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So, where to (So-we-to) with audiences? An explorative inquiry into audience development strategies at Soweto Theatre in the period 2019-2023

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University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

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UNIVERSITY OF THE
WITWATERSRAND,
JOHANNESBURG

MA RESEARCH REPORT

So, where to (So-we-to) with audiences? An explorative inquiry into audience development strategies at Soweto Theatre in the period 2019-2023.

A research report submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts by Coursework and Research Report in the field of Cultural Policy and Management.

By

Ratanang Mogotsi

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Plagiarism Declaration

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Course: Master of Arts by Coursework and Research Report in the field of Cultural Policy and Management
Due date: 15 March 2024

Plagiarism declaration

1. I know that plagiarism is wrong. Plagiarism is to use another's work and to pretend that it is one's own.

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4. I have not allowed and will not allow anyone to copy my work with the intention of passing it off as his or her own work.

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Date Submitted: 2024
R. S. MOGOTSI

Acknowledgements

This is for my late mother, my first love, my best friend and my forever cheerleader. I did it, mama, because of your love and support. Thank you for always believing in me, for supporting all of my dreams no matter how absurd. I am so grateful for your love and for always teaching me to believe in myself, to work smart and hard, to remove self-doubt and to always focus on the end goal. Thank you for making your presence felt in times when I needed it the most. I love you, mama.

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To all research participants, thank you for your time, for sharing and your honesty.
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To God.

To me, for writing this paper and submitting it.

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Acronyms

CIMS: Creative Industries Marketing Stokvel

COJ: City of Joburg

DSAC: Department of Sports, Arts and Culture

JCT: Joburg City theatres

MICM: Morris Isaacson Centre for Music

MOE: Municipal Owned Enterprise

MTF: Market Theatre Foundation

MTP: Music Tutorial Programme

TRC: Truth and Reconciliation commission

Chapter 1: (Research Background) Research Overview

1. Introduction

2019 and 2023, saw the biggest decline in theatre audiences because of the Covid-19 pandemic and this brought to the surface the challenge of audience development across the theatre sector in South Africa and beyond. Using a qualitative inquiry and Soweto Theatre as the case study, this research explores audience development strategies implemented at Soweto Theatre between 2019 and 2023. Kawashima (2000)'s conceptual framework about the types of audience development strategies is used to read and discuss findings drawn from the case study. The main aim of this research report is to identify and understand Soweto Theatre's audience development in response to various challenges posed by the pandemic. Through the analysis of programming, marketing, and audience development, this study seeks to discover how these structures within the organisation work together to build audiences. Additionally, the study highlights the importance of collaborations, partnerships, and innovative approaches in sustaining and growing audiences within the South African theatre sector at large.

1.1 Research Background

Soweto is an urban township in the South-western part of Johannesburg. It had a population of 1 895 921 in 2023 (SAHO, 2023) and 200km2 in size. The apartheid government created Soweto in the 1930's to split and isolate people of colour from economic activities in the cities (Hurst, 2009). "So, where to?" came from relocated residents who were forced to live in the township by the apartheid government under the Group Areas Act of 1950 (SAHO,2021). But the name Soweto is a composite which stands for South-western-township.

The people of this township have different stories to tell about life in Soweto. On one side you have a modern Soweto. On the other side, the township still suffers from apartheid legacy issues leaving them with the lack of basic amenities, even as it exhibits the extremes of poverty and wealth characteristic of the city (Mbembé, et al.., 2004). The City of Joburg (COJ, 2018) acknowledges that the main issues facing Soweto include, but are not limited to,

unemployment, with South Africa's current youth unemployment rate at 32.9% (Stats SA, 2023). Other issues are a lack of well-resourced healthcare facilities and clinics, and the necessity for installing more and improved sports and recreational facilities in the township. Soweto has emerged as a notable tourist destination. Statistics from December 2023 by Stats SA (2023) show that 2.9 million tourists visited South Africa. According to an article by Ma Africa Tours (2023) an estimated 250 000 to 300 000 tourists visit Soweto each year. Soweto's vibrant cultural attractions, such as the renowned Vilakazi Street, which boasts an array of restaurants, retail shops, and pubs, are famous tourist attractions in the township and South Africa. Vilakazi Street holds historical significance as the former house of apartheid struggle icons, Nelson Mandela, and Desmond Tutu.

Under apartheid, Soweto became a centre of political campaigns and student movements activities. The 1976 student uprisings began in Soweto, where more than 10 000 students from different neighbourhoods in Soweto such as Orlando, Diepkloof, Pimville and Jabulani marched and protested in the streets of the township (Hurst, 2009). In some neighbourhoods, people staged school and economic boycotts and meetings. The uprisings aimed to overthrow the oppressive apartheid government, its laws and the Bantu Education system. The student "uprising occurred against a backdrop of entrenched racial inequality, perpetuated by the South African government's apartheid policies, which had long sanctioned racial segregation and discrimination against non-whites in the country in all aspects of life" (Kulik, 2024:1). Bantu-education was a system where Afrikaans was the medium of instruction and was imposed by the apartheid government in black schools in the country. Black students were generally taught in their native languages with Afrikaans and English as languages that they spoke when they had to interact with white people, police officers and bureaucrats (Kulik, 2024). In response to these resistance movements and activities from black students and South Africans, the South African government banned black people from any form of assembly or gathering (a group of three or more people meeting, Hurst, 2009). Churches and community halls and centres became alternative spaces for black people to meet and became an integral part in what we now know as Workshop theatre. Soweto produced the likes of playwright and theatre maker Gibson Kente who is considered the Father of South African Township Theatre, Maishe Maponya and Matsemela Manaka who all made works in churches and community halls.

Uplifting and conscientizing the community about the socio-political climate through theatre and music was one of the reasons why meeting in community halls and churches became so important to the people living in townships (Schneider and Nawa, 2019). But it was the lack of or under-resourced recreational facilities such as theatres, sports and entertainment facilities in the townships that forced many artists to make do with working in community halls and churches. Despite the absence of a formal theatre space, community halls, people's homes and churches gave the people of Soweto an escape from the realities and regulations under apartheid.

1.2 Soweto Theatre- The Case Study

Fast forward to the 25th of May 2012, Soweto Theatre was built as part of the legacy projects aimed at serving and improving the township following the 2010 FIFA World Cup. (Schneider and Nawa, 2019). Soweto Theatre is the first theatre to have been built in a township in South Africa. The aim of the theatre was to provide a space for the arts and culture development for the people of Soweto, to address historical injustices and to widen arts participation in the township (Schneider and Nawa, 2019). "More than a theatre – it is a multipurpose performing arts centre, used for theatre productions, music productions, dance productions and choir singing. It also hosts festivals, conferences, meetings, and community gatherings. Dedicated to the arts, it is here that the community can find expression" (Joburg City theatres: Integrated Report 2021/22: 32). Soweto Theatre was an extension of the Jabulani Amphitheatre which was built in 1952. This is an outdoor theatre complex situated outside the Soweto Theatre complex. This amphitheatre was one of the few leisure venues where black people could gather, host cultural, political rallies and sporting events during the apartheid regime. This amphitheatre was also an integral location for secret African National Congress (ANC) meetings during the apartheid era. It survived the uprisings of 1976, and became a place that still holds great social, cultural and political significance (Schneider and Nawa, 2019).

Since January 2013, Soweto Theatre has been integrated with the Joburg Theatre and the Roodepoort Theatre under a single theatre management company called Joburg City Theatres (JCT), owned by the Johannesburg municipality (Joburg City Theatres: Integrated Report 2021/22). Although under the same management (Board of directors, chief executive

officer, chief financial officer and an artistic director), the JCT is managed by the Executive Management led by the Chief Executive Officer who is also the Accounting Officer. Each theatre is assigned their own youth and community development team and marketing team to facilitate outreach initiatives and programmes, audience development activities and engagement. This is beneficial due to each theatre having different audiences, programmes and productions.

Below is a visual illustration of the organisational structure of the Joburg City Theatre sourced from The JCT 2020/2021 annual reports is shown below.

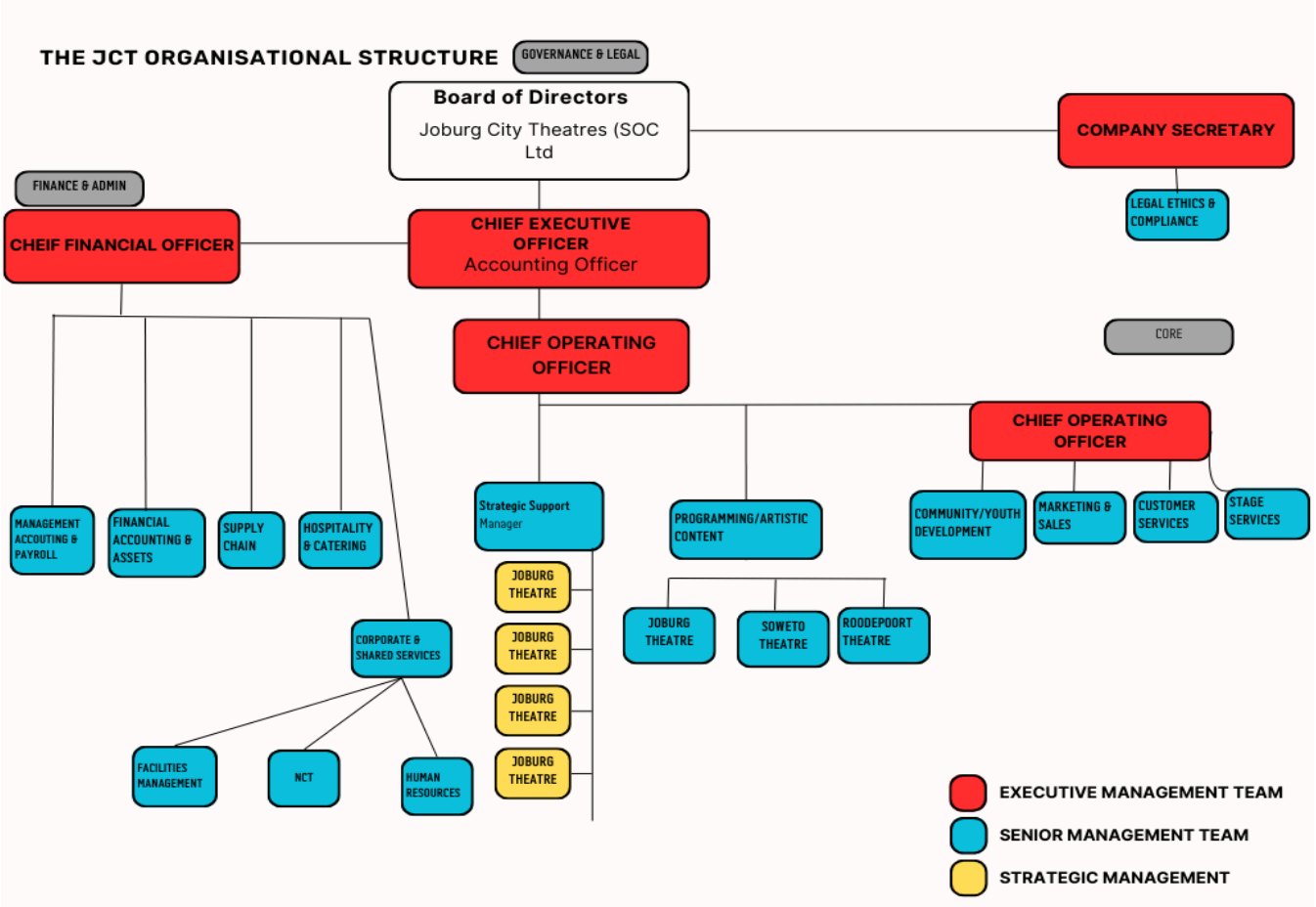


Figure 1: A visual representation of the current approved JCT Organisational Structure sourced from JCT 2021/22 Annual Report.

In 2013/14 Soweto Theatre's marketing and audience development campaigns were developed with the aim to reach audiences (Joburg City Theatres Annual Report, 2014). The strategies included leveraging existing audiences from other arts and cultural organisations and venue rentals such as The Idols SA competition in 2012, Clash of the choirs SA, and SA's

Got Talent. According to *Mthandeni, a current marketing assistant at Soweto Theatre, this was an audience development strategy for Soweto Theatre to make use of the marketing strength of M-Net's Idols SA in social media platforms in 2012. Billboards and local radio stations partnerships with Jozi FM provided an opportunity for artists, the artistic director of the JCT and producers to be interviewed about programming and other activities offered at the theatre. Jozi FM is one of the largest community radio stations in South Africa, located in Dube Soweto. It broadcasts in English, isiZulu, Sesotho, Sepedi and Setswana. Its listenership is at 7 597 000 (Broadcast Research Council of South Africa, 2023). Soweto Theatre had a Friday morning slot on the radio station discussing programming at the Soweto Theatre and continues to utilise the radio station for its current marketing strategies. The South African Broadcasting corporation (SABC), with a total viewership of 36,160,000 on three of its television stations had a partnership with Soweto Theatre to promote shows and programming on SABC shows such as *Morning Live* on SABC 2 which remains the most-watched breakfast show in South Africa, with viewership at 492 423 (Ferreira, 2022). These partnerships continue to be utilised by the JCT, however Soweto Theatre still faced challenges in developing audiences.

In December 2013, Soweto Theatre began in-house productions and programming to continue growing its audiences and attracting people to the theatre. The first plays to open Soweto Theatre were an adaptation of Es' kia Mphahlele's *The Suitcase* (1954), and Percy Mtwa's *Bopha* (1987), as well as Athol Fugard's *Nongogo* (1959), all directed by James Ngcobo, the current Artistic Director of the JCT. Following from these works, Soweto Theatre offered a wide range of productions, which included Zakes Mda's *And the Girls in the Sunday Dresses* (1993), Philip Dikotla's *Skierlik* (2014), dance productions by Vuyani Dance, a comedy show titled *Interpret This!!!* with the likes of Kid Sithole and Kagiso Lediga on the line up. In 2014, the theatre embarked on new audience development and marketing strategies which contributed to growing audiences at the theatre. Warona Seane was appointed as the first Artistic Director of Soweto Theatre in 2013, however, resigned soon thereafter, in November 2015, serving only three years of the five years contracted for. During the tenure, Seane was able to stage sold out shows such *The Story I am about to tell* directed by Monageng Motshabi, a play about the personal testimonies from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). This show brought many audiences to the theatre and

during the last three performances, potential audience members had to be turned away because the theatre had reached full capacity (Schneider and Nawa, 2021). The success of this production, Seane reflects, was due to its one-hour long post-performance discussions where audiences were able to speak back about their experiences of watching the play, questions, and comments about the TRC play (Schneider and Nawa, 2021). During her Artistic directorship tenure, outdoor experiences such as the community arts and crafts markets were held on the last Saturday of each month as a way to attract diverse audiences to the theatre. This alongside the children and youth training programmes and performance gave the theatre a high visibility (De Beer, 2013) that it needed.

In the 2013/14 financial year targets to reach younger audiences were exceeded and continued to do so into 2015 right through to 2018. A pivotal period was May 2016 when the JCT appointed Nomsa Mazwai who took over from Carl Johnson as the General Manager for Soweto Theatre and Salvataris Koloti as the Marketing Executive, and Makhaola Ndebele as the Artistic Director. Under the leadership of Mazwai and the artistic vision of Ndebele, Soweto Theatre became one of the only theatre spaces to host outdoor theatre experiences and events which drew large crowds of Sowetans to the theatre (Tsumele, 2021). This strategy benefitted the theatre when the country was hit with the Covid-19 pandemic, due to the experience of hosting audiences outdoors. Soweto Theatre was able to adjust better in comparison with other theatres because it had long established outdoor activities. Mazwai also initiated a School Set-Works program as a teaching aid for high school setworks. Under this program, a professional theatre company is tasked with presenting the setwork (plays, poems, short stories and other literature studied in schools). Furthermore, an inter-school drama festival was inaugurated, where students performed devised plays and published plays, attracting participation from various schools across Johannesburg. These initiatives continue cultivating young audiences and positively impacting youth and community development programs at Soweto Theatre. Mazwai, in an interview with *Just Trimmings* (2021), attributed the success of audience growth at the theatre during her tenure to partnerships with Soweto Theatre producers, existing client retention and collaborative marketing and promotion activities.

The youth and audience development programs seemed to be progressing on paper, only, with a few challenges mentioned in the JCT Annual report of 2013 and 2014. These included:

shortages in instruments, stationary, sheet music, more parental engagement and support for learners, especially younger students. Tutors also expressed a need for a stricter policy in enrolling students for the Music Tuition Programme (MTP). In David Nkosi's 2017 master's research report (Nkosi, 2027), he demonstrated how the MTP had failed to meet certain targets set up by the theatre. The challenge was that due to the handover from the Roodepoort Theatre to Soweto Theatre there was a "disjuncture within the stakeholders of the Soweto Theatre Music Tuition Programme, which is the Soweto Theatre management, JCT management, facilitators, parents of the participants and the participants themselves in the programme" (Nkosi, 2017: 56). There was a lack of strategic plans in the short, medium, and long term from Soweto Theatre management, involving participants and their parents. There were no proper auditioning processes, no success stories to the program, inconsistent participation, low morale from facilitators, and poor communication all around (Nkosi, 2017).

The 2013 and 2014 annual reports are a reflection on all three JCT Theatres and this does not demonstrate fully how each theatre performed individually, in terms of audiences. These observations and analysis are important for this research report as they highlight some issues facing Soweto Theatre where audience development strategies are concerned. Additionally, the annual reports from 2012-2022 give a general outlook on figures. According to the annual report of 2021/22 a total of 211 974 audiences attended the JCT surpassing the target to 80 000. In the financial year 2022/23 the JCTs had 193 677 audiences visit the theatres and R27 569 million was earned from ticket sales, rentals, in house and co-productions. This was an improvement but still 29% down from pre-pandemic levels. It seems all three theatres under the JCT are doing well where audience development is concerned, but how are they doing when viewed individually?

According to theorist Nobusaki Kawashima (2000) audience development is related to arts marketing and the two work together in growing, retaining and attracting audiences. This report delves into how Soweto Theatre does audience development to grow its audiences. It explores the collaboration between Soweto Theatre's audience development and marketing departments, and the pivotal role the Artistic Director has on programming thus influencing audience engagement. Rogers (2000 in Maitland, 2008) underscores this holistic approach,

emphasising the need for skills in marketing, education, and programming as crucial components of audience development.

1.3 Research Aims

Research aims refers to the main goals and the purpose of the research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This research report is aimed at the following:

1. Finding out and seeking to understand how audience development is approached and what tools and strategies have been implemented by Soweto Theatre in the period 2019 to 2023 which saw the biggest drops in theatre audiences worldwide due to the C-19 pandemic.
2. Finding out who, in the theatre organisation, is involved in growing, retaining, and attracting audiences and what challenges and strengths are evident in the organisation where audience development is concerned.

1.4 Research Questions

The main inquiry of this paper is: How does Soweto Theatre approach audience development in the period 2019 to 2023?

The following are guiding sub-questions used in this research to answer the main question above:

1. What informs the audience development strategies at Soweto Theatre?
2. Who is involved in audience development at Soweto Theatre?
3. How involved is the artistic director in audience development at Soweto Theatre?
4. How marketing and audience development operate within Soweto Theatre?

1.5 Rationale

The sustainability of live theatre has become a great concern for the future due to declining audiences (Wessels, et al., 2022). Audiences' needs and preferences have changed significantly (Bernstein, 2007) due to the rise in digital platforms, social and economic inequalities. The growth and convenience of digital platforms has added pressure on the

theatre and live performance sector to ensure that audiences still have an interest in theatre. Soweto Theatre was built for the community to have access to and experience the arts near their homes. This is an alternative space for Soweto Theatre practitioners and audiences to have access to the theatre going culture (Schneider and Nawa, 2021), and to further try and close "barriers for community participation in the arts (as appreciators and practitioners)" (Nkosi, 2017:10). This research report interrogates the audience development strategies created and implemented by the theatre and explores the impact of Soweto Theatre in increasing access and participation for the community and diversifying audiences for the theatre.

The research conducted on audience development strategies in the South African theatre sector and cultural policy is limited but developing with mostly master's research. Maphaladi Phokungwana's *(2014)* master's research report titled *"Audience development: an investigation into audience interest in theatre in the inner city of Johannesburg"* focuses on audiences interests and motives in attending and not attending theatre in Johannesburg. In the report, possible ways to develop audiences in Johannesburg included marketing, research, social media and more involvement from the government and those funding theatre spaces. Boitumelo Motsoatsoe's (2016) master's research report titled "*From Clicking" yes, I Am Attending", to Actually Attending: Audience Development for Independent Theatre Organisations in Johannesburg-the Place of Facebook" is among* the recent contributions to this field. She focuses on ways in which independent theatre makers explore Facebook as an effective tool to build audiences and additionally explores audience motivations, trends, barriers and effects these have on theatre attendance and growing audiences. Where Soweto Theatre is concerned, only one master's research report by David Nkosi (2017) could be found.

These research reports raise concerns about what is being done by arts organisations and those who make theatre about the declining audiences in the South African theatre sector. The reports raise questions about audience development as a major policy issue that requires a collaborative effort from artists, organisations and, most importantly, the Department of Arts and Culture (Motsoatsoe, 2017) to develop strategic plans that outline goals, with specific time frames and linked to specific assessments, outcomes and outputs (Nkosi, 2017).

This research report raises questions about what art organisations such as Soweto Theatre are doing to ensure they continue to exist and serve the needs of the people these organisations were built for, namely, to have access, and participate in the arts. This research report is located in the Cultural Policy and Management discipline, and further analyses what support theatres are in need of in order to grow audiences, because the future and survival of the arts and cultural expression lies in the development of new audiences and markets.

1.6 Research Method

To conduct research, suitable research methods are needed for the research. This study employed a qualitative research method with Soweto Theatre as the case study. Document analysis, semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and personal observation served as strategies and techniques employed for data collection. This approach is emphasised by Yin, (2018) that case studies rely on multiple sources for data collection which allows for more engagement with the various perspectives. Furthermore, in the qualitative framework, the case study approach enables participants to provide in-depth insights into their perspectives and experiences related to the specific case (Creswell, 2003). I chose the case study method because I wanted to get a deeper understanding of the complex issues in audience development by looking at one case study and exploring its unique approaches to audience development. The method for this study will be discussed in chapter two of this research report.

1.7 Research report structure

This section provides the outline of what each chapter in this research report entails. Chapter one presented an overview of the study, the introduction, background of the study, the case study, research aims, research questions, rationale and research method. Chapter two discusses the research methodology used in the study. It consists of an introduction, research design, research participants, qualitative data collection methods and analysis, as well as ethical considerations and limitations to the approaches and study methods used. Chapter three comprises the literature review, covering audience development, arts marketing, some audience development strategies such as digital marketing, and theatre

audiences and segments. Chapter four analyses the conceptual framework, presenting key concepts and themes visually. Chapter 5 presents the findings that answer the main research questions about audience development strategies, roles within Soweto Theatre, challenges and possible solutions. Chapter 6 discusses recommendations and limitations of the study. Finally, Chapter 7 concludes the report with closing remarks.

1.8 Concluding Remarks

As highlighted in the rationale section of this research report, the research conducted on audience development strategies in the South African theatre sector and cultural policy is limited but is developing. The research conducted raises concerns about what theatre organisations and theatre makers are doing to address declining audiences and ensure the survival of theatre culture in South Africa.

Therefore, conducting case study research on the topic of audience development in the theatre sector is essential to gain a deeper understanding of the exciting strategies and to create new ones. This research report is situated within the Cultural Policy and Management discipline, and positions audience development as a major policy issue. Effective audience development requires collaboration from artists, theatre organisations and municipal and government entities. Such collaboration is crucial for creating strategic plans that will outline clear goals, objectives, specific time frames, and linked to specific assessments, outcomes and outputs of each theatre (Nkosi, 2017). Utilising the case study approach for this research report required patience. I faced many challenges such as participants choosing at the last minute not to participate in the research, some were unavailable for scheduled meetings and we had to postpone. This led to a small sample group of a total of ten participants. This can be viewed as a weakness for this research report.

Chapter 2: Research Methodology

This research employed the case study method of analysis. It involves a detailed examination of a specific case or subject (Stake, 2005). A case can refer to various phenomena within a defined context, such as an event, situation, or organisation (Yin, 2018). Soweto Theatre was chosen as the case. This allows for a focused investigation of audience development in its unique context (Zainal, 2007). Through the qualitative framework, the case study approach enables participants to provide in-depth insights into their perspectives and experiences related to the specific case (Creswell, 2003). Baxter and Jack (2008) note potential challenges in comparing cases. But the aim of this research is to understand how Soweto Theatre understands and does audience development. This includes its reasons, obstacles, and successes. Instead of using quantitative methods, this research interrogated the meaning of the phenomenon from the participants' views (Creswell, 2003). The quantitative method to case study could have been considered, however, I wanted my research to rely on and enable subjective views of the research respondents as well as incorporate my own observations to the case study. I also struggled to gain access to a lot of information from Soweto Theatre. I relied on a lot of annual reports which were made available online, however, even those did not provide me with information such as number of audience attendance for each production or event held at Soweto Theatre during the period 2019-2023. However, according to Stake (2005) and Creswell (2003) the qualitative method through a case study is able to utilise other sources relating to the case study, for evidence and validity. Therefore, I made use of as much information that I could access to assist in my research. By utilising the qualitative case study methodology, this research obtained insights into the unique dynamics and circumstances of Soweto Theatre.

2.1 Research Design

Fieldwork was conducted as part of the research. The aim of the fieldwork was to interview participants who are involved and assigned by Soweto Theatre to handle audience development. Numerous challenges were encountered, including participants opting out of the research due to time constraints and availability issues, as well as some choosing not to respond or commit to their preferred interview times. Given the inherent challenges, I relied on the understanding that case study analysis often involves a small sample size, enabling

thorough exploration of complexities and nuances (Schoch, 2020). This approach allows researchers to focus on the most relevant participants or cases in line with their research questions and objectives (Yin, 2018). Despite efforts to recruit participants who were/are closely related and knowledgeable to the case study and audience development, I relied on those who were willing to speak about audience development at Soweto Theatre. Ethical considerations and time constraints and my resources as a researcher prohibited any coercion of participation. While the sample size of this report may be small, with only five participants and five focus group participants, the data collected, though not intensive, was sufficient enough to address the research question; how does Soweto Theatre do audience development in the period 2019 to 2023? The gaps discovered can be explored in further research.

2.2 Research Participants

The participants for this research report include one youth and community development representative and one representative in marketing from Soweto Theatre. These two representatives hold junior roles in the organisations but are older in age to the participants of the youth programmes. The above participants were recommended for this research report by the COJ Theatres based on their knowledge, expertise, duty and experience in audiences and audience development at Soweto Theatre. They were both interviewed at the Soweto Theatre. I had an online meeting with the former director of Arts, Culture and Heritage at the COJ and was responsible for ensuring Soweto Theatre was built. A former artistic director of Soweto Theatre stepped in when the current was not available, and I interviewed him over coffee. Lastly, I interviewed an audience development specialist who has worked in and with various theatre spaces in the Johannesburg area doing audience development projects with his company called D-Tours. He is also the current co-director of an initiative called Creative Industries Marketing Stokvel (CIMS), which creates comprehensive and inclusive audience development structures for independent art producers in South Africa.

The table below presents profiles of all the semi-structured interview participants in their order of expertise in relation to Soweto Theatre's approaches to audience development. They are placed in the order of relation to audience development at Soweto Theatre. Those

marked with a * are the pseudonyms used as participants were not comfortable to have their names mentioned in the research report.

Role	**Demographic**
Current Marketing Assistant at Soweto Theatre *Mthandeni is the pseudonym used	Black Male
Current Intern Youth Development at Soweto Theatre *Aliyah is the pseudonym used	Black Female
Former Artistic director of Soweto Theatre 2016-2019	Black Male
Former arts, culture and heritage director at COJ 2004-2012	White Male
Audience development specialist working in the theatre sector	Black Male

In addition to the above participants, I had a focus group with five audience members. They are also former participants of [1]Lits'omong Drama Programme at Soweto Theatre. Focus group is a method to collect qualitative data. The main advantage is that there is an interaction between participants during data collection (Morgan, 1996). The method aims to obtain data from a purposely selected group of individuals rather than from a statistically representative sample of a broader population (O. Nyumba et al.., 2018). Participants are given an opportunity to openly voice out their views on a particular topic with other participants present (Marshall, 2006). Initially, the plan was not to interview any audience members, thinking that insights from those directly involved in audience development at Soweto Theatre would be sufficient. However, Lits'omong Drama programme directly impacts the programming at Soweto Theatre, particularly the theatre programming and its audiences. The participants of the program often share rehearsal and performance spaces with professional productions at Soweto Theatre.

[1] Lits'omong is a theatre development program for children and youth. Provided in partnership with the internationally acclaimed children's theatre organisation ASSITEJ SA, and gives children the space to explore their talents for the arts. Cutting across various disciplines that support learners' cognitive, emotional, social and physical development as well as create equitable opportunities for learning.
. The aim of the programme is to use theatre as a learning tool and a means of emotional and physical development for young people 7 to 21 years of age (Soweto Theatre, 2024. Available on: https://www.sowetotheatre.com/youth-development/. Date accessed: 21 April 2024).

Pseudonym	Role	Year of participation	Demographic
*Lesedi	Former participant of Lit'somong Drama Program	2018-2019	Black female
*Gift	Former participant of Lit'somong Drama Program	2016	Black male
*Mpendulo	Former participant of Lit'somong Drama Program	2018-2020	Black male
*Nokuthula	Former participant of Lit'somong Drama Program	2018-2019	Black female
*Tokollo	Former participant of Lit'somong Drama Program	2016-2017	Black male

The focus group consisted of current Wits School of Arts students and interns at Wits University's Drama for Life. The participants joined the programme due to their interest and love for dramatic and performing arts. After the program they were inspired to study further. I reached out to two participants involved in the program, who then recommended three others. Initially the plan was to interview them individually, I ultimately conducted a focus group with all five participants after agreeing on a suitable time where they would all be available. The session lasted for an hour but extended as participants had questions and concerns about the research topic and processes. They also sought reassurance about anonymity, expressing worries about being identified by the theatre. To address their concerns, consent forms were provided to assure them of confidentiality. At first, they had reservations. But felt comfortable sharing. They shared their experiences as program participants in Lits'omong, audience members, and for two of them, as young and aspirant theatre makers. The focus group provided valuable and additional insights into audience development from both audience and participant perspectives.

The inclusion of participants from Lits'omong Drama Program was fitting for this research. It aligns with one of the audience development strategies employed by Soweto Theatre. The strategy aims to promote interest and engagement among young people in theatre. I believed that insights from these program participants would enrich understanding of how audience development is approached at Soweto theatre. They would also contribute to addressing the research question: How does Soweto Theatre approach audience development? Lits'omong Drama Program is designed to educate youth in the theatre sector. I anticipated that the perspectives of its participants would offer valuable insights into the diverse approaches to growing audiences and building interest in theatre.

2.3 Data Collection

A comparative analysis of the eight participants' (focus group participants included) response was utilised to allow for the linking of several pieces of information from the same case study to highlight the different perspectives (Njie and Asimiran, 2014) about the Soweto Theatre. The semi-structured interviews or non-structured interviews were conducted with participants for the duration of an hour to two hours and offered richer and more extensive data. Two participants were three more times as I felt I needed more information and clarity from them to better answer the research question. The same set of questions were used for each participant to assist me as a researcher to refer back to the main themes of this report. Follow up questions or probing questions were also used as these were sparked by the participants responses (Creswell, 2003) and to further expand on the participants responses to questions, to seek clarification but also to allow for participants to fully express themselves when answering the same set of questions.

To assist in my data collection, the following questions were selected as guiding questions:

1. What informs the audience development strategies at Soweto Theatre?
2. Who is involved in audience development at Soweto Theatre?
3. How involved is the artistic director in audience development at Soweto Theatre?
4. How marketing and audience development operate within Soweto Theatre?

As an audience member of Soweto Theatre, I employed direct observation as a method of analysis and to make connections with the information shared from the participants. This method involved making use of all five senses, taking field notes, and creating a narrative based on what I have seen, heard, sensed and observed. This was done by attending shows and engaging platforms such as social media platforms to observe how audience development/strategies are created and to compare these to the interviews with the participants. The former arts, culture and heritage director of the COJ could not respond directly to audience development questions, but he offered insightful information about community advocacy, the processes, plans and research that went into establishing the theatre. The audience development specialist working in the theatre sector was approached to fill this gap and he spoke generally about his work as an audience development specialist,

providing insightful information about the South African theatre sector and audience development and marketing strategies.

To keep record of the interviews, each interview was recorded on recording devices with written and verbal consent from my participants as well as note taking that could be used to create follow up questions and to capture my data for analysis. These recordings served as valuable resources for quotations that were incorporated into the findings and discussion chapters of my research.

2.3.1 Data Analysis

Due to code switching[2] from some of the participants interviewed for this research report, transcribing some data was a challenge. A prevalent challenge encountered with many transcriptions software and applications used for this research report, is their inability to accurately transcribe non-English speaking voices. This resulted in errors such as incorrect word renderings in the written text. As a multilingual speaker, I undertook the task of transcribing the majority of the data into English. In doing so, I attempted to ensure an accurate representation of the participants' words into English while preserving the authenticity of their viewpoints as best as I could.

Another issue that occurred during my field work and data collection, some participants leaned towards implementation processes rather than strategy. This affected the data that was collected, analysed thus affected the research question asked; how does the Soweto Theatre do audience development?

After gathering and reviewing the data, I closely examined it to find similar statements, phrases, and themes, following the method outlined by Miles and Huberman (1994). Kiger and Varpio (2020) follow similar approaches for thematic analysis, “searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report” (Kiger and Varpio, 2020: 846). The thematic analysis is an appropriate method to use for this research

[2] Code switching and code mixing are commonly used throughout the world. Both occur when two languages are used spontaneously in one clause or utterance. Code switching is also a complex process, which involves different levels of switching or mixing in accordance with proficiency in the languages used. definition sourced from: Mabule, D.R., 2015. What is this? Is it code switching, code mixing or language alternating. *Journal of Educational and Social Research*, *5*(1), pp.339-350.

report as it seeks to understand and examine a set of experiences, thoughts, or behaviours across a language- based data set (Braun and Clarke 2012). Specifically, the inductive thematic analysis was employed, where I allowed the themes to emerge naturally from the data instead of predefining them beforehand, as in deductive analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2012). While I had some initial themes in mind, I allowed the data to guide the analysis process. This approach enabled me to approach the data with an open mind, identifying patterns and themes that were grounded in the data itself.

I utilised the six steps of reflexive thematic analysis offered by Braun and Clarke (2012: 121) to analyse the data collected.

1. *Familiarising myself with the data:* The process includes transcribing data, reading and re-reading the data multiple times to gain a deep understanding of its content, noting initial ideas.
2. *Generating initial codes:* Identifying interesting features, patterns, repeated words, phrases or themes in the data. This involves highlighting and labelling relevant sections of the data.
3. *Searching for themes:* Collating the codes into potential themes and gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4. *Reviewing themes:* The process is to check if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis.
5. *Defining and naming themes:* This step involves articulating the central meaning of each theme in relation to the research question or objective.
6. *Producing the report:* The final step includes a selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, a final analysis of selected extracts, relating the analysis to the research question and literature and producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

Direct quotations were utilised to present the research findings and discussion for this report. This method has been identified by theorists Anne Corden and Roy Sainsbury (2006) as an emerging standard practice in qualitative social research. Halcomb and Davidson (2006) argue for direct quotations and the use of verbatim presenting of data because they clarify "that interviews were actually conducted, and that the data reported by a researcher are a true and accurate representation of the data obtained through the interview process"

(2006:40). The decision to present certain portions of the data in monologue or quotation format was motivated by the desire to accurately convey the participants' manner of expressing their perspectives. During the transcription process, I observed recurring themes and phrases, which I anticipated would facilitate subsequent thematic analysis. Furthermore, the audience development specialist (frequently referenced a concept he termed the ‘storytelling model’ employing a narrative style reminiscent of storytelling. This observation resonated with the essence of theatre, which inherently involves storytelling—a central focus of this research report.

I presented the findings using Word Art (2024) to demonstrate all words repeated by participants. This method offers a visually engaging and accessible approach to show the patterns that emerged from the data. While interviewing the participants and holding the focus group, there were recurring phrases that were emerging. Subsequently, I grouped the repeated phrases and generated themes that connected to audience development and discussed these themes with reference to Kawashima’s (2006) four strategies or aspects of audience development. Although not explicitly outlined in the conceptual framework, Varbonova (2013) and Chong (2018) emphasise the importance of strategic management in audience development. Therefore, strategic management emerged as a central theme in this report, marking the beginning of the discussion chapter.

2.4 Ethical considerations and Limitations

Permission was requested to conduct interviews and access annual reports from the Soweto Theatre and Joburg Theatre, permission was granted. However, difficulties arose in securing annual reports, commitment from participants for interview scheduling and duration. “Research using human data should consider the values and principles of ethical conduct which should be considered before starting the study” (Kaewkungwal and Adams, 2019: 176). No participant was compelled or pressured to take part in this research. Participant consent forms were administered prior to the interviews, providing participants with comprehensive information about the study and affording them the opportunity to decide whether or not to participate.

In terms of anonymity, some of the participants interviewed were happy to have their names used in the report. To protect the confidentiality of those who were not comfortable to have their names mentioned in the report, with the permission from the participants, pseudonyms were used (Wiles, et al., 2008) as well as their roles within the organisation. A request from Soweto Theatre to share the research analysis and final research report has been noted and thus will be provided to the organisation. Furthermore, I obtained ethics clearance from Wits University as it is a requirement that I obtain ethics clearance when interviewing people for my research.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

Audience development is crucial for theatres because they rely on audience attendance for their existence. Whether in-person or online, as seen globally during the Covid-19 pandemic, theatres thrive through patronage (Essien, 2006). Without an audience, the theatre experience is non-existent. Audience attendance has dropped, and audiences have more cultural expressions and activities to choose from (Mendal et al., 2014). Therefore, various methods, tools, and strategies are necessary to reach and expand an organisation's audience base, while also establishing a clear positioning of the organisation's work (Gillard, 2000). Art organisations should know their audience well and adjust their audience development and marketing strategies accordingly. The purpose of this research report is to discover what informs audience development at Soweto Theatre in the period 2019 to 2023. This period saw a drop in theatre audiences locally and globally. Although approaches to audience development are unique to each organisation, the main goal of audience development is to reach audiences.

The purpose of this section is to access and review various literature in the field of audience development. While the literature reviewed is not exhaustive and has limitation representation from Global south, however, it provides some key themes and arguments on the topic.

3.1 Cultural Value: The Value of Theatre in Soweto

The assumption is that some Sowetans, particularly those who experienced the Apartheid regime and those familiar with the history of the township, know what theatre is, its significance, its value and its contribution to the cultural landscape of South Africa. Historically, most Sowetans interested in live performance and theatre would often visit The Market Theatre to watch plays. The Market Theatre was one of few spaces that welcomed non-white artists and audiences during Apartheid. With the establishment of Soweto Theatre, more accessible offers became available, allowing people in the township to experience and participate in live performance and theatre. Greg, Roodhouse and Blakey (2007) support this observation. They state that “the value of a cultural product or service depends on its ability to connect us to other people and our culture” (2007:424). This connection underscores the importance of culture and cultural value.

People connect to what they value. In *Balancing Act: Twenty-One Strategic Dilemmas in Cultural Policy,* written by Matarasso and Landry (1999), they argue that in cultural policy, providing a community such as the people of Soweto access to a predetermined set of cultural values, experiences and products, like a theatre, reflects "a 'top -down' dispensation of elitist cultural values developed in the context of time and class" (Matarasso & Landry, 1999:13). However, I argue that when Soweto Theatre was built, there was a long theatrical culture and heritage that had been in existence in this township (Hauptfleisch, 1984). Much of what is written about South African theatre, particularly workshop theatre and protest come from Soweto.

Although Soweto didn't have a formal theatre, theatre is a known and powerful art form within the community. The township was the political hub for student uprisings, protest and workshop theatre. Playwrights such as Matsemela Manaka and Gibson Kente contributed through their work to document their experiences of living in the township and under Apartheid. Many artists used theatre as their political statement through their plays *How Long?* (Kente, 1973) and *Egoli: City of Gold* (Manaka, 1982). The plays of both playwrights, Kente (1973) and Manaka (1982) continue to be staged all over South Africa with new imaginations to the texts and performances. Sowetans had access to community art centres such as Funda Centre and community halls such The Diepkloof Hall to put up their plays, rehearse and to hold political gatherings and talks. They also have access to MTF, Joburg Theatre, Wits Theatre and other theatre spaces in the greater Johannesburg and Pretoria areas. The theatre places allow for easier access to a formal theatre, but Sowetans can still leave the township to go and see theatre elsewhere.

Hutter and Frey (2010) argue that "cultural value finds expression through mutual, collective judgement procedures" (2010:36). In this context, an organisation's ability to clearly define its role and its offerings leads to a shared understanding of cultural value. It then finds different ways to engage with its audiences through these collective judgements (Cantamessa and Montagna, 2015). Holden (2006) agrees and identifies three ways publicly funded organisations generate value: intrinsic, instrumental and institutional. Intrinsic values relate to an individual's subjective experience of culture intellectually, emotionally and

spiritually. Instrumental value refers to how culture is used to achieve broader social or economic purposes. Institutional value is concerned with how organisations engage with and create value for their stakeholders.

The challenge with intrinsic value is that it deeply refers to the personal and subjective experiences. How are those measured, and whose cultural experience matters most? Cultural value is different for each person, and so, people's interpretations and experiences vary (Holden, 2006). Furthermore, there is often tension between the government, producers, and the public, as each stakeholder values culture in very distinct ways. The government typically focuses on instrumental value, producers on intrinsic value, and the public on a mix between intrinsic and institutional value. This differentiation creates discrepancies and tension between stakeholders (Holden, 2006). It also affects how cultural value is measured. Holden (2006) advocates for combining instrumental and intrinsic values to better capture the full scope of cultural value. Instrumental and intrinsic values can be used together to best capture cultural value, an approach suggested by Holden (2006). This approach acknowledges that "value stems from customers' learned perceptions, preferences and evaluations (Tzokas and Saren, 1991:55). This approach means we would be able to acknowledge cultures' ability to transform people's lives, for their own development and to meet policy objectives (Holden, 2004). However, this approach does not create a bond between potential consumers and cultural producers/workers and institutions. Potential consumers are also vital in considering cultural value because they are made up of those who do not know and have no interest, and those who have no access to culture. Holden (2006) offers a recommendation: The government should understand the value that the public have on culture. The cultural producers should explain the value of their goods and services. They should make it clear to the public who use or access them. Holden (2006) offers that the challenge of cultural value is that the public, organisations, and government have different interests and motivations in culture. Holden (2006) highlights that the differing interests in culture amoung the public, cultural organisations and government is a significant challenge in audience development. For instance, the public/community could seek access, enjoyment and relevance in cultural offerings, organisations may focus on the financial aspects, viability and sustainability. The government could focus on promoting

culture and economic development. The differences in motivations complicates and aids audience development and engagement efforts.

Observations made on how Soweto Theatre, a cultural organisation, contributes to the creation of cultural value could be through its existence, programming and performances. Institutional value is where Soweto Theatre is located as a cultural organisation that creates cultural value through its programmes and live performances for its audiences. Soweto Theatre is not only a mediator between the public and government, but it is an active agent in creating what is valued by the public (Holden, 2006). Soweto Theatre is not just a site of live performance and theatre, or an instrument for generating cultural meaning, it too creates value (Holden, 2006). Soweto Theatre can also be located in the instrumental value segment as it contributes to the social and economic significance of the arts. Institutional, intrinsic and instrumental values can be developed, and contribute to the context of audience development through the feedback from the public, youth programme participants, partners, employees and other stakeholders working with the organisation.

3.2 Audiences and Theatre

The audience is essential to the existence of theatre, it is the reason why the artist/s and performers are there (Hill et al., 2003). Audiences are central to the definition of theatre, at the heart of a theatre. Without an audience, there is no experience of theatre (Weaver and Freshwater, 2017). Suonsyrjä (2007) reiterates this, stating that audiences and those who watch art, are involved with artists and art institutions in some sort of transaction. They exchange value, and this exchange is what makes theatre exist. In this research report, audiences refer to individuals who attend, engage with or participate in programs offered by the theatre, whether they pay for the experience or not (National Theatre and Dance Policy, 2023). Audiences also include those who approve government funding, grants, or corporate subsidies (Bennett, 1988).

The audience acts as one-fold to witness, spectate, participate, and experience theatre. However, Rogers (1983) argues that if audiences are only those who attend, the definition is narrow because it disregards those who cannot attend and those who can. This includes social media audiences too and that “those who only visit online may have particular

interests which could define an entirely new audience for the organisation" (Gillard, 2000:217). With this, social media or digital platform audiences, though not physically present, interact in ways that are still valuable to theatre, serving as potential and future attendees or as part of engaging with the larger audiences and virtual communities. The emergence of digital platforms and social media have extended traditional concepts of audiences and interaction. Audiences are interacting through likes, shares, comments, reposts and these are virtual extensions of their experiences with theatre. Such interactions are valuable as they expand potential audiences who, for varying reasons cannot physically attend but are still engaged in the content and interested in theatre.

This research report focuses on how Soweto Theatre can capitalise on its existing audience base to expand its reach and attract younger, more diverse and new audiences. It also explores the role of social media as a tool to facilitate this expansion, with a particular focus on how online engagement can serve as a gateway to drawing new theatre visitors. By understanding both virtual and physical audiences, the theatre can implement various strategies that can cater to broader audiences while ensuring its relevance and sustainability in the rapidly changing digital landscape.

3.3 What is Audience Development?

There is no agreed definition of audience development, various interpretations have been offered to provide a definition or rather the process. I think it is better defined through implementation. The term was coined in the mid-1990's Maitland (2007), who suggested that audience development is a continuous process used by institutions to find and retain potential audiences through various strategies. This is echoed by Alnasser and Yi (2003) emphasised that audience development is a planned and continuous process relating to methods, tools and activities that are aimed at growing audiences. Adding to this understanding are McCarthy and Jinnet (2001) who described audience development as a process in which organisations attracted both existing and potential audiences through the implementation of innovative strategies. Varbanova (2013 notes audience development is primarily associated with the arts and culture sector, where it is "related to participation and active engagement in the creative process. In the case of non-profit or subsidised arts organisations, it usually also includes elements of education and then is called audience

outreach" (2013: 162). This approach, emphasises the need for organisations to understand audience's, their needs and motivations while also aligning with organisational objectives to design programming, audience development strategies and marketing initiatives.

The definition of audience development provided by the Arts Council of England encompasses the main aspects offered by scholars such as Kawashima (2000) and Varbanova (2012). It describes audience development as an "activity which is undertaken specifically to meet the needs of existing and potential audiences and to help arts organisations develop ongoing relationships with audiences. It can include aspects of marketing, commissioning, programming, education, customer care, and distribution" (Arts Council England, 2011: 2). This definition highlights what scholars such as Maitland (2000) emphasised above. It stresses the need to understand existing and potential audiences' behaviour and preferences. This understanding is key to making meaningful, strategic and sustainable audience development strategies (Varbanova, 2012). It emphasises the importance of acknowledging potential audiences who include those who are not easily available as offered by Kawashima (2000). The 'not easily available audiences' include those who have not attended arts events ever, lapsed or infrequent attendees. The above definitions include key parts and cover components of marketing, programming and education which are the main aspects of building audiences. This report will explore these components further, using the Soweto Theatre as the case study.

The term audience development has been in existence in global north cultural policy since 1945 and the method was supply-led (Hayes, 2003) and progressed to the demand-led approach (Hayes, 2003). The supply-led approach placed emphasis on existing audiences or participants. The implication of this perspective was that it limited audience development to current audiences and not new audiences. But this approach introduced touring opportunities for some arts organisations. These were aimed at expanding beyond the existing audience base and providing more opportunities for people to have access and participate in the arts and create new audiences in the arts (Kawashima, 2000).

The 1990's demand-led approach to audience development became popular for arts organisations and museums in the UK. More emphasis was made on creating audience development manuals or frameworks that would be used by arts organisations. The

demand-led approach, according to Hayes and Slater (2002), was about attracting new and current audiences by enriching the experiences of existing audiences as well as engaging new audiences who were often from marginalised groups in society. The demand-led approach included what Kawashima (2000) called arts education as a way to allow for more access and participation in the arts. But McCarthy and Jinnet (2001) argue that still, many arts organisations have little guidance on how to build audiences due to the limited literature on the subject, thus they simply follow “a hit-or-miss approach” (McCarthy & Jinnet, 2001: xi) in developing audiences and audience engagement.

To avoid or address the above challenge, Varbanova (2013) presents a strategic management process tailored for arts organisations which serves key functions in financial and fundraising, marketing and communications, and organisational and managerial realms. They are used interchangeably with corporate strategy, business policy and strategic planning. This process encompasses planning, setting an intention and evaluating and monitoring organisational capacity and resources. This strategic management process involves the whole organisation (Maitland, 1997, 2008; Hayes, 2003. Kawashima (2000) offers a framework on audience development which arts organisations can use to frame their strategies. She presents four aspects of audience development which are distinguished by the audience target, form and main purpose within an organisation. The four types of audience development are cultural inclusion, extended marketing, taste cultivation and audience education. These are used as the conceptual framework that guides this research report and will be discussed in the conceptual framework chapter hereunder. Kawashima (2000) further argues that audience development is related to arts marketing. She states that “arts marketing has facilitated the rise of audience development by statistically proving that audience composition is not representative of the whole population and also by throwing light upon the psychological barrier to attendance which had not really been noticed in the previous debate over access” (2000: 18). This insight stresses the importance of creating tailored strategies for different audience segments.

Audience development, therefore, requires organisations to clearly define their target audiences and align programming, the organisation's goals, and strategies to suit these groups (Gillard, 2000). The word, strategy has been used to describe audience development, strategy according to Porter (1996) strategy is a set of decisions, tools and actions that assist

an organisation to remain competitive and be able to create value through their offerings. Kawashima (2006) argues that strategies for audience development rely on past knowledge of audiences, new research on audiences and their interests by analysing the relationship audiences have with the content offered and how it is communicated. In practice each organisation has its own strategies and approaches to audience development (Suonsyrjä, 2007). They are based on its needs, missions and visions while targeting various audience segments within new and current audiences. But at the heart of audience development is providing access to culture as well as creating new management processes that will support these organisations in the cultural and entertainment markets (Alnasser and Yi, 2023). This research report puts Soweto Theatre at the centre and aims to find out what informs the theatre's audience development strategy in the period 2019-2023.

3.4 Audience Development and Marketing

Marketing is a strategy or position for audience development (Chong, 2002), and both are key management functions. They are an important part of every strategic plan (Varbanova, 2013) and the overall business strategy of an organisation (Hill and O'Sullivan, 1993). Kotler and Scheff (1997) argue that audience development is a practice-based approach and business strategy that includes arts marketing as one of its strategies. It is an integrated management process with a set of techniques. Kawashima (2006) clarifies that "arts marketing tends to concentrate on existing audiences, audience development is seen to be different in that it targets not easily available audiences" (2000:8). These "not easily available" audiences include individuals from low-income households or those who may not be adequately informed or educated enough about the arts. However, using the Ansoff Matrix, arts marketing can cater to new audiences, thereby aligning with the principles of audience development.

Meldrum and McDonald (1995) propose four marketing strategies than can be linked to audience development:

1. **Market Penetration:** selling existing products in existing markets.
2. **Product Development:** developing new products for existing markets.

3. **Market Development:** selling existing products in new markets (market development) aligns with audience development because it's aimed at attracting not easily available audiences.
4. **Diversification:** Creating new products for new markets.

If audience development is about creating access and participation as Kawashima (2000) suggests, then extended marketing, one aspect offered by Kawashima (2000) can be a powerful tool to attract the 'not easily attracted audiences'.

Literature indicates that arts marketing, like audience development, is a continuous and evolving process that is constantly reinventing and transforming itself by identifying new methods and strategies of connecting with audiences (Diggle,1984; Varbanova, 2013). Arts organisations can benefit from marketing and audience development strategies that align with the overall business strategy of an arts organisation (Varbanova, 2013). Arts marketing is "an integrated process which sees mutually satisfying exchange relationships with customers as the route to achieving organisational and artistic objectives" (Hill and O' Sullivan, 1993:31). Like audience development, arts marketing can take different forms depending on how it is implemented (Colbert and St-James, 2014).

Arts marketing draws from traditional marketing principles but has evolved into a distinct discipline. It employs critical and creative approaches to generate more meaningful and actionable arts marketing theory and practices (Fillis, 2011). While arts marketing draws from the foundations of the marketing mix. Fillis (2011) also encourages arts marketing "to move forward on its own terms" (2011:3). This aligns with my research on how the Soweto Theatre approaches audience development on its own terms. Colbert and St James (2014) argue that those involved in arts marketing in organisations traditionally have no say in the production and creation of the product. However; my view is that they can certainly be involved in marketing the product from its inception, similarly to those involved in audience development. Colbert and St James (2014) support my approach and understanding of audience development to include artists as artistic marketers of their own work and as vital resources and collaborators of audience development.

Kotler and Scheff (1996) add that there are difficulties with the collaboration between the artistic directors and marketing departments on audience development, as each department serves different profiles in management and artistic offerings. However, both departments serve the same audience by making available an artistic experience and product. This research report explores the role of the artistic director and the extent to which programming is or could be influenced by audiences and ways in which to grow their participation in the theatre.

Kawashima (2000) and Hill et. al (2012) also supports the idea that audience development includes aspects of arts marketing. Arts marketing can be used to document the different programmes offered by an organisation as a tool to attract funding stakeholders. Varbanova (2013) points out that only in non-profit organisations does audience development include education and outreach programmes aimed at furthering participation. Bjornsen (2013) adds that while marketing can be used alongside audience development, audience development primarily supports democratisation of culture without the concern or pressure of generating profit or reaching a diverse audience, that is the role of marketing.

Both audience development and arts marketing on cultural policy have become a discourse of cultural policy and on the arts and culture management agenda. In Sirayi's (n.d.) unpublished text titled *Draft policy review report* a recommendation is provided on how audience development and marketing of cultural organisations to South African and international communities should be taken as major policy issues. The report by Sirayi (n.d.), argues that audience development and arts marketing are used interchangeably in South Africa. This causes confusion about their distinct meaning and functions within cultural policy, organisations and for cultural makers.

3.5 Audience Development, Cultural Inclusion and Participation

Kawashima (2006) distinguishes between cultural inclusion and audience development, but cites cultural inclusion as one of four types of audience development. Cultural inclusion caters for excluded people who have limited opportunities to participate in the arts, or those excluded due to social and political inequalities such as poverty and apartheid. Both Kawashima (2006) and (Bjornsen, 2013) argue that for an audience development strategy

aimed at achieving cultural inclusion to be a success, it has to be target-led in order to make contact with new audiences. Where product-led refers to the arts organisation's core product, target-led are other offers available in the organisation that can draw more, new and diverse groups of audiences. The cultural inclusion strategy for audience development, according to Kawashima (2006) and Bjornsen (2013), emphasises that access to a specific cultural professional art is what some people have no access to, and that audience development and its strategies is supposed to bridge this gap.

McCarthy and Jinnet (2001) outline three ways people participate in the arts. The first is through attendance. The second is through media, and the third is through a hands-on way, engaging in activities set up by the theatre such as the youth and outreach programmes. The explanation provided by McCarthy and Jinnet (2001) makes all three groups of participation equally important to arts institutions that wish to increase public involvement in their activities. Audience development "changes the structure and composition of audiences to achieve democratic participation in the arts to engender greater levels of trust and commitment [loyalty] among existing and fledgling audience groups" (Hayes, 2003:1). These three groups of audience participation are vital to consider when creating audience development strategies.

This research examines the role of digital marketing-particularly social media- as an emerging tool for audience development and engagement. The next part of the literature review explores the growing usage of digital marketing as another tool of audience development and arts participation, particularly using social media to increase theatre attendance.

3.6 Digital Marketing as a strategy to Audience Development

The rapid diffusion of the internet presented arts organisations with new tools and challenges to audience development and arts marketing. Information can now be accessed through digital platforms (Besana et al., 2023). Digital platforms such as those used by social media create a new form of audience development and relationship (Gillard, 2000; Bernstein, 2007). In theatre, the internet and social media platforms provided performance

spaces (Lonergan, 2015) and certainly under the Covid-19 pandemic conditions saw a massive rise in the use of social media and other online platforms. Social media, or social network sites, promote “connections among users through personal profiles with the ability to form online friendships and groups, and to communicate through public posts and private instant messages” (Cole, 2014:43).

These platforms were leveraged as digital marketing strategies for audience development and engagement to reach and engage audiences (Bernstein, 2007) while sharing cultural activities and experiences. Digital Marketing encompasses the use of electronic devices, social media or the internet (Desai, 2019) to connect with audiences. Due to its global reach, digital marketing allows for greater interactivity between audiences, users, and organisations or service providers (Aleksandra et al., 2021). Although the shift to digital marketing is not new, its role in audience development grew significantly during the C-19 Pandemic, which pushed many industries and sectors to rely on online platforms to reach audiences.

Soweto Theatre makes use of social media as a supplementary and alternative marketing strategy (Timplalexi, 2020) to promote and advertise upcoming shows and programmes. Audiences can witness this through their cell phone devices, computers, tablets and laptops. The above-mentioned devices are some of the devices which we saw being utilised during the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown. They have emerged as cultural workers (Richardson, 2013; Timplalexi, 2020; Padberg, 2021) and as instruments for publicity and marketing (Schmitt, 1976) for the theatre. Through images, the filmed versions of some live performances, art making processes, trailers and short clips of live performances. Soweto Theatre utilises these and uses its platforms to gather quantitative and qualitative analysis concerning their audiences. However, the challenge with social media is the issue between online interaction and engagement versus whether this correlates to that of in person attendance to the theatre.

Digital marketing through the use of social media as Lonergan (2022) and Besana (et al., 2022) write, has become a contributor to audience development and marketing. On social media, marketing and advertising are supported on various platforms in order to attract the attention of different stakeholders (Besana et al., 2013). Viral marketing is also explored as a “concept of digital advertising that has developed within social media. Viral marketing, viral

advertising, or marketing buzz are buzzwords referring to marketing techniques that use pre-existing social networks to produce increases in brand awareness or to achieve other marketing objectives" (Bicas, 2011:34) through interactive content shared on social media. Theorists such as Besana et al. (2012) have argued that theatre is a difficult art form, due to audiences only being able to judge a play after seeing it. There is an opportunity with this gap in the art form to make use of social media to post all information about the theatre and its productions. Another opportunity is to create short trailers, similar to those of movies, short clips of the behind-the-scenes footage as a way to attract audiences and to provide them with a taste of what to expect when they watch the play. Both theatregoers and non-theatregoers can become loyal audience members through the use of digital platforms and social media (Di Maggio and Maggio, 2004; Besana et al., 2023). Social media has demonstrated to be an effective tool in attracting diverse and broader audience groups. I explore how Soweto Theatre makes use of social media platforms to attract and engage audiences from Soweto and beyond. Social media has become an accessible tool to build and maintain relationships with audiences and for marketing opportunities (Hadley and Hadley, 2017). Due to this growth, social media strategies are also created as an addition to audience development strategies.

3.7 Audience Segmentation

The need for theatre organisations to understand and respond to the changing expectations of diverse audience groups, including age, cultural background, and socio-economic status is essential to audience development. When audiences sit in the theatre, they are homogenous, they act as one-fold; to watch, experience, spectate and witness the offerings that are on stage. Audiences are far more complex than grouping them into general and homogenous as done by Edwin Wilson (1991); more often a heterogeneous audience exists and are those who attend the theatre, composed of diverse ages, characteristics, values and knowledge (Essien, 2006). But for Soweto, some people aren't even audiences or are aware of Soweto Theatre. Patricia Gassner (2007) further reiterates this by claiming and concluding that "South Africa's audiences as it is assumed that a wide range of given diversities, as for example regarding languages, races, beliefs, norms, classes, wealth, education and so forth, are significantly contributing to audience fragmentation and suggest adequate media

supply" (Gassner, 2007:120) for people to be able to participate and have access to a wide range of art forms.

Suonsyrjä (2007) groups audiences into two; *primary* and *secondary.* However, there are various categories that emerge within the two. *Primary* audiences are those who frequently attend, as well as target audience, regular audience, occasional audience are those who are present when there is an event which they deem to be important and potential audiences who need to be convinced to attend as well as youth and tourists (Alnasser and Yi, 2023). *Secondary* audiences are those that play a part in the attendance of the *primary* audiences. They include audiences such as other stakeholders and funding bodies (Suonsyrjä, 2007) and those who have an interest in and want to support the arts (Hill, et al., 2003).

The secondary also form part of the potential audiences or missionary, traditional non-attendees (Hayes and Slather, 2002) and those who cannot attend are vital in understanding how a theatre such as Soweto Theatre begins to think of who else to attract and how. However, there are residents in Soweto who make up what Hayes and Slather (2002) call the "*indifferent group"* (2002:10). These are groups of people who have no opinions about the arts and have no desire to attend. This group are not audiences per say but could be if they are given the education through the youth and community development initiatives offered by Soweto Theatre.

Another audience group which falls into the indifferent or potential are those who only attend special events such as The *Seven Colours Event* and the End of Year Countdowns. *The Seven Colours* Event is Soweto's first food market which happens every last Saturday of the month at Soweto Theatre offers a DJ line up, dance floor, best chefs and caterers from the Johannesburg area serving township cuisine, "the Seven Colours Sunday dish" and desserts. "We host this event outside the theatre we have a lot of young people attend, last month (November 2023) we had close to 500 people attending and the outside area can host up to 2000 people" (Marketing representative at Soweto Theatre, 2023). The End of Year Countdown takes place every year on the 31st of December into the 1st of January. On average it costs about 2000 audiences who make use of the outside area of the Soweto Theatre and the Jabulani Amphitheatre which can host up to 3000 people. "These events bring a lot of young people to the space" (Aliyah, 2023). These groups of people are only

interested in the venue or Soweto Theatre as a building that hosts these events and not so much the theatre offerings.

3.8 Audiences Experiences in the Theatre

Audiences have the potential to play a bigger part in developing and growing audiences. Word of mouth on what they say about the experience they had at the theatre could impact theatre positively or negatively. Simpson (2017) explores how theatre, governed by expectations of a silent auditorium, attentive audience members, cell phones switched off for the duration of the performance as well as no video or photography taken in the theatre is part of the theatre experience. Simpson (2017) writes that "the acceptance of quiet-audience etiquette as a theatrical norm radically decreases the auditorium's accessibility" (Simpson, 2017:1). This etiquette allows for less conflict amongst theatre audiences and for respect and focus to be given to the performers on stage. For some audience members and performers, the cell phone is a distraction due to texting, ringing, flash photography or browsing social media during a performance but for others it is an opportunity for others to come and see the offerings of the theatre space.

In my experience at Soweto Theatre, a selfie station in the waiting area was installed, where audiences could take pictures and videos, with a big sign that has the logo of the theatre and social media handles. The content taken could be used on social media as a way to advertise and draw attention to indifferent audiences (Hayes and Slather, 2017) who have access to digital platforms. Audiences were encouraged to mention the theatre when sharing images taken at the theatre on their social media platforms. The cell phone and social media have proven to showcase the ability of this small device to emerge as a cultural worker (Richardson, 2013; Padberg, 2021). The cell phone and the content taken by audiences at the theatre has the ability to emerge as an audience development strategy that could boost the Soweto Theatre and other arts organisations. With a simple share, another share of the same content, the chain continues reaching other audiences.

For the experience inside the theatre, scholar Heim (2012) introduces the concept of *Audience as performer* and draws her inspiration from Jerzy Grotowski's and Richard Schechners' ideas of *Theatre of Participation* (1968). These concepts explore how the

embodied actions of the audience constitute a performance or indicators to audiences' experiences and perceptions of the production they are watching. Actions such as cheering, standing, responding to the action stage can say a lot about audience experiences but would require those in marketing and audience to attend shows to assess how programming is received. Post-performance discussions, where "audience members became active contributors to and co-creators of the theatrical event through their self- direction, their negotiation of meanings, and their performed role as critics" (Heim, 2012:1) can be used as a tool to assess audiences' experiences. Furthermore, post-performance discussions can enhance theatre education as well as to further assist in the development of future programming at the theatre where audiences have an influence in what productions are on at the theatre. This approach enhances data collection because each audience's experience can be noted, although it is impossible to fully capture or accommodate each audience's needs.

Similarly, to opening nights, post-performances enable audiences to meet and interact with the artists involved in the production. These concepts explore how the embodied actions of the audience in the theatre also constitute as indicators of audiences' experiences (actions such as cheering, standing, responding to the action stage) which Soweto Theatre can also use to assess audiences' reception and experiences as well as their audience development strategies. However, finding other formal ways of capturing audiences' experiences is crucial for the overall success of Soweto Theatre's audience development strategies.

The literature review emphasises the importance of a nuanced understanding and adapting to cultural contexts and audiences first, understanding audiences' diversity, behaviours, segmentation, needs and preferences in order to promote meaningful audience development strategies to grow theatre audiences. However, what is revealed in the literature, is the importance of clarity on terminology and alignment between the artistic expressions needs, marketing functions and audience development strategies to effectively meet the needs of audiences, art makers and other stakeholders in the theatre sector and the creative and cultural industries at large. Although audience development is a continuous and ever evolving process that involves research on audiences and current contexts. It requires strategic planning and ongoing adaptation. The strategies should be a response to this and be innovative and adaptable to changing audiences' preferences, the digital and

technological advancements as well as the societal needs. With the growth in digital platforms, audience development strategies have adapted to this emerging trend; by utilising such platforms in addition to other audience development strategies, Soweto Theatre can strengthen its role as a cultural hub that fosters inclusivity, participation, and meaningful audience experiences in the township.

Chapter 4: Conceptual Framework

This section outlines the conceptual framework guiding this research report. Audience development focuses on understanding audiences and finding strategies that will meet them where they are (Varbanova, 2013; Parker, 2012; McCarthy and Jinnet, 2007, Kawashima, 2000). In a paper published in 2000 titled "*Beyond the Division of Attenders vs. Non-attenders: A Study into Audience Development in Policy and Practice,"* Kawashima (2000) analysed audience development efforts of cultural organisations and catergorised them into four approaches used as strategies for different audience segments: Cultural Inclusion, Extended Marketing, Taste Cultivation and Audience Education. These approaches were developed in response to issues of access to the arts, declining participation in the arts, particularly in theatre, classical music and visual arts. Kawashima (2000) observed that while cultural policies were aimed at democratising access to the arts, in practice strategies fell short in ensuring diverse arts participation.

Although theorists such as Steve Hadley (2017) argue that Kawashima's (2000) framework does not provide any greater or new understanding of audience development, claiming that the framework provided by Kawashima (2000) is simply a "reworking of Ansoff's Matrix Ansoff, 1957)" (Hadley, 12017:2). This approach in fact aligns with Rogers (1998) and Kawashima (2000 and 2006) who assert that audience development requires tools and skills in marketing, education and programming. Audience development is a collaborative effort between those involved in programming or the artistic aspects, audience development and marketing within the organisation.

Below is a table offered by Kawashima (2000). The four types or aspects to audience development usually overlap in practice and do not need to be looked at as mutually exclusive.

Aspect of audience development	**Target**	**form**	**Main Purpose**
Cultural Inclusion	People least likely to attend, e.g. low-income	Outreach	Social
Extended Marketing	Potential attender,	The same product	Financial, Artistic

	lapsed attender	offered, but with improvement to cater for the target audience	
Taste Cultivation	Existing audience	Introduction to different art forms and genres	Artistic, Financial (and educational)
Audience Education	existing audience	The same product offered with extensive education	Educational (and financial)

I use the table above and conceptual framework to see whether Soweto Theatre utilises the four key aspects of audience development as proposed by Kawashima (2000) in its own strategies to attract audiences. The table captures the audience target, form and purpose of each strategy of audience development. Strategic management is a central component for this conceptual framework. It encompasses the business strategy which includes the goals, vision, and mission of an organisation (Hill and O'Sullivan, 1993; Varbanova, 2012). Marketing and audience development are recognized as essential management functions and integral parts of any strategic plan of an arts organisation (Varbanova, 2013). I will now discuss the four main aspects of audience development.

Outreach projects or cultural inclusion: This is a type of audience development that is aimed at targeting those who have historically been marginalised or excluded from cultural experiences. “The group of people who for apparently social reasons, are the least likely to attend the arts” (Kawashima, 2000:8) due to lack of access, education as well as social inequalities. Access to the arts is far more complex than we think and that it is also tied to broader social issues, structures and history. The goal of outreach projects or cultural inclusion is to dismantle some of these barriers and to encourage participation. Outreach projects or Cultural inclusion strategy takes the arts into the community without the expectation to add to ticket sales in the immediate future through a range of activities such as educational projects initiated by arts organisations. With the awareness of the community’s barriers, cultural organisations can better tailor their outreach efforts effectively and by diversifying their offerings.

In terms of programming, cultural inclusion can also include programming that can draw diverse audiences by incorporating different art genres, themes, stories and languages.

Extended Marketing: includes a set of strategies to encourage both current and non-attenders to build trust relationships with arts organisations, which places customers at the core of their business. Kawashima (2006) proposes that extended marketing relies on arts marketing principles of persuasion by improving aspects of the theatre's offerings such as discounts, special events and other opportunities that allow for people to be persuaded to become regular audiences. Woo Lee and Lee (2005) earlier argued that an organisation should focus on producing what is a real need, interest or what is popular to its customers/audiences and participants rather than struggling to sell what the organisation can produce. My approach to audience development and arts marketing is that the two are team players where audience development is concerned. They should integrate in tasks to further increase audiences and interest the organisation through various activities (Hill and O'Sullivan, 2003). Kotler et al. (1997) earlier argued that arts marketing should not abandon the artistic vision, nor should the artist be uninterested in audience development strategies and arts marketing for their work (Diggle, 1976). Extended marketing highlights the importance of audience engagement and feedback as a contributing factor to audience development and strategies.

Taste cultivation: This strategy aims to cultivate the tastes of existing audiences and introduces different art genres and forms to attendees of specific art forms to nurture theatregoers' tastes and broaden their experiences in the arts. Taste cultivation can also introduce current audiences to new ways of experiencing other art forms offered by the theatre. Complimentary and free shows are also used to cultivate audiences' taste. Similarly, arts education is an opportunity to introduce those who would least likely participate, to find it worthwhile to participate without having to pay or to pay at a discounted rate. The strategy to offer complimentary tickets and discounts gives those people/audiences who may have challenges in paying the full price an opportunity to see the work. The hope is that they see value in the work and enjoy the experience to make them want to see it again or see versions of the same experience and see the need and value in paying for it.

Audience education: Similar to taste cultivation, audience education or arts education targets existing audiences. It is about enriching the quality of the audience's experiences and appreciation of the arts as well as to ensure that they return to events more frequently (Kawashima, 2000). Audience education is concerned with providing the audience with sufficient information that will enable a better understanding of or perspective on the performance they will be experiencing (Radbourne et al, 2009). This strategy includes pre- or post-performance engagement moments with theatre audiences, crew and performers. Opening night events are another example where patrons are welcomed with food and drinks and photo taking moments, all aimed at providing the audience with an opportunity to better understand the event or a different perspective from which to appreciate the performance. Education, in particular arts education, is a powerful determinant of cultural participation. Theorists such as Brito and Barros (2005) and Bergonzi and Smith (1996) argue that knowledge and experience of how an art form works is what is needed for someone to appreciate it and want to participate and see value in it.

Monitoring and evaluation of audience development strategies is the final step in accessing how strategies perform and “in order to make sure everything is going according to plan and make corrections, if needed” (Babić, 2011:99) throughout the process. This part of audience development takes place throughout and after a strategy has been implemented as a method to assess the progress of various strategies implemented by an organisation. It is a tracking process offered by Varbanova (2013) that reviews the industry and peer company behaviour towards the fulfilment of plans as well as other performance measures versus the objects. “It looks at what you set out to do, at what you have accomplished, and how you accomplished it” (Shapiro, 2001:3).

This research report is an exploration on approaches to audience development and uses Soweto Theatre as a case study to add to growing literature on the subject in the South African context. I simply document how and why and provide observations as contributions to finding ways to grow audiences in the South African theatre sector. By utilising Kawashima (2000; 2006) I am guided by four main aspects which contribute to understanding and analysing audience development at Soweto Theatre.

Chapter 5: Research Findings

5.1 Introduction

Audience development as a research topic is a growing interest in the South African theatre sector. It reflects a global trend towards understanding and engaging diverse audiences who have access to a wide range of cultural expressions and experiences (Bernstein, 2007; Besana et al., 2023). Innovative audience development strategies are a priority for theatre practitioners and organisations as they continue to make artworks for audiences.

5.2 Audience development at Soweto Theatre

This chapter presents the results that were obtained from the semi-structured interviews, my observations as a researcher, focus group discussions and external documentation. The documents include annual reports and past interviews about audience development at Soweto Theatre. The results are all aimed at answering the question: How does Soweto Theatre approach audience development in the period 2019 to 2023? The results came from three sample groups. Those who were involved in audience development at Soweto Theatre (*Mthandeni, a current marketing assistant, *Aliyah, a current representative for youth and community development at Soweto Theatre). The second group is the former artistic director (2016 to 2019), an audience development specialist working predominantly with independent organisations and artists as well as the former director of arts, culture and heritage at the COJ from 2004 to 2012. The former director of arts, culture and heritage played an integral part in what is now Soweto Theatre, from the research phase, budget and implementation. The third sample included five former participants of Lits'omong Drama Program. They are also current audience members of Soweto Theatre; they took part in the focus group discussion for this research report.

As discussed in the methodology chapter, the findings are presented in a word chart format first. They demonstrate all the repeated words and phrases captured from all the transcripts. The first word chart is from the semi-structured interviews and a second word chart is from the focus group. The transcripts were a long read and I had to find a strategy that would best connect the data together. Finding the repeated words and phrases was the strategy that I employed for my data analysis.



figure 2: A visual representation of repeated words and phrases from interviews conducted.

I analysed the interviews for repeated words and phrases. I grouped them to extract key themes, pertinent to audience development literature review and conceptual framework. The themes were both inductive and deductive (Braun and Clarke, 2012). I anticipated themes prior to the data collection. I created new themes after reading the transcripts and made groups of repeated words and phrases. The following themes and sub-themes emerged from the interviews:

1. Strategic Planning and Management: Resource Management and Operational Challenges
2. Audience Education: Youth and Community Empowerment/Development and Engagement
3. Extended Marketing: social media, word of mouth



Figure 3: A visual representation of repeated words and phrases from focus group discussion conducted.

The following themes emerged from the focus group discussions which aligned with the conceptual framework:

1. Audience education: Lits'omong programme, its value on participants, participants experiences and feedback to Soweto Theatre.
2. Extended Marketing: social media marketing, word of mouth and posters

These themes show the nuanced nature of audience development. They also highlight the importance of strategic approaches in addressing diverse challenges and opportunities within the field.

The next part of the findings chapter will explain the themes in relation to audience development. I used some of the data and quotes from research participants to demonstrate their relation to the themes and used the themes to group and provide structure for the research findings section of this paper.

5.3 Strategic planning and management

The theatre was a strategic move by the COJ. It aimed to make Soweto viable and well-resourced. The theatre has added to the already existing cultural life and theatre going culture of the township. The idea of having a diverse and minimal theatre space was informed by the former director of arts, culture and heritage for the COJ and the research he undertook before the building of the theatre. He visited and studied various theatres in Johannesburg, London, Montreal and Toronto. The research included finding out how some theatres were funded, resources that went into the buildings, the seating arrangements, designs and architecture. He saw theatres that were referred to as 'box' theatres. These theatres are small with flexible flat floor spaces that could be used in multiple ways. The 'box theatres' informed the brief for the architects involved in building Soweto Theatre. Currently, the theatre has three theatre spaces. The Red Theatre, the largest theatre space, has a fixed stage and seating of 420. It has a full orchestra pit and a bridge for the fly tower and wings. The other two venues are a 180-seater- Blue Theatre, and a 90-seater Yellow Theatre. The latter mentioned theatres are more flexible and allow for flexible seating arrangements (DWR, 2012). The Foyer is a public space which is also an additional performance space, a social gathering before, during intermissions and post-performance. My observations agree with the above because when visiting Soweto Theatre, I observed how the theatre is well-resourced and how the various theatre spaces were flexible and were used in multiple ways for different productions. I also observed the foyer as a meeting place, social gathering space as well as an additional performance space for the theatre.

When asked about how the Soweto Theatre approaches audience development and the process taken to develop strategies to grow audiences, *Mthandeni expressed the following: "We usually take the same approach to market and advertise shows, it includes finding out the show's dates, cast and crew information and which venue. We get a poster done by the designers in collaboration with the director and other crew and our job as the marketing team is to get that information out. We also create marketing materials such as content ideas for social media, press releases and updating the newsletters that get sent out to people by email." This process takes place in production meetings with the production team, the artistic director and producers of Soweto Theatre. A budget and production timeline are already set prior to this meeting and each team is expected to brainstorm ideas based on

this and present them at the production meeting. The Marketing team have their own duties and responsibilities outlined, the youth, audience and community development team also have the same.

When asked how marketing and the youth, audience and community development teams work together to implement strategies and distribute information to audiences and the community *Mthandeni said the following: “Even if they (youth, audience and community development team) don't go out, they're the ones who are holding and responsible for the database for the audience. Yeah, they must always refresh the database. They must always collect the database. Yeah. Every time that happens when we need an audience, when we need to send maybe via email, via WhatsApp, or via other platforms, they are the one who will distribute.” Perhaps this does not answer the question above. However, it was the response given by the participant and I think it answers the question about audience research and audience engagement strategies at Soweto Theatre. The response highlights the importance of community outreach and involvement.

5.4 Resource Management and Operational Challenges

While a clear plan could be established with relevant key players to implement it, Soweto Theatre faces several challenges that impact audience development plans and strategy execution. Implementation of strategies became a recurring theme to answering the question how Soweto Theatre does audience development. Resources and roles and organisational capacity appear to play significant roles in strategy development and in implementation. I asked how strategies or projects for audience development developed? *Mthandeni spoke about the process taken for audience development strategies and revealed a few issues and gaps. He began by stating the following, “so, when we're still planning, there are no problems, but when it comes to implementing, that's where the challenges come”. He further admitted that it was the marketing team that was managing the budget, the budget approved by producers of Soweto Theatre from the JCT. The programming team, which includes the artistic director and other creative teams, marketing team, producers and audience development teams are all present for the meetings. However, when it comes to work allocation and implementation, *Mthandeni has to split his

focus between the marketing team, audience development team and the digital marketing team- an external company hired by Soweto Theatre. He admitted that the digital marketing team could assist him more by taking full control on their part.

When asked how marketing and audience development teams operate, the responses were unclear, but what was revealed was the following; currently, the marketing team are the primary creators of marketing content for social media and other marketing material such as posters, flyers and billboards with information about programming and youth development programmes. The audience development teams focused more on community interaction, they “go out to people, like schools, delivering what we have made” said *Mthandeni before admitting that a more collaborative format would better assist in lowering the workload and improving strategies and their implementation. The youth participants who participated in the focus group followed a similar strategy to advertise their own productions with the assistance from heads of marketing and youth and community development departments. One focus group participant shared their experience in the following way. “We had to get involved in making posters, in telling people about our shows”. This process was taken with the approval of the head of marketing and head of audience development.

5.5 Digital Marketing and Social Media marketing strategies

Soweto Theatre in addition to the above-mentioned strategies, make use of social media and digital marketing platforms. The content consists of posts, posters and videos with information about audition dates for youth programmes, performance dates, costs and venues, vacancies and other information relating to Soweto Theatre. “The reasons to go the social media route was to capture our younger audiences and new audiences and to keep up with marketing trends- using social media more” this was shared by *Aliyah. The website follows a similar pattern of content. I asked *Aliyah, why these strategies were chosen, and this was her response alongside, “this is what we saw working, we change the posts, yes, but this is how we have been doing it”.

I have created a table demonstrating interactions on the social media platforms used by the Soweto Theatre. It demonstrates the average social media online interaction and posts and type of posts that Soweto Theatre makes use of, starting with the platform that receives the

most interaction to the least. What is evident in the table is how a platform can have many followers, many views but less likes or comments that acknowledge that a post has been seen, or that a show will have x number of audiences attending from seeing the post online. The information was sourced from my observation and interaction with Soweto Theatre's social media platforms. I began tracking the social media platforms when I began the fieldwork, however as an audience member of the theatre, I have always taken note of the social media interactions of Soweto Theatre. For the data provided below, I spent a month tracking posts, likes and interactions as a way to support my research question on finding out how the theatre approaches audience development.

SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORM	**TOTAL LIKES and FOLLOWERS**	**INTERACTION**
Facebook and Instagram There is more activity from Soweto Theatre and interaction on posts from audiences.	● Posts range from short videos, images, posters of upcoming shows, rehearsals, artists profiles and audiences at the theatre. ● A short paragraph accompanies the post with more detail and link to the Soweto Theatre website and web-ticket.	**Instagram:** 2467 followers ● On average more than 10 likes on each post lowest likes: 2 **Facebook** Rating: 4.6 out of 5 (444 reviews) total likes: 42 000 total followers: 46 000
TikTok	● 1010 Followers ● most likes: 684 on a digital poster with a voice over providing information about the show; where to purchase tickets, prices, cast members, playwright, director and duration of the show.	6 posts: 2 clips of rehearsals process ● 1 video of audiences (students) attending a show ● 3 digital posters of upcoming events ● 713 likes and a total of 20 000 views ● Average likes: 88,6 on a post ● 2 positive feedback comments on audience's experience ● Last post posted: 2023/11/22
Twitter	9569 Followers Last post: 12/02/2023	average views: 150 Most liked post: 7 The post likes on a post are for a Marketing Manager vacancy retweets: on average 5

Figure 3: Illustration of social media activity and performance of Soweto Theatre taken on 25 March 2024.

From the table above, the theatre makes use of Instagram and Facebook more than they do other platforms and the interactions are evident of this. *Aliyah recalled the following: “during lockdown, there was a real need for us to be more engaged on these platforms because they were all we had to keep people engaged”. One such example was the online poetry open mic challenges which took place at the early stages of lockdown. This was open to anyone, and audiences were charged R30 for a ticket and a black Friday special of R100 for five tickets to watch the online performances on Facebook Live. The highest number of likes/shares/comments and overall engagement automatically qualified a poet a slot to perform in front of an audience at Soweto Theatre after the National Lockdown. The audience figures were not available on annual reports nor were they known by those interviewed and because the events were live, this information is not available on the platforms nor is it captured in the annual reports.

5.6 Audience Education strategy: Youth participation and access during Lockdown

Some of the chosen strategies revealed a few challenges for those who the strategies were meant for. Classes for the youth programs took place over platforms such as Zoom, Whatsapp and Facebook during lockdown. It was not easy to interact with participants online due to some having connection issues, lack of cell phone data. *Aliyah further added the following: “some students used cell phones and others had computers and laptops, those with cell phones really struggled and those without any devices felt left out”. In addition to youth program online classes, audiences had the opportunity to view plays via the JCT website and YouTube by purchasing vouchers online from the JCT website. *Gift, a focus group participant shared the following: “for me, data was an issue, I couldn't watch the shows because I had to make sure that I had enough data that would sustain me for the whole show. You must remember that even though it (the theatre production) was online, it was still theatre, so I couldn't pause and then watch at a later stage when I did have the data”. The former artistic director also spoke briefly about putting shows online, but says that it was a partnership with all JCT’s, audiences could go to the JCT YouTube page or

website and watch live versions of plays such as Gibson Kente's *"How Long?"* (1973) performed by The National School of Arts students and Janice Honeyman's *Snow White* the Pantomime and open Mic Poetry performances. The online theatre productions were all pre-recorded and free and had allocated time and date slots for audiences to attend. Those who could not make the scheduled dates, could make use of vouchers from Webtickets that allowed for them to watch shows at a time convenient to them. This was to ensure that the majority of the audiences could watch the shows.

While audiences, art makers and the theatre were excited to have audiences back after the national lockdown, some challenges arose. *Mthandeni admitted that the shows worked at a loss because "the theatre that sits 400 plus people could only fit about 100 people, also we did not get 100, people were hesitant, people didn't want to get sick, people didn't want to wear masks, so we lost out a lot during that". *Aliyah and *Mthandeni acknowledged that utilising social media wasn't their forte. However, the social media company enlisted by the Soweto Theatre assisted the marketing team with some aspects of social media and digital outreach. They did not share when the company was appointed but expressed a need for better communication and better task management and delegation between the company and Soweto Theatre team. He further expressed that it was a lot of work for the current team of four (which includes a graphic designer, a marketing assistant, a junior member and an intern) who all get the go-ahead from Mthandeni who gets his go-ahead from head of marketing. The digital marketing strategy is not fully developed as most of what is used for traditional marketing, is used for social media marketing.

5.7 Youth and Community Development and engagement

The estimated numbers for the youth served in Soweto Theatre's youth programmes as stated in the JCT annual report of 2022-2023 is over 883 youth reached which was an increase from 500 in the previous financial year. But these figures are for all the JCT's, and those from Soweto Theatre could not be provided as the manager of youth and community development was not available nor could participate in this research report. But the success or assessment of this programme is measured on the end of year productions and throughout the year. The facilitators, appointed by the Head of Youth, Audience and

community Development, are tasked with providing feedback and reports on the participants' progress during rehearsals. They dedicate the majority of their time to interacting with the participants, offering valuable insights into the operation of the programs.

But it has been a challenge for both departments over the past 5 years to get audiences. In terms of the youth, the challenges included a lack of interest in particular shows, other commitments, and interest in specific events and not so much theatre plays. *Mthandeni added the following: “we must reintroduce different things, especially for the elderly people too. So, we need everyone to utilise the space, not just the people who are on social media, or young people, or the artists or musicians, or anything like that, abantu ba la” (referring to people who reside in Soweto). A response from *Lesedi, a focus group participant, reflected their frustration as a former youth program participant stating the following: “we must take over guys! take-over audience development at S-T so that we come with creative ideas, creative ways to lure in the audience of Soweto. Because if it's old people doing this, they can't relate to young people”. Another focus group participant offered their experience as being quite positive in the way that they were able to participate in some audience development initiatives. He recalled the following: “I was invited by the marketing team at Soweto Theatre, we would go to schools, like maybe every Friday to high schools, to perform a specific performance in maybe five minutes. Just a trailer that gives the vibes… So, I guess it was their strategy to win among high school learners, those that are interested in theatre space, I think it worked”.

5.8 The role of the artistic director in audience development

Upon his arrival in 2016 as the artistic director of the JCT, the former artistic director realised that there were issues in audience development and marketing. One Of the first things he did was to observe. He observed the area outside of Soweto Theatre, he found that the space was open, had tables and chairs, had great WIFI and a great space for hanging out for young people, especially high school learners. A lot of students from nearby schools often met at the theatre after school to skateboard, to hang out, meet friends and create social media content. The outside area became an alternative space for learners to meet after

school and he recalls how parents would say they preferred the space because of its safety and proximity to the schools and homes. Many learners would join the programs, so it became important to know which schools they attended for school visits. This was especially crucial since some learners were already involved with Soweto Theatre and its various activities and programs for young people.

The former artistic director's second strategy as artistic director was to continue with the programs that were already existing such as the school's set works festival. The *Schools Set Works* was popular, I observed numerous schools visiting the theatre to watch shows when I was waiting to interview *Aliyah. She mentioned; “young people really love coming to see plays, we see their excitement before and after a show. The set works programme is great because they get to ask questions which they may find in their school tests and exams. The interaction of these young kids is really beautiful to see”. The after-school Drama programme Lits’omong which was started by former artistic director Warona Seane during her tenure, the Music Tutorial Program (MTP) are the two youth programmes which run throughout the year and are separate from the Schools Set Works. The former follows an audition and selection process, and young people actively participate in making theatre productions. The latter is offered by the theatre to schools and all the productions are done by professionals. The other programmes run at various times of the year such as holiday programmes and the set works programme.

“I wanted to target the youth, those outside, just hanging out, I wanted them to hang out creatively here” (Former artistic director of Soweto Theatre 2016-2019).

This quote informs a second strategy. He looked at programming to inspire young people and artists who resided in Soweto to be resourceful and to think of their productions or any artistic idea as having the ability to exist outside of Soweto and Soweto Theatre. This strategy was also aimed at introducing different ways of producing theatre to young people who frequented the space and those who were aspirant art makers. So, *One Man Shows* or a minimum of 5 cast member productions with minimal sets and designs became the tool and inspiration for young audiences and aspirant theatre makers. The programme ran for just over two years, alongside the music version titled, *An evening with…* the idea was to have

young creatives and aspirant art makers see that they could make work on a small scale, for cheaper and with less performers but with a good quality script, cast and crew that would be able to perform in diverse spaces due to its minimal sets.

However, a response from *Mpendulo, one of the focus group participants offered this reflection when he approached the theatre post his participation in the Lits'omong program. This participant was looking for a space to put up their theatre production which he developed while studying at Wits University. "So, at the Joburg theatre, there's a space for youth development. So, its youth development space, space.com. So there, there's an option of renting out the space or doing the split. So, you take 70% of the practitioner as the production. The theatre takes 30%, right? The Soweto Theatre buy-ins are better buy-ins because last year I went there wanting to do a show there, but I bought a show on that structure because that's where the profit comes from. So, you don't think I'll be that vibrant and youth-vibrant, it's because buy-ins are also fair for the space". *Tokollo added to this and said "yes, the program is for youth, you can't teach us and leave us, you're training performers, and you only want them to be audience members and not support them as performers in the space?".

The third strategy from the former artistic director was to continue with the lifestyle events that utilised Soweto Theatre as a venue and these catered for older youth and older audiences, and these events were scheduled to take place on weekends. The events included the Seven Colors, Comedy evenings, music performances and the arts and crafts markets. The idea was to get to a point where these audience members found an interest in the theatre offerings. He also admits that the issue was not that they could not afford a ticket for a play, because they bought tickets for the lifestyle events, but what would they be coming to see for the price they were expected to pay, what would the experience be? *Mthandeni shared a similar sentiment and mentioned that "this is a theatre, we must try more to get people who like the events, to also like coming to watch plays".

The former artistic director concluded by saying that audience development was in crisis and an issue at Soweto Theatre when he was appointed the artistic director of the JCT's. His approach to getting audiences to Soweto Theatre was about continuing what the previous artistic director; Warona Seane had introduced. He felt those strategies needed to be tested

as he felt due to her resignation, she was unable to fully see her strategies through. He admitted though, that he had to continue from where Warona Seane left off because he wanted to test the strategies out as he felt they were valuable, and slowly begin testing out some of his strategies. He kept the Lits'omong Drama Programme as well as the MTF, these aligned with his strategy of targeting the youth. He was able to slowly incorporate his strategies as seen with the *One Man Shows* and familiarising himself with Soweto, its people and the arts and cultural offerings. He admitted that the task and responsibilities of an artistic director for the three theatres was one that he knew would come with a lot of adjusting and felt that artistic directorship takes collaboration. Collaboration internally with management, audience development and the marketing team at Soweto Theatre. He proposed that more than one artistic director would benefit the JCT's as there would be an opportunity to bounce ideas, to collaborate and to have more time to focus on each theatre's programming.

5.9 Partnerships and Collaboration

As outlined in the introduction of this research paper, Soweto Theatre established several partnerships, including Idols SA, Clash of the Choirs, and SA's Got Talent in 2012 and 2013. When queried about the origins of these partnerships, *Mthandeni stressed this; "they were not partnerships. They were rentals, they were rentals okay, so they're renting the space… Morris Isaacson, another school the name I'm forgetting now, Don Mattera school, we partner with them, for watching shows, doing the music classes, drama classes". When asked to elaborate on what he means by saying that they are not partners, he said "yeah, we set up, open the space for them because they are renting it from us. They come with their own audiences, the whole package, their own marketing, they have their own agent or company helping them, thina we are the venue and stuff like that". The only partners for Soweto Theatre according to *Mthandeni are the mentioned schools.

As someone who has not worked with Soweto Theatre in his capacity as an audience development strategist and specialist, offered this opinion; "I'm interested on how spaces such Vilakazi street and The Hector Pieterson Memorial as examples could collaborate with Soweto Theatre, these spaces all need people to come to them, so why not all come

together and create an experience like Soweto tour experience of food, history, art and theatre, that kind of cultural experience?".

This concludes the findings chapter, the discussion chapter will explore scholarly perspectives, the conceptual framework, and include direct quotes from research participants to provide further insights on the data collected.

Chapter 6: Discussion and analysis

6.1 introduction

The findings chapter revealed several themes following which require further interrogation, themes such as strategic planning, community and audience engagement, and effective resource management in audience development at Soweto Theatre. Additionally, a few challenges were identified, particularly execution and digital engagement. Throughout the period from 2019 to 2023, opportunities were practised and implemented that enhanced audience participation and strengthened relationships at Soweto Theatre. Continuous efforts to collaborate with the community and to find innovative strategies are essential for the cultural scene in Soweto and for the theatre's growth and relevance.

To analyse these themes, I will utilise the conceptual framework provided by Kawashima (2000 and 2006) and Varbonova's (2013) theory on strategic planning and management. This framework is further supported by Shapiro (2001:3) who emphasises the importance of monitoring and evaluating goals and strategies within an organisation. These concepts are discussed in detail in chapter four of this research report and will inform the analysis of findings related to the central question; How does Soweto Theatre do audience development in the period 2019 to 2023? All the discussions in this chapter consider the main research question, sub-questions themes, theorists and conceptual frameworks.

6.2 Strategic Planning and Management

Audience development is a thorough process of planning as highlighted by theorists such as Maitland (2000) and Hayes (2003). This process entails the intentional implementation of strategies while employing a variety of tools and strategies to reach and expand audiences (Gillard, 2000). The purpose of this research was to investigate the approaches to audience development by the Soweto Theatre in the period 2019 to 2023. The data indicates that addressing the challenges highlighted by research participants necessitates not only financial investments and adjustments but also structural adaptations and collaboration and partnerships among internal teams and external partners. These challenges are not unique to Soweto Theatre alone. Scholar Lidia Varbanova (2013) notes that "strategic management

is an essential element that drives an organisation's success, yet many cultural organisations have yet to apply strategic thinking and action within the management function" (2013: i). Thus, a process that improves resource allocation and enhances support for administrative tasks is imperative to facilitate more effective audience development initiatives at Soweto Theatre, aligning with the organisation's objectives of providing access and participation within the Soweto community.

To begin the discussion on research findings, I found it fitting to include this quote from the former artistic director of Soweto Theatre who began our interview conversation with this; “so, I think it’s like a story, so when I think about audience development at Soweto Theatre, I go; theatre is storytelling, so what is the story that Soweto Theatre wants to tell that young people or people will want to see?”. This quote encapsulates the essence of audience development at Soweto Theatre, aimed at bringing young audiences and the community of Soweto to the theatre. It further answers the question about what informs audience development at Soweto Theatre from the perspective of the artistic director. This chapter incorporates quotes from the research participants as a tool to best capture their relation to key concepts from the conceptual framework and to honour those who partook in this research report.

Firstly, strategic planning and management are crucial components of an effective audience development strategy, as highlighted by scholars such as Maitland (2000) (Hayes, 2003) and Varbanova, 2013). The meticulous planning and systematic execution of strategies as emphasised by Moses (2024) are essential to optimising audience engagement and participation. Furthermore, *Mthandeni (2024) echoes this and introduces the importance of following a routine for gathering information as well as collaboration among internal teams to create and implement strategies across various platforms. This partially answers the question on what informs audience development at Soweto Theatre from the marketing team. The challenges highlighted in the implementation of audience development strategies at Soweto Theatre expose the complex interplay between resource availability, organisational capacity, and strategic planning. Despite efforts to devise comprehensive strategies, constraints such as administrative tasks and burdens hinder the execution of plans, including those for social media marketing. Consequently, one department or staff

member becomes overloaded, negatively impacting the implementation and distribution of strategies as a whole.

In terms of strategic planning and management on the part of the artistic director, assuming the role from 2016 to 2019. With the awareness that his predecessor had been unable to fully implement certain strategies due to their resignation. He observed these strategies, the activities taking place and the various people and audiences frequenting Soweto Theatre and integrated these observations and strategies into his own strategic approach to growing audiences and attracting the youth to the theatre. These strategies include marketing strategies, audience education initiatives and outreach programmes. The strategies suggested as crucial to audience development and tend to overlap each other, according to Kawashima (2000 and 2006) are Outreach, Extended marketing, Taste cultivation, digital marketing and audience education. Each of these will be discussed separately, but they may overlap as they do in practice.

6.1 Cultural inclusion through Youth and community Empowerment/development

This audience development approach targets individuals less likely to attend the arts due to factors like limited access, education, and social disparities. It involves outreach projects that directly engage communities, encouraging participation (Kawashima, 2006). This answers the question on the approaches and strategies to audience development. Examples from the findings include the *Schools Set Works Festivals*, youth programs, and distributing flyers to schools and organisations. These programs are aimed at reaching a broader audience and young people within the township. This speaks back to the intentions of why the theatre was built and it further answers the question about who is involved in audience development as well as the roles of the marketing and audience development staff. Most of the outreach projects are attended by the youth and development staff as part of their role within the organisation. The marketing team would be involved in the advertising of such initiatives.

The former artistic director echoes scholar Pierre De Flas Mouton (2014) that it is imperative that youth are given opportunities to assist in their development as future art markers in the sector. The youth audiences and particularly those who were participants of Lits'omong Drama Programme, who took part in the focus group, felt that opportunities to access

Soweto Theatre as young professionals after participating in the program were limited and they questioned the goals of the programmes. The constant comparison to spaces such as Joburg Theatre's Space DotCom and The Market Laboratory revealed that the youth are in need of spaces and opportunities to put up their artistic work. Many young theatre makers rely on independent theatre spaces, the state owned and municipal owned performance spaces for these opportunities.

The comparisons to other youth development initiatives suggest a potential opportunity for Soweto Theatre to explore the integration of similar initiatives designed to support both young and emerging professional artists, in addition to those participating in their existing youth development programs. This observation speaks back to the question on what strategies are in place and it further highlights some of the challenges facing Soweto Theatre on implementation of these strategies. If the goal for the youth and development programmes is to develop young audiences and artists, Soweto Theatre needs to do a lot of introspection on how the programme is implemented and received by those who participate as audience members and as emerging artists.

Monitoring and evaluating the Youth development programmes is also essential as it sets the rhythm for future programmes and participants' experiences. Scholar Claudia Aldamuy (2019) shares the same sentiments and writes; "understanding former members' perceptions…will provide other program directors with opportunities to create best practices to affect the development of future programs positively" (2019: 4). In Bollo, et al. (2017) audience analysis and audience development strategy monitoring and evaluating remain sensitive issues for many cultural organisations. The reasons include, having to fully capture and understand audiences' contexts (gender, demographics, age, education, etc) and markets and then to design strategies and programming that can fully align with audiences' preferences (Bollo, et al., 2017). It is difficult to ascertain the extent to which Soweto Theatre comprehensively understands audience development without more specific information about their internal operations and policies. It is also impossible to meet the needs of all audiences, but audience and participant feedback is vital in getting a sense and understanding of audiences while Soweto Theatre is developing programming and other audience development strategies. The theme that emerges here is of audience feedback

and engagement, it becomes an essential tool to what could better inform future audience development strategies for Soweto Theatre.

6.2 Marketing, Social media Marketing and cultural inclusion

Word of mouth emerged as a crucial tool and strategy utilised by Soweto Theatre and that gets transferred to the community that the youth and community development team engage with. Arts education emerges for outreach, enabling individuals to participate in the storytelling model proposed by the audience development specialist interviewed for this research report, he expressed that 'those who are directly involved with the production go and tell people about the show, who will tell people, who will tell people and so it goes'. The information about the show is spread through personal networks within the community. As mentioned above, going out to the community is the responsibility of the youth and community development team, however during lockdown this was not possible. Social media became a tool for outreach and cultural inclusion for the youth and community development team. An external team was appointed to work with the marketing and youth and community development teams respectively. Which answers the question about the roles and involvement of the marketing and audience development department in coming up with strategies. While the theatre continues to make use of social media, the various platforms "enhance social inclusion by engaging many participants, who may not be able to participate via traditional methods" (Lin and Kant, 2021:1). This emphasises the significance of harnessing digital platforms to engage diverse audiences, particularly those encountering obstacles to attending cultural events through traditional avenues, individuals residing at a distance from the theatre, and those preferring digital access. It underscores the continuation of the word-of-mouth approach to audience development, but in the realm of social media. Scholars like Larson (2009) and Norazah (2014) refer to this as Viral Marketing - the online manifestation of word-of-mouth, enabling the rapid and widespread dissemination of information across vast audiences (Puriwat and Triposakul, 2021). Social media serves to enhance this phenomenon.

*Mthandeni expressed that Soweto Theatre worked with an external social media team for some of their digital marketing initiatives and strategies. What I observed from the findings is that the external social media team could take more initiative to allow him to focus on

other marketing activities and improve implementation of strategies. It may be beneficial for the external team to participate in discussions on marketing strategies directly. Currently, it appears that *Mthandeni is responsible for relaying information to the external team and managing other marketing requirements simultaneously. This answers the question on the role of marketing in audience development at Soweto Theatre. The current marketing team of four are capable of doing all marketing activities while the external social media team focuses on all digital marketing matters. The process of this collaboration involved meeting with this time, discussing information about the programme, time frames, poster designs and the relevant information that needed to be advertised to audiences.*Mthandeni and the former artistic director both expressed that it was a challenge to track the progress of some of their strategies due to the time frame in which productions took place at the theatre. Two weeks or three weeks was a short amount of time to track audiences, their feedback on strategies, while trying to implement new strategies for the next production. The former artistic director mentioned a discussion he had with an independent producer, Richard Lauren, who said:

It takes about two weeks for word of mouth to spread properly. So, your production runs as well are important…you really have to market it in a different way because your word of mouth won't be the thing that's going to sell it. So, what you need to do to start advertising it way ahead in advance. So Joburg Theatre's top grossing product is dropping at the moment, but it was traditionally the pantomime. So, the thing is that when you saw the poster today you made a decision: what am I going to do this December? it becomes a part of a list of things even if it's a subconscious thing… And so, another thing that really helped us get audiences was the lifestyle events that we put on at the day. So, they weren't necessarily theatre events (Former Artistic Director of Soweto Theatre).

The above quote highlights the significance of prolonged marketing efforts, emphasising that relying solely on word of mouth or community engagements may not suffice to drive ticket sales. But initiating advertising well in advance, the former artistic director implies that would make a huge contribution to audience numbers. That productions become ingrained into individuals' (potential audience members) plans, even subconsciously, contributing to increased attendance. Additionally, the quote demonstrates the efficacy of lifestyle events in

attracting audiences, underscoring the interconnectedness of marketing and audience development with the organisation's success. As Kotler (1999) suggests, marketing is an ongoing process, integral to sustained audience engagement and revenue generation, rather than a one-time transaction (Varbanova, 2013).

To answer the question on the role of the artistic director in audience development at Soweto Theatre, the findings chapter was able to document how the former artistic director was able to express some of the specific responsibilities that he was typically involved in. His awareness of the organisation's overall vision informed how strategies were tailored, and he spent a lot of time familiarising with the space, the theatre's, staff and audiences. These included program selection and curation, developing initiatives with the marketing team as well as the youth and community development team that would connect audiences of all ages to the theatre. This approach fostered long term relationships with the community, which he has been able to leverage in other roles, and other performance spaces, contributing to the growth of the theatre sector not only at Soweto Theatre but across the country.

6.3 Limitations

The intention of this research report was to study how Soweto Theatre does audience development. I think a study such as this could encourage other theatre organisations in the South African context to think about audience development strategies and ways to grow theatre audiences and contribute to the entire theatre sector in South Africa. Each theatre would produce unique data based on different contexts and theatres. Audience development in the theatre sector is a growing interest in research and in practice, more studies could contribute to finding strategies and methods to sustain the theatre-going culture in South Africa.

A few limitations emerged from this study. The first is that I did not interview non-theatre attendees. Part of the reason is that they were not part of the research objective to understand how Soweto Theatre does audience development. Furthermore, the non-attendees may not have provided relevant insights or experiences to contribute to the research topic, as their lack of attendance means they have not engaged with the case study.

Although I think future research on the topic could benefit from interviewing non-attendees to better understand why they don't know about Soweto Theatre or why they do not participate or attend shows at the theatre and how this could affect how Soweto Theatre does audience development that considers non-attendees. Another limitation is that the sample group was very small due to issues of access into the space and participants choosing not to participate. Those who head marketing and audience development departments could have added more nuanced contributions to the topic and perhaps provided more insight on some of the challenges expressed in this report.

In a future study, the Limpopo State Theatre in Polokwane could be explored. The theatre is under construction and is due to open on the 26th of February 2026 (Machaka, 2024). This theatre, like the Soweto Theatre, is being built in the township for easy access, for the community, a first for the community of Polokwane. Themes such as the township development and township economy could be explored in the future study and used to evaluate the extent to which the cultural organisations in the township contribute to the township economy and the cultural life of the township.

The youth development programs at Soweto Theatre have helped nurture young artists, some of whom now work in the theatre sector, while others are pursuing studies in the broader creative and cultural industry. However, participants in the focus group who were also part of the Lits'omong Drama Program felt neglected after their involvement. They expressed a need for more support and opportunities for young creatives aiming to enter the live performance and theatre sector. One suggestion was to provide opportunities for alumni of youth programs and other young people to contribute to Soweto Theatre's programming, similar initiatives like the Joburg Theatre's Space dotcom and The Market Theatre's Fringe festivals for young artists to participate in.

Soweto Theatre was built for the community and serves as a tool for democratising the arts to the community, promoting social cohesion, and empowering the community to shape its own cultural narrative. This approach and having a theatre in the township create a sense of ownership and pride of the community. Ultimately it should pave the way for a more

inclusive, accessible and equitable space for the community, a space that is representative of, and responsive to, the needs and aspirations of the community and the youth it serves. Different youth development programmes across various theatres could make for very interesting case studies that might produce insight on how they are structured, how young artists can get access to their offerings and also what model is used for each as a way for theatre spaces who do not have these youth development programmes to begin to find ways in which they can create platforms for young artists and those who are fresh out of higher education and learning.

A collaboration between other arts and culture organisations in close proximity to Soweto Theatre is another tool that could be explored as a way to leverage off those audiences and to contribute to growing the townships cultural offerings. Arts and cultural organisations exist in silos but what they have in common is a need for audience attendance and for people to be interested in wanting to participate and access cultural activities.

6.4 Conclusion remarks

After critically engaging with the findings and the conceptual framework theories, several important factors influence audience development at Soweto Theatre. Among these is the support from key stakeholders and funders, such as the theatre's producers, the COJ, JCT and DSAC. They played a crucial role in establishing and sustaining this cultural space in the township.

Another factor which is important to growing audiences is audience feedback, which was articulated in detail through the perspectives of the artistic director and contributions from youth participants. This feedback provides valuable insights into community, audience and youth development participants' needs and preferences, highlighting crucial areas for improvement and innovation in programming at Soweto Theatre. By incorporating and considering feedback, Soweto Theatre can develop more targeted strategies for their audiences' and engagement, ensuring that their theatre's strategic goals, vision and programme offerings resonate with diverse audiences and fosters long lasting relationships with its audience.

In addition the discussion indicated tensions and challenges facing the implementation of some audience development strategies at Soweto Theatre. These can be overcome through the adoption of more monitoring and evaluation moments within the organisation and with the presence and cooperation between the stated stakeholders and those who are directly working on audience development strategies.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

This research report was set out to explore the approaches to audience development at Soweto theatre from 2019 to 2023. Through this case study, I set out to examine key questions regarding what informs audience development, the individuals involved, and the roles of the artistic director, marketing and audience development departments.

The findings indicate that what informs audience development at Soweto Theatre is community engagement, audience feedback, strategic information from annual reports, and the strategic goals of Soweto Theatre. Key stakeholders -including the artistic director, marketing team, and audience development departments-work collaboratively to develop strategies. In addition to this team, the strategic management at JCT and goals set up by JCT play a crucial role in executing these initiatives and strategies.

Findings also revealed that the artistic director plays a critical role in shaping the theatre's artistic vision, ensuring that programming resonates with the audiences reflects Soweto Theatre vision. This role involves storytelling through events and programming, adapting the strategies of previous artistic directors to meet current challenges, such as timing and production schedules. One proposed solution was to integrate more process-related content, such as rehearsal footage, into marketing initiatives. This approach begins the marketing process in conjunction with rehearsals, but it also helps audiences and potential audiences to connect with the theatre's journey from rehearsal phase right through to performance phase. Starting the marketing process in conjunction with rehearsals to overcome time constraints and enhance audience engagement. The involvement of process related material and more artist involvement aligns with Kotler et al. (1997) and Diggle (1976) who argue that arts marketing should not abandon the artistic vision, and that artists and those involved in programming should be interested in audience development strategies and arts marketing initiatives for their work.

The findings also indicated that social media emerges as a valuable tool for outreach and cultural inclusion at Soweto Theatre. The marketing team works to promote the

programming and events through various marketing initiatives as well as working with an external social media team as an opportunity to optimise digital marketing efforts and to alleviate the burden on internal marketing teams who are not capacitated enough to utilise digital platforms. This aligns with theorists Roger (1998), Kawashima (2000 and 2006) and Hadley (2017) on including marketing as part of audience development. Social media emerges as a supplementary and alternative marketing strategy (Timplalexi, 2020) at Soweto Theatre.

Overall, various challenges in fostering community engagement and participation for Sowetans and Soweto Theatre audiences were expressed. Addressing these challenges requires restructuring of various roles and responsibilities within these departments and better communication among internal teams and external partners in implementing strategies. This aligns with Lidia Varbanova's (2013) observation that strategic management is pivotal for organisational success. Therefore, improving resource allocation and enhancing support for administrative tasks is crucial to facilitate more effective audience development initiatives at Soweto Theatre. Furthermore, monitoring and evaluating strategies is crucial to the success of audience development in any organisation. This is supported by Babić (2011) who argues for monitoring and evaluation from the planning phase right through to implementation of strategies and initiatives. Varbanova (2013) adds to this, by suggesting that each department would need to systematically monitor and evaluate how the theatre performs against the established plans, strategies and objectives as an essential tool to audience development. Strategies can be created,identified and implemented; however, it is essential to have performance measures that will assist the organisation to determine how effectively they’re functioning relative to the goals and objectives.

Soweto Theatre is a catalyst of cultural democracy, promoting social cohesion and empowering the community to shape its cultural narrative. By nurturing young talent through the various youth development programmes, engaging with the community and audiences, having sustainable partnerships and leveraging digital platforms, Soweto Theatre can continue to democratise the arts and create a more inclusive and accessible space. Furthermore, collaborations between arts organisations in and around Soweto Theatre and

exploration of youth development programs across various theatres could further enrich participants' experiences and provide platforms for emerging artists.

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