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ABSTRACT

Practices of Pleasure: Exploring porn consumption in South Africa

Despite its enormous global lucrative charge, porn remains an under-researched topic in media studies, especially in Africa. Consumption theories which shed light on how people acquire, use and dispose of products (Aldridge 2003) can be used to explain the various ways people attain pornography and their motivations. In the context of South Africa, where pornography only became legal 20 years ago (1996), we still don't have sufficient research that illuminates on the uses leading to the expansion of explicit media. Most research projects addressing the topic of porn in South Africa porn do so by engaging its textuality and discourses surrounding it. Pamela Ramlagun's work on teenage girl's consumption of porn is the only known work in South Africa to tackle pornography through those who use it. Still, this work is mainly qualitative and does not offer an encompassing national outlook. It is also not clear how South African porn consumption practices deviate from or converge with other consumption practices in other global economies. What can pornography consumption in South Africa tell us about South Africans? This research proposes to find out "why do people watch porn?" (motivations), "which types of porn do people watch?" (preferences), "what are people hoping to get when they watch porn?" (needs) and "what do people think about certain aspects of porn?" (beliefs).

In determining the various consumption patterns of pornography consumers, this study utilised a mixed method approach, a large anonymous survey and in depth interviews. A total of 676 survey responses and 25 in depth interviews were recruited. Phase 1 of this research comprised the survey stage. An online questionnaire which remained open for 6 months gave porn consumers within the country an opportunity to participate in the study. The survey was hosted on an online survey hosting site called *Qualtrics* so that anyone in South Africa could access it. Information about the survey was advertised on the *Sunday Times* newspaper which is considered the largest weekly paper nationally. Various online fora such as *Chat24*, *ZaGossip*, *Facebook* and *Blogspot* were also used to mete out information regarding the study. Readers were informed the research sought to investigate porn usage in the South Africa and that in order to participate they had to be porn consumers, be at least 18 years of age, and be residing in South Africa at the time of completing the questionnaire. The link to the online questionnaire was also included. Once all the survey data had been collected, I exported it to SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) for analyses.

Phase 2 of the data collection process comprised interviews. Interview respondents chose their preferred mode of interviewing i.e. a face-to-face session, a recorded phone-call conversation, a WhatsApp mobile chat or an online live-chat. Information about the interview phase was distributed on *Blogspot*, *Facebook* and *Chat24*. All participants of the survey were guaranteed both anonymity and confidentiality. Where it was impossible to grant anonymity to the interview respondents (e.g. face-to-face interviews) confidentiality was assured. Interviews were transcribed and a coding schema was manually developed for the analyses of the interview data.

Data reveals that African[1] porn consumers often use borrowed, pirated and free porn whereas their white counterparts mostly afford to buy original DVD's or pay for home internet which they use to download and/or stream quality porn material. Porn is thus revealed to be a commodity whose attainment reflects national socio-economic inequalities where white minority citizens possess greater wealth than the African majority. In South Africa, porn also proves to fill the glaring crevices of sexual education in a prude socio-cultural milieu where many parents and educators deliberately eschew the topic of sex. Furthermore, South Africa is a nation bereft of access and circulation of its own porn with most porn consumers indicating to watch only international explicit content. Not surprisingly, many survey respondents felt there wasn't enough porn in South Africa. Lastly, porn consumption in the country is modulated by a contradictory legal framework which grants sexual consent at age 16 yet disbars porn till adulthood, making many consumers who possess and view porn as teenagers criminally complicit.

[1] In this dissertation, I use the word 'African' and 'black' interchangeably