

ABSTRACT

The overarching aim of this dissertation was to produce a critical and intersectional understanding of the South African creative digital citizen who resides in Johannesburg, South Africa and the factors that inform their production of YouTube content. The dissertation addressed the main research question:

“What are the socio-demographic barriers for social media video producers, as digital citizens, amongst Johannesburg-based social media video producers?”

This main research question was sub-divided into the following questions:

- What factors affect the digital citizen and their participation in terms of social media video production?
- What local and global factors affect the video content these digital citizens produce?
- What kinds of ideas does the term “digital citizen” amongst our particular target group mobilize? For example, ideas of capitalism, individualism, global workforce, uniformity or localization.
- How do these digital citizens conceive of their video production work? For example, do they conceive of the work as pleasure, labour, resistance, or activism, or is something else being realised here?
- How does being a creative digital citizen impact the offline lived experiences of these individuals?

As part of the research design, a multi-method approach was employed which included two phases: The first phase involved an analysis of the semi-structured qualitative interviews, while the second phase comprised a visual description of the YouTube videos and the peripheral social media environment.

The overall findings from the dissertation were as follows: the term creative digital citizen was found to share similar characteristics and invoke similar notions to the term millennial and digital entrepreneur. Where millennial became shorthand for a certain industrious and independent mindset, digital citizen became the shorthand for an individual who possessed certain technological privileges and took advantage of them. In short, both terms are useful in understanding how the economically and technologically advantaged make the ideal neoliberal subject: a subject who is constructed as entrepreneurial and self-sufficient and who possesses the socio-economic means to capitalise on the 'promise' of a neoliberal work ethic.

Most significantly, the dissertation found that offline socio-demographic factors are reconstituted in online environments: creative digital citizenship practices are informed, structured, and mobilized by neoliberal capitalist logics through complex systems of liberation and capture. On the one hand, liberation or self-amplification can be understood to be the discourses of empowerment, democratisation, creative autonomy, and financial freedom that social media platforms such as YouTube promise. On the other hand, capture or self-amputation is understood to be the negative consequences of engaging in social media work, such as the various forms of digital labour, and the processes of datafication, which are often rendered invisible.

The dissertation concludes by making recommendations into further studies within this field: in the quest for the foregrounding of Afro-centric ontologies, and the centering of African epistemologies, a cross-national study between Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa would make

for compelling research in terms of national identities. In fact, a comparative study between so-called Anglophone and Francophone nations would greatly contribute to an understanding of the African digital citizen. Again, in recommending such a study, the aim is to shift focus from generalisations of the way a nation performs its identity, which has its own uses, to the ways in which its constituents internalize and negotiate identity.