy as part of the student leadership (Mathebula, 2015).

4.5.4 The Chaos Frame

The Chaos Frame, which has characteristics of all three frames discussed above, was most prominent in the coverage of protests at the Union Buildings in Pretoria on October 23 where thousands of students had been bussed in to hear President Zuma. The chaos

¹⁵ The Freedom Charter, the ANC’s blueprint for a free South Africa, was adopted by the Congress of the People in Kliptown, Soweto on June 26, 1955. It promises, among other things, a democratic state with equal rights for all regardless of race, gender or religion. These rights extended to free, compulsory, universal and equal education for all children— with the doors of higher education and technical training open to all by means of state allowances and scholarships awarded on merit for deserving students.

was triggered by his refusal to address the students, who were then blamed for being unruly.

- TimesLIVE's Hosken quotes an unnamed police source as saying, "We knew that people were sent deliberately to cause chaos... they were sent to make our kids look bad... those behind these antagonisers must be found and punished severely" (Hosken, 2015). A Tactical Response Team source tells him, "Only as a last resort have we been told to fire. We can see the genuine students and the trouble makers" (Hosken, 2015). This framing is negative.
- In *Student protesters leave their mark on Parliament* on October 21 TimesLIVE reporters Nashira Davids and Gabi Mbele emphasise the "chaotic scenes" outside Parliament as students "braved police stun grenades and teargas". Nothing is said about the violence perpetrated by the police as they push back (Davids & Mbele, 2015).
- Chantelle Presence, in an IOL article *Cops justify reaction to student protesters* on October 22 cites "chaotic scenes in Cape Town CBD", while riot police managed the situation satisfactorily despite "being constantly provoked by students" (Presence, 2015).

4.5.5 The Social Justice and Rights Frame

Wits students viewed protests as historic, drawing parallels with the 1976 Soweto uprising. They were challenging the ruling ANC on post-1994 unfulfilled promises while claiming their rights to freedom of expression and access to free education.

- However, IOL in *Wits prof: Underfunding is the issue* seems to discount this, instead it justifies the fee increase because Wits University's hand is being forced "by rising costs and being hamstrung by dollar rand exchange, inflation and government underfunding of universities". By mentioning that Wits "provides bursaries for 20 000 poor students" but the "cost saving-measures will not

compromise quality of education”, IOL seems to be painting the students as being unreasonable in their demands.

- TimesLIVE in *Nzimande no Father Christmas* on October 21 highlights the “persistent global capitalist crisis, the socio-economic polarisation and ongoing weak economy” to counter-balance the argument and justify the fee hike.

4.5.6 The Solidarity Frame

All three mainstream news sites highlight the Solidarity Frame. For example, all highlight the solidarity among students and academics at home and abroad during the #NationalShutDown on October 19. Placards, memes, cartoons from all over the world are used to illustrate this point.

- IOL in *#FeesMustFall goes global* notes the power of social media which resulted in “#FeesMustFall and #NationalShutDown trending at number eight worldwide” (Mohedeen, 2015).
- Similarly, TimesLIVE in *#NationalShutDown worldwide trend* (Quintal, 2015) acknowledge the global reach of the protests. TimesLIVE journalist Andile Ndlovu in *I get you, been there done that and grateful* (Ndlovu, 2015) sympathises with the students. In thanking his single mother for all her sacrifices, Ndlovu acknowledges the struggle of most poor students. Shenaaz Jamal’s *Experiencing the #FeesMustFall ‘revolution’ first person account at Union Buildings* (Jamal, 2015) the journalist shows solidarity with the students whom she presents as “organised and peaceful, until they are teargassed by the police”. Jamal, who covered the protests from day one, gives a blow-by-blow account of events—the good, the bad and the ugly—leaving the reader to make up their own minds.

4.6 Prevalent Frames in The Daily Vox

The thread running through the alternative media frames is how, through alternative media platforms, students responded immediately and forcefully to their representations

as being violent or confrontational in clashes with police or in response to negative narratives that the mainstream media put out. In tweets and Facebook posts (which are not analysed in this study) alike, the students countered these negative narratives. Below the alternative media frames are discussed in detail.

4.6.1 The Violence Frame

The Daily Vox presented the protesters as victims of government and institutionalised violence.

- Mupotsa’s article *I was never ready for what happened at Wits yesterday* laments “oppressive policies which have left students feeling out of place, having to conform to whiteness, being denied access through dramatic stoppages; exclusion and the backlash from universities bent on minimising protest and vandalism” (Mupotsa, 2015).
- The photo essay titled, *In Pictures: #FeesMustFall protesters clash with police outside Parliament*, a series of photographs document the confrontation as riot police teargas students with white students forming a human shield to protect their black counterparts. Using aggregated content, the platform shows the extent of police violence (The Daily Vox, 2015). Examples include:
 - A tweeted photograph of students in a holding cell by @Ayabukwa.
 - A photo of a student’s badly burnt feet, with one shoe completely destroyed. “His shoe was shot off. Just for trying to get an education. #NationalShutDown” (Luso Mnthali @ikmnthali).
 - Ra’eesa Pather provides a different narrative from students on how the showdown with police started. “We were sitting down. People had their hands up. No police were attacked. All we were doing was to throw water bottles at them. That was the justification for throwing the stun grenades. They said we were throwing water bottles at them. What the %\$&?” (The Daily Vox, 2015)

4.6.2 The Social Justice and Rights Frame

For students the 2015 #FeesMustFall campaign was a fight against the apartheid legacies of financial and academic exclusions and post-apartheid realities such as institutional racism, racialised poverty and financial exclusion. With poverty blamed for the continued marginalisation of black students by universities and the government, The Daily Vox presented this fight as a demand for redistributive justice as the examples below show.

- In *Wits SRC president: "Everything about this has been historic"* Pontsho Pilane and Aasha Dadi Patel quote Wits SRC president Shaeera Kalla on the suspension of fee increase. "We pushed the university hard enough to know that we aren't here to play...Where the battle needs to be fought is at University Assembly.... and this is something that has never been done before...Everything about this has been historic" (Pilane & Dadi Patel, 2015).
- In *Victory for Wits students as fee hike is suspended* on October 17, an "exhausted but happy" SRC member Fasiha Hassan felt justice had been done when the SRC and Wits Council agreed to suspend the fee hike at 5am. "It definitely seems unreal. It's not the end point, but it's a step in the right direction. It's most importantly indicative of the progress made and of the fact that management is starting to take us seriously... It's the university's job to provide us with an education, and not run it like a business" (Dadi Patel, 2015).

Dadi Patel, who was at the meeting throughout the night, tweeted constantly, keeping the students in the loop about the negotiations between the Wits Council and the Wits SRC. "For those who have not seen it, this is the contract signed by Exco in the wee hours of this morning" (The Daily Vox). Being able to deliver the breaking news on the agreement meant that the students got the news as it happened, making the communication more effective.

4.6.3 The Solidarity Frame

In this frame, the storytelling was left to the students who used alternative platforms such as live blogs, photographs, placards, memes and graffiti to highlight positive representations of students' generosity and their comradery with academic staff and general workers. These stories hardly made it into the mainstream media narrative. A few examples include:

- The closed *#NationalShutDown: Live blog 21-22 October* and *#NationalShutDown: Live blog (closed)* (The Daily Vox, 2015) on October 23;
- *Three moments from the #WitsShutDown that gave us the feels* (The Daily Vox, 2015) on October 21; and
- *10 unforgettable moments of solidarity from #FeesMustFall on October 19* (The Daily Vox, 2015).

Highlighted in the above posts were large and small deeds of kindness, heart-warming gestures such as tutorials arranged for students to catch-up after protests; the SRC collecting cash and other donations including sanitary pads; discussions about poverty and inequality. Stories of NGOs such as Equal Education, Medics for #FeesMustFall and lawyers offering to help and defend arrested students were also shared.

4.6.4 The Chaos Frame

Presented as radical dissent in alternative media, the chaos caused by students is justified. The Daily Vox highlights the violation of students' rights by the police and universities in a bid to stop them from destroying property. Instead, the disruptors are presented as being in the minority but the police crackdown is never justified.

- Mupotsa's article *I was never ready for what happened at Wits yesterday*, notes "No one was ready for what was the biggest protest many of us have ever seen at Wits. What the students and the workers succeeded in doing was stop the

institution from its daily functioning. What the students were able to demonstrate was the violence (against them) of living-in-being stopped” (Mupotsa, 2015).

- In *Wits fees protesters panic after pepper spraying incident* Pilane highlights the chaos and panic that ensued after a security guard pepper sprayed students in the Senate House concourse. A video of panicking students trying to get out of the concourse is hyperlinked. Pilane adds, “I’ve just been told its pepper spray not teargas. Apparently teargas stings in eyes as well. No sting in my eyes” (Team, 2015).

4.6.5 The Battle Frame

This frame is presented as justified reaction to police brutality after extreme provocation of the peaceful protesters. In the following examples, students and their supporters are presented as victims of both the university management and an uncaring government.

- One example is *UCT management fanned the flames of protest by bringing police onto campus* (Pather, 2015). The running battles and the ensuing chaos at both the Parliament precinct on October 21 and the Union Buildings on October 23 confrontations are attributed to the police’s over-reaction and high-handedness.

4.7 Visuals Used in Mainstream and Alternative Media

Visuals played a very important role in putting the 2015 #FeesMustFall story into the public domain. Live blogs, photographs, placards, cartoons, graffiti and memes were used in both mainstream and alternative media to show the full impact of #FeesMustFall protests over the ten-day period.

For example, when the state denied that students arrested outside Parliament in Cape Town were charged with treason (charges later withdrawn), a photo of the high treason charge sheet was tweeted on October 22. The Daily Vox’s Dadi Patel and Pilane live tweeted from marches. Bonga Dlulane (an eNCA television reporter) shared powerful images of all front pages of Cape Town mainstream daily newspapers the day after

protests at Parliament. To show the unreported positive students' stories, Dadi Patel shared the #WitsFeesMustFall Day 7 programme showing the student's study timetable in between protests.

All three mainstream news sites also used images and visuals but in most cases they represented the negative aspects of the protests. For example, during the politically significant marches to Parliament on October 21; to Luthuli House on October 22; and protests at the Union Buildings on October 23, students live-streamed or blogged these events, tweeted and retweeted photos and updated their Facebook status with images of "the current situation right now". Both mainstream and alternative media picked on the statuses of students and used them as hyperlinks on their platforms. All news sites in this study also used a lot of aggregated content from other news sources.

This interactivity meant instant feedback and counter-narratives being put out for target audiences to make up their own minds about the student protests. This also marked a significant shift from the one-sided nature of mainstream media reporting in the past. It also enhanced the students' storytelling and engaged audiences in the #FeesMustFall farming and agenda-setting narratives.

4.8 Analysing the Findings

Comparing text and visual representations of students in alternative youth media and mainstream news websites is a useful exercise as it builds towards answering the research questions of this study. It also helps determine how the four news platforms in this study covered similar events by answering these research questions:

1. Did new media or alternative media platforms used by students influence the mainstream news framing in any substantial way?
2. How did the mainstream news media frame the protests?
3. How did the alternative media platforms frame the protests?

4. Can we detect any impact on the mainstream media news agenda by the alternative media platforms? If so, in what way did the use of students' tweets for instance influence the coverage?
5. Did either of these framings divert from our normative expectations of how each would frame the protests?
6. Given the above, what can be said about the role of youth media in providing an alternative perspective compared to mainstream media on critical issues such as student protests?

Based on the analysis presented in this chapter, unsurprisingly this study found that alternative youth media, The Daily Vox, not only set the news agenda but it was more positive in its framing of the student protesters. The extensive use of multiple alternative news sources and platforms resulted in counter-narratives to those presented in the mainstream media. A combination of students' voices (and their tweets) as the main sources, meant The Daily Vox was more positive and balanced in its representation of students. Although not part of this study the Cape Argus' initiative of letting students co-edit a special edition on October 23, 2015, provides a unique experiment of how mainstream media can respond to criticism of bias and misrepresentation of protesters¹⁶.

By letting the students tell their own stories through a number of platforms, The Daily Vox affirmed the protesters as reasonable young people wanting to be heard, to be taken seriously and have their post-1994 promises fulfilled by the governing ANC (Jacobs,

¹⁶ On October 22, 2015, the Cape Argus editor Gasant Abarder and his editorial team responded to a Twitter challenge by protesting students in Cape Town that mainstream media was biased and misrepresenting their protests. The editorial team then invited eight students to co-edit the following day's edition of the newspaper, on the eve of the storming of Parliament.

2015). Images of riot police brutalising students at Parliament in Cape Town and at the Union Buildings in Pretoria conveyed strong messages of how students were being victimised and bullied while their genuine concerns were ignored. In the rush to publish, most mainstream media articles failed to give context to the protests, something alternative media paid attention to.

Below the interview responses of editors and journalists are presented and discussed. This is done to determine the role of journalists in the framing of the protests' coverage and analysing how and who set the news agenda.

4.9 Analysing Interview Responses

4.9.1 Introduction

In research interviews are used to gain access to credible information. The interviews can be formal face-to-face formal conversations with the researcher eliciting information from the respondents (Burns, 2000). This is of great benefit to a researcher who can ask follow up questions to get in-depth responses. The face-to-face, telephone and e-mail interviews conducted in this study consisted of several key semi-structured questions with four editors and seven journalists involved in the #FeesMustFall campaign answered. These responses are important in answering the research questions presented earlier and in determining how the media framed the protests and who set the agenda for the coverage.

4.9.2 Interview Responses of the Journalists

The journalists were identified during the data collection process (**See Appendix 2: Table 2**). Each journalist was asked several questions and the most relevant responses were selected in line with the framing and agenda-setting theories of this study. Below are selected responses by journalists to specific questions.

4.9.3 Selected Questions and Answers

How were the protests framed by different media?

Pontsho Pilane, a senior journalist at The Daily Vox said, “As a media studies scholar I believe that there is always sway in the voice that is prioritised. So my reporting was based on student voices more than anything. I guess that makes us alternative media. For some people this is a bias but it is the nature of the work at The Daily Vox. Our role is to reverse or dismantle the organogram that exists in how we gather news in South Africa. Instead of just focusing on what university management and the experts were saying I was also focusing on students’ voices. They were the protagonists after all. Honestly, I did not think the students would successfully shut down the university on October 14, 2015. I remember tweeting ‘OMG! Wits University has actually shut down!’ I was in disbelief. The whole country was in disbelief hence #FeesMustFall became such a historical moment... it was quite amazing, it was momentous” (Pilane, 2016).

Pilane was clear on who set the media agenda. “It (social media) was there for students to tell their own stories, especially when they were unhappy with the narratives pushed by mainstream media. For example, students started the #RealWitsStory because they were disproving of the negative narratives in mainstream media. They were saying ‘you are lying this is not how this happened. You are misrepresenting us’. It was a huge blessing to have social media. It played that role, making the story alive” (Pilane, 2016).

For Aaisha Dadi Patel, also a senior journalist at The Daily Vox, their coverage was distinct because the team had context of the protests. “It’s not that we said #FeesMustFall is important on the morning of October 14, 2015. We had been covering the tensions on South African campuses throughout the year. So we could see the build-up into something bigger. We had been listening to students’ frustrations, speaking to student leaders, activists and students on the ground about what the fee increase meant. So when

the protest blew up we knew exactly how to cover the story in terms of practicality and emotions. Our mandate at The Daily Vox is to focus on and to highlight stories of those marginalised by society.

“For example, instead of reporting on violent protesters causing traffic jams, we focused on how starving students were protesting because that’s the only way they could highlight their problems and hopefully get commitment to change. Literally, the angle from the outset was ‘team underdog’. We were looking at what mainstream media was not picking up. There were plenty people to speak to. In the grand scheme of things why are we choosing some voices as more valid more important than others” (Dadi Patel, 2015).

Shenaaz Jamal, a junior reporter at TimesLIVE, found social media both useful and problematic. She cited the example of different narratives which emerged on social media around an incident involving a white motorist who was reportedly assaulted by students. Jamal, who had joined the students’ sit-in, felt most narratives excluded how the impatient driver had driven into a group of students blockading the Empire Road exit of the Braamfontein Wits campus. Angry students then chased him down to a nearby petrol station. Johannesburg Metropolitan Police Department (JMPD) officers intervened before the driver was assaulted. Jamal’s colleague, education reporter Poppy Louw, sympathised with the protesting students because “I understood their plight as someone saddled with student debt” (Louw, 2016).

Tsholofelo Wesi, a reporter at The Citizen Digital, found social media an “indispensable” and very effective news-gathering tool. Wesi sourced stories from students’ and universities’ Twitter timelines and to tracked events on Facebook. “It (social media) was really a method of getting the bigger picture,” Wesi noted. He also focused on the other intersectional issues such as the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT+), queer

and feminists' voices. "If it wasn't for social media I don't think I would have been so keenly aware of the feminist and queer politics that emerged from the protests. Social media allowed for diversity of voices and forced journalists to look for fresh story angles. You could even smell it in the headlines—and the clickbaits" (Wesi, 2016).

For Mzwandile Khathi, also The Citizen Digital reporter, social media was a double-edged sword because in "wrong hands it can be used as a tool to pursue more sinister motives" (Khathi, 2016). Khathi felt that mainstream media "focused primarily on the destruction of university property and omitted the most important part—the legitimate demands of angry and frustrated students—who had exhausted all avenues to resolve the crisis". Khathi claimed that the live reports "bore a hint of subjectivity which affected public opinion" with some sources "clearly pushing their own agendas" (Khathi, 2016).

Gertrude Makhafola, the only news agency (ANA) journalist interviewed for this study, found social media very effective. "I reported what was happening and presented the various students' views as they happened. We were required to tweet updates, photos and video clips. It's a vital tool for reporters" (Makhafola, 2016).

What can be said about the role of youth media in providing an alternative perspective compared to mainstream media on critical issues such as student protests?

Dadi Patel of The Daily Vox said new media was a powerful tool in this regard. "From early in the morning on October 14 (and throughout the day) we had been trending on Twitter. The movement itself, as much as it was on the ground, it was a social media movement. So when people were looking for updates on #FeesMustFall, they got links and headlines. I think that was when people noticed that our coverage was very different. We had videos, pictures and it was so much easier for them to interpret or judge what was

going on. I had an iPad so literally, I saw something took a video and a picture and uploaded directly onto our website spontaneously. It's easy to capture 30 second video, caption and upload it. It started off as #WitsFeesMustFall before it became a national #FeesMustFall movement on Monday October 19. So when people were looking at what was going on at Wits, they were looking at hashtags and online. So obviously they could see for themselves what the situation was. We garnered an audience immediately, and because we were familiar with student issues our audience was able to trust us. The response was immense and our website crashed a couple of times. We did have a very strong engagement with our audience. We were strong on all social networks" (Dadi Patel, 2016).

Dadi Patel also had problems with students being patronised by mainstream media. "Post 1994, young people, without their permission were labelled born-frees¹⁷. They are coming to an age looking at their reality and saying 'what are you talking about'. Systemic and structural inequality remains extremely prevalent. Injustice is all over the place. All these issues are still alive. Despite promises, our government is doing nothing. So we are here to call out that nonsense. Throughout 2015 whenever there were issues (students were unhappy with on campuses) it would always come back to the myth of the 'Rainbow Nation' which was exposed" (Dadi Patel, 2016).

¹⁷ Born-frees (BF) is a term used to describe South Africans born in the post-Mandela South Africa. While most adults use this to describe this generation as youth born into freedom and often assume that they have no political ambitions, the young people have started rejecting this labelling. The 2015 #FeesMustFall campaign is just but one example of this rejection. The youth have also started to reject the "Rainbow Nation" as a myth, considering the fractured race relations in South Africa today.

4.10 Interview Responses of the Editors

4.10.1 Introduction

The four editors interviewed for this study were closely involved in the coverage of the 2015 #FeesMustFall campaign and their participation is valuable as it gives credibility to this research. The editors agreed that this was the first truly new media driven event, which made the campaign both exciting and challenging. As a contentious news-gathering tool, social and alternative media platforms shaped the narrative of the protests. However, the editors were adamant that journalistic standards such as ethics, accuracy, fairness, balance and verification of sources were not compromised. The editors noted that, although disruptive, South African journalists have embraced social media in their work to the benefit of news consumers. They also admitted that this influenced the public discourse and helped audiences make up their minds based on the information at their disposal. Below are editors' responses to selected questions.

Mainstream media has been accused of handling the #FeesMustFall story poorly while alternative media has been praised for pushing against an established narrative. Is this a fair assessment?

Dominic Mahlangu, deputy editor at TimesLIVE, admitted that mainstream media was playing catch-up as alternative media set the agenda for the protests' coverage. But Devlin Brown, former editor of The Citizen Digital and Adrian Ephraim of IOL both dismissed suggestions that mainstream media had any agendas to frame the protesters negatively. Ephraim said this on the impact of social media, "Social media was the fulcrum on which the protests shifted between the media and public discourses. I don't think we went into the story with a preconceived narrative. Social media helped us to understand the story better, and the nuances of what was a very important national story. Social media allowed students to become our eyes and ears on the ground" (Ephraim, 2016). Mahlangu said this on social media's influence, "I first came to the story by

following the chatter on Twitter and Facebook. Twitter was far ahead in terms of covering the story because the students were actually reporting on what was happening on the ground. Yes, students (and alternative media) set the agenda for how the story was reported. That's why we quoted verbatim what students were saying online. We took our lead from students. Definitely, we had to up our game. In fact we had to use unconventional methods (like monitoring social media and asking questions on social media). We picked influencers, people who were telling us 'I'm in the meeting and this is what is being said'. We took that information and verified it with the student leaders and in most cases they confirmed it. So it made the story even more credible. That is why we had to listen to the voices on the ground while also talking to vice chancellors and others” (Mahlangu, 2016).

What were the similarities and differences in the approach and representation of student protesters on your platform?

Dominic Mahlangu of TimesLIVE said, “Alternative media took the lead in the framing of the #FeesMustFall story. I think mainstream media was caught napping. The Daily Vox actually embarrassed mainstream media, not only with the #FeesMustFall (but with subsequent stories). Social media is disruptive yes, but it is a good disruptor because if we continue to do journalism in the old way we will be irrelevant to our audiences. Everyone has a cellphone or smartphone through which they get their news. We have to make sure that the news being filtered through those platforms is credible. In fact TimesLIVE is becoming the platform of choice for our audience. People would rather have their stories on TimesLIVE first (instead of the print edition The Times) because of the interactivity. The biggest challenge is that young journalists come with the savviness of using all these gadgets but the difficulty is that they might not have the experience (to pick on the nuances and give context to stories)” (Mahlangu, 2016).

Mahlangu also spoke about the framing of the incident involving the impatient white motorist referred to earlier. “I had to fight in the editorial conference because colleagues were trying to frame that incident in a negative way. I said I trust (reporter) Shenaaz (Jamal) because she was there at Wits University. I fought, and changed the story even though some editors were not in favour. I said we should report the facts. That’s how the rest of the coverage was framed—reporting the truth and what students were saying. My strategy was to use Facebook and Twitter messages as this gave credibility and fair balance to the stories. The readers would then be able to say this is what the journalist said and this is what students wrote, and then come up with their own conclusion” (Mahlangu, 2016).

What sources did you use and why? Social media came to prominence during the protests. Did this make any difference in how the student protests were covered? If so, please elaborate?

In responding to the above question, Khadija Patel co-founding editor of The Daily Vox, said social media allowed students to tell their own stories, thereby pushing “against established narratives” (Patel, 2016).

“Our coverage was very distinct from what others were doing particularly early on when protests were largely ignored by big media houses or were featured as an inconvenience on traffic reports (such as on Radio 702). We were on the ground at Wits University. We were speaking to students and allowing them to articulate their messages for a broader audience. From the get-go we sought to understand why the students were protesting instead of dismissing the protests as some kind of lunacy. But most importantly, we had been covering student movements for months before October 14, 2015. We were doing Google Hangouts with student leaders and Vox Pops with students, so we were plugged-in with the student leadership and the student activism on university campuses.

“However, we could not have predicted how it (the crisis) would coalesce and what form it would eventually take. We were best placed to take the story forward. I think mainstream media changed to be more sympathetic towards students after the protests outside Parliament on October 21 because that’s when you saw the state actually clamping down on students. Media in South Africa have gotten so used to having the students as the bad guys, so it was a bit difficult and challenging to change or get around that formula. But once you saw the students being repressed by the state, it was something that became familiar. It’s a very controversial thing to say but I am willing to debate this with colleagues. There was so much noise and so much action. Students were being portrayed as belligerent and the state’s involvement was very clear.

“Social media was absolutely crucial because beyond our own reporting it allowed students to tweet what they were seeing and how they were feeling about it. That was crucial because it nullified (negative) mainstream media (narratives) because it allowed students to mobilise and communicate (their messages directly to the public). Social media has great potential for organising and that was enhanced as well. Our job is to tell the truth. However, we try to tell the truth from the perspective of students. That’s the way we framed the stories, we always tried to emphasise what students were saying because they were ultimately the ones who were leading the protests. Of course we balanced that with other actors like the state and the university management” (Patel, 2017).

Devlin Brown, then digital editor at The Citizen, addressed the issue of who set the coverage agenda thus, “Social media changed the process of monitoring the situation and finding news. We relied on a network of young reporters and interns tech-savvy millennials who monitored, trolled (student leaders such as Mcebo Dlamini and other influencers) to stay on the pulse of the story. The agenda was clear from day one: be first and don’t miss a beat. But there was no editorial agenda of how the news would be

presented. Our agenda was to be the best and fastest at telling the story of #FeesMustFall” (Brown, 2016). Brown rejected suggestions that mainstream media were negative, insisting they reported the truth. “If we ran a story with a video of a young man breaking a window the mainstream media was accused of trying to show the student as violent. The counter-argument is that by being present and not running that video, by not publishing what we saw, we are censoring our coverage...”

4.11 Conclusion

This study, focusing on four online-based news platforms, set out to compare how mainstream and alternative media framed the 2015 #FeesMustFall campaign at Wits University and to establish who set the agenda for the coverage. The research is the first to directly compare alternative and mainstream’s coverage of student protests in particular although Pointer (2015); Tapela (2013); and Bond and Mottiar (2013) have analysed the framing of service delivery protests in mainstream media.

This study, in line with findings by Boykoff (2006) and Feffer (2008), identified six common frames present in both alternative and mainstream online sources however the specific content of that frame differed. For example, alternative media used the Violence Frame to focus attention on the violence of the state and universities where students were victims of police brutality. Universities were accused of perpetuating this violence through academic and financial exclusion of poor students most of whom are black (Mupotsa, 2015). The framing of students as belligerent, violent hooligans in mainstream media (Patel, 2017) focused on students destroying university property, what Cammaerts (2013) refers to as “logic of symbolic damage”.

This distinction is important because it highlights the differences in how alternative and mainstream media framed the #FeesMustFall campaign. Violence or the potential for violence were strongly represented in mainstream media, something that Pointer (2013),

Boykoff (2006) and Feffer (2008) also found in their respective researches on the framing of events such as service delivery protests in South Africa and the 1999 OWS demonstrations in the USA. Despite data revealing violent behaviour on both sides of the conflict, alternative media presented the students as victims of the high-handed riot police behaviour while mainstream media reported protesters as being provocative and disruptive. However, overall the coverage in mainstream media was not as negative as it has been in the past and this can be attributed to the influence of social and alternative media and the extensive use of online platforms by protesting students to counter the negative narratives. They did so by telling their own stories that reflected solidarity, unity, kindness and how organised they were through study groups, collection of food and other essential items and helping each other cope with the stress of protests.

This study found that through the use of new media platforms, both alternative and mainstream media were able to present a more balanced coverage of the 2015 student protests. The results of the content analysis reveal that the framing of the student protests, although consistent with past research which showed that mainstream media relied mostly on official sources, the use of new media and alternative media platforms seems to have forced a shift in how the 2015 protests were covered. Official sources were not as dominant as the use of interactive online platforms influenced the coverage.

The Daily Vox made students the main protagonists in the protests, allowing them to set the media agenda by providing a counter-narrative to the mainstream media coverage. The alternative media's framing and agenda-setting roles influenced how the story was told. While this research did not set out to explore how social media influenced the coverage of the 2015 #FeesMustFall at Wits University, the results of the content analysis and interviews highlight the key role and social media's impact. Most journalists concluded alternative news sources and media platforms were instrumental in setting the agenda and shaping the framing of the coverage. Journalists also noted that alternative

news platforms were very effective as alternative news-gathering tools and sources of information. The journalists used these platforms to monitor breaking news; to get tip-offs; to follow events in real-time; and to identify influencers among the students. Students' voices were amplified as a result because the protesters used these platforms as storytelling tools and to counter what they perceived as negative narratives, especially in mainstream media. However, the editors were adamant that journalistic ethics and standards were still adhered to, with sources and information double-checked and verified, especially back in the newsroom where stories were curated and contextualised. Two of the four editors (Mahlangu and Patel) acknowledged the framing and agenda setting roles of alternative media while Brown and Ephraim said social media in particular was just a news-gathering tool which did not influence the coverage. Brown and Ephraim dismissed suggestions that mainstream media had any agendas to frame the protesters negatively.

CHAPTER 5: OVERVIEW, LIMITATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Overview

In summing up this study which explored how alternative and mainstream online-based media represented students in their coverage of the 2015 student protests, the researcher will summarise the main points from each of the chapters.

In Chapter One the researcher presented the historical context of student protests in South Africa and similar events elsewhere in the world and how the media cover such protests. Similar patterns of coverage emerged in this study. In the UK (2010) and Chile (2011) where similar protests have occurred in the past ten years, researchers had noticed a shift in how such events were covered by the media. They attributed this shift to the use of digital communication platforms, mainly the use of Twitter, Facebook and other internet-based platforms. Chapter Two focused on the literature review. The first section presented literature on student protests in general. The aim was to unpack literature around student protests both in South Africa and other countries that have experienced student uprisings. This was done to contextualise how alternative and mainstream media covered student protests in the past and the 2015 #FeesMustFall campaign in particular.

The second section reviewed literature around the two theoretical frameworks that underpin this study. Using the framing and agenda-setting theories, the researcher was able to establish how alternative youth media and new media platforms were used by alternative media to counter-narratives in mainstream media. This helped with the resultant positive framing of the protesters and the protest coverage, a notable shift from past research. It was clear that although the study was not analysing the impact of social media, Twitter especially, was crucial in shifting the paradigm in the coverage of the #FeesMustFall campaign. Its widespread use by both students and journalists influenced how the articles and debates were framed and who set the agenda for the coverage. Journalists (Dadi Patel, Pilane and editors Mahlangu, Patel) acknowledged social media's

impact. Protesting students' ability to frame their own messages enabled them to sway the media and public agendas favourably so. They did this by providing counter-frames while communicating what their real issues were. Students also recognised the importance of mainstream media, and shared aggregated content while at the same time correcting what they felt were misrepresentations of their struggle.

In Chapter Three, the research's approach and methodology were explained. Also explained were the data collection and analysis processes used in this study. The dominant frames identified revealed an overlap although alternative and mainstream media's approach in using these frames differed slightly. In responding to the research questions through the analysis of results in Chapter Four, the researcher gave a breakdown of the six identified frames and how alternative and mainstream media used them in the coverage. The interviews with the editors and journalists were very revealing as they confirmed the huge impact social and new media had on the framing practices of the media and how salient issues were made more noticeable. The editors and journalists also confirmed how the agenda-setting role of the media was disrupted by alternative media and other new online media platforms. Mainstream media's extensive use of social media as sources and their decision to let the students tell their own stories show this influence.

From the results, mainstream media appeared obliged to use tweets and Facebook posts, even though it is not clear if tweets were sent out to attract media attention. This resulted in a more positive shift in the framing of protesters by the mainstream media. The journalists and editors interviewed for this study acknowledged that social media was a very useful news-gathering tool. Editors, as traditional gatekeepers, reproduced these messages verbatim in order to let the students tell their own stories and for audiences to make up their own minds based on that information. They also acknowledged that in this digital age of fast-moving information and audiences inundated with news at their

fingertips, media is under pressure and cannot afford to ignore the role social media play in news generation and distribution. The strength of protesters' voice as a source in this research suggests that the students were successful in framing their own narratives more positively and in a way that mainstream media normally does not, which in turn shows the strength of the protesters messaging, mobilisation and the ability to organise themselves. The role and impact of social media in the 2015 #FeesMustFall student protests needs further investigation.

5.2 Limitations

Firstly, qualitative content analysis used in this study has been criticised for being unreliable because of its unscientific nature. The method relies heavily on the researcher's own interpretation of media texts which can be subjective. Secondly, this method is labour-intensive, time-consuming and involves small samples. The dearth in sampling techniques for online-based news media posed a challenge for the researcher. For example, the researcher dropped the student newspaper Wits Vuvuzela halfway through the study because of its limited data set. The student protests at Wits University coincided with students' year-end research projects. Student journalists joined the protests in solidarity after deciding not to cover the protests for the student newspaper. Thirdly, the data set for this study is skewed with three mainstream and only one alternative media websites. Fourthly, this study only focuses on the first ten days of the protests. An extended period and more in-depth analysis of social media's impact could yield more interesting results. Such research could also touch on the more nuanced and critical coverage beyond October 23, 2015.

5.3 Conclusion

Firstly, qualitative content analysis used in this study has been criticised for being unreliable because of its unscientific nature. The method relies heavily on the researcher's own interpretation of media texts which can be subjective. Secondly, this

method is labour-intensive, time-consuming and involves small samples. The dearth in sampling techniques for online-based news media posed a challenge for the researcher. For example, the researcher dropped the student newspaper Wits Vuvuzela halfway through the study because of its limited data set. The student protests at Wits University coincided with students' year-end research projects. Student journalists joined the protests in solidarity after deciding not to cover the protests for the student newspaper. Thirdly, the data set for this study is skewed with three mainstream and only one alternative media websites. Fourthly, this study only focuses on the first ten days of the protests. An extended period and more in-depth analysis of social media's impact could yield more interesting results. Such research could also touch on the more nuanced and critical coverage beyond October 23, 2015.

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Appendix 1: Letter of Consent and Research Questions

Research Topic: *Framing the Narrative: A Comparative Content Analysis of how South African Mainstream and Alternative Youth Media Reported on the 2015 Student Revolution*

Dear Participant,

Following the extensive coverage of the 2015 #FeesMustFall campaign, several themes have emerged of how the alternative and mainstream media covered the student protests.

The purpose of this research is to investigate how both sides of the online media divide covered the protests, how the protests were framed and who set the agenda for the coverage.

Your in-depth responses to these open-ended questions will help enhance this research by contributing to the body of knowledge in media and communication. The focus of this research is between October 14, 2015 (when the protests started at Wits University and October 23, 2015 (when President Jacob Zuma announced the zero percent tuition fee increase at Union Buildings in Pretoria). It was during this ten-day period that the protests and their media coverage peaked with the national shutdown of 14 university, marches to Parliament in Cape Town and Luthuli House, the ANC headquarters and the Union Buildings.

Thanking you in advance for your response.

Sincerely

Doreen Zimbizi

MA candidate: Wits University

Questions for Editors

Name.....

News Organisation.....

Job title.....

1. The #FeesMustFall campaign/movement received extensive media coverage both locally and abroad. How soon did you get onto the story and how was this coverage framed and who set the agenda in the coverage?
2. What were the similarities and differences in the approach and representation of student protesters in your publication?
3. What sources did you use and why? Social media came to prominence during the protests. Did this make any difference in how the student protests were covered? If so, please elaborate?
4. Mainstream media has been accused of handling the #FeesMustFall story poorly while alternative media has been praised for pushing against an established narrative. Is this a fair assessment?

Questions for Journalists

Name.....

News organisation.....

Job title.....

1. What can be said about the role of youth media in providing an alternative perspective compared to mainstream media on critical issues such as student protests?
2. What was it like to be on campus during the protests and how were the stories that ended up in the paper determined? Was your coverage the true reflection of what was happening?
3. For the first time in South Africa, social media was a big part of the story. How effective was it as a news-gathering tool and did this enhance or impact on your work? Did it change the narrative in any way?

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Table 1: Chronology of 2015 #FeesMustFall Protests

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Figure 4: Tone of Stories in IOL (The Star)

Figure 5: Tone of Stories in The Citizen Digital

Figure 6: Breakdown of Voices/Sources Quoted