

https://dspace.org/

Welcome back to my channel: creative digital citizenship and digital labour in the digital economy amongst South African YouTubers

Ngoma, Pumulo

2021
https://hdl.handle.net/10539/33848

Downloaded from a DSpace repository. https://dspace.org/

WELCOME BACK TO MY CHANNEL: CREATIVE DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP AND DIGITAL LABOUR IN THE DIGITAL ECONOMY AMONGST SOUTH AFRICAN YOUTUBERS

BY

PUMULO NGOMA (567423)

A dissertation in fulfilment of the requirements for Master of Arts in Digital Arts

Supervisors: Dr. Catherine Duncan and Dr. Benita de Robillard

Faculty of Humanities

Wits School of the Arts

University of the Witwatersrand

2021

DECLARATION

I, **Pumulo Ngoma**, am a student registered for Master of Digital Arts by Research. I hereby declare the following:

- I am aware that plagiarism (the use of someone else's work without their permission and/or without acknowledging the original source) is wrong.
- I confirm that the work submitted for assessment for the above course is my own unaided work except where I have explicitly indicated otherwise.
- I have followed the required conventions in referencing the thoughts and ideas of others.
- I understand that the University of the Witwatersrand may take disciplinary action against me if there is a belief that this is not my own unaided work or that I have failed to acknowledge the source of the ideas or words in my writing.

Date: 30/05/2021

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.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the following people:

To my supervisors Dr. Catherine Duncan and Dr. Benita de Robillard for your constant encouragement, nurture, and deep insight. For your guidance, correction and for helping me to keep sight of the end, thank you.

To the participants of this study and co-collaborators, Menzi, Thando, Michael and Thandi, thank you for giving me access to your lives and for sharing your truth.

To my most beloved siblings, the sibling club that everyone wants to be a part of, I'm so lucky I was born into it. I'm so blessed to have people with whom I can have deep and lengthy, late-night conversations, who continuously call out the greatness in me when I doubt my own ability. Thank you for the unrelenting support and encouragement along the way. I love most you most ardently.

To the people I get to count as friends in this life, thank you for the journey, thank you for the wisdom, and thank you for your presence.

Lastly, to my most beloved Ancestor, my grandfather. To my parents. Thank you for the sacrifices you made that delivered me to this, the present moment.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION 2

ABSTRACT 3

CHAPTER 1: "ARE WE ALL DIGITAL CITIZENS NOW?" INTRODUCTION TO CREATIVE DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP 10

1.1 Introduction 10

1.2 Problem Statement 15

1.3 Aims and Objectives of the Study 16

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE 18

2.1. Introduction 18

2.2 Defining Citizenship. 19

2.3 Defining Social Networks, Millennials and Digital Natives 21

2.4 Origin of the Digital Citizen 23

2.5 The Digital Citizen and Sociodemographic Features 24

2.6 Digital Labour, the Digital Economy and Conflicts within Creative digital citizenship 28

2.7 The Digital Citizen and Participatory Culture 33

2.8 The Digital Citizen and Political Engagement 36

2.9 Conclusion 40

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY 42

3.1 Introduction 42

3.2 Research Questions 42

3.3 Significance of Methodology Focus 43

3.4 Qualitative Research and Internet Use 43

3.5 Participant Selection 48

3.6 Contacting Participants 48

3.7 Researcher Position 51

3.8 OFFLINE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY 52

3.8.1 Semi-Structured Interviews 52

3.8.2 Semi-Structured Interview Analysis Procedure 54

3.9 ONLINE METHODOLOGY 54

3.10 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS 56

CHAPTER 4: BIOGRAPHICAL INTRODUCTION TO PARTICIPANTS 58

4.1 Introduction 58

4.2 YOUTUBE PARTICIPANT PROFILE AND VIDEO VISUAL DESCRIPTION 62

4.2.1 Menzi, 26, Johannesburg 63

4.2.2 Visual Description of Menzi's YouTube Video: "Broke Niggaz 46 - Snake Eyes 2" 66

4.2.3 Thando, 30, Johannesburg 72

4.2.4 Visual Description of Thando's YouTube Video: *"How men behave at the reed dance Umkhosi womhlanga 2018".* 73

Editing Style 75

4.2.5 Thandi, 27, Johannesburg 79

4.2.6 Visual Description of Thandi's YouTube Video: "ISSA VLOG: A DAY IN MY LIFE! | Thandi Gama" 81

4.2.7 Michael Cost, 27, Johannesburg 84

4.2.8 Visual Description of Michael's YouTube Video: MICHAEL COST: "Events, South African YouTubers + Famous People - Vlog 5" 86

CHAPTER 5: DATA ANALYSIS INTRODUCTION 92

Organisational Structure of Chapter 5 92

5.2 PARTICIPATION AND THE CREATIVE DIGITAL CITIZEN 93

Participation as a Function of Socio-Economic Conditions 93

Participation as a Function of Desire or Motivation 100

Access to Resources, Equipment or Time 104

5.3 "EVERY DAY I WAKE UP AND I DO MY DREAM JOB": THE DIGITAL LABOUR BIND 107

Digital Labour and Reward 107

"Double-movements of Liberation and Capture": Video Production as Labour 115

Passion vs Work: Converting Immaterial Labour into Material Labour 122

CHAPTER 6: THE PLATFORM SELF: PERFORMING A DIGITAL IDENTITY 127

"This Thandi Doesn't Go on YouTube": Self-Branding and the Performance of Self 127

"Everything I do is an extension of who I am": Negotiating Offline-Online Identities 133

I Can't Fake My Aura or My Spirit: The Conflict of Being Authentic 134

"I Have a Story in My Spirit": Constructing Authenticity on YouTube 136

The Platform Self and The Micro-Celebrity 138

6.5 DIGITAL ENTREPRENEUR AS CULTURAL ENTREPRENEUR 141

Entrepreneurial Language as Self-Amplification 141

"The World Is Your Oyster, You Can Do and Be Anything You Want, Go Be It!": Constructing the Neoliberal Subject 144

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATION, AND IMPLICATIONS 148

7.1 Introduction 148

RESEARCH QUESTION 1: What factors affect the digital citizen and their participation in terms of social media video production? 149

RESEARCH QUESTION 2: What local and global factors affect the video content these digital citizens produce? 149

RESEARCH QUESTION 3: What kinds of ideas does the term "digital citizen" amongst our particular target group mobilise? 151

RESEARCH QUESTION 4: How do these digital citizens conceive of their video production work? 152

RESEARCH QUESTION 5: How does being a digital citizen impact the offline lived experiences of these individuals? 153

7.2 Conclusions on research problem 153

7.3 Limitations of Study 155

Research Design 155

Sample Group 156

7.4 Recommendation for Future Research Within Creative Digital Studies 156

REFERENCE LIST 159

APPENDICES 183

CHAPTER 1: "ARE WE ALL DIGITAL CITIZENS NOW?" INTRODUCTION TO CREATIVE DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP

1.1 Introduction

The Creative Digital Citizen and Democratisation

Over the last two decades, the establishment of social media has engendered an unprecedented wave in the production and distribution of media products (boyd and Elison, 2013; Loader and Mercea, 2012). The term social media refers to "blogs, social networking sites, collaboration projects, content communities, virtual social worlds, and virtual game worlds" (Kaplan and Haenlein cited in Bucher, 2015:3). Social media platforms are built to capture social practices: these platforms capitalise on new and existing human networks of connectivity to enable further platform activities. The social aspect centralises the individual user's identity (van Dijck, 2013), while the platform component emphasises the user's enhanced ability to build, engage and distribute information through the use of the platform structure. Through social media platforms, locally situated individuals are able to circulate content to global networks with relative ease. Activists are able to foster support for community issues; citizen journalists, to collate and collaborate on breaking news projects; filmmakers can access creative tools and participate in 'free' production and distribution platforms (Delwiche and Henderson, 2015). In the context of global connectivity, those who are able to participate in online digital technologies and employ them for their benefit are termed digital citizens by prominent theorists (Hintz, Dencik, and Wahl-Jorgensen, 2019; Isin and Rupert, 2015; Vivienne, McCosker, & Johns, 2016; Mossberger, Tolbert and McNeal, 2008). Individuals who use the affordances of digital technologies to create cultural products or platform publics, often with a civic tone, are described as creative digital citizens.

Citizenship has often been understood to possess three components: firstly, citizenship as conferring legal-political status. This means that because one is a citizen of a country, they are legally able to take up permanent residence in a country, receive benefits such as welfare or purchase land on the basis of their citizenship. Citizenship is also understood as civic participation and agency which means one has the power to vote, to campaign, protest or participate in civic life. Lastly, citizenship is understood as social membership, as a mechanism that confers an identity to an individual (Carens, 2000): reductively put, since one has South African citizenship, one is given a South African identity.

Affixing the modifier "digital" to citizen references a technological relationship between the citizen and the technological. Broadly speaking, the digital refers to the relationships and interactions produced by the wide range of information and communication technologies (ICT's) and the internet and data processes (Bukht and Heeks, 2017). That is, the digital includes, but is not limited to, the placing of the material world into a format or a language that can be processed by technology. This process produces data on the material world or reproduces the material in a data format. Thus, digital here also refers to the relationship that the citizen has with data and how this data lives, how it acts and how it informs their life. Though digital citizenship has wide applicability, this thesis is particularly focused on a narrow definition of the digital, the digital as it relates to online platform cultures, specifically the video culture of YouTube.

The Creative Digital Citizen, Datafication and Platform Capitalism

In the present moment, social media participation has presented a fascinating dual dialectic within the critical digital humanities (Wauthier, Fisher and Gajjala, 2019; Meijas and Couldry, 2019; du Preez, 2018; Jarrett, 2016; Zuboff, 2015; Lupton, 2015; Gajjala, 2013, Fuchs, 2013).

On the one hand, global digital platforms are seen to empower the creative digital citizen by facilitating participation in their social networks. Through social media, users are able to circumvent the restrictions posed by the concentrated media hierarchies that largely characterised the pre-social media age. The distribution of media products appears to be decentralized; the user, democratised, and the public sphere reinvigorated. Yet, on the other hand, the very same platforms that empower the creative digital citizen, seem to capture and entrap them in numerous ways. Firstly, the success of these platforms is entirely dependent on the 'free' labour of the creative digital citizens who participate through consistent use, through the production of content. Secondly, these platforms are predicated upon systems of datafication (data extraction) and data surveillance (surveillance through the use of private and public data) in which enormous amounts of user data are treated like a natural resource, like crude oil (Meijas and Couldry, 2019). Data as a resource is extracted, distributed, and commodified for capital acquisition and expansion by companies like Google, prompting some to term the present age data colonialism (Meijas and Couldry, 2019). This fairly recent phenomenon, this data-driven model of capital employed by platforms like Facebook, Google, Apple and Amazon and has been described in various ways. Some have described it as surveillance capitalism (Zuboff, 2015), platform capitalism (Srnicek, 2016) or more broadly, Big Data capitalism (Fuchs and Chandler, 2019). Though there are nuances in their arguments, their work concedes that the intensive datafication of public and private life forms the nucleus of this business model. That is, their arguments together serve to inaugurate the new relationship between data-driven capitalism and the digital citizen. The convergence of these two phenomena, digital labour and datafication, are radically shaping discourses and identity formation online. This prompts critical questions: what does social media participation do? Are social media interactions mechanisms of democratisation? Are they forms of participation and

agency, or forms of entrapment? How then do South African creative digital citizens navigate the desire for self-expression and form an online identity within these stringent conditions?

Offline-Online Life

The 2017/ 2018 Cambridge Analytica Scandal[1], which resulted in the personal data breach of millions of Facebook users, is a clear indication that the digital can no longer be disassociated from the 'material', flesh and blood lives of individuals (Ward, 2017; Sanders, 2018; Jurgenson, 2012). This offline-online entanglement is also visible through offline-online protest, for example: the links between civil rights action and online participation have proliferated across the continent since the Arab Spring[2] of 2010/2011. A number of hashtags have been used to map the contours of offline-online activism: #FeesMustFall in South Africa and #BringBackourGirlsNigeria[3]. Some African governments have responded to online activism and online distribution with Orwellian measures: national internet services have been shut down with increasing frequency, as was the case in Zimbabwe in 2019, Guinea, Ethiopia and 23 other nations in Africa (Dahir, 2019). In America, the murder of George Floyd in June 2020, sparked an intensive online campaign, reinvigorated the visibility of the Black Lives Matter movement, and led to global civic protest. The global visibility of these events arguably contributed to the arrest of the perpetrators in the George Floyd case. Additionally, faced with

[1] Cambridge Analytica was a UK-based consulting organisation that extracted the private data of approximately 87 million people from around the world without their consent. As a result, Cambridge Analytica was able to construct intimate biographies of American users, including their voting habits. The consulting group allegedly worked with Donald Trump on his 2017/2018 presidential campaign, micro-targeting users through a disinformation campaign (Manokha, 2018). Cambridge Analytica have also been accused of experimenting with African countries, though research into political tampering in Nigeria and Kenya, specifically, lacks conclusive empirical evidence.

[2] The Arab Spring was a season of intense unrest and protest in the Middle East and North Africa. The wave of anti-government protests started in Tunisia in 2010 and spread quickly to neighbouring countries. Though there are conflicting opinions as to the extent of social media's involvement in the displacing of regimes, the use of mobile phones was instrumental in spreading the message to neighbouring countries (Nasralla & Sarkis, 2020).

[3] Bring Back Our Girls was an international Nigerian social media campaign that began in 2014. It was in response to the abduction of almost 300 high school girls by Boko Haram, the militant West African rebel group.

increasing pressure from civil society, IBM, Google, Amazon and Microsoft, developers of police surveillance technologies withdrew the commercialisation of some of their facial recognition software and predictive policing tools (Heilweil, 2020). This facial recognition software has been algorithmically trained on the millions of photos, selfies and vlogs uploaded to social media platforms daily. This software is used for police surveillance technology and deployed within the criminal justice system at large (Benjamin, 2019; Noble, 2018). The digital has material consequences within the private and public sphere. These cases exemplify the suspended self that is the offline-online subject, a subject that performs and intercedes on behalf of the flesh and blood self. Who is this subject; how does this subject come to be? The above developments in online data participation and surveillance, confirm the need for a critical understanding of the links between online and offline identities, their related consequences, and effects.

Through technological advancements, access to digital networks has increased across the developing world, these developments have been attributed to the mobile phone. In Southern Africa, 32% of the population is reported to be active on social media platforms, Facebook being the most popular (Statista, 2018). According to Lisa Nakamura (2013) and Radhika Gajjala (2013), online-offline practices offer insight into how both global and local hegemonic socio-economic relationships are replicated in online environments. For instance, the relationship between the Global South and Global North become increasingly visible online. If offline-online relationships render visible societal power structures between individuals in a society and regions in the world, an understanding of what socioeconomics does to online participation is necessary. In 2016, for example, Facebook implemented Free Basics,[4] an app

[4]Free Basics is a Facebook-developed app that provides free access to services like Bing Search Engine and Facebook in parts of the developing world, namely Asia, Africa and Latin America. Significantly, the app acts like an Internet Service Provider and allegedly targets individuals who have no internet access. All user data is processed through Facebook servers. The app would essentially establish a "two-tier" internet, one for the rich

that has the potential to be used by African governments to create a limited internet and thus control information access. The app constructs a limited, zero-rated internet for the poor, while the rich have access to the whole internet, replicating information inequality in online environments. Additionally, gender and race is reproduced online: In *Algorithms of Oppression*, Safiya Umoya Noble (2018), for example, provides a scathing critique of the use of Google's algorithms in discriminating against people of colour, and black individuals online, while Lisa Nakamura and Peter Chow-White's edited volume, *Race After the Internet*, contends that "race has become a digital medium" (2013:5). This marks the ways in which the digital continues to both respond to and reconfigure social life, through the organisation of information. As such, this thesis' enquiry into offline-online identities and online practices in South Africa provides deeper socio-cultural insight into the South African digital citizen's relationship with the region, as well as the globe. It is thus imperative for the Global South to contribute to scholarship in this area from a locally situated perspective, to map the patterns of the current digital phenomena. Through this scholarship, African academics can better understand the associated relationships, rights and responsibilities of digital environments and the digital citizens who inhabit them.

1.2 Problem Statement

Numerous scholars have investigated creative digital citizenship and online participation in its varying forms (Delwiche and Henderson, 2015, Loader and Mercea, 2012, Jenkins, 2008). Nevertheless, there is a paucity of research on South African social media content production in comparison to content consumption (Iqani, 2019; Bosch, 2015; Daniels, 2017, Garman, Milton and Wassermann, 2013). Despite the widespread literature on the topic of digital citizenship, scholars still specify that there is much that is not understood. Though researchers

and another for the poor (See: https://www.apc.org/en/news/another-internetorg-possible-developing-country-pe).

acknowledge that offline local and global socio-demographics may inform online identity formation and online practices, how creative digital citizens navigate these complexities, particularly in the South African context is often neglected. Additionally, much of the work being undertaken in this area neglects to situate the creative digital citizen within the broader contexts of the global digital economy and new modes of capital acquisition (Duffy and Hund, 2019; Wauthier, Fisher and Gajjala, 2019; Jurgenson, 2012; Mainsah, 2015, Lessig, 2004).

Nevertheless, scholars are specifically invested in two key dimensions of creative digital citizenship: firstly, offline socio-demographics of race, sex and gender simulated in online environments (Nakamura, 2013; Gajjala, 2013) and secondly, the broader tensions between digital labour, the digital economy and participation (Fuchs, 2016; Jarrett, 2016; Villi and Matikainen, 2016; Gajjala, 2013; van Dijck, 2013; Schradie, 2011).

1.3 Aims and Objectives of the Study

The overarching aim of this dissertation was to produce a critical and intersectional understanding of the South African, millennial, creative digital citizen who resides in Johannesburg, South Africa and the various factors that inform their production of YouTube publics. This study specifically focused on millennial video content producers aged 26 – 30, who produce video content for YouTube. Through the application of a qualitative methodology, the study also aimed to enhance existing knowledge of the ways in which creative digital citizens form their online identity, online practices and navigate the complexities of digital labour within the digital economy. Lastly, the aim was to contribute to a growing corpus of similar cultural research being undertaken concerning digital identities in other regions of the Global South, namely India (Gajjala, 2013) and Kenya (Poggiali, 2016).

Based on the above concerns, this dissertation had the following core objectives:

1. To develop Mossberger et al. (2008) definition of digital citizenship. Broadly speaking, both Mossberger et al. (2008) and Isin and Ruppert (2015) conceive of a digital citizen as one who uses the internet responsibly, towards the end goal of civic engagement (*ibid*). I go into further detail concerning critical debates around this term and its significance in the literature review section of this dissertation (Chapter 2). I expand on the definition of digital citizenship to acknowledge some of the South African socio-demographic factors that contribute to online identity formation either presently, or historically such as: race, gender, geographical location, age, class and education. Additionally, I complicate creative digital citizenship by emphasising the tensions between liberation and capture (Hintz, Dencik, and Wahl-Jorgensen, 2017), by situating these practices within the contexts of the datafication and new modes of data capitalism (Fuchs and Chandler, 2015; Zuboff, 2015; Srnicek, 2016.)
2. To critically identify the offline-online socio-cultural or socio-economic contexts that contributed to the formation of the millennial digital citizen through semi-structured interviews with the participants.
3. To analyse *how* these socio-cultural contexts affected the *video content* these digital citizens produced, through interviews with the participants and visual descriptions of their YouTube videos.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

2.1. Introduction

Although there is wide-ranging scholarship on internet users as digital natives, e-citizens, or cybercitizens within cultural studies, there is still much work to be done to understand the individual context of the social media content producer (Gajjala, 2013; Mossberger, Tolbert, McNeal, 2008; Haythornthwaite, 2005). There is a paucity of research dedicated to the complex relationships that exists between the digital citizen as a producer, the offline contexts that inform them, and the digital outputs they produce (Iqani, 2019; Bird, 2011; Chigona, Kamkwenda, and Manjoo, 2008, Schradie, 2011). Developing from within the field of digital humanities, creative digital citizenship elicits new concerns about power, hegemony, knowledge production and global labour which make for a pertinent study. First, my aim is to provide a conceptual understanding of creative digital citizenship and its context within South Africa. Secondly, my intention is to discuss the key conflicts associated with creative digital citizenship and digital labour within the digital economy.

This literature review begins by offering a theoretical exposition into citizenship as it is commonly understood within a global context and its importance within South Africa. I then chart a critical history of the conception of the digital citizen according to dominant theories. At this interval, I mobilise the central theme of this project – the intersectional digital citizen, at the juncture of creative practice and digital labour. Finally, I conclude by providing insight into participatory culture and creative forms of citizenship within political and popular culture contexts.

2.2 Defining Citizenship.

Creative digital citizenship cannot be critically understood without first clarifying its citizenship dimension. Citizenship within the democratic context is generally defined as follows:

> (a) [it] gives membership status to individuals within a political unit; (b) confers an identity on individuals; (c) constitutes a set of values, usually interpreted as a commitment to the common good of a particular unit; (d) involves practicing a degree of participation in the process of political life (Abowitz and Harnish 2006:653).

According to Cindy Steenekamp and Reinet Loubser (2010), citizenship can be defined through a dual conception: first, it confers or denies legal status and national identity to the individual; second, citizenship prescribes what contributions and conduct constitute a good citizen. Enquiry into citizenship is particularly pertinent due to South Africa's contentious relationship to citizenship, as a result of colonisation and the Apartheid legacy (Mphidi, 2016). Both colonisation and the Apartheid project legislated the classification of South African inhabitants into two distinct categories: the citizen and the subject. Citizenship status was bestowed upon the Settler Colonial (those possessing Dutch or English ancestry) and subject status was conferred upon the African Native (Hall, 2010). This legal distinction enabled the subsequent social and economic disenfranchisement of the African Native and would largely define citizenship rights into the early 1990s and today. As a result of this legacy, some scholars refute any claims to the existence of a South African citizenship. Other scholars are more concerned with the securing of a South African identity. Ivor Chipkin (2007) deliberating on the question of nationhood and nationalism, argues that citizenship is conditional on the exercising of fraternity, equality and liberty, effected with ethical responsibility. As these have not been equally effected in theory or practice in South Africa, according to Chipkin, South

Africans are only still *becoming* citizens. In contrast, Anthea Garman, Viola Candace Milton and Herman Wassermann (2013) argue that South Africans *do* possess citizenship and contend that citizenship should be broadened, not negating the legal-politico relationship between the state and citizen but, acknowledging that the term possesses social and symbolic capital that filters into the everyday workings of the individual.

Both Terry Flew (2011) and Garman et al., (2013) advocate for the broadening of the term beyond the following:

> [a] set of practices (juridical, political, economic and cultural) which define a person as a competent member of society, and which as a consequence shape the flow of resources to persons and social groups … Citizenship is concerned with […] the various social arrangements whereby benefits are distributed to different sectors of society
>
> (Turner, 1993:2–3).

On a similar note, in *Introduction: Identity, Citizenship and Power in South Africa,* Yoon Jung Park (2010) insists that states play a major role in delimiting citizenship and identity formations. To Park (2010), citizenship, is the most strategic institutional apparatus for establishing the inclusionary and exclusionary boundaries that define South Africa.

In contrast, Lauren Berlant (1997) insists that citizenship can function as a counter-hegemonic device. In her monograph, *The Queen of America Goes to Washington,* she argues that citizenship is a personal, intimate experience felt through embodied markers of race, sex, sexuality, and class. Thus, citizenship is produced, enacted and experienced on the level of the intimate, and cultural, not solely the rational, the legal, or the judicial. She argues that culture can be employed as critical evidence for everyday nation-making and therefore citizenship.

Can digital cultural products intervene into the nation's memory? Can video producers claim space for themselves as citizens and can digital culture be deployed to launch a critical

investigation into the citizen's connection to the nation? As such, this thesis contends that digital cultural products, allow a reframing of the nation, and allow for a different kind of citizen to be revealed.

2.3 Defining Social Networks, Millennials and Digital Natives

According to Nikki Sullivan and Samantha Murray, technology implicates the interwoven nature of the body and technological formations as co-productive entities, since both technology and the body are equally manifestations of ideological inputs (O'Rourke and Giffney cited in Sullivan and Murray, 2012). In fact, to Murray, embodiment, or bodily-being, is the manifestation of socio-political discourses. That is the body (as a cultural text) and technology are "mutually interdependent" (O'Rourke and Giffney cited in Sullivan and Murray, 2012: xi) entities, ideologically informed by one another. In this view, technology in any form, is not a corporeal appendage, but rather the means in and through which the body is articulated, situated and constituted (*ibid*). What this indexes is that the online technologies the human beings interact with, such as social media, form and embody human beings, just as equally as humans form the technology, which suggests then, that human beings are never *truly* offline. For instance, even when individuals are physically offline, they may be subliminally thinking about or affected by online content - their lives being structured by various technological affordances. Again, human life is increasingly structured by data processes, so that even obtaining a bank loan, a credit card, or university entrance is the result of algorithmic decision-making, or at the very least digital processes. Apps like Google Maps track one's geolocation and offer products and services based on one's location. For the purpose of this research however, the offline contexts I refer to here indicate a place-based positionality, what Jurgenson refers to as "physical–occupying geographic space with flesh-and-blood bodies" (2012:1). Online here references digital access and digital use, that is internet access and use. Further, I use the term offline-online to index the simultaneity of the two worlds and to

designate the increasing difficulty in severing online and offline identities. Throughout this dissertation, I understand social media to be networking platforms that first, allow the creation of a profile and in turn facilitate the convergence of multiple relationships (boyd and Ellison, 2008). These platforms are rooted in rich user-generated content and emphasise community, connectivity, and participation according to van Dijck (2013), Gillepsie (2010) and Kaplan and Haenlein (2010). Kaplan and Haenlein further offer a useful categorisation of social media as being "Blogs, Social Networking Sites, Collaboration Projects, Content Communities, Virtual Social Worlds, and Virtual Game Worlds" (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010 cited in Bucher, 2015:3). Social media platforms enable the production and dissemination of 'networked publics' as well as eliciting and circulating 'affective publics' (Hjorth & Hinton, 2019). This means that social media platforms capitalise on social networks to enable and provoke the production and distribution of information as well as emotion-inducing experiences.

The term *digital natives*, refers to those who were 'born' with access to technology and therefore, it is assumed, possess an 'indigenous' awareness of online environments (Prensky, 2001; Chigona, Kamkwenda, and Manjoo, 2008). This term has been associated with the millennial generation: typically born between 1980 and 1994, millennials or the always-connected generation was the first to come of age in the new millennium (Bull, 2010). The term is significant for the concerns of this study as it further invokes a particular technological orientation, a predisposition towards cosmopolitanism and further assumes an inclusion in global technology-literate cultures and attitudes (Beck, 2010, 2002). Cosmopolitanism in this sense connotes being locally situated, yet globally oriented or influenced, through association or practices (*ibid)*. Through the information flows of globalisation South African millennials are increasingly exposed to and have heightened access to global cultural products. Precisely how this transnational exposure contributes to and informs both their identity formation and practice as creative digital citizens is of great importance to this dissertation.

2.4 Origin of the Digital Citizen

There has been extensive debate on whether the internet has coded its own form of citizenship, namely the digital variety (Isin and Ruppert's 2015; Mossberger *et al.*, 2008; Ribble, Bailey, and Ross, 2004). This digital variation of citizenship is termed digital citizenship. Digital citizenship "designate[s] the possibility that the individual has to participate in society using electronic means which require both skills and access for regular and effective use … such as reading, writing, comprehending, navigating and broadband access" (Sebastião, 2015:5). The term digital citizenship can be traced back to Katz's work *Digital Citizen* in 1997, but it was in the early 2000s that the term gained further recognition (Ribble, Bailey, and Ross, 2004). In 2004, ISTE published an article in *Learning & Leading with Technology*, entitled "*Digital Citizenship: Addressing Appropriate Technology Behavior*" (Ribble *et al.*, 2004). Ribble *et al.* established the term based on the analogy that computer users participate in a networked society, as 'physical' citizens participate in a 'physical' society and as such, are obligated to perform certain duties within the digital realm (Hollandsworth *et al*., 2011; Ribble *et al.*, 2004). Responding to both a "policy vacuum and conceptual vacuum" (Moor, 1985:266) in the lack of both adequate conceptual and ethical infrastructure around emerging technology, Ribble et al. categorised digital citizenship behaviour into specific pillars: *digital etiquette* which involves electronic standards of conduct or procedure*; digital communication* concerns the electronic exchange of information and *digital rights and responsibilities* describe the freedoms extended to persons in the digital world. All of the above pillars are dependent on *digital access* which is full electronic 'participation' in online society.

Ribble *et al.*'s estimation of digital citizenship as "the norms of appropriate, responsible technology use" introduced a prescriptive agenda that would largely define digital citizenship as an educational concept used to teach young people about ethical internet use (Oxley, 2010). There are many studies undertaken on Ribble's formation of digital citizenship as a framework

for an ethical online curriculum (Choi, 2016; Macleod, Xu, Yang, and Zhu, 2016; Oxley, 2010). This call to produce responsible internet citizens has been heeded by academics, educators and policymakers alike[5] (Oxley, 2010). In addition, the above framework supported academic enquiry into digital citizenship as an expression of online political participation (Sebastião, 2015). However, digital citizenship conceived in this manner becomes prescriptive, privileging entrenched ideas of successful citizenship based on Western democracies rather than taking advantage of the potential of unconventional forms of citizenship. What my dissertation is interested in investigating is how, on one hand, the internet performs as a post-geographic locality, and yet, on the other hand, persists in reinstating the bounded binaries that lead to inclusion for some parts of the world, and exclusion for others (Nakamura, 2013). This project seeks to understand how the territorial assertions of offline markers are inscribed in social media and how these conditions affect the formation of South African digital citizens.

2.5 The Digital Citizen and Sociodemographic Features

While Ribble *et al*. signify a focus on the *production* of ethical internet participation; Mossberger *et al*. (2008) shift their attention to the *conditions* of internet participation: Mossberger *et al*. (2008) call attention to what social circumstances govern internet use such as gender, race and class. Ribble *et al.* (2004) on the other hand are concerned with how users behave once online. Mossberger *et al*.'s (2008) study aims to contextualise digital inequalities within the broader context of social inequity (2008:2). Based on a 2006 Pew Research study of 100 000 participants, Mossberger *et al.* conclude that social inequalities are simulated online, and that participation follows racial or ethnic fault lines (Mossberger *et al.*, 2008). Significant racial differences are not caused by race on an *individual* level, but by the institutionalized aftereffects of race, such as residing in high-poverty neighbourhoods. These neighbourhoods

[5] For an extensive account see Sebastião, 2015.

may provide little opportunity for exposure to technology due to the lack of equipped schools, workspaces or public access sites like libraries or community centres (Mphidi, 2016). Mossberger *et al.*'s (2008) study coincides with Mutula and Mostert (2010) and Osunkunle (2010) claim that consistent exposure to digital technology results in increased usage, signalling that the more frequently one uses the internet, the higher their digital competency.

Research within the South African context strongly corresponds with the above studies: the Apartheid legacy of separate socio-economic and educational development are some of the fundamental causes for digital inequality in South Africa (Mutula and Mostert, 2010; Osunkunle, 2010; Sikhakhane, Lubber and Klopper, 2005).

The conclusion of the Cold War in 1989, signalled the end of Communist nation-states' support of the African liberation movements, particularly the South African liberation movement. As such, despite the socialist nature of these liberation movements, the early post-Apartheid economic era was surprisingly defined by a strong anti-socialist sentiment. According to Harvey, neoliberalism is the socio-political orientation or notion that,

> human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong property rights, free markets and free trade (2005:2).

Niels van Doorn, contests the limits of neoliberalism as merely establishing favourable economic conditions for businesses. He contends that through policy, "governments are 'active agents' in capitalism's evolution" (van Doorn, 2017:2). He concludes that a neoliberal governmentality, neoliberal techniques or strategies of governing, reconfigures the role of the state and simultaneously shapes the relationship between labour, capital and business (*ibid*). Ulrich Bröckling (2016) similarly argues that neoliberal governmentality does not shape the behaviour of the individual directly, but rather limits the possible paths that one can take,

ultimately positioning neoliberalism as the most natural path to achieving one's objectives. Cut to South Africa. In South Africa's case, the failure of global communism and the so-called triumph of capitalism globally, as well as within newly independent African states made neoliberalism a 'natural' choice. The establishing of neoliberalism as a global hegemonic discourse in the 1980s, contributed to the foregrounding of neoliberalism in South Africa, through principles such as economic deregulation and privatization[6] of State-Owned Enterprises. Once such significant neoliberal characteristic is privatisation of public enterprises and limited government market intervention (Bond, 2000). Both the socio-economic isolationist nature of South Africa, as an effect of the economic sanctions at the time, and the neoliberal policy environment of the 1980s[7] (Brown, 2005). This ensured that internet access was available predominantly through university networks and then only later for domestic use, with Rhodes University being the first university to acquire internet in the early 1990s (*ibid*). That the internet was primarily available through university networks, already suggested that this new technology was extending offline infrastructural inequality in online spaces.

According to the literature, spatial apartheid or racial residential division has become South Africa's most enduring legacy (Seekings, 2008) - which essentially suggests that even internet access follows the same structural developments. That is, since internet access was initially granted through telephone lines, internet access was initially only accessible to formal electricity and home line networks. Strategically, this discriminated against individuals who resided in townships or rural areas and privileged those who had access to phone lines.

[6] See Narsia (2002) and Peet (2000) for a more detailed report..

[7] Following the establishment of a few commercial Internet Service Providers in 1992, whose Internet services were based on phone lines provided by Telkom, South Africa's semi-privatised telecommunication provider. Telkom entered the Internet market, participating in anti-competitive behaviour between local and global Internet companies, like the American Telecommunications giant, AT & T (Lewis, 2005:16)

These were individuals who were able to access privileges that were largely the purchase of white middle to higher income individuals (Lebelo, 1990; Southall, 2014).

Mossberger *et al*.'s (2008) distinction, that offline socio-demographic contexts fundamentally inform online behaviour and participation, indicates a nuance that had been lacking in prior research. Preceding research into digital citizenship had placed emphasis on digital rights and responsibilities (Ribble *et al*., 2004) or on policy concerning the digital divide (Mphidi, 2016) with little consideration into the *individual*'s (present or historical) socio-demographic orientation to technology.

But it is Hintz, Dencik, and Wahl-Jorgensen (2019) that extend prior considerations of digital citizenship to acknowledge the developments that characterise the present age. Building on an extensive UK-based study with a wide spectrum of media and policy professionals, Hintz et al. (2019) locate their argument at the nexus of critical data and surveillance studies. Systematically, they contend that the digital in digital citizenship cannot solely be understood as performative "acts of (self-construction)" (Hintz et al, 2017) but must be understood as environmental. That is, "We are not just digital citizens because of our actions but also because we increasingly live and operate in a datafied *environment* in which everything we do leaves data traces." (Emphasis my own). Thus, the digital cannot simply be defined as acts of ubiquitous connectivity, but an age of accelerated connectivity.

Thus, my interrogation intends to further extend current digital citizenship claims (Isin and Rupert, 2015; Mossberger *et al*., 2008) by positioning digital citizenship within the broader contexts of participation and labour within a neoliberal digital economy. In so doing, it is my aim to endorse a more consummate analysis of the South African digital citizen – that is, to begin to take into account, the intersectionality of this individual and their socio-cultural contexts. I hope to achieve this by investigating the offline-online practices of creative digital

citizens in terms of social media video production and analysing how the relationship between socio-demographics, such as race, gender and class inform their creative digital citizenship practices.

2.6 Digital Labour, the Digital Economy and Conflicts within Creative digital citizenship

While both Lessig and Hartley conceive of the digital citizen as an exponent of negotiated power, the key to upending socio-political institutions, and the site of the digital economy, other scholars do not share the same techno-optimism (Hartley, 2013; Lessig, 2004). At this point, a clear definition of the digital economy is needed: Rumana Bukht and Richard Heeks (2017) compile an extensive literature review of the digital economy and note that a broad definition refers to all digital activity based on digital technologies. These activities include consumer and producer goods, hardware, software, infrastructure, services, retail, content production and distribution, business processing and digitisation (2017). They employ Narasimhan's (1983) notion of extensivity and intensivity of ICT (Information Communication Technologies) applications to provide a narrower definition of the digital economy. While intensive applications deepen or intensify the use of the technology, extensive applications extend the reach of the product or service. They conclude that the digital economy is "that part of economic output derived solely or primarily from digital technologies with a business model based on digital goods or services" (2017:13). To Nick Srnicek (2016) however, the digital economy is not simply becoming a large part of economies, but it is increasingly hegemonic; it is a directive, a template and an order to other less digital economies to incorporate more digital means into their own economies. In *Platform Capitalism*, Srnicek (2016) explains that the platform is a key component of the digital economy. Srnicek understands platforms to be intermediaries or infrastructure upon which users build a product or a service. YouTube is a platform in that users are able to build on the available infrastructure, create a profile, upload

videos or interact with other users through comments or create playlists. He describes platforms as having a multipurpose function – they enable different parties to interact, and they mediate interactions between groups. Platforms depend on network effects: this means that the more users on the platform, the easier it is to deliver value and the greater the value delivered. Take social networks like YouTube or TikTok for example, the more users use the platform, the more content is uploaded, the greater opportunity to find content that one might enjoy. This means users potentially stay on the platform for longer. Though he delineates five different types of platforms from product platforms (Spotify or The Apple iStore or Google Playstore) to lean platforms (Uber and Airbnb), this thesis is most concerned with advertising platforms. Advertising platforms like Google and Facebook, "extract information on users, undertake a labour of analysis, and then use the products of that process to sell ad space." (Srnicek, 2016: 657). In other words, advertising platforms extract data, process data and monetise that data by selling ad space, amongst other things. However, David Nieborg and Thomas Poell (2018) take Srnicek's (2016) exposition further: platforms, they argue, are becoming contingent through a process they call platformisation. Platformisation can be conceived as,

> the penetration of economic, governmental, and infrastructural extensions of digital platforms into the web and app ecosystems, fundamentally affecting the operations of the cultural industries (2018:2).

Through network effects, cultural production and cultural distribution are reconfigured, becoming dependent on platforms. In other words, platforms consolidate their platform power through reproduction: the more video producers publish on YouTube, the more dependent they become on the platform as a means of communication and circulation and thus, the more YouTube becomes indispensable for video producers.

Broadly speaking, the digital economy refers to the interactions and processes "premised on the new relationships between knowledge, information, creativity, innovation and economic structure" (Flew, 2015:6). These interactions are not strictly limited to *financial* transactions but 'free' or 'gift' transactions as well. To Barbrook (1998), the digital economy is not inherently capitalist in formation, but rather possesses features of both a capitalist and gift economy – the gift economy emphasises the *sharing* and *exchanging* of information or services as opposed to *the payment* of services (1998). As Barbook notes, digital citizens who engage in online communities and transactions such as fan cultures are unconstrained by physical distance (*ibid*). For example, artists, musicians and video producers in South Africa can share and exchange music samples with their counterparts in South Korea and,

> collaborate with each other without the direct mediation of *money and politics*. Unconcerned about copyright, they give and receive information *without thought of payment*. In the absence of states or markets to mediate social bonds, network communities are instead formed through the mutual obligations created by gifts of time and ideas (1998: 135, emphasis my own).

Although Barbrook (1998) was writing at the turn of the millennium, his view of the gift economy still remains relevant, arguably formative. Both the gift and the sharing economy (Uber, Airbnb) are predicated on the notion of openness, such as open-source software, which is software that does not have a patent or belong to one individual. This kind of software is usually produced in community, with many members contributing to its development. Openness, as an instance of neoliberal hegemonic ideology of free-market thinking online, is meant to invoke participation, non-market transparency and to encourage independence, reciprocity and egalitarianism over traditional media hierarchy (Velkova, 2016; Pomerantz and Peek, 2016). Velkova argues that gift economies "embed the participants in this gift economy in a struggle for power, status, and recognition online." The gift economy is based on affective

or “symbolic exchanges through which social relations and hierarchies are established and maintained – the gift giver becomes indebted to the gift receiver, or at every least an affective relationship of some kind is established. Terranova (2000) contests the notion of economies of exchange or gift economies, emphasising that the internet simultaneously functions as a gift economy and an advanced neoliberal capitalist economy. Broadly speaking, capitalist economies enable the private sector to control the means of production for corporate profit rather than public interest (Scott, 2006). Neoliberal here, indicates uncontrolled access to the means of production characterised by a free-market approach where corporations are largely unregulated by government entities (Scott, 2006).

It is precisely Barbrook’s logic of free digital labour that undergirds the digital economy. Digital labour refers to “simultaneously voluntarily given and unwaged, enjoyed and exploited, free labour” (Terranova, 2000:2) undertaken by cultural workers in the digital economy. To exemplify this, scholars like Erin Duffy and Becca Schwartz (2017) draw upon a qualitative textual analysis of 150 adverts to emphasise the labour involved in social media. Duffy and Schwartz (2017) concluded that social media labour is characterised by invisibility, lower pay and marginal status within the wider arena of technology. They argue that digital labour routinely “invoke[s] the blurred boundary between work and play” (Duffy and Schwartz, 2017). Likewise, Mark Andrejevic, John Banks and John Campbell insist that, entrenched in a neoliberal structure, “social media, as a technology of subjectivity, commodifies personal identities and creativities, while promising particular kinds of personal and social benefits.” (2014:4). As such, this dissertation asks the following question: how does the creative digital citizen navigate their position as both a digital labourer and creative practitioner to produce cultural publics of value?

In opposition to Terranova’s argument, concerning digital media as an instrument of capitalist forces, Havens, Lotz and Tinic (2009) maintain that Marx himself acknowledges contradictions

in the construction of capitalism and it is from this premise that Havens *et al*. launch their claim. The scholars contend that media production is not solely at the behest of the capitalist parent entity, nor is the sole role of media to recognise or call attention to the false consciousness that capitalism constructs through media producers as agents. Although acknowledging the importance of the Marxist foundation, Havens *et al*. (2009) contends that,

> We cannot accommodate the conclusion that meaning, textual production, and industry practices are predictable or guaranteed to reflect only the interests of those who control the means of production (16).

What Havens *et al*. (2009) seem to be authenticating is the power of the individual producer to contravene, subvert (use the logics of the system against itself) and create within the contradictions capitalism itself enables. What is then emerging amidst the contradictions of Havens *et al*.'s (2009) 'affirming' of a capitalist mode of production and Terranova's leftist approach is the negotiated power that the digital citizen embodies in participating and producing. Power and resistance are understood here to be mutually constitutive, as producers embody their agency within the bounds of the structural imperatives of the social media platforms, the very same imperatives embody opposing forces. How does the digital citizen navigate these extreme conditions; internalize the inherent paradoxes of the digital economy and ultimately, produces cultural products or publics of value? (Havens et al., 2009). The above arguments demonstrate a lasting conflict between conceiving of social media participation as an exploitative exercise on the part of capitalism, and a more liberal approach.

Castells expounds on the background of this shift in terms of the notion of counter power in the network society:

> Wherever [there] is domination, there is resistance to domination, be it political, cultural, economic, psychological, or otherwise… We have witnessed in most of the

> world the growth of social movements… opposed to what they often define as global capitalism (2011:1).

Likewise, Andrejevic *et al*. proposes that these political economic theories of neoliberal social media need to be supplemented with models of participatory culture and agency (Andrejevic *et al*., 2014). These statements echo Bird's sentiments, which caution against the research of online practices in isolation, and advocates for scholarly enquiry into how digital practices intersect with offline actualities (Bird, 2011). This acknowledges the need for further scholarship on how digital citizens navigate the "complex interaction of structural media power and… how audiences, whether *produsers* [producers as consumers] or not, negotiate and manage the complex interaction of structural media power and individual/community agency" (Bird, 2011:14).

2.7 The Digital Citizen and Participatory Culture

Participatory culture is the online ecosystem within which the digital citizen is situated (Jenkins, Clinton, Purushotoma, Robison and Weigel, 2006). Henry Jenkins *et al*. articulate participatory culture as,

> a culture with relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, where members believe their contributions matter, strong support for creating and sharing one's creations and members feel some sort of social connection with one another (2006: 3).

For the purpose of this research, the authors delineate two kinds of participatory cultural categories: *affiliations* and *expressions.* The *former* involves formal and informal membership on social networking sites. To Villi and Matikainen (2016) and (Schäfer, 2011) *affiliations* indicate a kind of implicit participation, or interaction, where the contributions of members are not always 'acknowledged' or seen, such as liking or sharing a YouTube video. The latter category is *expressions,* which is described as the production or adaptation of new original

forms of content such as fan video-making or fan fiction (Jenkins, 2006:3). This is explicit participation as community members are well aware of the content produced.

Per contra: Chris Fuchs (2013) and others (van Dijck and Poell, Karpi, 2014), offering a contribution from a critical social media perspective, denounce social media as sites of participatory culture. Fuchs argues that the capitalist agenda of corporate social media, social media used in a corporate capacity for marketing and datafication purposes, such as YouTube or Instagram advertising, is in fundamental conflict with the participatory democracy of participatory culture. Datafication is the process of culling, capturing, harvesting (van Dijck, 2013) or the quantifying of "human life through digital information" (Meijas and Couldry, 2019:1). Reflecting on this process, Meijas and Couldry assertively claim,

> Through this process, large domains of human life became susceptible to being processed via forms of analysis that could be automated on a large-scale. The dynamic that drives datafication as a social process then becomes apparent: the drive to 'render [...] human behavior… into an analyzable form' (2019:1).

Phrased differently, datafication is the extraction of data as a raw material from human life and human experience, both public and private. It is the body as algorithm, as malleable code. Within the context of the platform economy, datafication is largely utilised towards capital acquisition. "Datafication combines two processes: the transformation of human life into data through processes of quantification, and the generation of different kinds of value from data." (Meijas and Couldry, 2019:2; Zuboff, 2015). Nevertheless, within Jenkins' conception of participatory digital citizenship, Ratto and Boler (2014) introduce DIY/DIT (Do-It-Together) citizenship and "Selfie citizenship" (Kuntsman, 2017) as sub-practices of the overarching discourses of creative digital citizenship (Hartley 1999). These practices constitute what is termed "vernacular culture" (Jenkins, 2006:143). Vernacular culture references how amateur

production, distribution and consumption frame internet culture within specific locales (Burgess, 2016; Jenkins, 2006). Situating the participants of this study within the larger scope of vernacular digital culture aids in interpreting various iterations of creative citizenship in South Africa.

Not everyone is able to participate in online culture. The digital divide has been conceived as the division between individuals and communities who have ready access to technology to better enrich the quality of their lives and those who do not (Ferro, Helbing and Gil-Garcia, 2011; Rahman, 2008; Salinas, 2003:131). Scholars such as Adebesin and Kotze (2010) emphasize that there is not a single divide and that the term digital divide betrays the complexity of the situation as multiple divides exist between genders, generations, regions and societies.

Within the digital divide, secondary fragmentations exist: one such fragmentation is the participatory divide (Hoffmann, Lutz, and Meckel, 2014). While the first level divide is indicative of a lack of digital infrastructure and the second level divide specifies a deficit in digital competency, such as a lack of Google Search skills, or the use of Microsoft Office, the third references the socioeconomic gap that prevents users from *producing* digital content (Hoffmann *et al*., 2014). The participatory divide references "the unequal access to opportunities, skills and knowledge" (Jenkins *et al*., 2006:5) that is necessary for producing meaningful participation in the digital world. This study emphasises the external conditions that may hamper participation in the online world in terms of social media video production. The study additionally enquires how millennial video producers may circumvent unequal access to knowledge, skills and social capital to produce online video content.

2.8 The Digital Citizen and Political Engagement

Multiple scholars have focused much of their attention on the conceptual links between digital citizenship and political participation (Hermes, 2006; Hirzalla and van Zoonen 2011; Dahlgren and Gurevitch, 2005; Wellman and Haythornwaite, 2002). The conception of creative digital citizenship and the potential of online civic engagement to treat the offline democratic deficit has emerged as a significant academic concern within the greater milieu of internet studies and media studies. Prevailing academic enquiry into creative digital citizenship has been shaped by a fidelity to civic duty and political participation (Rainie, Smith, Schlozman, Brady, and Verba, 2012; Sebastião, 2015). The most recent exponent of such an interest is literature on the 2015/2016 *Fees Must Fall* and *Rhodes Must Fall* student movements, which conceive of *Fees Must Fall* as an instance of the power of the networked youth (Trillò, 2018; Daniels, 2016; Bosch, 2015). Though Bosch's study is not explicit, there is an underlying comparison between South African networked movements and the *Arab Spring* of 2010/2011 which may reference the need for young South Africans to be acknowledged as global digital citizens, participating in global internet cultures.

Bosch and others note that South African 'social media movements' engender a *collective identity,* form a site of "generating new symbols" and 'minority' memory production (Mainsah, 2017; Bosch, 2015; Garman et al., 2015). Despite allegations of youth civic ennui or apathy by proponents of traditional democratic technologies (voting, rallies, volunteerism, community campaigning), the networked publics have engendered a form of new digital civic identities outside of traditional political participation. This dissertation shows how South African video producers employ video production to construct counter publics or a counter visuality and represent a collective platform identity. Counter visuality is Nicholas Mirzoeff's term (2011), taken from his interdisciplinary work, *The Right to Look: A Counterhistory of Visuality*, wherein he foregrounds modern visuality (the visualisation of history) as a central technology

in the historicisation and establishment of Western hegemony. Counter visuality is at once an intervention, an interruption and a gazing back. Yet within the context of the platform economy, this intervention is intervened upon, the interruption interrupted, and the gaze back is simultaneously gazed at through datafication flows. Visual platform economies, of which YouTube is a part, present an opportunity for exploring a South African countervisuality, the kinds of identities that are seen and acknowledged and the kind of digital labour that is necessary to be seen.

As aforementioned, much work within the South African context excavates the explicitly *political* uses of social media through an analysis of online protests and community campaigning practices. Though these explicitly political uses are necessary, emphasising them neglects the opportunity to understand how socio-demographics influence even the most 'non-political' of texts. What my research aims to emphasise is the notion that social media text production cannot be disembedded or removed from the broader political contexts of sex, gender, race, class and education, as well as platform politics. Though the boundaries of what constitutes civic participation and activism are beyond the scope of this study, increasingly scholars have noted, that the demarcations between what is political or unpolitical and *who* mobilizes these configurations is demonstrative of exclusionary power plays in the digital realm (Banaji, Buckingham, van Zoonen, and Hirzalla, 2009; Dahlgren, 2007). Further, the ascription of higher value to explicitly political texts, over 'popular culture' (such as entertainment, slice of life, hobbies, vlogs) or intimate, subjective private sphere texts, as exponents of 'true' citizenship, is deeply problematic. This asymmetry is based on exclusionary, gendered, raced and sexed Western ideals of participatory democracy. This asymmetry genders the political sphere as masculine, which it has historically been, and genders cultural expressions, beyond the jurisdiction and interest of the political, as feminine, and if feminine then inferior. It thus reinforces notions of the ideal digital citizen as white and

male, reifying offline hierarchies online. The prioritising of these texts is rooted in the preference for and historical dominance of masculine, political objectivity over the varied cultural politics and subjectivity associated with the intimate public sphere.

Berlant's conception of the intimate public sphere through a feminist lens is critical here. To Berlant, "an intimate public operates when a market opens up to a bloc of consumers, claiming to circulate texts and things that express those people's particular core interests and desires" (2008:8). An intimate public sphere assumes that its end users have had similar affective experiences and thus possesses a shared history (Berlant, 2008), a group consciousness or a linked fate in some way. As the members of the intimate public sphere are assumed to share in a group consciousness because they share a history, the cultural products produced in that intimate public sphere embody that history (Berlant, 2008; Stewart, 2013). YouTube, thus in interpellating participants with a shared history, group consciousness, or linked fate constructs countless intimate public spheres. For example, the beauty vlogger community in general, forms a broad intimate public sphere and black beauty vloggers form a more specific intimate public sphere since they both fulfil the requirements of Berlant's definition. Additionally, South African YouTubers additionally form a broad intimate public sphere. Thus, in embodying shared histories, intimate public spheres recoup numerous marginalised subjectivities who had been too disenfranchised to participate in the formal political sphere. These conflicts further evidence the asymmetrical hierarchical structures of power that seek to reassert their unmarked logics in the life of the digital citizen. In analysing YouTube vlogs, this thesis sought to illustrate popular cultural texts as sites of the political and emphasise the invisibility of the socio-political processes implicated in the production of platform publics - from the platform itself, to the discourses it constructs, reproduces and circulates.

For creative digital citizens, the new media has enabled a diversification of the public sphere and the bypassing of traditional media gatekeepers, but its use is complicated by opposing

logics. Scholars emphasise the paradoxical limits of agency associated with User Generated Content platforms like YouTube, TikTok and Instagram: on one hand, digital citizens may be in opposition to its underlying neoliberal logic, but nevertheless engage in a platform that is built on the same neoliberalism they resist and as such further reproduce, disseminate and embed the logic and effects of these platforms (Ratto and Boler, 2014). This constructs, to invoke Deleuze, "double-movements of liberation and capture" (Deleuze 1989: 68, cited in Hintz *et al.*, 2017) where both 'emancipatory' and surveillance mechanisms exist side by side. To Shoshana Zuboff (2015), these surveillance mechanisms do not merely constitute a fleeting moment in the history of late capitalism, but rather announce a very particular archetypal logic of capital accumulation. This logic's key operations are the pervasive extraction, commodification, and control of user data, alienating users from their own behaviour, modifying it and profiting from it (*ibid*). Zuboff inaugurates this contemporary age, as surveillance capitalism. Others have termed this age Big Data capitalism (Fuchs, 2016). Nick Couldry and Ulysses Meijas, expand on the processes of the surveillance capitalism by understanding surveillance capitalism as a data colonialism. Interestingly, they emphasise that data colonialism is not metaphorical, but rather explains in clear terms, that data is capital. Read together, Zuboff (2015), Meijas and Couldry construct an image of a society that has been overcome by the pervasive logics and attendant processes of data capitalism. Importantly, double movements of liberation and capture must also be understood to mean the contradictory nature of creative digital citizenship work - that is, participants *self-consciously* engage in platforms that grant creative autonomy on the one hand, but demand forms of digital labour or datafication on the other. These complexities are precisely what make creative digital citizenship compelling. As such, the way in which digital citizens internalise and negotiate their complex relationship with the political economy of social media necessitates much further interrogation.

2.9 Conclusion

The purpose of this literature review was to provide a conceptual understanding of what comprises creative digital citizenship in its current academic condition. While there is evidence of a new shift towards more dynamic forms of citizenship such as creative, DIY and cultural citizenship, many digital citizenship scholars appear to be concerned with satisfying a political or civic agenda. As such, much of the literature is concerned with the relationship between online and offline civic engagement (Hartley, 2016; Sebastião, 2015; Loader, Vromen, and Xenos, 2014; Bennett, 2008; Hermes, 2006; Dahlgreen, 2003). The advent of digital technologies is widely celebrated for its democratic potential; this potential, however, is often undermined by the neoliberal capitalist logics that both undergird these platforms and reinforce socio-economic hierarchies online (Nakamura, 2013). Extant research within South Africa often adopts a public policy or political model, neglecting the opportunities for nuance that a micro-level approach could introduce (Bosch, 2015; Mutula and Mostert, 2010; Osunkunle, 2010; Sikhakhane, Lubber and Klopper, 2005). A nascent corpus of work within this field is further concerned with the emerging consequences of the digital economy and labour (Gajjala, 2013; Duffy and Schwartz, 2017; Loader *et al*, 2014) and how participatory cultures can best position themselves to produce alternatives to the precarious culture of social media production (Bird, 2010).

There is much work to be done. First, a shift towards a greater understanding of the digital citizen's offline subjective contexts must occur: I advocate for further academic exploration into the offline-online contexts of the individual producer as these indicate how digital citizens navigate, internalize and, in some ways, subvert various manifestations of power, labour and globalization, as well as critical shifts within cultural and knowledge production. In essence, how the citizenship component (e.g., offline socio-demography, history, national identity and Global South relations) of digital citizenship agitates and activates the digital (datafication and

data surveillance) must be invoked when using the term *digital citizen*. Though there is some acknowledgment that offline contexts influence online constituents, *how* they do so has often been neglected (Mutula and Mostert, 2010; Osunkunle, 2010). Second, I propose that future research into creative digital citizenship should establish a broad framework that foregrounds the intersectionality of offline and online identities; the political economy of social media; digital labour and participatory culture. Though these discourses are often not explicitly associated with creative digital citizenship, it would bode future research well to not only acknowledge but embrace and incorporate the challenges and prospects they present to enhance digital citizenship studies, as these discourses intersect and embody the attributes of what I, and others in this review, understand creative digital citizenship to be.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I provide a description of the blueprint of the methodology. I first present the central research questions, followed by a discussion of theoretical resources, related social media research methodologies, and a theoretical framework. Further, I discuss the reasoning and appropriateness behind a multi-dimensional qualitative approach to address the study's research aims.

3.2 Research Questions

The research questions seek to understand the complexities of the offline-online lives of digital citizens. Derived from the preceding argument, the following research questions can be posed:

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 is 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?**

3.3 Significance of Methodology Focus

Prior bodies of work addressing creative digital citizenship have often reproduced a certain bias towards an audience rather than producer mode (Hargreaves and Hartley, 2016). Few scholars have departed from the audience model to focus on a production lens (Schradie, 2011; Blank, 2013). Bou-Franch, Lorenzo-Dus and Garcés-Conejos Blitvich (2012) emphasised audience reception through data analysis of YouTube interaction by YouTube users, while others have opted for qualitative analysis of YouTube videos, but few studies have focused on South African YouTube video producers. Moreover, the surveyed research does not attempt a qualitative analysis of social media video producers *and* their corresponding video content. Thus, this dissertation intended to provide insight into social media video producers and how their offline contexts affect the video content they produce. In this way, the study aims to offer a contribution to the field, by extending the relationship between digital citizens, digital economy, and the production of platform texts.

3.4 Qualitative Research and Internet Use

In recent years, research emphasis has been placed on the digital divide (Mphidi, 2016) rather than on particular communities of practice, which are groups who share a craft or profession or pursue a sustained enterprise, to borrow from Wenger (2010). Few studies have focused on content production from the producer perspective, with the vast majority of the studies emphasising socio-demographic contexts without applying the contexts to producers or content creators. Multivariate studies by Schradie (2011), Correa (2010) and Blank (2013) investigated both non-demographic and demographic features of content production; two of these studies

feature university students and indicate education as a strong predictor of digital citizenship. Again, the studies neglected to research the context process in connection with the content output.

Technological platforms and the new media have often emphasised the collapsing of the producer and consumer, to create the category of the *prosumer/ produser* (Bird, 2011). Such categories often elide diverse forms of digital labour, and in doing so presume that all social media users are labouring in the same way. The kind of labour this study was primarily concerned with was production labour and the implications associated with mobilizing production as a form of digital citizenship in offline-online contexts.

There are multiple qualitative approaches to internet use. Certain research advocates for an ethnographic approach of digital media ecologies – understanding the online environments and how users interact with the content they create (Turkle, 1996; Goode et al., 2011). Other studies indicate a need to understand the offline contexts of online users (Mainsah, 2017; Gajjala, 2013; boyd, 2007; Couldry et al., 2014). Still others emphasise the convergence of the offline and online contexts as providing rich insight into how social media sites are embedded into the contexts of the everyday (English, 2013, Jurgenson, 2012). The explicit severing of the offline and online world has increasingly become eschewed as a form of "digital dualism" as it rejects the conceptual marriage of offline and online contexts in the lives of producers (Jurgenson, 2012; Gajalla, 2013:18). Additionally, across socio-economic contexts, offline-online lives are being irrevocably informed and structured by datafication technologies, so much so that life is increasingly structured by data flows. This ontological divergence (the real versus the digital) results in the inability to acknowledge the fusion of offline-online lives and the impact of datafication flows on human life is one reason why internet legislation has taken so long to catch up to technological shifts. As such, the study assumed a multi-method approach. This

approach critically explored the platform itself, the online video producers and the video content they produce.

Social Media Research Methodologies

The study investigates the offline-online lives of social media video producers as creative digital citizens in Johannesburg, South Africa. As such, in assessing the offline-online relationship of the creative digital citizen, the study must include inquiry into both the offline and online dynamics of this relationship. Accordingly, in this chapter, the reasoning behind a multi-dimensional qualitative approach to address the study's research aims is discussed.

Social-network based research approaches can often loosely be classified into two distinct categories: the first is online-based research of the broader environment – this includes research of the internet platform itself, such as YouTube, Twitter and Instagram. The second category is an online investigation into platform users or platform producers or to borrow from Bird (2011) *produsers*[8]. Within the second distinction, data collection can occur in strictly 'online' environments, examining the relationship between internet users and other media technologies in their lives (Couldry et al, 2007; Livingstone, 2008, van Dijck, 2013). In investigating the so-called 'integration' of the offline-online world, some internet researchers have devised an internet model based on television audience studies (Morley, 1997), such as Maria Bakardjieva and Smith (2001) where offline interviews are undertaken. Another form of data collection is an amalgamation of the two where both 'offline' and 'online' qualitative data is collected (English, 2013; Orgad, 2009). This study adopted this mode of data collection in order to sufficiently fulfil the aims of the research which are to investigate the offline-online lives of social media producers.

[8] Bird (2011) employs the term *produser*, to signal the incorporation of the producer and the consumer.

Though mapping a definition of online qualitative research can often prove elusive, it often evidences a critical dedication to an interpretive analysis of internet users' experiences and the offline-online texts or cultural artifacts they produce (Orgad, 2009). Again, Orgad (2009) notes,

> The question underlying a qualitative Internet research project would be: what does "the Internet" stand for in a particular context, for particular agents? … Part of any qualitative exploration would have to be articulating what research arenas "the Internet" comprises, and how they shape, as well as being shaped by, participants' and producers' experiences of use (2).

This suggests that qualitative online inquiry involves more than just the documentation of the producers' lives, but also involves an inquiry into the embeddedness of social media platforms and how social media content creation inform and enable the producers' lives (Orgad, 2009).

3.6 Critical Ethnography

There are multiple types of theoretical frameworks that underpin a research project. The theoretical approach I will be employing is informed by *critical ethnography*. As this study at its core, emphasises the production of publics within the digital economy and digital labour, it fulfils the requirements of researching "issues of power, inequality and hegemony" which are often central to critical ethnography (Leedy and Ormrod, 2010:70).

Ethnographical practices are best suited for investigating questions of power within cultural groups. The mixed method approach adopted in this study is appropriate for excavating the "potential tension between behaviours [what people do] and language [what people say, or what people say they will do]" (Leedy and Ormrod, 2010:70). The approach provides a "multi-layered, intertextual case study that integrates private and social experience and ties [the biographical] to sociological writing." (Ellis, 1995:3). Ellis further notes that ethnography as

strategic practice sutures the personal to the political, the social to the cultural, finally connecting all these elements to the biographical (*ibid*).

While quantitative research studies demand larger sample sizes from which representative deductions are drawn, qualitative research design is more concerned with smaller focus groups who are familiar with the research topic (Lee and Ormrod, 2010). As participants are central to qualitative research design, choosing the right participants is significant.

The participants chosen for this study were millennial video content producers aged 20 – 30, who produce video content for social media. The term millennial, as discussed in greater detail in the literature review (See Chapter 2), connotes a lifestyle of technological access and competency. The participants work alone or in a group and are not associated with larger commercial production houses. These producers often post regularly to YouTube and had been posting video content consistently for the past three years. The video producers reside in Johannesburg, South Africa.

From the onset, the structure of participant selection has been very specific. Similar to Jenkins *et al*. (2013), I occupy the researcher/participant position as I am also a video producer. Occupying the researcher/participant role in such communities of practice, was precisely what made for interesting research, as I was able to employ my insider knowledge in structuring the semi-structured interview questions. Additionally, I was very conscious of the fact that this insider knowledge demanded a deeper awareness of my own subjectivity for the data collection and analysis stages, in order to avoid superimposing my own experiences on the participant.

3.5 Participant Selection

The recruitment process began by searching for individual content creators aged 25-30, that resided in Johannesburg, South Africa specifically and that had been producing content on YouTube with some regularity for the last three years. The profiled individuals had to have completed their matric and were in their mid to late twenties. This age bracket, within the South African context, is arguably when individuals exhibit a greater sense of independence, and a decisiveness about career selection, unlike the early twenties where it is more likely that they would have the luxury of depending on caretakers, siblings, or parents to shield them from the financial risks of part-to-full-time content production. The presence of such a buffer is largely dependent on the affordances of one's class and quality of life, a concept which will be elucidated on in a later chapter.

3.6 Contacting Participants

The next phase of the recruitment process involved contacting social media video producers by email. Many had a visible email address on their YouTube channels or Instagram social media page, in order for brands and other parties interested in collaboration to make contact directly. Despite some candidates initially being quite receptive to participating in the research, there was no decisive communication in certain cases and no further response in others. For example, an early candidate, though initially enthusiastic, expressed some discomfort around being recorded, and preferred to submit her answers by email.

A secondary attempt at securing participants was made directly through Instagram. Many of the content creators that fit the constraints of my study were active on Instagram and responsive to their followers' or fan community's comments, so it seemed logical to make contact in this manner. Unfortunately, this proved difficult: firstly, owing to the less professional nature of Instagram in comparison to more formal communication formats like email for example,

participants were unable to express full commitment to the study. Additionally, an Instagram direct message inbox might be full, due to a combination of messages from followers, spam messages as well as messages from possible collaborators. Since Instagram's central appeal is not direct communication functions as opposed to formal email clients like Gmail or Yahoo Mail, Instagram does not possess a robust inbox sorting feature or spam guard, it is often difficult to determine which messages are important. Secondly, there was a general difficulty in coordinating schedules and settling on a suitable time and location. This difficulty in coordinating schedules was not just a 'shortcoming' on Instagram's part, but a feature of the recruitment process in general. The final interviews ranged from one and half hours to three hours. The majority of the final interviews took place outside of working hours – in the evenings, or on the weekend. Of the interviews that took place during working hours, these were digital entrepreneurs – individuals who are full time content creators. I understood content creators to be individuals who produce and distribute content for social media using a cross-platform approach. A content creator might create anchored content on YouTube and then produce attendant images across Twitter and Instagram promoting that content. Both digital entrepreneurship and content creators are terms that will figure more significantly in later chapters.

From the 31 Johannesburg-based video producers contacted, the total number of participants recruited came to four. Though four is too small a sample size to make a generalised application across the entire South African YouTube community, the combination of intensive semi-structured interviews and videos produces rich qualitative insights into the South African YouTube community and the ways in which they negotiate offline-online identities. The multi-method approach places equal significance on the offline and online environment and YouTube personas, and adds authenticity to both modes of data collection (Hine, 2000; Ogard, 2009).

Of the final participants in this study, 50% identify as male and 50% as female. All participants had completed some form of tertiary education and were between the ages of 25-31 (see Figure 1.1).

Name	**Gender**	**Age**	**Race**	**Education**	**Occupation**
Thandi	Female	26	Black	BA (Strategic Communications)	Full time content creator and Strategist
Thando	Female	30	Black	BTech (Film and Television) and Honours in Journalism.	ENCA camera person and news producer
Menzi	Male	26	Black	Digital Communication and Multimedia Design	TV producer
Michael	Male	27	White	Masters (Architecture)	Full time Content Creator and consultant

Figure 1.1. A table of the final participants and their biographic information.

Before the interview formally commenced, the scope of the research was explained, and video producers consent to being recorded both visually and with audio was granted (See Appendix B for a copy of the information sheet and Appendix C for the informed consent form). It was explained that the next phase would involve an observation of the behind the scenes of their next video shoot and the subsequent description of their YouTube videos. Unfortunately,

schedule limitations would not permit any form of participant observation. One of the participants was taking a break from producing videos, citing mental health reasons; another had a skin issue and was waiting for their skin to clear up before recording their next video. Other participants recorded videos irregularly or spontaneously or had previously recorded a whole series of videos that only needed to be edited, and as such would not be recording any new material within the data collection period. That the video recording process involved so many unseen considerations from mental health to pre-recordings already begins to make apparent, the latent nature of digital labour. Accordingly, that participant observation feature was removed from the study and emphasis was placed on the in-depth interviews and the producers pre-existing videos.

3.7 Researcher Position

The participants and I share certain similarities in terms of social class and ethnic backgrounds in many cases. We are similar in age; we were born around the 1990s and came of age in the 2000s. Another similarity we share is that I am also a video producer. As a researcher/participant, it was important to ensure that there was a robust structure in place in terms of analysis, so that researcher bias would not affect the analysis of their responses. This was in order to circumvent the risk of interviewer bias and over-involvement (Jenkins, Clinton, Purushotoma, Robison and Weigel, 2006). The next section details the parameters put in place to prevent such interviewer bias through a lengthy coding process. Additionally, what follows is the semi-structured interviews and subsequent textual analyses that were undertaken as part of the research methodology.

3.8 OFFLINE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.8.1 Semi-Structured Interviews

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.

Within the field of internet studies, the qualitative tradition is often heavily informed by research interviews as a means of generating rich data (Schrøder *et al*, 2003; Orgad, 2009; Leedy and Ormrod, 2010). From the onset, semi-structured interviews would form the nexus of the multi-method approach adopted for this research. First, the semi-structured interview style afforded a framework to categorise the broad spectrum of research questions into cohesive sub themes, that produced a sense of conversational cohesion for the participants (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). Secondly, this kind of protocol provided a sense of direction in instances when the interview digressed beyond the intended scope of the research (see Appendix D for a list of interview questions and Appendix E for a sample interview transcript).

Adopting a semi-structured interview style centred the subjectivity, contoured experiences and insights of the participants, rather than centring the interview questions (Azzara, 2010). Additionally, it established the interview as a conversational process, rather than focusing on a specific outcome. It engendered a much more laid back, conversational response from the participants in many cases.

The semi-structured interview approach possesses additional benefits for the entire interview process: first, it afforded the participants the flexibility to share beyond the scope of the prepared questions (Edwards and Holland, 2013). This allowed for an iterative approach, in that new concerns were noted, that did not initially form part of the prepared set of questions,

and then formally integrated into later interviews. Second, the semi-structured approach provides key themes or focus for subsequent analysis which proves valuable in distilling the key focus in large amounts of data.

The analysis of the interviews involved the following cycles:

Cycle 1, or the first pass through, involved transcribing the semi-structured interviews. As a kind of preliminary form of coding, transcription produces theoretical sensitivity, which further helps develop a deeper understanding of the data. To this end, Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke delineate a six-step approach to thematic analysis – namely "familiarizing yourself with the data: generating initial codes; searching for themes; reviewing themes [and] defining and naming themes." (2006:). In following Braun and Clarke's approach, the interviews were listened to more than once, until certain themes became apparent, prior to the formal coding cycle.

Cycle 2, or the second pass through, involved more rigorous thematic coding. Thematic coding refers to:

> a form of qualitative analysis which involves recording or identifying passages of text or images that are linked by a common theme or idea allowing you to index the text into categories and therefore establish a framework of thematic ideas about it (Gibbs, 2007:42).

In order to establish a scaffolding of thematic concepts, certain codes were highlighted question by question such as repetitive phrases, explicit and implicit sentiments, common approaches to the questions as well as comparisons and contrasts (Alhojailan, 2012).

Procedures from grounded methodology were employed in order to deconstruct the data generated from the interviews and the video environments (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Although grounded theory often negates previous research studies and construct theories *ex*

nihilo, the systematic thoroughness of grounded methodology is what was vital here (Strauss and Corbin 1998). Though, a set of guiding categories from the interviews already existed, such as creative digital citizens, digital labour and digital practice, the interview responses evidenced the need to investigate other codes. Connections between codes, subcategories and cause-and-effect relationships were considered, in order to construct a gestalt of the video producers' identities and their relationship towards digital citizenship, digital labour and the digital economy.

3.8.2 Semi-Structured Interview Analysis Procedure

The analysis of the data gathered from the semi-structured interviews (see Appendix E for an interview transcript) of this dissertation. The semi-structured interviews were transcribed and words, phrases, comments were then coded. These were then coded into 76 different repeated codes. The 76 codes were then categorized into the following core emerging patterns:

- Performing a digital identity,
- Types of labour,
- The cost of the digital economy,
- Platform politics,
- Participation and Necessary Skills and Characteristics for Digital Citizens, and lastly
- Digital Entrepreneurship and Neoliberal Identity

3.9 ONLINE METHODOLOGY

This study aims to investigate how offline socio-demographics inform online creative digital citizens and their relationship to digital labour within the digital economy. The aim of the online methodology is threefold: to address the research aims more carefully, to complement the offline methodology and finally to understand how the different modalities critically form

and inform or contradict each other, without sacrificing the 'distinct' nuance that each methodology captures. To this end, Orgad usefully remarks:

> In treating online and offline data, we should be informed by the recognition of the distinct character of online and offline data, we should be informed by recognition of the distinct character of online and offline contexts and interactions… while…accounting for the inextricable connections, similarities and continuities between the two (2009:21).

Based on the literature presented above, the online methodology involved a visual description of both the producers' videos and the peripheral video environment, in detail:

Each producer's YouTube homepage video description, and a representative YouTube video was analysed using an in-depth visual description. Though the study initially sought to research the producers' Facebook pages, two of the participants had deleted their Facebook account, and the other two only used Facebook sporadically or for brand partnerships. A cross-platform was necessary to understand the different aspects of the video producers' online identities.

In short, a visual account of the following was undertaken:

- YouTube video description
- YouTube video – genre, structure, style, language and tone

In terms of the visual description of their videos, the type of video content, the video structure, as well as the performance of identity within the video were all noted. That is, the use of certain language and tone was taken into consideration. Finally, the community response across the different platforms was observed, by noting the most common type of comments and interactions within the producers' YouTube communities. Though the research does not focus on the 'audience', it was vital to take into consideration the fan community's response, first as

an extension of the video producers' online identity, and second as a significant component of the broader ecosystem of social media transactions and digital labour within the digital economy, which are the key concerns of this study.

3.10 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Leedy and Ormrod (2010) advise that when individuals are specifically recruited for a particular study, participants should be fully informed of the nature and scope of the study and given the option to participate or withdraw at any time, that is voluntary and informed consent (105). Prior to the interview stage, I applied for, and I obtained ethical clearance (see Appendix A for the ethical clearance certificate).

During the data acquisition stage, participants were not offered anonymity. Due to the nature of the project, I was unable to offer anonymity to the participants as their names are attached to their video channels. I clearly explained the aims and objectives of the project to all participants involved in the research project. The participants were informed that participation was completely voluntary, and should they desire to withdraw at any point, they would be able to do so without penalty. They were asked to sign an informed consent form (See Appendix C) which was drawn up with my supervisors, containing their full names and signature. As the participants were easily identifiable because of their public video content, they occupied the role of expert informants in the field of social media video production and were treated as such. I emphasised that their privacy would be respected throughout the duration of the research project and that the information shared would be confidential. The captured data would be stored online until such a time as it was transcribed. In addition, the video content was also stored to avoid possible deletion and inaccessibility during the duration of the study.

CONCLUSION

The aim of the methodology chapter was to provide insight into the methodological logic of this dissertation. This chapter has delineated both the recruitment process and some of the associated challenges experienced. Further, it has outlined the multi-method approach employed for both data collection and analysis. In following the qualitative tradition, both rich offline and online data was collected and analysed to articulate the offline-online digital citizen who resides in Johannesburg, South Africa and who falls between the ages of 25-30.

The qualitative approach used was multi-method, in order to construct a data-rich understanding of the digital citizen from multiple perspectives. On one hand, the deeply personal semi-structured interviews provided insight into the very public 'convergence' of the 'offline' and 'online' worlds. The in-depth interview approach allowed the researcher to explore the way that those experiences inform the consumers' sense of self. As the dissertation aims to investigate the navigation of a digital identity within the platforms, the semi-structured interviews alone would not have been sufficient. It was necessary to suture the interviews (a reporting of the production process) to the practice of creative digital citizenship by analysing the output (the videos and images within the platforms). The description of the content producers' videos contributed another layer to the interview identity, as well as more deeply situated the producers within the complicated politics of the platforms. In this way, the study methodologically offers a contribution to the field, by extending the relationship between creative digital citizens and their production of digital publics. The following chapter will present the data findings and analysis.

CHAPTER 4: BIOGRAPHICAL INTRODUCTION TO PARTICIPANTS

4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this section is to construct a biographical profile of each participant in this study. The study involved four participants in total. As outlined in the methodology chapter, data was collected and analysed through a multi-method approach which included qualitative interviews and a visual-semiotic review of both videos and each producer's YouTube account. The aim of this chapter is to present the participants as creative digital citizens in terms of the following categories – their socio-demographic background, their education as well as the scope of their YouTube use based on the data collected. I use the term content creator[9], video producer and YouTuber[10] interchangeably.

Differences Between Content Creators, YouTubers and Creative Digital Citizens

In the South African context, I use the term creative digital citizen self-consciously to animate the national function that South African YouTubers undertake: how their influences, their interactions, their creative processes and acts, and finally the cultural publics they produce provide insight into South Africa as a nation, both past and present. However, as a term, creative digital citizen further renders visible changing global shifts and changing cultures that are occurring within the digital environment at large -- global shifts and cultures that have come to be seen as naturalised (Hintz, Dencik, and Wahl-Jorgensen, 2019; Isin and Rupert, 2015; Vivienne, McCosker, & Johns, 2016). These shifts include the global labour involved in internet cultures (Jarret, 2016; Gajjala, 2013) data capitalisms (Fuchs, 2016) and the digital citizen's tendency towards neoliberal entrepreneurial strategies (McRobbie, 2015; Duffy and

[9] Though content creator specifically refers to a cross-platform engagement, where individuals produce both video and images or blogs for multiple platforms including Instagram, Facebook, YouTube and TikTok.
[10] The term YouTuber or video producer refers to individuals who produce video on YouTube (Van-Dijck, 2016). Colloquially, content creators is usually a term reserved for cross-platform content production.

Hund, 2019). For the purpose of clarity, the terms content creator and creative digital citizen can be used interchangeably in this thesis, but with a caveat: creative digital citizen is a much broader historical term with more theoretical weight. This category often includes, but is not limited to, work of an explicitly political nature, such as that of citizen journalists or citizen activists (Ratto and Boler, 2014; Haythornthwaite, 2005). As will be shown later, within a global neoliberal context, the work of South African social media content creators is deeply embedded in the socio-political and must be included in this category.

As previously stated, creative digital citizen can refer to a content creator, or an influencer who creates content for social media. Content creator is as an umbrella term and usually refers to an individual who produces content (such as images, graphics, audio, blogs, and videos) or repurposes content for social media platforms, such as YouTube, TikTok, Twitter and Instagram. Content creators and influencers are the most closely linked terms, however not all content creators are influencers. Influencers specifically refers to a commercial relationship. It describes individuals who are social media brand ambassadors as they have a commercial arrangement or partnership with a brand that is reimbursing the influencer for producing brand-aligned content (Iqani, 2019). As terms, both content creator and influencer evolve out of the blogging era of early social media, where a female-skewed creator class were creating affiliate marketing content on blogging sites such as Blogger in 1999, WordPress in 2003 and microblogging site Tumblr in 2004 (Brügger and Milligan, 2019). Affiliate marketing refers to an automated reward system, where the content creator advertises a product and shares a product link on their social media (Brügger and Milligan, 2019). The content creator then receives a percentage of the profits of any sales that come directly from their social media page. In the 2000s, this creator class begins to circulate their content and influence across multiple sites as new social media platforms with new affordances and new audiences emerge. For example, a fashion blogger migrating from WordPress alone to WordPress and Instagram may

not be a difficult shift since these are on some level, image-based platforms. This is arguably the same for a YouTuber transitioning from YouTube to YouTube, Instagram Reels and TikTok. Content creators use these platforms as distribution networks or media networks, rather than as platforms in the strictest sense - in other words, they are not building something new on top of the platform structure, they are using the platform for media or affect distribution, its 'intended purpose' (van Dijck, 2016). Importantly, this shift, this cross-platform circulation of content and influence, is made possible through the renewable supply of digital labour that undergirds these practices. The same type of work, immaterial labour, is being undertaken no matter the platform, though the degree of labour might change.

Content creator references an individual with a specific content strategy across multiple platforms. Their work across each platform is unified by their 'brand identity' in the same way that a commercial brand like MacDonald's or Coca-Cola would be (Banet-Weiser, 2012; Hearn 2013). These terms are interrelated, but each bear a particular nuance. A YouTuber for example, might refer to themselves as a content creator, a vlogger, a digital entrepreneur, or a YouTuber – but YouTuber usually references an individual who mostly produces content for YouTube on a regular basis (van Dijck, 2016; Burgess and Green, 2009). Some of the participants in this thesis, and their peers, refer to themselves only as vloggers or YouTubers despite producing image-based and audio-based content across multiple platforms.

Vlogger is also a term that is commonly used: the term refers to individuals who create video blogs (vlogs), or online video journals intimately tracking both the mundane and exciting aspects of their daily lives for public consumption. As they are quite a popular style, they are considered one of the most symbolic forms of YouTube participation, according to Jean Burgess and Joshua Green (2009).

YouTube is largely considered to be the home of the vlog (Burgess and Green, 2009) and as such the believability and authentic character of the vlog as a communication medium finds its genealogical origins in home videos, newsreels, cinema verité and early ethnographic documentary. The term vlog comes from a combination of video and blog. Vlogs then, can be considered a more publicly accessible, widely enjoyed, distant descendant of the above earlier iterations of visual technologies. In much the same way that these technologies 'embodied' a sense of authentic life, so do the vlogs of YouTubers maintain that contract. Where these earlier iterations largely focused on their external world, vlogs focus on the individual subject as the centre of their world and guide the viewer, as a guest, through their world. Since vlogs are curated daily accounts, "digital autobiographical acts" (Raun, 2018:102) living archives of a video producer's life, vlogs can be seen to be mimetic technologies of the self. Vlogs as a visual format are dynamic and living, they move, sometimes at 24 frames per second, sometimes slower, sometimes faster. Given that a selfie is a static frame, and vlogs are moving frames, vlogs can be thought of as 'selfies on steroids'. Through the selfie-style camera, the vlog self-consciously interpellates (in the Althussian sense) the viewer, involves the viewer in their day-to-day life and demands presence and attention. In return, they promise authenticity, vulnerability and intimacy through day-to-day accounts.

As platform publics, vlogs embody, represent and consciously perform on behalf of the video producer ultimately authenticating the video producer (du Preez, 2018). Vlogs are situated in self-conscious performances of race, sex, gender and class. They focus on and document the materiality of the everyday as if every detail were important. In fact, it is the materiality of the real, the identification with the flesh and blood, raced, gendered, classed body that fan communities relate to, as will be shown in Chapter 5 and 6.

Thus, in analysing YouTube vlogs, this thesis positions them as cultural texts that critically reflect South African life and identity. Since YouTube vlogs are so common, and since their

subject matter largely focuses on the affective, banal, aspects of day-to-day life, they are considered trivial and useless to the political and social life of South Africa, in comparison to explicitly political texts. However, by recycling and repurposing vlogs as an instance of "the waste materials of everyday communication in the national public sphere as pivotal documents in the construction, experience, and rhetoric of quotidian citizenship" (Berlant, 1997:30) a countervisuality emerges that renders these vlogs useful. Vlogs, as the ''waste materials of everyday communication'' (*ibid*) are thus deployed in this thesis and reimagined as key texts that illustrate South African life, identity, and citizenship.

4.2 YOUTUBE PARTICIPANT PROFILE AND VIDEO VISUAL DESCRIPTION

The following section presents participant profiles as well as a visual-semiotic description of each video producer's YouTube videos. Each video was selected on the basis of being the most representative of the video producers' current aesthetic style. Videos were also selected on the basis of exemplifying the video producer's overall identity or self-branding choices. In short, a visual description of the following was undertaken:

- YouTube video and YouTube home page description
- YouTube video – genre, structure, style, language and tone

4.2.1 Menzi, 26, Johannesburg

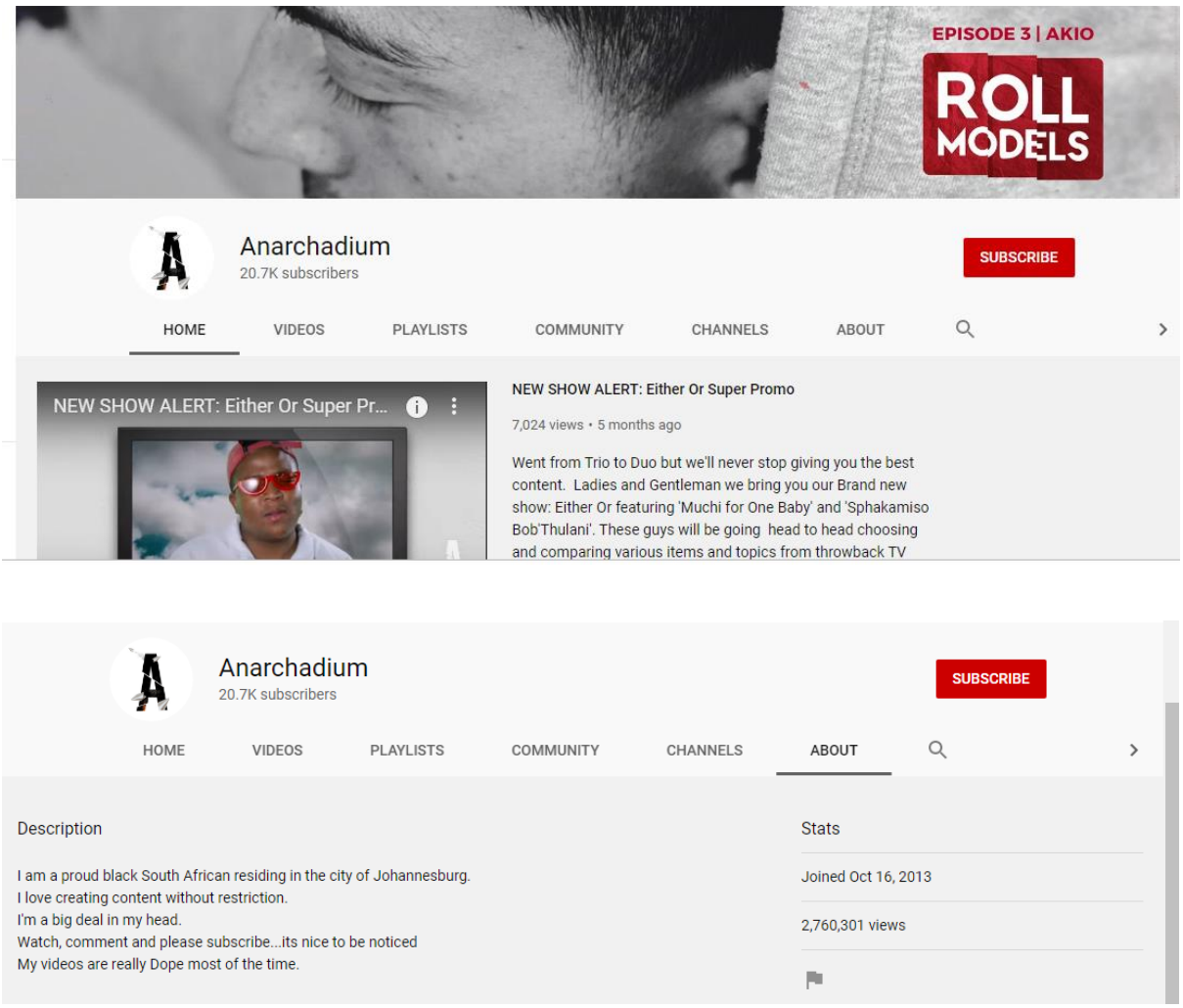


Fig 1.2 Image of Anarchadium's YouTube Homepage

Menzi, or *Anarchadium*, is 26 years old and works as a creative producer for a media agency. He sees himself as a vlogger and designer. At the time the interview was conducted, he had been running his YouTube channel for seven years. He graduated with a BA in Digital Communication and Multimedia Design from the University of Johannesburg. When he first began his channel, he considered himself to be more reckless and carefree and did not prioritise any form of self-branding, this is reflected in his channel name Anarchadium which seems to have its roots in anarchy and pandemonium. He now thinks of his channel, in a communal sense as "a hub for good content" (Menzi, 26, interview). To him, providing support for

emerging or new content creators is his primary focus and the most efficient manner to be productive. Menzi's approach can be characterised as a kind of digital *Ubuntuism*: *Ubuntu* is typically described as a singular African philosophy that connotes a kind of social or communal approach, in contrast to a 'Western' sense of individualism.

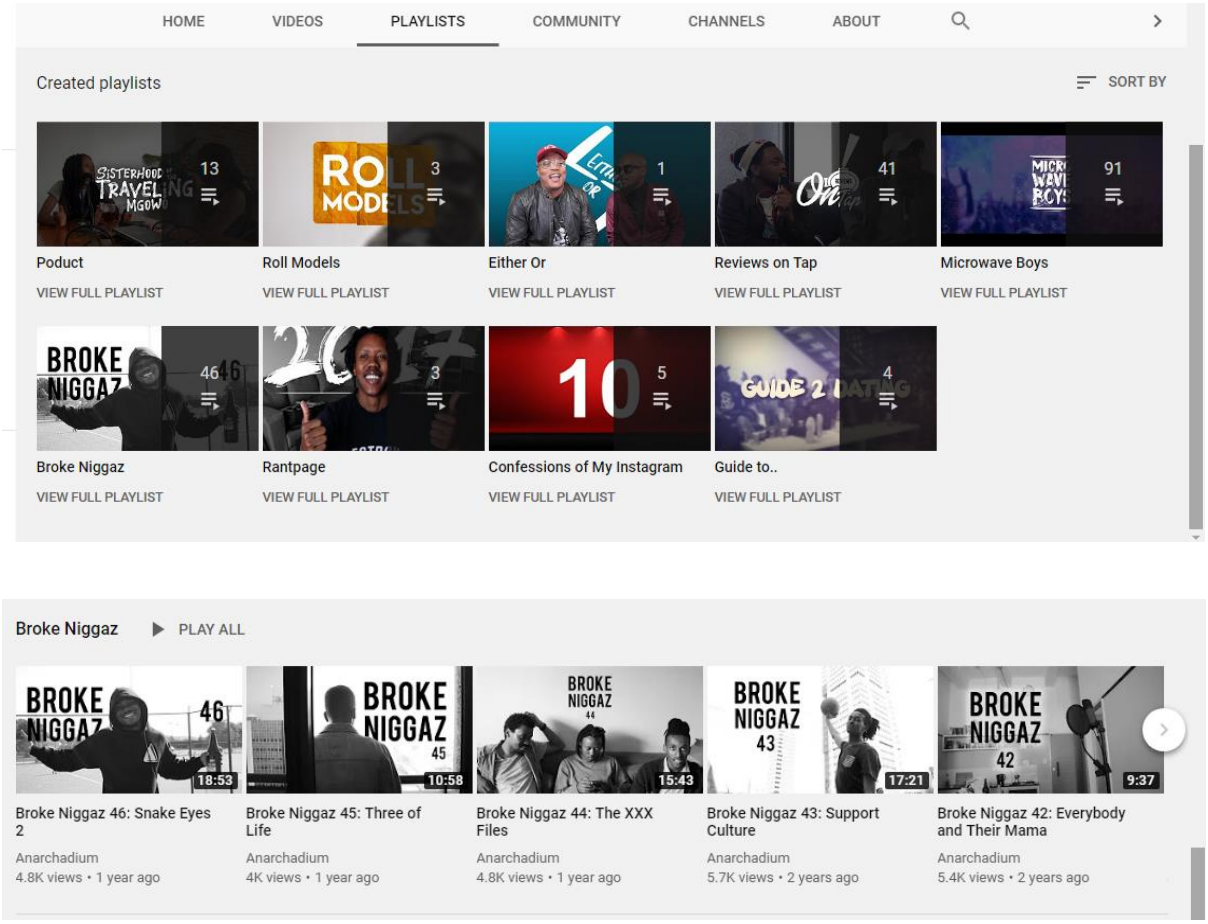


Figure 1.3: An Image of the playlists on Menzi's YouTube Channel

His channel, Anarchadium, features two podcast style shows, one of which focuses on film reviews and is called *Reviews on Tap.* The other is a woman-run podcast called *Sisterhood of The Travelling Mgowo*[11].

[11] The term *mgowo* is a South African vernacular term used to indicate that an individual is struggling or having a difficult time.

Another show on the Anarchadium channel which is illustrative of Anarchadium's overall visual style and cultural sensibility is called *Roll Models. Roll Models* is emblematic of what Menzi articulates his YouTube ethos to be due to the collaborative nature of the show, the cutting-edge content as well as the show presenting an innovative cultural take on music interviews. The show features South African Hip Hop and rap musicians who are interviewed about both their music and their marijuana practices. *Roll Models* episode 1 premiered on YouTube following the legalisation of Marijuana in South Africa in April 2019. This show was pitched to Menzi by his roommate and long-time collaborator who is credited as Kyoto Indie on multiple projects. Aside from hosting a variety of shows on his channel, Menzi acts as a producer on this show, as he does with all of the shows which feature on his channel. He is part of the editorial decision-making process, contributing financially as well as part of the production and post-production team. This means that Menzi often directs or contributes to the edit of the final videos.

Until May 2019, the Anarchadium channel also regularly hosted an incredibly popular South African Youth show called *Microwave Boys*. *Microwave Boys* was a pop culture show in which the three hosts humorously discussed pop culture, South African celebrities, South African news and social media trending topics. The show regularly featured famous South African YouTubers such as Mihlali[12] and Okay Wasabi[13]. Menzi co-created the show with one of the hosts, Larry Nhlane. Additionally, Menzi co-directed as well as co-edited the series with collaborators Lesang Tshoke and Kyoto Indie respectively. The show was cancelled after 81 episodes when the co-creator and co-host, Larry, was accused of gender-based violence by his

[12] Mihlali is one of South Africa's highest paid beauty vloggers, a graduate from Vega Advertising school and a makeup artist.

[13] Okay Wasabi is a famous South African YouTuber who produces videos alone as well as with his girlfriend, Sasha on their channel, Sushi with Wasabi. Their content mostly focuses on comedy, YouTube challenges and games, cooking and vlogs.

partner. The social media community called for the co-host to be removed and the show to be discontinued.

Menzi conveyed a desire to focus on narrative content such as short films and web series, in the future. He expressed a frustration with what he sees as an attitude of apathy on the part of the local television industry, towards excellence in the traditional television space that is in some ways evident in online spaces in South Africa as well: "I'm disappointed with about 60% of South African [television] content… I think Americans are just more rigid. They also have more resources" (Menzi, 26, interview). Menzi felt that even though South Africans possess the creativity to produce creative work that is on the level of the USA, for example, the willingness, the discipline and the television workflow to push for excellence and high-quality work was largely absent. As will be shown at a later stage, this frustration played an instrumental part in Menzi's choice to become a YouTuber in the first instance. What follows is a description of a show that that Menzi created, filmed and edited called *Broke Niggaz*.

4.2.2 Visual Description of Menzi's YouTube Video: "Broke Niggaz 46 - Snake Eyes 2"

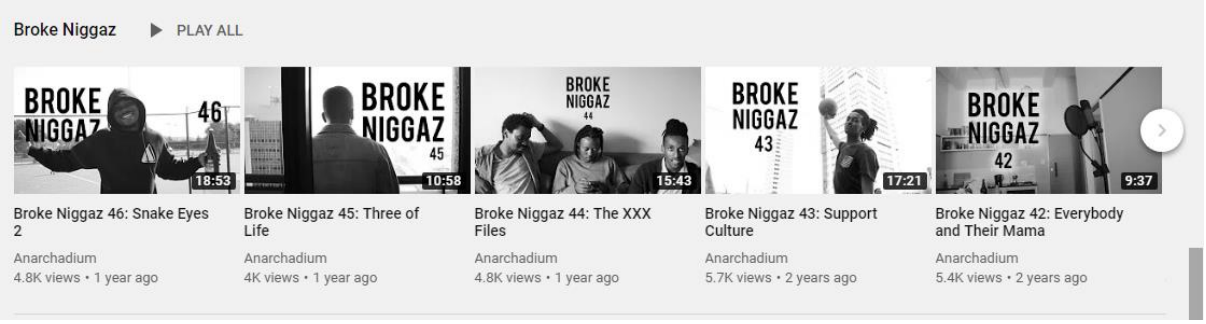


Fig 1.4 Image of Broke Niggaz Playlist

Menzi's YouTube series called *Broke Niggaz* references a global blackness in the title, particularly the use of the word "*Niggaz"*. Broadly speaking, the title may refer to the co-opting of the American racial slur nigger into the African American Vernacular English[14] rendering

[14] This is a type of English that is used by some African Americans and black Canadians.

"nigga". "Nigga" has become a global term used by both Africans and the African diaspora outside of America due to the export of Hip hop in territories beyond the Americas. It is most often used as a substitute for friend, but can also refer to a single black man, a collective of black men, or people in general. The use of the term "niggaz" in Menzi's YouTube show references the seduction of America's pop culture influence, as well as a kind of baptism into African American culture, which Menzi acknowledges being influenced by. Seduction here references the ubiquity of a commodified version of African American culture that is present in hip hop, rap, R'n'b and other popular music genres, as well as through visual mediums like TV, film and social media. This music is easily accessible, and the content and the life portrayed may be incredibly appealing for young men and women, around the world who identify with the hip hop narratives they see.

This episode of *Broke Niggaz* is number 46 and the final one of the series before the series was discontinued. The series, which launched in 2015 and ended in 2018, documents the emotional and creative growth of Menzi and his group of friends over a period of three years. Each member in the group embodies a particular character, similar to the cast of a young adult drama – characters like the clown, the playboy, the nerd, and finally, the 'good guy', which Menzi to some extent embodies. Throughout the series, his friends ask, "How did the last video do?" and enquire about the viewership numbers. In the first episode *Broke Niggaz Film 1: Subject (Don't) Matter*, the sound is heavily distorted and Menzi is often seen tinkering with the camera, checking to see if it is still recording. The entire series unfolds in cinematic black and white vignettes and shaky handheld footage with flashes of experimental edits and creative graphics. For example, at one point, a friend comments, "made by Menzi, directed by Menzi": the screen, as if following instruction of the speaker, cuts to black and reveals the spoken titles "made by Menzi" and then quickly changes to "directed by Menzi" in bold font. The overall

series bears some aesthetic and discursive similarity to the 2015 film *Necktie Youth*[15]. While *Necktie Youth* is more staged, self-important and indulgent in its attempt to portray affluent suburban youth, *Broke Niggaz* presents a more naturalistic, unforced thesis on urban life.

Menzi directed, co-shot and edited each episode, including the final episode, which makes an ideal case study. This episode symbolises the latest episode in which Menzi physically features on his channel using the vlog style, in more recent videos he takes on more of a behind-the-scenes role. This episode is shot in a loose selfie-vlog style, but changes point of view as the video progresses. The black and white monochrome visual style is reminiscent of French New Wave romanticism, featuring jarring jump cuts that serve to progress the narrative further. This French New Wave style of the 1960s is emphasised by the title sequence, which features Menzi and his black male friends swinging in slow motion on a public swing set, with a 1960s-esque jazz soundtrack. The title sequences conveys a sense of freedom and light-heartedness which is not typically associated with black manhood. It establishes the carefree, no-holds barred approach of the conversations that will follow. This child-like activity also contrasts with the adult conversation that comprises the bulk of the video, establishing a spectrum of black male representation in one video.

[15] Necktie Youth (2015, Shongwe-La-Mer) is South African film directed by Sibs Shongwe-La-Mer, which chronicles the lives of affluent teenagers living in Johannesburg, South Africa. The film has a loose plot and interrogates, albeit superficially, youth ennui, suicide, drugs, love and relationships in the new South Africa.



Fig 1.5 Title Sequence of the Final Broke Niggaz Episode

The video begins with Menzi and two of his friends exiting an apartment building. One of the scenes features the car they occupy stopping at traffic lights. A man at the traffic light approaches and proceeds to wash the windscreen. The more the occupants of the car protest, the more rigorously the man washes the windscreen. At the end of the exchange, the man in the passenger seat offers the 'window washer' a few coins. This scene is a typical scene in Johannesburg that is instantly recognizable due to high levels of inequality, high unemployment rates and the number of homeless people on the streets of Johannesburg. This scene maps class difference in South Africa – young, middle class, black men refusing the routine of the windscreen being washed, and offering the window washer, a homeless man, a few coins.



Fig 1.6 Image of Menzi and His Friends, Exhibiting the selfie-style Camera.

In the moment that follows, Menzi's friend unwittingly makes a prejudicial comment about China, enunciating his point with a chopstick gesture. Menzi and the occupant in the backseat of the car enter into an exchange about the fact that Chinese people do not only use chopsticks. They call attention to his prejudicial comments. In the comment section, a fan congratulates Menzi and his friend for calling the friend out on his act of prejudice. The exchange between these friends and the inclusion of the interaction in the final edit suggests that Menzi is trying to articulate that black individuals are not exempt from prejudice or discriminatory thoughts and the right action is not to tolerate it amongst each other.



Fig 1.7 Image of Broke Niggaz Change in Camera Style from Selfie-Cam

Jump cut to the next scene: the video progresses with Menzi and his friends arriving at a hockey game. Casually sitting down, they begin to discuss casual sexual relationships. The camera cuts between two groups of friends sharing their opinions. The camera appropriates the subjectivity of the viewer, as though the viewer is sitting in on the conversation, listening to the different groups offering their point of view. The subject matter itself seems topical and the attitudes reflected could be considered liberal global attitudes, not particularly specific to South African men. The informal conversational tone the discussion takes on has a normalizing function – these are young men explaining their sexual preferences, and their sexual encounters, and in this way reflect a present 'global' sex culture. It has the effect of making South African culture seem more global and therefore accessible and relatable.

4.2.3 Thando, 30, Johannesburg

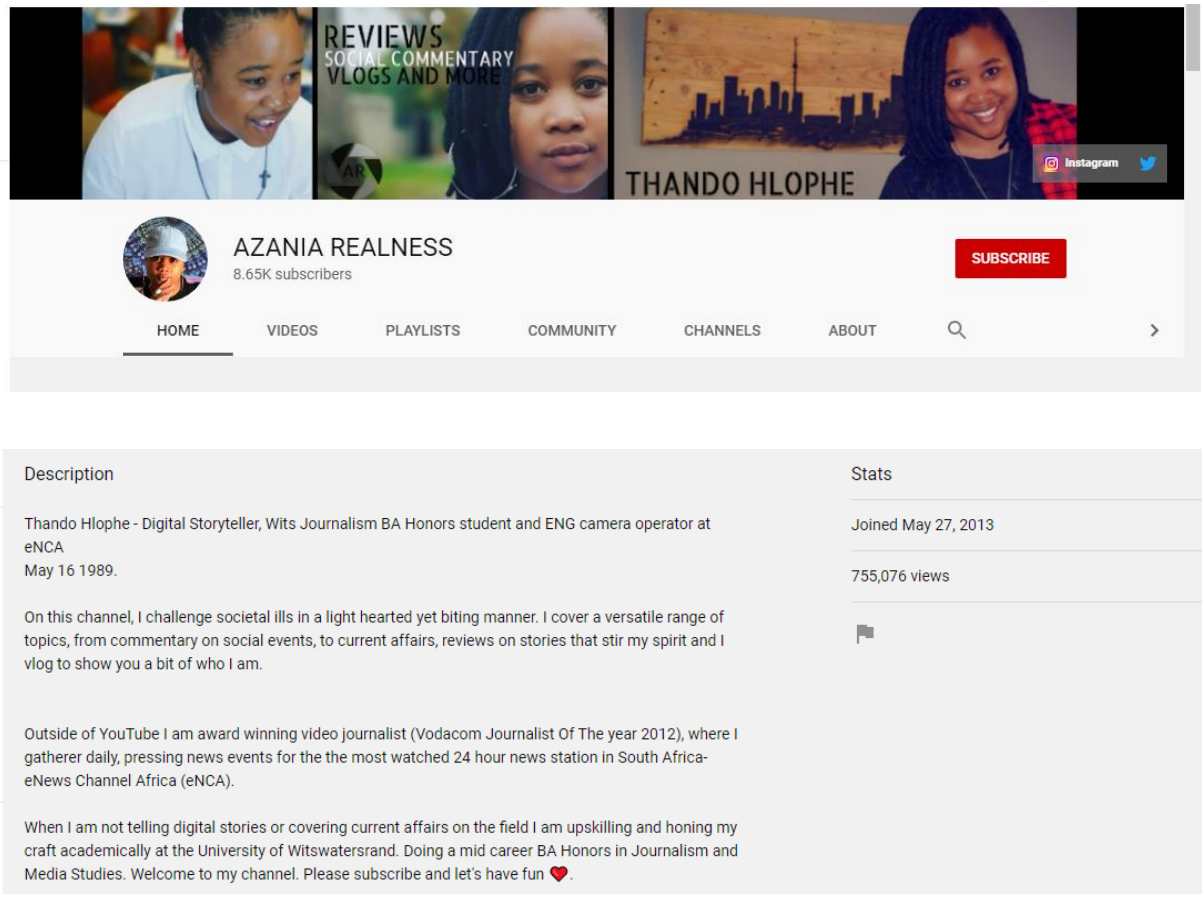


Fig 1.8. Image of Thando's YouTube Homepage

Thando is 30 years old and works as a TV producer and camera person for eNCA (eNews Channel Africa). The name of her channel is *Azania Realness* which covers "Reviews, social commentary, vlogs and more". She sees herself as a digital storyteller. In comparison to the other participants, *Azania Realness* features the most politically self-aware political content, embedded in the everyday. She graduated with a BTech in Film and Television and is originally from Kwa-Zulu Natal. She emphasizes that if she released content more regularly, she would probably have a larger following. One of her most popular videos features an adventurous travel vlog/documentary insert of the Zulu Reed Dance where she interviews King Zwelithini of the Zulu Kingdom. She travels regularly for work and often documents her travels on her social media, Instagram Stories in particular.

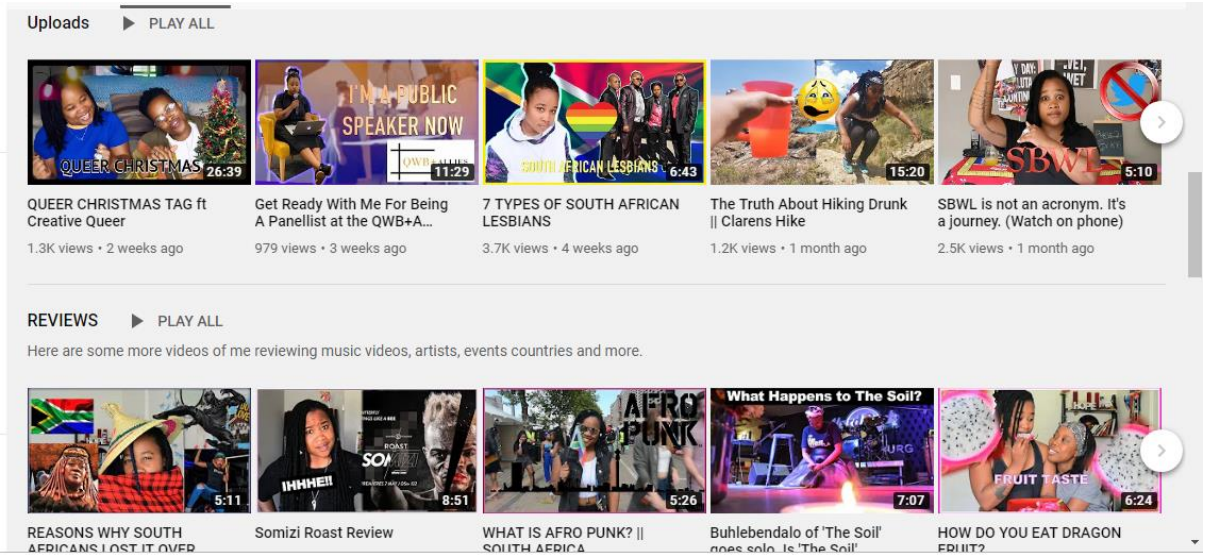


Fig 1.9. Image of Thando's YouTube Video Uploads

Thando identifies as both a Christian woman and Lesbian, both of which strongly feature as signifiers on her channel. She feels that members of her community do not take issue with her being a black lesbian, but rather problematise her being a lesbian *and* a practising Christian. Thando is in a relationship with an intersex[16] individual and uses her channel to 'advocate' for the LGBTQI+ community.

4.2.4 Visual Description of Thando's YouTube Video: *"How men behave at the reed dance Umkhosi womhlanga 2018".*

The name of Thando's YouTube channel is *Azania Realness*. This name signals a political affiliation and awareness as Azania is the political name for South Africa given by members of the liberation movement[17](Dladla, 2018). The latter part of her name references the forthrightness and authenticity that she hopes to espouse through her channel. Authenticity as

[16] Intersex refers to an individual who was born with XY chromosomes, but exhibits the body of an XX chromosome. Intersex individuals are often assigned a particular gender at birth, that might conflict with their gender of choice. The term intersex in South Africa came into the public sphere in 2008/2009 through Caster Semenya's case and maltreatment by the IAAF (International Association of Athletics Federations) in which she was forced to undergo gender verification testing. Semenya's case and the South African public sphere response to it, are testament to the history of the black 'female' body as spectacle.

[17] Azania's political or philosophical meaning entered the political lexicon by the PAC (The Pan-Africanist Congress of Azania). To the PAC, Azania is South Africa's true name.

a major theme will be analysed in detail in the following chapter. As Thandi notes in her channel description, “I challenge societal ills in a lighthearted (*sic*) yet biting manner... and I vlog to show you a bit of who I am.” (Thando, 30, YouTube Channel Description). This stresses Thando’s emphasis on social problems and her interpretation of authenticity as “stories that stir her spirit.” (Thando, 30, YouTube Channel Description).



Fig 1.10. The opening explainer of the Reed Dance Video

The video description defines the video with a single statement: “I wondered what the “role of men is at the reed dance so asked and observed (*sic*).” (Thando, 30, YouTube Video Description). It seems humorous that the video is entitled and described in this manner, as only the latter part of the video considers the role that men play in the Reed Dance, with the rest of the video largely focusing on Thando’s peripheral adventure and response to the location. The video opens with the *Azania Realness* title sequence which features a bleeding heart and an LGBTQI+ insignia with a fist. This may reference Thando’s sexual identity or activism/ advocacy in the LGBTQI+ community. It also signals upfront for her audience that she is part

of the LGBTQI+ community, as new subscribers might be unsure or surprised by some of the content.

The genre of the video takes on a lively, first person, reporter-style vlog. This style, along with the narrative structure of the video invokes Thando's daily occupation as a journalist and eNCA camera person. Thando opens the video by reporting that the video concerns her adventure at the 34th *Umkhosi Womhlanga* or the Reed Dance. The Reed Dance is a ritual process where Nguni women as far afield as Swaziland and Botswana gather at Nongoma, the King's homestead, and offer him a reed as a symbol of their virginity and as a strengthening of their womanhood (Maytham-Bailey, 2014). The ritual involves singing and dancing, and women are often accompanied by their matriarchs to attend the event. The Reed Dance is deeply controversial, at the seat of its controversy is the practice of virginity testing that all the women must undergo before presenting their reed to the King. Thando opens the video by greeting the audience with "Hello there, cultured viewers" which interpellates the audience and assumes that they are cultured, since they selected the video. Thando offers very casual social critique of The Reed Dance ceremony and invites her audience to participate along with her. There is a conspiratorial, investigative tone towards the video. She is on a discovery – as she discovers information, the audience too discovers information.

Editing Style

The video makes use of jump-cuts which is quite common in YouTube videos as it creates a sense of dynamism in the edit. It is also not as time or knowledge intensive as other forms of editing and is easy to execute with a single camera setup. The effect of the jump cut contributes to the dramatic performance and excitement the participant feels or is performing around the Reed Dance. In comparison to Thando's online performance of identity, she has a heightened, excited persona, but one that does not differ much from her offline persona. The jump cuts also serve to intensify the dramatic potential of the content as well as deliver comedic effect. For

example, as she says, “My first quandary? What do you wear as a guest?” And then looks directly at the camera, “A possibly non-virginal guest?” She inserts a jump cut here, and then proceeds to ask, “Because what is virginity, okay? These are questions that we are going to find out as we go along on this journey together. All right?” The way in which she delivers the line, “All right” is with the kind of accent that black people usually do to impersonate white South African accents for comedic effect. Thando then proceeds to talk through her choice to wear a *Masaai shouka*, a red and black, Masaai, traditional blanket, as women are not allowed to wear trousers to the event. At this point in the video, she addresses the paradox of attending an event that is part of her Zulu culture but being ignorant about the correct etiquette. This is particularly interesting because even though Thando does not perform a Zulu ethno-feminine identity, many of her videos centre on or, at the very least provide commentary on Zulu culture. Thando vocalizing her ignorance on Zulu etiquette reveals the complex position that she occupies offline, that is Thando’s identity is intersectional on multiple levels: within a largely Christian, heteronormative and homophobic black South African society her black queer[18] sexuality is not embraced. As argued later, Thando’s YouTube channel generally allows her to express this intersectional identity cohesively, rather than as disparate, conflicting parts: the identities that from a heteronormative perspective might seem to conflict offline (such as her Christian and queer identities), are given sufficient room to breathe and co-exist online. While this intersection of her queer, Zulu, black and Christian identities might not be so readily consumed in offline spaces because of broader homophobic narratives in South Africa, it makes for a more dynamic character online. She is also able to control and present the conversation around this intersectional identity with nuance and specificity than she would online. Thando then expresses a disappointment in herself and invites “traditionalist, culturalist somebodies”

[18] Queer is an inclusive term that refers to an individual who identifies as part of the spectrum of Lesbian, Gay, Bi-Sexual, Trans, Intersex or Pansexual sexualities.

to openly criticize her and be disappointed in her, because she is equally disappointed in herself. In other words, in calling ‘traditional, culturalist somebodies’ to criticize her, she is effectively placing herself outside of what she sees as the realm of the traditional or the cultural.



Fig 1.11. Images of Procession of Zulu Maidens at The Reed Dance Ritual Ceremony

The next scene features a series of documentary insert edits of The Reed Dance participants singing and walking with their reeds accompanied by dramatic music. This is followed by an interview with King Goodwill Zwelithini explaining the ‘necessity’ of the Reed Dance Ceremonial ritual. Thando was only able to secure this interview due to her professional credentials as a camera person and journalist for eNCA.



Fig 1.12. Image of King Zwelithini, the reigning Zulu Monarch, receiving a reed from his daughter at Reed Dance Ritual Ceremony

The remaining scene features Thando interviewing the boys at the event, enquiring what their role is, which is also the title of the video, their car getting stuck in the mud as well as the fog on their journey back home. The video ends with Thando assessing her internal bias towards the ceremonial ritual. She was initially against the ritual because she felt it was very patriarchal, particularly that the women are offering a reed to the King as a sign of them offering their virginity to him. She openly acknowledges the contradictions in the ritual - the ritual celebrates the virginity of Nguni women, for example, but there is not a similar ceremony for men. Nevertheless, she comments that she has learnt about her Zulu culture and herself.

4.2.5 Thandi, 27, Johannesburg

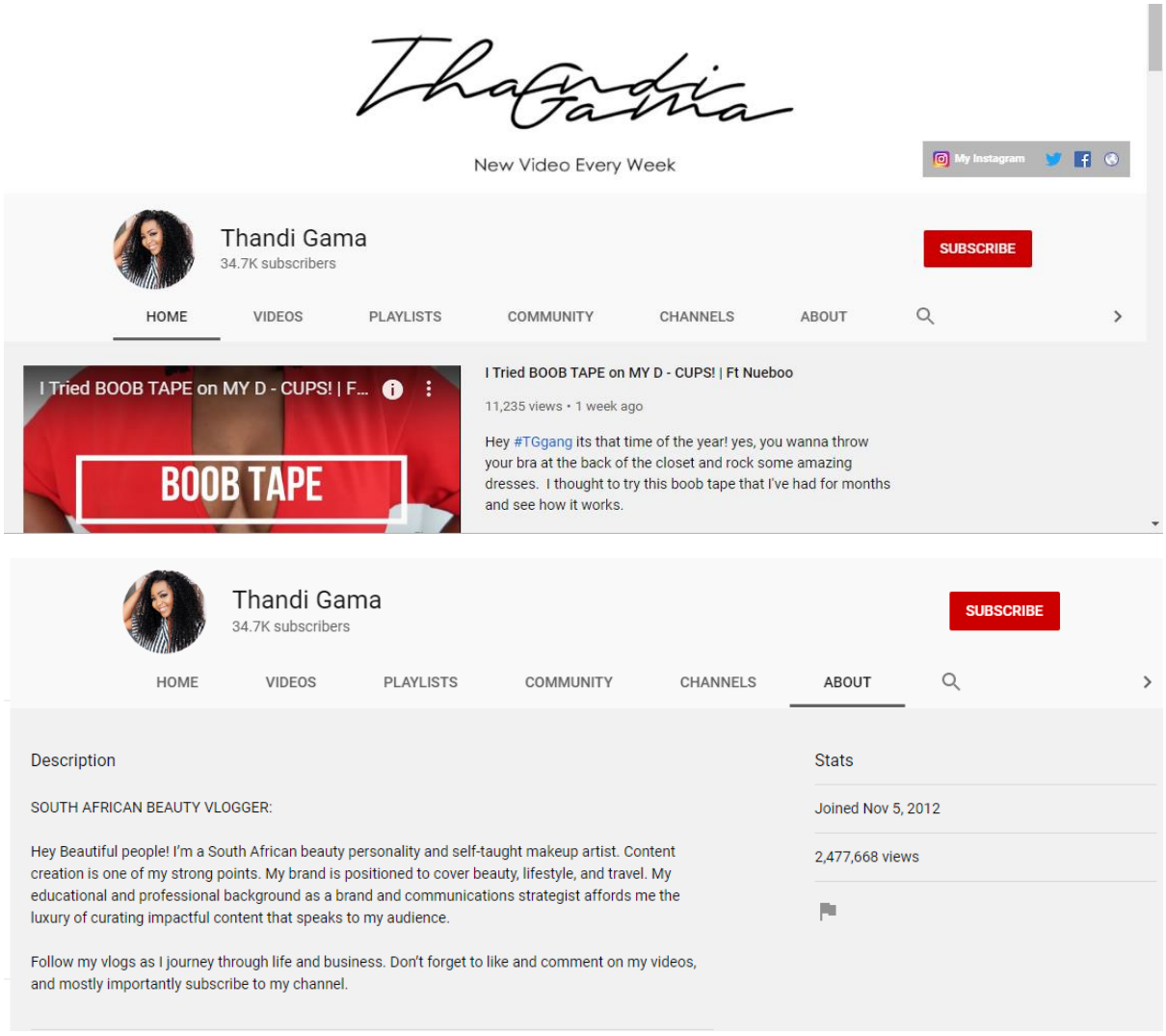


Fig 1.13. Image of Thandi's YouTube Homepage

Thandi was 27 years old and currently works as a fulltime beauty blogger and entrepreneur. She also works as a make-up artist, utilizing her YouTube platform as a living portfolio of sorts. Prior to becoming a full-time content creator, Thandi studied Strategic Brand Management at Vega and she still views herself as a strategist. She also worked in the advertising industry as a strategist and still considers herself to be one as she uses her strategic acumen in brand partnerships. She supplements her YouTube AdSense Revenue Stream through her work as a makeup artist. She also recently launched an Eyelash Brand called *Lash Me Baby*, leveraging the success of her YouTube Channel.

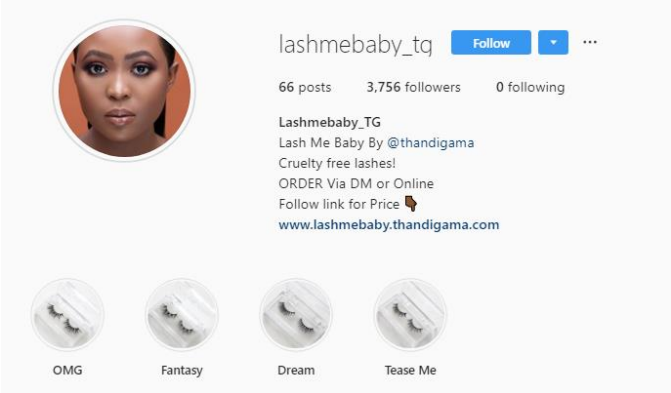


Fig 1.14. Image of Thandi's New Business Instagram Page, Lash Me Baby

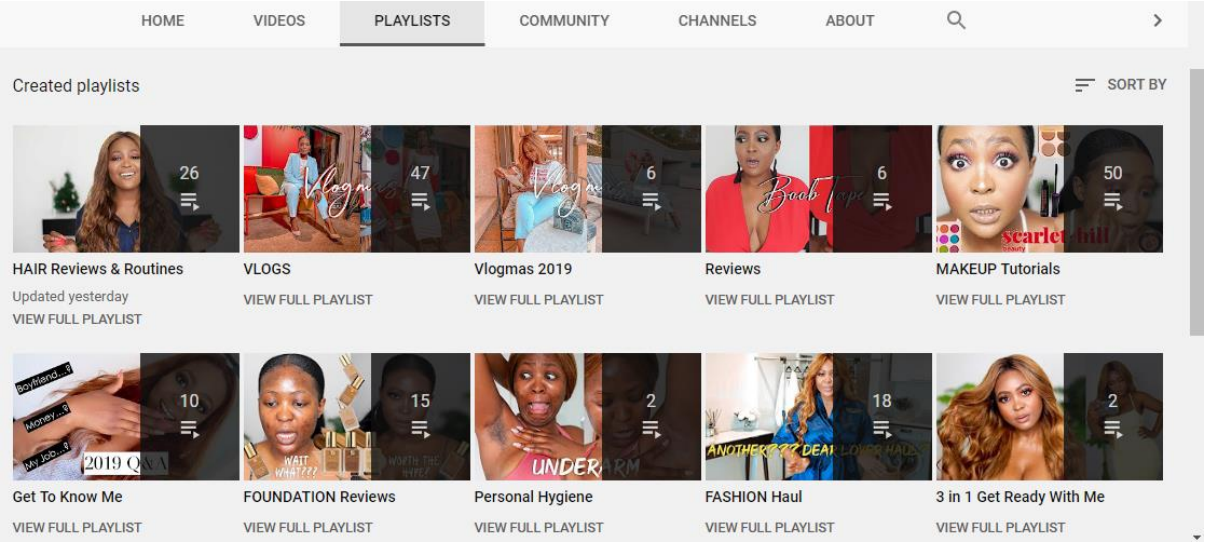


Fig 1.15. Image of Thando's YouTube Homepage

Thandi's channel features a plethora of beauty, lifestyle and travel orientated content. She has video content on makeup tutorials, events, hair reviews and hair routines, interior decorating of her apartment and fashion hauls. Fashion hauls are videos which involve a review of clothing items from various stores. Her channel comprises a combination of brand sponsorships, where a commercial brand hires her to be a representative for the brand, and self-funded videos.

4.2.6 Visual Description of Thandi's YouTube Video: "ISSA VLOG: A DAY IN MY LIFE! | Thandi Gama"

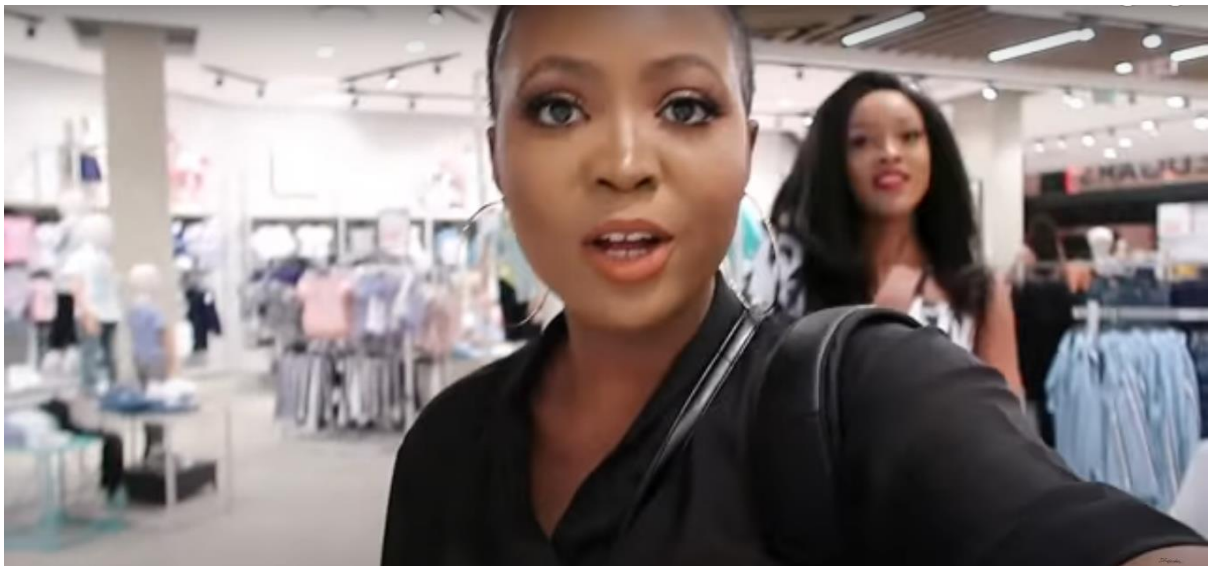


Fig 1.16. Stills from Thando's Vlog Showing the Selfie Camera Style

The video opens with an upbeat montage of the various things Thandi will do in the video. This is followed by Thandi in a shade matching[19] consultation, as she looks for a new foundation. The video is saturated with aspirational consumerist signifiers from shopping for makeup to getting a manicure. Though Thandi is half Malawian, she does not perform a Malawian or overt bi-cultural identity online, but rather peppers her videos with *isiZulu* phrases, thereby appearing unquestionably South African. Being a Zulu speaker in Johannesburg gives Thandi access to certain privileges, since *isiZulu* is one of the languages that possesses linguistic prestige in Johannesburg and linguistic hierarchy in South Africa, more generally. Additionally, Thandi's Model C English accent is also a marker of privilege and aspiration. Model C is the term used to describe schools that were largely white-only schools under Apartheid. Following democratic changes in 1996, admission requirements were no longer permitted to discriminate against learners on a racial basis, which precipitated the migration of black learners who lived

[19] Shade matching is the cosmetic practice of an individual finding the foundation that matches their skin tone by consulting with a professional.

in townships, for example, to attend well-resourced suburban schools (Radebe, 2015; Msila, 2009). According to a study undertaken by intra-race trust is higher for people who have a Model C accent. A Model C accent or "twang" is largely a sign of high-quality, white, suburban schooling and therefore is associated with privilege and proximity to whiteness. She provides an update on her life in episodic fashion, the viewer is compelled to watch the previous video to find out what they missed.

The kind of language she employs is somewhat natural and conversational. The interaction with the other vloggers is friendly and again, the vlogging style, first person camera implicates the viewer in the scene. This is the aspirational labour of the beauty vlogger as the viewer attends the exclusive event vicariously through Thandi.

What Thandi brings to bear through the use of beauty is the performativity of an identity, the constructedness of identity. She performs a South African identity – an outgoing Zulu girl. But she is different on camera, her fan community have commented on how soothing and quiet her tutorials are.

There are different kinds of authenticity for different YouTube communities. Thando being open and upfront about her skincare issues forms a kind of authenticity. Even if it is a performance of authenticity, or the platform demands it of its producers. In this way, she becomes a vector of authenticity and intimacy and presents a "transgressive intimate self" - a self that mediates between her public "glam" persona and private persona. It has to be questioned if authenticity is also the product of an offline essentialism. Authenticity does not only exist when the producer is true to their offline identity, it seems to be more philosophical than that. Authenticity can also describe being loyal to the particular performance of a self rather than the existence of an offline self. In terms of rendering her authentic self, Thandi is undertaking cultural work. Thandi showing her skin that has hyper-pigmentation and dark spots

as a beauty blogger is a different type of authenticity to Thando's, but they are both equally valid, capitalizing on their fan community's desire for flesh and blood, real life authenticity which their community can relate to.



Fig 1.17. Still of Thandi showing her hyperpigmentation under her foundation.

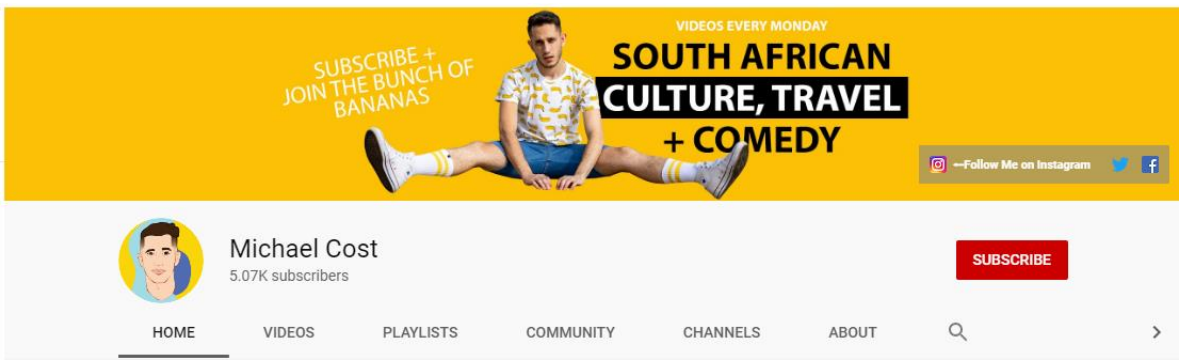
Thandi vlogging the moment where offline meets online in the form of her fan meeting her and commenting on her work ethic, including it in the final video edit, and finally at the end of the video commenting on how many fans she met and how that made her evening is evidence of the offline-online conversion cycle. At the event, her fan crashes into the frame and competing with the loud music, shouts into the camera, "This Babe right here guys! The future of hard work…" and then turns towards Thandi and softens, "You work so hard and I'm so proud of you. I feel like I know you because I watch your videos." To which Thandi responds, "You don't know how much that means to me."



Figure 1.18. Still of Thandi with a fan at a Beauty Influencer Event

This meaningful exchange of sisterhood will be articulated in more committed detail in later chapters. Thandi employs the offline 'social capital' and then capitalizes on it by including it in the video and then commenting on it and framing it as she's here for the fans, even though she is clearly exhausted. This is the contradiction of digital labour – while she is undertaking "meaningful labour", labour, no matter how immaterial or invisible is still labour (Tokumitsu, 2014).

4.2.7 Michael Cost, 27, Johannesburg



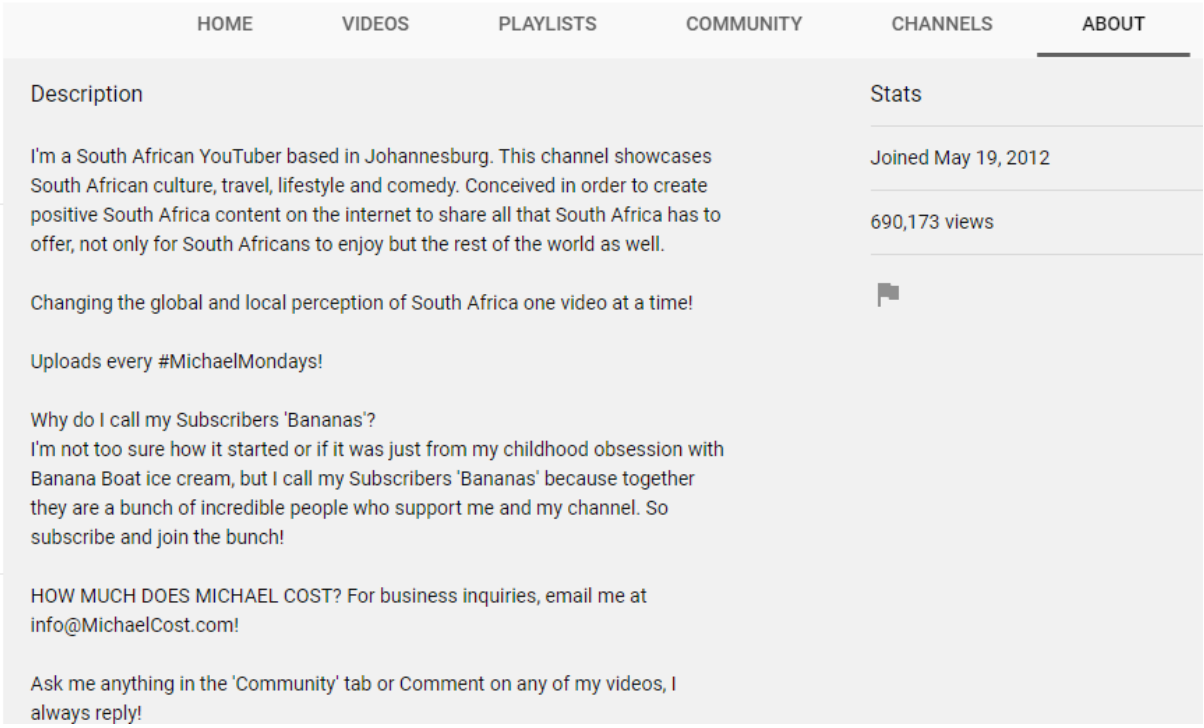


Figure 1.19. Image of Michael's YouTube Homepage

At the time of the interview, Michael Cost was 27 years old and ran his YouTube channel fulltime, as well as undertaking part time creative consulting for various brands. Michael started his YouTube career in 2013, whilst studying architecture at the University of the Witwatersrand. He experienced viral success with YouTube early on, two years after he had become a YouTuber in 2015, when he published a video entitled "What Not to Say to a South African."[20] The video garnered upwards of 240 000 views, leading him to create another popular video based on the fan comments on the first video. Unfortunately, despite those particular videos trafficking unprecedented views, the rest of the content on his channel has not enjoyed the same popularity.

[20] Michael's video is entitled *Things Not To Say To A South African / African:* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hKpuTAsOUfY

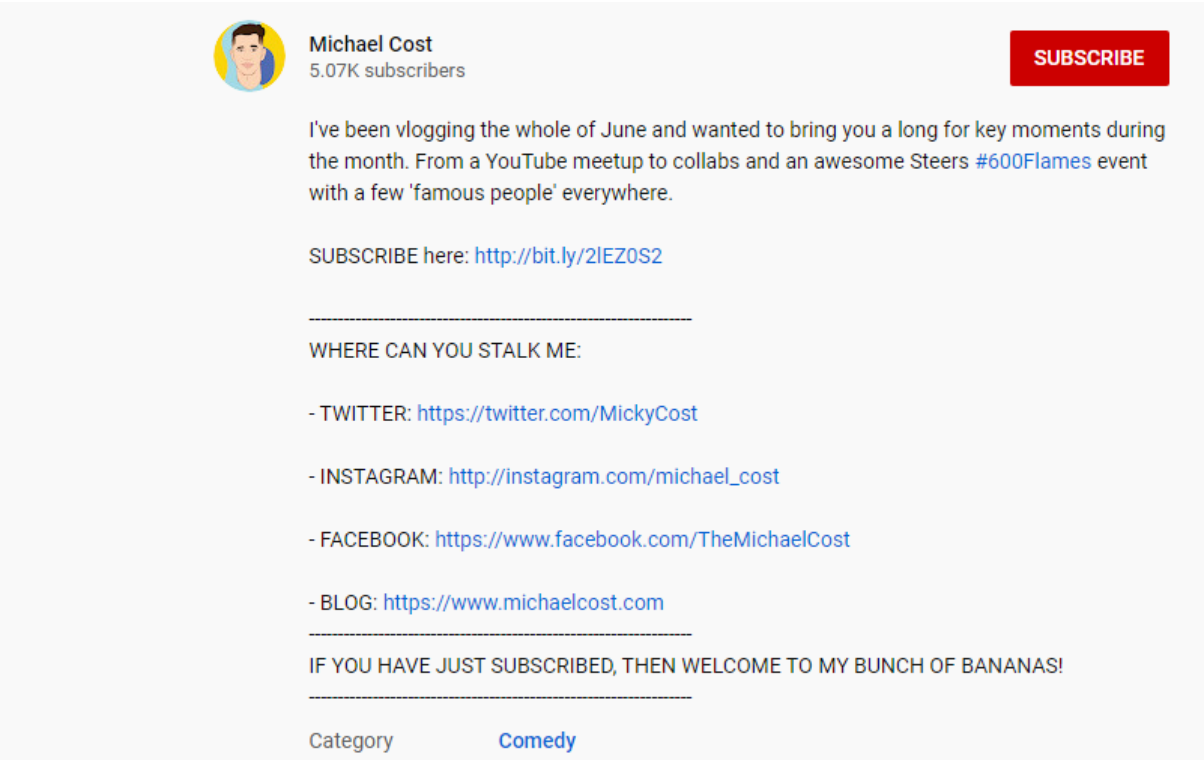


Fig 1.20. Image of Michael's Video Description

4.2.8 Visual Description of Michael's YouTube Video: MICHAEL COST: "Events, South African YouTubers + Famous People - Vlog 5"



Fig 1.20. Image of Michael's Video Opening Title



Fig 1.21. Image of Michael with YouTuber Dennis Ngango, at YouTube event

Michael opens his vlog with “Hey Bananas, welcome to Vlog 5”. Bananas is the name assigned to his YouTube fan community. Vlog 5 indicates that there are previous vlogs that he is inviting viewers to catch up on. The vlog features interactions with other YouTubers at a small community event. One such interaction is with Dennis Ngango, who runs a channel called *Defining Media* with 25 000 subscribers at the time of the analysis. Michael comments that Dennis is leading the way in the YouTube community, to which Dennis responds, “It’s everyone’s responsibility to keep everyone going, like we’re a team. And I think everyone must stop working in isolation, we’ve got to do this together good people” to which agrees. Michael repeatedly comments on the event being part of uplifting the South African YouTube community.



Fig 1.22. Image of Michael with YouTuber Owamie for their YouTube collaboration

The vlog takes place across different days. At a later stage in the vlog, he features the behind the scenes of a video with another famous South African YouTuber, Owamie Hlongwane. Owamie has two channels: Owamie Hlongwane and Owamie Hlongwane entertainment. The former is the original channel and focuses on her personal life and the latter channel focuses on South African celebrity news and gossip. Michael is wearing a shirt that reads “Inkomazi” (Traditional South African Sour Milk) by the brand Krag Drag for Big Blue (*see figure below*). Big Blue is renowned for clothing that celebrates uniquely South African culture.



Fig 1.23 of Big Blue Inkomazi Shirt.

The association of an individual who wears this particular kind of clothing is someone who might identify as being creative, politically conscious, or at the very least liberal, who economically belongs to a particular class, namely upper middle class, upwardly mobile, who desires to be seen as enjoying South African culture, or actively denouncing a particular type of whiteness and embracing an African-ness, it's a signifier of patriotism, of possessing certain cultural knowledge – it indicates an embeddedness in South African culture. Michael wearing this t-shirt indicates an attempt for consonance or symbiosis between an identity you believe about yourself and identity performance. Paradoxically, the shirt is referencing *inkomazi*, sour milk, which is a traditional South African beverage and a household name. In a way, that is Michael's intention – to become a household name on YouTube.

The interaction with another YouTuber features an exchange of self-deprecating humour where Michael comments that Owamie has travelled from the Free State to Johannesburg to collaborate with "little old me" on a video. "Little old him that has more equipment than me." To which Michael comments, "Little old her who has more subscribers than me." This exchange first of all evidences the need for South African YouTubers to capitalize on each other's subscription base through collaborations. Second, it evidences the idea of taxonomies of offline and online currency, while Michael possesses 'offline' currency in the form of equipment, Owamie possesses online "subscription base" currency which is why the exchange is taking place. YouTube becomes a kind of bureau de change in this instance where producers are able to make exchanges in the 'gift economy'.



Fig 1.24. Image of Michael at Steers Influencer Event

The ensuing part of the video features Michael at an event held by Steers. He mentions that the camera he is using does not fare well in low light. What follows is a combination of cutaways and B-Roll as well as selfie-style camera as Michael navigates the event. A volunteer camera person records him in front of the Steers press board, the footage is unstable, and Michael and text comes up on the screen that says "Bananas, I honestly need a proper camera man to come with me to events because I can't deal!" The overlayed soundbite is a popular phrase that says "Mabena, please disappoint me again. I knew it Mabena!" which references soccer player Bob Mabena's tendency to disappoint soccer fans. This is particularly an intertextual, South African Twitter reference. In using it, Michael is capitalizing on South African social media culture and rewarding his audience with the humour of the situation. He is also taking an otherwise awkward moment and building on it, first with the text overlay and then the intertextual Mabena reference, which tells his audience he is in the know. In the next scene in the vlog, he points to a sign that reads Steers VIP Guests Only. The fact that Michael chooses to include this in the vlog indicates a performance of upward mobility, of aspiration. He is important enough to be invited to various events, but he is also taking his audience with him on this VIP-lifestyle

(stylistically through the selfie-style camera as well as by featuring this specific type of content).

Overall, the participants shared the same style in terms of vlogging. They all employed a selfie-style vlogging technique. Each participants presented a certain level of authenticity, sharing their intimate thoughts or at the very least intimate space with the camera. The participants represented a spectrum of different South African identities – Michael for example represents a white South African identity. The producers also capitalised on their South African identity, whether intentionally or not, in unique ways – Thando, for example uses the Reed Dance to launch a commentary about Zulu traditions and her place within the culture, while Menzi provides a vignette of South African urban life, portraying an 'unfiltered' form of South African black manhood and culture. The next chapter shows how factors like the South African context and a South African identity inform the construction of a creative digital citizen identity.

CHAPTER 5: DATA ANALYSIS INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this dissertation was to identify what offline-online socio-demographic features informed the practices of South African creative digital citizens online and in so doing, distinguish how the creative digital citizen navigated contradictions of digital labour in the digital economy. The next few paragraphs provide an organisational structure of this chapter.

Organisational Structure of Chapter 5

The following findings are parsed through a Deleuzian lens of "Double movements of liberation and capture" (1968). Hintz *et al*., (2017) invoke Deleuze's conception of double movements of liberation and capture to describe how the digital citizen is at once liberated and captured by their relationship with online technologies. The liberation component refers to the technology-enabled ability of digital citizens to perform traditional citizenship functions online such as the circulation of political information or the organisation of protests and election rallies. While Hintz *et al*., (2017) specifically address digital citizenship from the perspective of civic life and agency, this chapter extends their argument into the arena of social media content production. In the case of social media video producers, the liberation component, refers to the liberation from the traditional, concentrated ownership of media publishing which largely characterised the media publishing environment before the emergence of social media networks. Liberation here addresses the ability of video producers to become 'independent' producers of digital publics in the first place, and consequently to circulate their publics to new audiences through 'decentralized' platforms like YouTube. This liberation dimension of the social media production is complicated by the capture dimension. Capture is understood as two-fold here: firstly, capture refers to the surveillance environment precipitated by the present age of surveillance capitalism. These practices are best understood as dataveillance (Raley, 2013): the process of data consciously and unconsciously being utilised to monitor interactions

across platform technologies and ultimately "predict and modify human behaviour to produce revenue and market control" (Zuboff, 2015:75). Significantly for this thesis, capture is also understood as the various forms of digital labour that is demanded by these platforms and the algorithmic discipline that video producers subject themselves to in order to participate within the platform economy.

The first thematic section considers the barriers to participation in 'getting online'. In this section how digital citizens begin to participate online is discussed. The section considers questions of socio-economic access, privilege and desire or motivation.

Following this, the next section of findings considers how digital citizens behave *once online*. This section reports on what contributes to the performance of a digital identity, and how digital citizens as video producers employ a South Africanness and authenticity as currency. This chapter also comprises of a discussion on the implications of digital citizenship in terms of the kinds of local and global factors that affect the video content that digital citizens produce, such as Global South and Global North flows and attendant platform politics.

5.2 PARTICIPATION AND THE CREATIVE DIGITAL CITIZEN

The study discovered a recurring pattern of privilege and access which related to different participants in a variety of ways. Firstly, creative digital citizenship participation appears to be a direct function of the following:

- Participation as a function of socio-economic conditions, class and access
- Participation as a function of desire or motivation

Participation as a Function of Socio-Economic Conditions

What was particularly thought-provoking is that the South African creative digital citizen was constructed out of a series of interrelated socio-economic conditions and events. These socio-

economic events enabled the video producers' participation in online participatory cultures. The broader political events leading up to the end of Apartheid, in the early nineties and the global neoliberal economic climate that began in the 1980s, ushered in a new socio-economic environment that engendered the rise of a new Black middle class[21] (Seekings, 2015, Bond, 2000).

Though concepts of class largely resist singular theorisation, Post-Apartheid South African scholarship has been marked by a Neo-Weberian, rather than a Marxist conceptualisation of class (Ngoma, 2015). A Marxist approach argues that class is determined by the relationship of the individual to the means and the control of production: the means of production being labour power, capital, land, property and machinery. According to Marx (1974), the *bourgeoise* (the capitalists, or upper class) own the means of production, while the dispossessed proletariat (the working class, or the lower-income classes) own only their labour. In Marx's exposition, a social class was largely defined by ownership of the means of production and labour power, rather than income or status. In a capitalist society, the capitalists and the proletariat are diametrically opposed, while in Marx's estimation, a middle class or a group of small capitalists exists, between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Both Marx and Weber emphasise the limited hiring power of the middle class. That is, the middle class, small business owners and intellectual workers, possess a very small purchase of the means of production, but this is insufficient enough to employ workers.

Intervening in Marx's conception of class, a Weberian explication of class distinguishes class situations from social classes. To Weber, class situations are not communities connected by a capital-labour relation but determined by three interconnected factors: one's life chances,

[21] The rise of the new Black middle class is distinguished from the previous black middle class due to independence in 1994. The Post-Apartheid Black middle class has been directly attributed to the redistributive policies of the ANC (The African National Congress) such as affirmative action or economic empowerment. See Ngoma (2015) and Southall (2005) for a more detailed discussion.

economic markets and economic interest. Life chances are the opportunities one has to improve their quality of life, determined by socio-economic position (Weber, 1946). While economic markets refer to external market forces, economic interest indexes one's interest in accruing capital. Weber indicates four major classes: the working class, the petty bourgeoisie, the "propertyless intelligentsia" and the classes privileged through property ownership and education (Giddens and Held). The petty bourgeoisie share a common characteristic – a limited ownership to the means of production, their relationship to limited ownership determines their life chances.

Based on a neo-Weberian approach, a middle-class position is indicated by individual occupation, as those who occupy this position share similar relationship to the means of production and as a result possess similar life chances (Ngoma, 2015). That is, to belong to the middle class, one's occupation may range from senior administrative positions to other 'professional' positions such as teachers. The familial financial contexts of the participants fulfil the conditions of either a Post-Apartheid Black middle class or middle-class positionality, and as a result were able to engage in social media video production. Michael exemplified this point when he reflected on the financial support he received from his family. He candidly noted that not everyone possessed the financial privilege his family provided, which enabled him to be a fulltime content creator. He went on, "If it wasn't for them and living at home and I didn't have certain financial benefits from my family, I wouldn't be able to do what I do…" (Michael, 26, interview).

Similarly, Thando exemplified the point that social media video production was an exclusive activity. She explained that despite popular perception, social media had a limited capacity to shift national conversation because it was elitist: "That's the 1% who have internet access, not only internet access, who have smartphones and care about - and can speak Twitter English."

She concluded with, "Twitter has even more of a constituency than YouTube[22]." (Thando, 30, interview). By this, Thando means that Twitter has more active users than YouTube, and even the small amount who use Twitter only represent a small percentage of the South African population. This suggests that those participating in social media video production are not the majority of South Africans, but a comparatively small, privileged group. Those participating do so by activating or accessing certain socio-economic class-based privileges like internet access and knowledge of internet use. This claim is congruent with Mossberger *et al*.'s (2008) findings on socio-economic status as a key predictor of digital citizenship. This can be attributed to several factors, such as consistent internet access which results in increased exposure to digital technologies, in turn results in increased digital competency (Osunkunle, 2010). This finding about the Black middle class in particular also contributes specificity to who is participating in South African digital cultures.

In addition to the post-Apartheid conditions that produced a new Black middle class, the neoliberal economic environment of the early 1990s strategically engendered a monopolistic television environment. The result was a particular kind of black television identity, one which some of the digital citizens would come to rebel against. The South African paid television market was anticompetitive, dominated by Multichoice, South Africa's subscription TV service platform and its flagship product DSTV (Digital Satellite Television). While the legacy of spatial Apartheid guaranteed that public telephone-based internet was not accessible to the broader Black middle class, it did ensure the availability of DSTV. Consequently, the participants of this study had access to what they call "disappointing" local and global representations of black bodies through the public broadcaster, the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) and through DSTV respectively. Menzi, for instance, articulated his

[22] According to 2020 data, Twitter represented 4% of South African social media users in comparison to YouTube, which is 1%. See: https://gs.statcounter.com/social-media-stats/all/south-africa.

overall disenchantment with South African television content with an impassive and disillusioned air, “From my experience, TV [content] has been quite disappointing 60 percent of the time.” (Menzi, 26, interview). Thando, impassioned, concurred with Menzi’s sentiment, noting that the dawn of the new democracy meant visually replicating Hollywood discursive modes and the representation of black American bodies rather than black *South African* bodies on television, “And that's all we knew…” She said, “And then when we started making our [own content] … we were allowed to tell our own stories...” (Thando, 30, interview). Notably, both Thando and Menzi’s accounts reflect a disillusionment with both traditional television forms of storytelling and representation. These were contributing factors in their participation in social media video production.

The creative digital citizen was also born out of the socio-economic conditions of South Africa as they relate to unemployment. As of 2019, youth unemployment in South Africa sat at 53,18%, with graduate unemployment at 31% (Plecher, 2020). Menzi wryly related how YouTube provided an opportunity for him to experiment with new creative techniques amidst unemployment, “I never thought I’d be a guy who is a YouTuber, I was YouTubing because I didn't have an opportunity to work when I was trying to get a job...” He related, “So for me, YouTube was just more like a beat board for things I'd like to do… in the future.” (Menzi, 26, interview). This indicates that had Menzi *had* employment, he might have never embarked on his YouTube journey. This correlates with the assertion that previously disadvantaged individuals, such as African Americans or Latinos, are more likely to use the Internet for employment increasing opportunities (Mossberger *et al*., 2008). The uploading and testing of future projects, aesthetics and edits, as seen in Menzi’s series *Broke Niggaz*, allowed Menzi to unintentionally access a community of practice, increase his skills and build an online portfolio. In this way, he escaped the immobility of his unemployment through participatory practices (Schoon and Strelitz, 2014). Other studies (Kibere, 2016), for instance, attest to the use of social

media as a participatory tool for social mobility within townships. The difference between Menzi and other case studies, is that cultural products generated by disenfranchised communities often remain marginalised due to socio-economic and as a result, digital inequity (Kibere, 2016; Schoon and Strelitz, 2014). Menzi's testimony importantly provides insight into the way social media participation is structured by socioeconomics and geographical contexts. The socio-economic conditions of unemployment occasioned an opportunity for Menzi to explore various digital prospects creatively, an opportunity he was in prime position to exploit precisely because of his class-based digital competencies.

Participation as a Function of Class

Engaging the participants on the question of socioeconomics and social media video participation revealed that participation is not only a function of class, but the ancillary privileges associated with a middle-class positionality such as social capital and desire. The following section will discuss social capital followed by middle class desire or motivation.

Social capital is understood as "the social networks that can be leveraged for access to information about the education system, the labour market, job availability, or for access to jobs themselves" (Li, Chen, Sang and Lee, 2019). First, as a result of coming from middle class homes, the participants had access to "good high schools" (Menzi, interview) and tertiary education which could be converted into additional social capital in the form of employment. Their tertiary qualifications suggest that the participants were provided access, at the most, and exposure at the very least, to digital environments as a result of class privileges. This access assumes the participants possessed certain initial skills, such as uploading and downloading, posting, commenting, research through Google Search. These are the kind of initial skills necessary to function as digital citizens. This finding is significant and correlates with

DiMaggio and Hargittai (2001) and Mutula and Mostert (2010) conclusions on digital inequality.

In turn, their class-related educational privileges provided structure for the ways in which they participate as digital citizens. For Michael, Thando and Menzi specifically, their degrees provided high-level knowledge of various software, such as Adobe Photoshop and Premiere Pro for editing. Their tertiary degrees also provided research or multimedia production skills, thus even before considering uploading to YouTube, on paper, their class-related privileges indicated they were well-equipped to become content creators. Additionally, Thandi's degree in strategic communications secured her employment as a strategist which afforded her the business acumen to manage her YouTube channel and strategically access brand partnerships. Take note of the conflation of these socio-economic effects, which are by no means accidental, and which produce a particular subjectivity. The implications of which, will be addressed in further detail in a later section on the neoliberal subject. It is not at all surprising that historical literature repeatedly concurs that digital access is directly related to broader forms of economic access. This relates to the deductions of Mossberger et al., (2008) which strongly assert that social capital and digital access are positively correlated.

The notion of the city, specifically an economically vibrant city like Johannesburg, plays a critical role as a socio-economic indicator for digital participation. Such cities more readily provide access to an entrepreneurial mindset, a plethora of technologies, events, social media collaborative opportunities, brand partnerships and so on – access which is not as readily available to individuals who reside in marginal cities or towns. Thando's education, for example, resulted in her relocation from a small town in Durban to Johannesburg, which resulted in a greater exposure to opportunities. Menzi equally attested to Johannesburg playing a pivotal role in his creative digital citizenship practices and credited Johannesburg as being one of the reasons he has a YouTube channel, "Joburg is like a more hyped-up space." He

admitted, “So I don't think I'd be introduced to the things I know, that helped me create if I was somewhere else...” (Menzi, 26, interview). To invoke Francis Nyamnjoh, Johannesburg acts as a “centre of accumulation” (2013:1). Though Nyamnjoh (2013) employs this term to signal the ways in which Johannesburg operates as an end site of migration for individuals within the country and migrants across the African continent, the term is useful in imagining how cities like Johannesburg become epicentres of information, headquarters of socio-economic mobility and a symbol of social networks as a consequence of capital flows; and more importantly, how these movements are simulated in online vernacular (‘amateur’) cultures.

Significantly, as indicated above, the participants' access to the social capital and networks that Johannesburg provides can be seen as another instance of their class privilege. Peripheral areas may provide little opportunity for technological exposure due to a deficit in equipped public spaces, such as libraries (Mphidi, 2016). This finding also relates to Mossberger *et al*.’s (2008) conclusion that participation follows ethnic fault lines, or, in the case of South Africa, participation is strongly predicted by architectural Apartheid (Seekings, 2010). This indicates that various offline socioeconomics cannot be disembedded from the formation of the creative digital citizen and their practices. As explained at the beginning of this section, class not only structures participation through social capital, but as will be explained next, socioeconomics also inform participation psychologically through desire or motivation.

Participation as a Function of Desire or Motivation

While the access to social capital worked to *include* the participants in online environments, it also *excluded* the participants from identifying with certain visual narratives and consequently pursue wider spectrums of representation. Participation, here, does not only become a function of socio-economic access, but an associated function of middle-class desire or motivation. While the desire to produce content for YouTube appeared to be an obvious motivation to start

a YouTube career, what was surprising was the *kind* of desires that were expressed and the ways in which these formed and informed the expression of digital citizenship. First, the desire to produce content was informed by the need to be visually represented in new modes, modes that mainstream television or other YouTube channels were not doing insufficiently. Certainly, Thando repeatedly acknowledged her frustration with the saturation of YouTube beauty vloggers, and the absence of representation for women like her. Relating how she began her YouTube channel, she explained that her channel fulfilled a desire to educate, spark critical thinking and most importantly embody her subjectivity,

> It started off as just to represent people like myself: black female who has opinions, … We don't have too much of an LGBTQ+ constituency [on South African YouTube] … So, I was like hey, we exist, we're here. It's not a need per se, it's something I *want* to do. Something I've seen a lack of and a gap in the space. (Thando, interview, 30)

What Thando is signalling is the social potential that the 'democratisation' of social media has engendered (Ward, 2016), despite this social potential largely being enacted through middle class privileges, as earlier discussed. Mark the term democratisation. It will be complicated at a later stage. For now, this social potential is the space that social media at large has, in some cases, generated for producers to re-present and reimagine marginalized bodies, like the queer community, beyond South African exclusionary nationalisms which are operationalized through discursive processes and normalized through mainstream media, broadcast programs and online. South African exclusionary nationalisms, denote configurations of power between the citizen and the nation and between citizens. These nationalisms are those processes and practices, rooted in and produced by power dynamics which construct the normative South African citizen as an able-bodied black man or historically as a white man, for example. The South African citizen of the present is embodied as a Vusi Thembakwayo, a Jacob Zuma, or a Siya Kolisi, for example: authoritative, visibly heterosexual, Nguni-speaking, able-bodied

black men. Their bodies symbolically circulate in the nation as texts and templates of the normative citizen. Exclusionary nationalisms therefore exclude marginalized individuals whether through prescriptive practices of sexuality, gender, ability, ethnic group, language, racial group or class. For instance, the ritual process of the Reed Dance broadcast on national television and radio reinscribes the boundaries of what a woman in the nation believes about her body, her sexuality and how she performs and does not perform her Zulu ethno-femininity. In this sense, Thando is in some ways the antithesis of this embodiment of South Africanness: she is at once, Zulu, black, Lesbian, and Christian. She does not represent the normative citizen and therefore exists outside of the symbolic boundaries of the nation. She must therefore find alternative ways to re-present herself.

Additionally, by virtue of these participants re-presenting themselves as South African, and Thando in particular, presenting herself and her intersex partner as *South African*, ("we're here, we exist") as normalized, as non-sensational, legitimate members of the nation, in this authentic manner, she confronts these exclusionary nationalisms and reinscribes herself 'back' into the nation and returns from exile. Thando participates in a type of social media activism, counters dominant narratives around the South African LGBTQI+ community and establishes a counter-public through her body online and through the production of her cultural work. Notably, Thando's LGBTQI+ identity is read as South African because her videos are *anchored* in overt markers of acceptable, legible South Africanness - for example, the use of *isiZulu* phrases or South African-specific humour. Thus, on the part of her audience, recouping an LGBTQI+ identity as part of her South African identity, and not outside of it, is not as difficult as it would be should she not possess any signifiers of South Africanness. In this way, she reproduces her intersectional queer identity as a legitimate South African identity. Publics are the self-structured, self-initiated social spaces produced by the reflexive circulation of discourse. In other words, publics are a response to discourse. Michael Warner (2002) intervenes in

Habermas' original conception of the public sphere, with the term "counterpublics". He strongly contends that "the public sphere is not a single entity, but rather a multitude of diverse, interacting and competing publics." Thus, counterpublics are an "explicitly articulated alternative" (Asen, 2000) to mainstream public discourse or practices. The participants' counterpublics, in relation to the constellation of mainstream publics develop as a decisive reaction, an opposition to mainstream discursive sites with the aim of influencing the very same publics they oppose. Warner (2002) is invested in cultural performance as a type of counterpublic, as a mechanism to shape society. Castells (2015) argue that online platforms have produced a space for the development of counterpublics through increased accessibility to digital platforms. In this sense, citizen, breaks trust with socio-legal fidelity and adopts an unconventional, adaptive form consistent with cultural movements rather than purely legal modes. It insists that citizenship be understood through intimate lived experiences, through the affective rather than the rational. In other words, what it means to be South African goes beyond the purely legal and flows into the socio-*cultural*, into something that is experienced, not in the civic sense, but in the affective sense (Berlant, 1997; Garman *et al*., 2013; Flew, 2011).

Though extant research does articulate desire as one of the key factors for the acquisition of digital skills (Mphidi, 2016), what is not addressed is where this desire might initially stem from in the first instance. The ability to visually imagine oneself in a different manner from mainstream representations, may be seen as a 'higher' psychological desire once other fundamental human needs are met. Thus, this motivation originates from accessing a middle-class psychology[23].

While this can be read as suggesting that social media video participation is *solely* the purchase of middle class and beyond privilege, it is more accurately understood as being more readily

[23]See Bandura's work on social cognitive theory (1962) and self-efficacy theory (1997). Bandura's work has been read in light of technological diffusion and internet self-efficacy. In particular, how environments

accessible to individuals who can *exploit* middle class social capital, such as social networks or digital competencies. These further suggest that offline socio-economic environments inform psychological patterns of digital participation through interaction with socio-economic environments, and the associated observation and modelling of middle-class behaviours and attitudes (Bandura, 1962; 1997). This notion of behaviours and attitudes is critical for neoliberal digital identity and will be addressed in greater detail at a later stage. Additionally, these patterns of participation confirm that creative digital citizenship follows templates of broader social economic participation and provides a strong context for understanding how digital identities are performed within a neoliberal digital economy. As will be explained next, though the participants were well-positioned to benefit from the broader economic conditions of South Africa, their participation was still structured by access to tangible resources on a micro-economic level.

Access to Resources, Equipment or Time

Despite claims of the democratisation of social media through technological flows, access to certain types of video production resources affected participation. Surprisingly, the participants reported that start-up costs for becoming a 'serious' video producer could easily fall into the thousands. With a deadpan demeanour, Thando confirmed that it was easy to use a phone if you are "doing sit-downs in your bedroom," while simultaneously recommending the use of rather high-end phones like iPhones or Huaweis. She emphasised that a basic production setup comprising of a camera, tripod, microphone and light would come up to R7900, excluding editing software.

Significantly, the participants' accounts alluded to "good quality phones" that retail for more than R2000, an amount that is almost half the South African National Minimum Wage[24]. Michael explained the practical implications of limited resources for the South African YouTuber, reporting that a now famous South African video producer, Mihlali[25], had to save for an entire year before purchasing a camera. As a matter of fact, he offered,

> Depending on what class and income bracket you fall under, content creation *does* get affected because things like equipment, software and computers are expensive... you can't get everything for free and when you don't have money, it's just so unobtainable. (Michael, 27, interview)

On one hand, invoking a Deleuzian framework of "double movements of liberation and capture", social media participation offers a form of freedom, which in this case can be understood as 'democratisation' or 'empowerment', however the above accounts evidence barriers to entry for even the social media participants themselves. The above accounts are inconsistent with findings that promote the democratisation of media through diffusion of technology and mobile phone usage (Delwiche and Henderson, 2015). What accounts for this inconsistency in findings? The literature promoting the benefits of the diffusion[26] and democratisation of media technologies often emerge from a Global North worldview and appear to be fixated on endorsing the technological benefits of globalization, as an emancipatory panacea for Global South predicaments (Gajjala, 2013), while eliding the sometimes-negative practical implications. In fact, even the use of the term democratisation, to some extent, invokes offline hegemonies (Nakamura, 2013). In that, the Global North has

[24] The National Minimum Wage as of March 2020 is R2284 - 4152 based on an hourly rate of R11.42 and R20.76 an hour respectively, and 5 days a week. See: https://www.gov.za/speeches/new-nmw-base-rate-come-effect-march-%E2%80%93-department-employment-and-labour-24-feb-2020-0000.

[25] Mihlali is one of South Africa's highest paid beauty vloggers. She once explained that when she started her YouTube channel, her friend, a film student at the University of the Witwatersrand would 'sneak' her into the editing labs at the university, where she would edit her YouTube videos throughout the night.

historically undertaken the epistemological task of defining what constitutes democratisation. Notice how mainstream discourses of democratisation perpetually flow *into* the Global South, not *out* of it. Secondly, democratisation would need to be diffused from more concentrated democratised spaces into less democratised spaces, often these less democratised spaces are imagined in the Global South and not the other way around. In such Global North settings, equal signal coverage and the diversity of the mobile phone market is such that, even second-hand mobile phones and mobile data plans are comparatively cheaper than in South Africa, which makes online participation more accessible.

These accounts specify much: first, this indicates that there are multiple levels of socio-economic barriers to entry for a video producer who does not enjoy the same economic purchase that these producers have come to possess over time. Again, these gaps in who is participating versus who is *said* to be participating and *how* complicates the participation divide (Hoffmann *et al*., 2014). This confirms that participation is determined by the broader context of offline socioeconomics that inform every aspect of participation (Mphidi, 2016).

Not only does participation have an associated cost, but an ideology. These costs are increasingly consumerist in nature, structured by neoliberal discourses of individualized aspiration (Wauthier *et al*., 2019). While one participant noted that they had amassed almost R100 000 in equipment, in the same breath, they expressed a disenchantment in having only received a quarter of that amount, directly from YouTube in the previous year. Thandi, for example, justified how she has grown from using elementary to more advanced forms of technology in tandem with the growth of her YouTube channel. As though wishing she could remedy past mistakes, she commented almost disbelievingly,

> I remember when I started out, I was using my phone, so back in the day it was easy to start out with your phone, if you were just doing this as something that you enjoy doing

> as a *passion*. But if you definitely want to do this *fulltime* and earn money out of it, then you definitely need a *professional* camera (Thandi, 27, interview, emphasis my own).

Notice the association of *fulltime* with professional equipment, and mobile phones with *passion* or hobby. Significantly, the participants commonly pitted the notion of "serious work" (fulltime work) against "passion", wherein serious work was associated with, and therefore necessitated, increased acquisition, with the imminent 'promise' of increased reward as both Duffy and Schwartz (2017) and Andrejevic *et al*. (2014) contend. As such, this account and others, confirms that this kind of participation establishes an acquisition Mobius loop - the more they possess, the more they need to acquire for the next level of production. These accounts also provide personal justification for the participants to labour financially, and otherwise, under the guise of individualised growth and aspiration. As will be discussed next, social media video production does not only implicate financial labour, but various other form of labour within a neoliberal conception of the digital economy.

5.3 "EVERY DAY I WAKE UP AND I DO MY DREAM JOB": THE DIGITAL LABOUR BIND

Digital Labour and Reward

Though digital labour is often understood to be "unwaged... unsolicited labour" (Terranova, 2000), it stands to reason that there were particular benefits that the producers derived from engaging in digital labour, otherwise they would not have continued to do so. Menzi, for instance, articulated the creative autonomy and freedom of expression he experienced, in *comparison* to his fulltime job as a creative producer. He explained that he enjoyed knowing that he could do whatever he wanted "in the space" (Menzi, 26, interview). In contrast to this claim, he later clarified that he has somewhat towed the line, being more specific about the kind of content he produces, since the initial launch of his YouTube channel, seven years ago.

Take note of this development as an instance of neoliberal professionalising; it will be expanded upon in due course.

It is vital to understand that Menzi's claim reveals the relativity of 'democratised' expression in digital platform cultures. First of all, aside from the socio-economic gate-keeping that limits who participates and how, the oft-touted 'democratisation, liberation and emancipatory' dialectics of YouTube are not absolute, but relative in comparison to prior or alternative modes of expression and distribution. For instance, participatory cultures are often lauded for their democratising potential by numerous scholars (Hirzalla and van Zoonen 2011; Dahlgren and Gurevitch, 2005). However, critical studies scholars, like Fuchs (2013) resist entertaining the notion that social media is participatory at all. Fuchs (2013) contends that participatory culture scholars like Jenkins, construct a duality between creativity and exploitation. Reflecting on the contribution of critical studies to participatory cultures, Jenkins holds that creativity and exploitation, pleasure and labour, platform capitalism and participatory cultures co-exist and expand simultaneously. Fuchs (2013) maintains that even in that revised hypothesis, the creativity evident in participatory cultures is not parallel to exploitation, but rather central to it.

On a related note, the participants had to relinquish certain benefits for the 'right' to utilize the platform. In this regard, a disenchanted Thando, explained these contradicting constraints of expression. She complained that YouTube's new set of guidelines was geared at being more child-friendly, and as such, her queer-focused content was not prioritised by the YouTube algorithm. YouTube generates 97% of its revenue from advertising systems, since YouTube targets a broad base of advertisers as their first priority, the more 'advertising-friendly' the content, the wider the pool of potential advertisers. Pontsho Pilane and Mehita Iqani (2016) in critiquing media representations of black female bodies note how traditional and safe representations of bodies in traditional consumer media are. "The econom[ies] of consumer media," Pilane and Iqani write, "[make few concessions] for radical, intersectional and

progressive forms of representation." (2016:10). Phrased differently, YouTube assumes that advertisers are unwilling to advertise on a video which has Queer content, as this could be read as aligning their brand with the queer community, thus isolating their heteronormative audience, which they consider a brand risk. In fact, since the undertaking of these interviews, YouTube has initiated even stricter policies regarding children's content as a result of COPPA (Children's Online Privacy Protection Act). COPPA does not permit the collection of data from children under 12 years of age. This development truly evidences the complex interplay of various socio-economic factors that inform platform cultures[27]. This had material ramifications for Thando. This suggests that if Thando *wanted* to monetize her content through YouTube 's partner program, she would have to appease the YouTube algorithm and self-censor or self-surveil[28]. In this sense, Thandi, as a datafied subject, as a data commodity is not only sexed, raced and gendered, she is also discriminated against on the basis of sexuality.

These creative digital citizens in self-surveilling the content they upload, in tracking their analytics and measuring their performance online form a kind of "quantified self" (Crawford, Lingel, and Karppi, 2015). Deborah Lupton (2015) explains the quantified self movement as one in which health users attempt to biohack their lives by measuring and analysing everything from diet to sleeping patterns in a form of self-surveillance and self-improvement. The flesh and blood body devolves into data, into numbers to be improved upon, as a metric to measured. These online personas, these doubles, these apparitions of data, these data doppelgängers are powered, shaped and constructed by the data trails that users leave behind with every click, rooted in real life existing power and hegemony. The way in which the video producers

[27] Other YouTubers around the world have protested YouTube's queer monetization (cf. Romano, 2019).

[28] This kind of policing is incredibly telling of YouTube's capitalist priorities, particularly in light of the Logan Paul scandal. In 2018, Logan Paul uploaded a video about Japan's Aokigahara forest, colloquially known as Suicide Forest. The video featured close ups of a deceased man, who had recently hung himself. After garnering 6.5. million views in a day, the video was met with outrage across social media. In the end, it was Logan, and *not* YouTube who deleted the video. Logan summarily issued an apology, and was removed from YouTube's top tier advertising program, *Google Preferred*. The gross oversight on YouTube's part as well as the lethargy in taking action called into question YouTube's ethics.

structure their content around algorithmic improvement bears some similarity - they are algorithmically disciplined to conform to the standards and demands of the platform. Thus, in the case of Thando and the other participants, these platforms construct a binary of social disciplinary control: they reward 'normative' expressions, such as heteronormative expressions of femininity or sexuality, while simultaneously punishing and disciplining 'deviant' expression: these discriminating processes bring queer define and exemplify – are you using the term in Jabir Puar's sense? expressions into line through social-economic algorithmic system of punishment and reward, or recognition and denial, or through honour and dishonour thereby maintaining the status quo.

The language and perceived behaviour of these digital citizens, as well as their consumption and production practices increasingly favours machine-like tendencies and demands. The participants reported feeling overwhelmed by the load of work, and criticised YouTube partners like brands for not treating content creators as human, and not considering their feelings. Thando even reflected that she disliked the term content creator because it made her feel like a machine. This evidences a kind of social-platform shaping of the technological body and evidences the ways in which the digital citizen is articulated, situated and constituted by social media platforms, their practices and their data processes. The participants reconfigure and reshape the production and performance of their digital selves according to the data received. It also explains the ways in which the technological or offline-online body informs the platform itself. Again, this coincides with what McLuhan understands to be the double bind of self-amputation and self-amplification that the interaction with technology constructs.

Thus, in light of this kind of self-surveillance, it cannot be disregarded that these platforms determine, structure and propagate their own societal values and their own forms of morality, re-instating familiar offline, traditional, social hierarchies through algorithmic architectures, a

finding that both Duffy and Hund (2019) and Nakamura (2013) attest. Additionally, Ruha Benjamin (2019) argues that technology adopts the default setting of society, being built upon pre-existing social cleavages. In this case, these platforms work to sustain offline logics of heteronormativity. This coincides with Bishop's assertion concerning the visibility mandate of video producers, contending that the algorithm foregrounds "feminized content" (70), but of course, what is understood by the term feminized is determined by broader socio-economic relationships between the advertiser and YouTube.

The participants' accounts emphasise how social media participation amputates as it amplifies. In this regard, Amanda du Preez (2010) appropriates McLuhan's dual-conception of self-amplification and self-amputation of technology. McLuhan explains the double-edged sword of humankind's relationship with technology, through a theoretical framework of self-amplification and self-amputation. The creative digital citizen is able to amplify their cultural publics, disseminate them to a wider audience and establish a self-brand. These effects would count as self-amplification in this case and are thus a kind of liberation. On the other hand, this involves self-amputating practices or practices that capture or entrap, such as digital labour which involves the loss or amputation of time and finances. Additionally, digital labour affects the quality of their mental health as well as their personal relationships. Self-amputation also refers to the way in which the platform causes the digital citizen to conform to a certain ideal - the way in which they are trapped in a web 'of their own making' by conforming to a self-brand and therefore, by following an algorithmic template and by self-censoring in order to meet the requirements of the platform or their audience. Moreover, self-amputation is the process of consciously and unconsciously colluding with the processes of datafication. Thus, liberation and capture can be understood as the wider overarching conditions of social media use, while McLuhan's contribution can be understood as a deeper dimension into the practices that liberate and capture.

In particular, as these producers amplify themselves and project themselves into the YouTube cosmos, they self-consciously amputate through practices of digital labour within the digital economy. These platform politics directly impact Thando's expression of creative digital citizenship, undermining Thando's earlier mandate concerning the re-presentation of queer bodies in South Africa, and as such this kind of policing behaviour cannot be understood as unequivocally democratic (See the section on *Participation as a function of desire or motivation*).

Aside from the more immediate affordances of creative independence and community, with digital labour came the promise of eventual commercial gain. The participants related the hope of securing brand sponsorships or in accumulating sustainable income through the aggregation of views and likes, or directly through YouTube's revenue program. However, it was not as straightforward as merely consistently uploading videos. Reflecting on the enigmatic difficulty in being seen and acknowledged as a YouTuber, Menzi ambivalently noted,

> You know, it's not just about your good work. Plenty of people creating good work don't make money… Eventually, you'll make it. I don't know if it's a strategy thing. I don't know what causes that, but it does happen. I think [it is] bad luck…life (Menzi, 26, interview).

Simultaneously, and in contrast to the benefits promised, the participants acknowledged, that there were numerous video producers on YouTube globally, potentially undertaking similar work, thus decreasing their chances of 'making it'. In light of this argument, participants adopted various localising strategies to off-set these effects, which will be discussed in further detail in a later section (*Self-Branding and the performance of self*). Notably, according to Google's former country director, Luke Mckend[29], it was these localising strategies that limited

[29] See: https://businesstech.co.za/news/internet/179131/how-to-make-money-on-youtube-in-south-africa/.

South African YouTubers' ability to monetize their content in comparison to content that was legibly aimed at an international audience, such as American or British content. Mckend (2018) thus encouraged South African YouTubers to adopt a more international-facing approach, to produce content that had an international appeal. Notice this increasing trend towards a deterritorialised 'globalized identity', it will gain traction as the section progresses. Problematically, within representational politics, content from a Global North perspective is considered internationally legible, whereas content from the Global South experiences audience limitations, unless framed within a globalized positionality. For example, notable South African YouTubers include British-South African YouTuber Caspar Lee. Around 2012, at age 16, Caspar Lee visited England and collaborated with a few popular British YouTubers, leveraging the uniqueness of his South African identity. As a direct result of this exposure, Lee's channel experienced significant growth, prompting him to move to the UK to focus on his channel fulltime. His channel bore great similarity to his British peers of that time: white, middle to upper middle-class YouTubers in their early twenties whose content consisted of a pastiche of daily life vlogs, pranks and challenges. There is no particular iconography that grounds his videos in South Africa, besides the presence of a South African accent. In comparison to Caspar Lee, Michael, does the labour of asserting his South Africanness through cultural proximity and cultural knowledge. Michael routinely collaborates with black South African YouTubers and invokes black South African popular culture, music, phrases and clothing, centring his South African identity.

Additionally, the above case reveals that the differences in Global South and Global North social media legibility strongly invoke a geopolitics of knowledge production. Global South ontologies are often seen as inferior or mimetic ontologies of Global North production. Thus, the promise to the Global North cannot be shared by the Global South who have historically possessed an asymmetrical relationship to knowledge production.

Significantly, on a related note, the underlying logic of hoping to financialize their digital labour against impossible odds is not dissimilar to the manner in which capitalism promises the eventual accumulation of capital through perpetual labour. Though these platforms are produced from Global North ontologies and socio-economic conditions, "habitually imagine [and therefore normalise] a single path to capitalist development and prosperity to be followed by all" (Shepphard and Leitner, 2017:3). That is, these platforms construct a mass template of capital acquisition to be followed by producers, regardless of territory, or socio-economic context or background. Following this thought, in order for South African YouTubers to equally benefit from the platform's capitalist logics, there would need to be a lower income vault, a human population, that the South African YouTube community exploits. However, from a territorial perspective, the South African YouTube community, as members of the Global South, *are* that lower income class, being 'exploited' by more well-resourced companies or economies and being unable to significantly monetize their work directly through YouTube's Programs, as in other regions. The South African YouTube community is also exploited by being the intimate, personal façade through which both personal and community data extraction becomes consensual and permissible. In comparison to American YouTubers, South African YouTubers did not earn as much through YouTube's AdSense revenue program, with South African YouTubers earning approximately R12 000 per 1 million views (Mckend, 2018). Global economic factors such as Rand-Dollar strength adversely affect South African AdSense revenue, as YouTubers are paid in the currency of the country they upload from. This finding is congruent with Gajjala's (2013) reflections.

These geopolitics are demonstrated elsewhere: Facebook's recent drive to provide Africa with increased internet connectivity through the construction of subsea internet cables, through a

project significantly called 2Africa[30], emphasises the internet connection as democratisation logic. This project reflects how capitalism enlists and operationalises the ideology of democratisation in its quest to innovate capitalist modes of acquisition. Pay attention to how even the title of the project "2Africa" simultaneously invokes and reinforces aged discourses of depletion, of destitution, and of disconnection of Africa from the rest of the world, and how the internet through this philanthropic or foreign aid investment promises to remedy that deficit. The need for platforms such as Google[31] and Facebook to conquer new big data frontiers in the Global South as their domestic markets increasingly tend towards saturation is evident. This project evidences a new drive towards internet connectivity as a form of foreign policy or foreign aid, which in turn indicates how internet connectivity and its effects are being conceived as increasingly material. Additionally, the non-involvement logic of aid as infrastructure, resembles neoliberal governmentality, in that welfare, in this sense, is outsourced. Welfare here, 'automatically' becomes the purchase of the newly empowered neoliberal subject and not the State (or the Platform).

These capitalist logics are not solely limited to the YouTuber-YouTube or Alphabet Inc. (Google's parent company) relationship, but as will be shown next, these logics permeate the value chain of participatory cultures, constructing neoliberal capitalist economies of exchange between various stakeholders, particularly YouTubers, their networks and their communities.

"Double-movements of Liberation and Capture": Video Production as Labour

Digital labour characteristically implicated more than solely the individual video producer's labour. Rather, this kind of labour became a communal effort, with family members, friends and partners being enlisted to feature in video projects. Each participant routinely featured

[30] See: https://www.cnbc.com/2020/05/14/facebook-building-undersea-cable-in-africa-to-boost-internet-access.html
[31] See: https://www.ft.com/content/5b9c89f5-6bba-43e9-a047-cb2a09ff894d

family or friend networks, or capitalized on their labour in some way, to edit a video or contribute a video idea as is the case with Menzi's YouTube Channel. This networked labour[32] (Michael, 27, YouTube video) or "Couples 123 Tag, South African Lesbian Edition [33]" Both of the said videos capitalise on existing YouTube trends, with the former featuring Michael quizzing his mother on her knowledge of him in a light-hearted manner, and the latter, romantic partners (Thando and "the lover" as she is known) competitively testing each other on their respective quirks. Both video formats are executed in a familiar and therefore easily consumable style for their fan community. That the above-mentioned videos are reiterations of existing YouTube trends demonstrates that the distribution of affective labour across peripheral networks, is not uncommon, in fact it is rather encouraged.

In Thando's case, her and her partner, a YouTuber, routinely feature in each other's videos, sharing influence, intimacy and authenticity through the portrayal of the relationship. The same distribution of labour occurs with Thandi and her sister, a beauty vlogger, with her sister supportively commenting on each video upload, encouraging community conversation. Other video producers, like Menzi with *Microwave Boys*, regularly collaborated with more famous YouTubers in the South African YouTube community. In this way, members shared labour, influence and audiences through collaborations. These collaborations were often marked by clickbait titles or viral trends such as, "*Macdonald's & Chicken Licken MUKBANG!!! + Story Time | Ft Thandi Gama."*[34] This video is Thandi's sister's video. The video combines two YouTube trends, *Mukbang* and Story Time. *Mukbang* refers to the viral South Korean YouTube trend in which users watch people eat various kinds of food. In South Africa, the *Mukbang* trend has been distilled to most commonly feature YouTubers eating food in collaboration with other YouTubers. These often involve particular kinds of conversation, such as a story time

[32] Michael's video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pByBMcVYQDg&t=230s.
[33] Thando's video: https://youtu.be/aUqt2HmPFLQ?list=PL_Hf9-i2aVLTX9QvI4Nj028KjkGvrld2u.
[34] See: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OCkCOQrqCfU (Gama, 2019).

feature, where YouTubers share an intimate, yet dramatic situation in which they were involved. Some feature an interview with another YouTuber or an Agony Aunt scenario, where the YouTubers answer questions fans send in, through other social media platforms or in the YouTube comment section, ahead of time. This trend largely replicates and commodifies the 'offline' intimacy that one may feel when they share a meal with a friend or family member. These South African *Mukbangs* in particular also emphasise the 'intimate' consumerist nature of YouTube culture – audiences visually consume the Youtubers consuming well-known food brands like Nando's, KFC, MacDonald's and Chicken Licken. They make apparent relationships between globalization of trends and consumerism. In utilising these trends, the participants become nodes in a global culture of consumerism, however, as Mehita Iqani (2019) and Simidele Dosekun (2019) write, they also lay claim to and solidify their right to be global in a global arena that had denied and continues to deny their global character, to relegate the African continent to a static past and an undeveloped elsewhere (Wauthier *et al*., 2019; Gajjala, 2013).

One of the reasons for the distribution of labour across peripheral networks was precisely because the digital labour was often all-consuming. As described previously, in Michael's video, *Events, South African YouTubers + Famous People - Vlog 5*, Michael appears irritated as a make-shift camera person captures a cringingly up-close video of him on the red carpet at an event. This amusing, yet uncomfortable, moment is enhanced by an on-screen title that suggests that he desperately needs a camera assistant. This sentiment was not isolated but shared amongst the participants. Thando, correspondingly, bemoaned the lack of additional assistance necessary to maintain a budding YouTube channel, noting that there was insufficient time to execute all the work she wanted to do. She continued, slightly annoyed,

> Where are you going to find the time to do all of this stuff? You're still a one-man project. Most of these people have an assistant or a production team... Some form of

> help in order for them to be able to *manufacture* content like that, at that rate in order for them to be able to make like a proper income from it… I'm a whole production team by myself and it's demanding (interview, emphasis my own).

Others detailed parallel experiences, articulating the amount of labour that was involved in releasing a single video. With a note of frustration, one participant complained that it often felt like their efforts were not being met with sufficient reward. They complained that disproportionate rewards for labour had an adverse effect on their mental health, ultimately making them feel inadequate: "You start to take it personal. It's tiring because you're putting out a piece of you into the world." The video producer's dilemma in producing large amounts of work alone, without assistance, also evidences the ways in which these platform cultures concurrently incubate liberation, through creative expression, but capture by endorsing disproportionate, *unacknowledged* modes of labour. Pay attention to this paradox, it will become significant as the chapter proceeds.

However, despite repeated claims of the challenging nature of social media video production, the video producers often made their labour appear effortless. Additionally, what is particularly interesting is not just the ways in which digital labour is elided or unacknowledged, but that the producers *themselves* are not upfront about this labour with their fan communities. With a very nonchalant demeanour, Thando, specifically, remarked that she could easily make an upcoming project "look like ten people, when it's just the two of us…" She stated this while acknowledging that it was demanding being "an entire production house" on her own. Correspondingly, Menzi irritated, mentioned, "People think I'm some YouTube production house… that I'm just this magic man who can just make shit happen."

In a similar vein, other participants were somewhat pleased that they kept the labour and other 'unsanitary' aspects of their lives to themselves. Michael intimated that he resisted divulging

the struggles of being a content creator on his channel. Consequently, his acquaintances often commented on how well he was doing. These acquaintances, he confessed, "don't see all the hard work and all the hours spent editing… because I don't let them see those things…" In participating in practices of self-elision, the participants become implicated in contributing to the sustainability of unacknowledged labour in the digital economy as well as disseminating its effects.

Meaningfully, what then becomes clear is that the dual practice of self-conscious acknowledgement and elision of digital labour are features of neoliberal participatory culture. These practices of self-amputation must be understood as part of the broader logic of participatory culture *as a culture.* That is, participatory culture as a culture, possesses its own embedded individualistic and aspirational logics organised and structured by neoliberalism.

Jason Glynos and David Howarth (2007 cited in Phelan, 2014) describe a logic as a naturalised "basic unit of explanation". They explain that social logics are naturalised, sedimented social practices whose codes and principles are integrated within social structures (Phelan, 2014). Social logics thus "conceal" the conditions of their own emergence" (Phelan, 2014:56). Sean Phelan describes a neoliberal logic in the following way:

> A neoliberal logic is a logic that neoliberalises the social, either in the form of reproducing an already sedimented social logic or in the form of a political logic that extends and intensifies the process of neoliberalisation (2014:57).

The process of neoliberalisation is the process in which "logics of market determinism, commodification, individualisation, competitive ritual and self-interest" become naturalised and reproduced in social practice. A neoliberal logic is thus a logic that deepens the process of commodification, individualization, competitive ritual or self-interest by masquerading as a naturalised social logic or by attaching itself to a political logic like the right to self-expression

or democratization. Thus, a neoliberal logic always articulates itself in relation to other discourses to conceal the constructed nature of its genesis.

This neoliberal logic normalizes the approach of acknowledging and eliding perpetual labour by attaching cultural meanings to it, by treating perpetual labour as a form of self-emancipation. The digital citizens, in consciously eliding their labour, are participating in the cultural demands of neoliberal participation. That is, this elision is emblematic of the culture itself and structures the way these digital citizens form their digital identity and practices. Essentially, this culture insists upon a blurring of personal and professional boundaries, of "entangling" leisure and labour. Jarret contends that this is the process in which the sociality is industrialised, and industry is socialised (Jarrett, 2016: 28). In other words, labour increasingly tends to look less like labour and more like pleasure, and communal social practices become more like labour. Certainly, Angela McRobbie (2015) authenticates the same phenomenon in what she calls the creativisation of culture wherein flows of capital develop a more consensual relationship with practices of labour under the naturalized guise of culture.

What is perhaps more critical than the mere existence of these contradictions is what they signal for the individual producer, which is this: it is difficult to interpret social media within binary oppositions of either a solely Marxist (capture) or capitalist (liberation) agenda. Reductively, a Marxist approach critiques social media video production, counting this labour as part of the social factory. A Marxist approach would emphasise the capture of reproductive labour, and the enlisting of reproductive labour on the part of capital. Marxist approaches like Fuchs (2011) and Jarret (2016) often de-emphasise the individual agency of the creative digital citizen, centring instead the political economy of social media or citing the lack of ownership of the means of production as lack of agency. In contrast, a neoliberal capitalist view over-emphasises the individual video producer's agency, celebrates participatory culture, circulates narratives of media decentralization and contributes to mythologies of democratisation and emancipation

without critiquing the very systems that enable these mythologies. Both of these approaches are valuable when they interface. It is more productive to understand that first, offline vernacular cultures, that is amateur production, distribution and consumption practices, define internet communities in their localities, as illustrated above with Menzi's testimony (Burgess, 2016; Jenkins, 2006). In the case of South Africa, this indicates that offline-online vernacular cultures have a spectrum of so-called socialist (digital Ubuntuism) and Capitalist (digital entrepreneurship) features reflecting the offline socioeconomics, both present and historic, from which the vernacular culture itself stems.

That offline vernacular cultures inform online practices indicates the importance of situating the construction of the creative digital citizen, "technologies of the self" (van Dijck, 2013) and their adjunct modalities within their particular geographic locales. Despite advances in globalisation, the creative digital citizen is not dislocated from their offline contexts but is largely defined by them and emerges as a result of their geographic contexts. In the same way that ignoring the broader socio-political logics associated with and endorsed by the networked publics neglects an opportunity for the preservation of nuance, so too, does a lack of geographic specificity.

Secondly, it is critical to understand the formation of the social network. If as argued above, social networks are indeed a manifestation of the intimate public sphere, trading in affect, authenticity and intimacy, then social networks were formed on the basis of the contradictions that were already present within the intimate public sphere and the culture itself. The culture having established entire ecosystems which capitalize on a spectrum of embedded Marxist and Capitalist logics. Within the platform ecosystem of YouTube for example, there are systems which comprise of various processes. The system of AdSense for example is a purely capitalist system, but it depends on the socialist logic of community labour. It is these systems which possess multiple contradictory philosophies, that have often been reduced to 'gift' and capitalist

economic features (Barbrook, 2000). Lupton and collaborators contend that platform technologies comprise only a facet of a matrix of "systems of monitoring, measuring and regulating the population and subgroups within the population that direct attention at individual behaviours rather than social processes." (2014:38).

Passion vs Work: Converting Immaterial Labour into Material Labour

It cannot be denied that social media has distinctively facilitated greater media distribution - enabling video producers to 'broadcast themselves' assume authorship of their self-narratives and represent themselves as spectrums rather than monoliths – and yet, despite these marked benefits, the participants expressed a staggering conflict between their cultural work as passion, and their work as digital labour.

Generally speaking, there was a stark contrast in attitudes towards labour between those who were full time video producers and those who were not dependent on content creation activities for an income. Menzi, in particular, related the privilege of being financially independent from YouTube, in comparison to Michael who repeatedly articulated anxiety associated with producing content full-time. Michael explained that content production was enjoyable when it was a side hustle, but once converted into a fulltime commercial venture, there were additional financial stresses to be considered. Aggrieved, he described the pseudo-optimistic, aspirational ethos that permeates the platform economy,

> I've heard all these people saying, "Oh no, every day I wake up and I do my dream job" and I feel like something is not working out with you. Yes, you are doing your dream job but what was the journey of getting to that dream job? I know I'm doing my dream job but I'm not there yet. (27, interview).

What the above account evidences is the glorification of the side hustle culture that is inextricably associated with extreme forms of digital labour. Even the terms 'hustle' and

'grind' glorify precarious, perpetual labour. This kind of perpetual labour is linked conceptually to the demands of neoliberal capitalism which seeks to commodify passion into labour. The platform ecosystem then, not only capitalises on, but encourages further, the economic maturation of labour within participatory cultures. That is passion as labour is only useful as insofar as it can be converted into more material forms of labour.

Thando voiced how "exhausting" not only the physical production of content was, but also the psychological implications of her "life being a circus for other people's entertainment." She went on, ardently relating the conflict she felt:

> That kind of affects me. Because that's what you put up, that's what you're doing. So, you can't now on the back burner of that, sit up and say *I am not here for you.* Yes, you are, you are. You're here for my entertainment and I didn't ask you, you just put [your channel] up here for me to watch. (Thando, 30, interview)

This account evidences how in order to successfully participate as video producers, the participants were often required to produce endless hours of labour. This labour was often immaterial or assumed an unquantifiable dimension, such as psychological labour, and as such was disregarded, as Duffy and others (Wauthier *et al*., 2019) have similarly noted. Historical insights into participatory culture (Jenkins *et al*., 2006), often overlook the notion of content creation as labour, conceptualizing it rather as passion. However, passion and labour are not mutually exclusive, with passion being a form of affective, emotional or psychological labour that often precedes other forms of production labour. McRobbie considers this "creativity as a practice of self-romantisation" (2015:33) in which passion becomes the compensation for the precarity associated with creative practices. These consistent paradoxical limits of agency, of liberation and capture, of benefits and drawbacks largely define the experiences of these creative digital citizens, their identity formation and their practices.

To counteract the above labour demands, the participants produced cultural products that they enjoyed, as a foundation. In this way, they maintained a sense of autonomy over their passion and the resulting work they produced. This sense of creative autonomy was central to their psychological well-being and psychological balance. Menzi described the "strenuous" balancing act of maintaining a YouTube channel, having a job and "living [his] life outside of YouTube". With resolution, he explained his manifesto,

> The foundation of [producing a video] is I have to like it, to *really* like what I'm doing and then I'll have no issue with working on it no matter how tiring it is…even if [I] don't get the [viewership] numbers. (Menzi, 26, interview).

It is imperative to note that Menzi understands freedom in what he produces as a resistant device, countering the demands of digital labour. He resolutely signalled that his labour belonged to himself, as it was enacted out of passion. Yet even though his labour was 'self-imposed', it does not discount the reality of 'external' networks at work that structure his tireless labour (Duffy and Hund, 2019), nor the matrixes of neoliberal capitalism within which his cultural labour is embedded, chiefly under the branding of emancipation. Indeed, it rather confirms that precisely *because* the participants internalize their labour through self-narrativizations, their labour still undergoes a process of conversion, largely structured by peripheral influences.

In a similar vein, on a platform predicated on the neoliberal tenets of individualism, personal, sporadic, passion projects were often considered unsuited to the platform, in comparison to regular, structured work directly for communal consumption. Menzi articulated that he originally approached video production with a "self-indulgent, personal" (Menzi, 26, interview) recklessness, producing whatever he felt like. This is evident in the comparison between a personal project like *Broke Niggaz* and the more structured *Microwave Boys*. As

demonstrated in chapter 4, *Broke Niggaz* possesses a chaotic, impromptu, unstructured energy, most of the episodes in the series are titled "films" and each episode is unexpected and unpredictable in style elements, like graphics or editing, and plotline. *Microwave Boys* on the other hand, follows a repetitive structure, a familiar talk-show format, driven by the external events and discussions that take place within the South African public sphere. His initial youthful recklessness has since matured into a conviction about the kind of cultural work he wants to produce. Again, this largely evidences how neoliberal platform cultures seek to organize, commodify, brand and automate immaterial labour, like personal passion, along material economic lines (Banet-Weiser, 2012).

Meanwhile, for Thandi, as a fulltime content creator this desire for production autonomy figured in the manner in which she spread out her sponsored brand content. This had the tripartite effect of not making Thandi appear 'brand promiscuous[35]', helped her maintain her authenticity, as well as afforded her the agency to preserve her personal brand voice. In comparison to the other participants, sponsored brand work introduced a complication in the form of labour, which mediated Thandi's creative digital citizenship. As she noted, somewhat despondent,

> I always try and make sure that there is a bit of me in everything I do and not just giving because when you give so much, you just get to a point where you have nothing more to give… There's no win-win when you're a creative… Sometimes I balance it, sometimes I don't.

Notably, all the participants conceded with the notion that they put something of themselves, their disembodied immaterial essence, their blood, sweat and passion, into the work that they

[35] Brand promiscuity references the ways in which influencers have been critiques for advertising the same product, offered by opposing brands one after the other in a slew of campaigns. For example, if an influencer were to sign onto a campaign promoting a Face-wash or acne cream. The focus is not their fan community, but rather the commercial benefits these opportunities may afford them.

produced, in a testament to affective labour. Thandi became a surrogate for the brand in her capacity as an influencer, adopting a secondary agenda in some instances and conforming her personal voice in the process, a phenomenon that has been noted by other scholars in this area (Hund and McGuigan, 2019; Khamis, Ang, Welling, 2017; Marwick, 2013).

CHAPTER 6: THE PLATFORM SELF: PERFORMING A DIGITAL IDENTITY

The first section of this chapter reports on the associated politics of being online as video producers. In understanding how offline socio-demographics inform online identity formation, these digital citizens unanimously attributed the notion of authenticity as the most important component in their work as video producers. The following looks at the construction of authenticity through its relationship to self-branding, as a means to understand the constructedness of a South African identity. The concept of self-branding ties into notions of the 'empowered' neoliberal self that will be complicated in this section. The second section reflects on the neoliberal entrepreneurial turn of the cultural producer.

"This Thandi Doesn't Go on YouTube": Self-Branding and the Performance of Self

For Alison Hearn, self-branding describes "the self-conscious construction of a meta-narrative and meta image of self through the use of cultural meanings and images drawn from the narrative and visual codes of the mainstream culture industries" (2008:198). Thus, the self-brand is at once personal and self-initiated as well as collaboratively constructed with the use of other cultural meanings in society. But as has been shown throughout this thesis, specificity in this instance is important. Cultural meanings, pertinently, in the South African context, connote a *South African* cultural identity – and in this case how the platform self produces, performs, doubles and intimately extends a version of South African identity online, or an "authentic self-brand" (Banet-Weiser, 2012:73). In other words, self-branding is the manner in which the video producer chooses to style themselves based on a mutually legible cultural language. Self-branding is an assertion of who the video producer is and a mission statement of what they hope to achieve, a digital skin they will grow into, a doctrine to consume and to be consumed, "a saleable image or narrative" (Hearn, 2008:198) which circulates cultural meanings. It is a personal constitution underpinning the kind of philosophies and ethos they

espouse. It does not represent the *greatest* parts of themselves and their product, but the most *strategic*, in terms of what aligns with how they want to be seen. Successful self-branding is the selection of the most deliberate edit, the selfie with a particular filter, the caption that has the effect of producing a spectrum of affective responses within the target audience, ranging from "She understands me, or she is me" to "I want to be her." It is a master signifier that will guide the decisions they make. Ultimately, it was self-branding that guided the performance of self amongst the participants.

There was a consensus amongst the participants to self-brand as *South African*, that is to perform a certain consumable South African identity, whose construction is much easier to produce and perform online than offline. This was expected based on the fact that the participants *are* South African and are largely addressing a South African audience within the transnational space of YouTube. However, what was unexpected is the spectrum in which South Africanness was expressed. For instance, Menzi opposed a deliberateness in terms of performing a forced South African identity,

> Me being myself in itself is unique to South Africa. I don't think we should overthink that. People will still see that… It will be educational to them because you're naturally being yourself and you're being *naturally* South African and to them it's different (26, interview, emphasis my own).

What prompts Menzi, in comparison to Chipkin (2007) to lay claim to the existence of an essential South Africanness? What causes him to disregard the constructed nature of South Africanness, and to see the possibility of a South African identity as being able to be "naturally" performed? Menzi, as a black, Zulu, heteronormative, middle class male, born into a post-1994 South Africa is marked as *relatively* privileged by these signifiers and is thus given the privilege

of being secure in his South African identity[36]. Unlike his parents for example who were not considered citizens under the Apartheid project, unlike a black heterosexual figure who is othered in a heteronormative South African society, unlike a Venda, Tsonga or member of an ethnic minority, unlike a black woman who is denied the full experience of legal citizenship, by being denied gender-based, economic rights (Gouws, 2005) - Menzi, through the above signifiers, possesses enough agency to lay claim to his citizenship and to live it (Gouws, 2005). Thus, the signifiers that cause Menzi to be constructed as a 'natural' South African citizen, are the same signifiers that other those who cannot so easily lay claim to this identity.

Nevertheless, the philosophy of a natural South Africanness is digitally embodied through Menzi's channel, in the unforced passion projects that he undertakes. His online, *tangible*, vlogs have been edited and pieced together and thus they have been constructed. Therefore, these constructed cultural products present an opportunity to be deconstructed, to analyse the *intangible*, 'natural' elements of their construction offline. That is, since a cultural product, like a self-brand or a vlog, is a tangible object whose construction has a beginning and end, its self-initiated, conscious, forced, construction is much more easily seen than an intangible, elusive object like a South African identity. Thus, this kind of unforced explication of South Africanness suggests that even in the mundanity of everyday South African cultural products, there are valuable cultural insights worth excavating. The very fact that South Africanness has become so socially sedimented that its construction is undetected, unopposed and can be seen as natural online and offline, is precisely what makes an analysis into these images critical (Berlant, 1997).

[36] Of course, this is not to say that Menzi is in every instance privileged, which is why I emphasise that his privilege is relative. There are other ways in which Menzi is subjugated as a black male in South Africa. Thus, he may not always feel himself to be South African, despite having these signifiers.

Broke Niggaz, for example, offers new insight into the worldview of young, black, South African men in a natural, unprompted style, of which Menzi is an advocate. This cultural work thus exists as an archive of South African life, like the home videos featuring the mundanity of a baby's first birthday party on YouTube, or a home video capturing inner-city Johannesburg as it was in the transition into the new democracy – these kind of videos perhaps are visual waste for those who lived through that era but are an invaluable reflection of South African life for those who did not. Thus, YouTube vlogs are visual "waste materials of everyday communication [and] experience" (Berlant, 1997:30), their ubiquity and accessibility, their commonness mark them as unimportant. Their ephemerality, their ideological instability, their commonplaceness, their 'camouflaged' ordinary character, their ability to go unseen, be overlooked and to be dismissed by the nation as unimportant is precisely what renders them important (Berlant, 1997). This is precisely what makes them critical evidence of the experience of everyday nation-making and by extension citizenship. They are visual afterthoughts and in being afterthoughts, tells much about the thought itself. They are visual parentheses, and in being parentheses tell us about the main clause. The waste materials thus reveals what product was manufactured, the nation's ideology, and what was left behind after the nation completed its manufacturing process. Waste materials can therefore reveal what is ideologically important to the construct of the nation and what is not (Berlant, 1997).

Thus, the privilege of this kind of mundanity- of Menzi walking through the city, of Thandi catching up with friends, of Thando deciding what to wear to a cultural event - reflects the privilege of being an unmarked individual. It reflects the right to be an ordinary, mundane citizen, to disappear into the shadows of society, to become a fly on the wall, to be *invisible*, unspectacular, unburdened, to not be a body marked black. The black body has often been visually recorded as extraordinary, deviant, 'other', for an archive in which it had no say, by a white heteronormative gaze, a gaze which considered itself unmarked and mundane and

everything else marked. Here, the mundane gaze is returned. This waste material is thus particularly important for those who were not rich enough to document everyday life through home video technology. Thus here, by capturing mundane life, they claim the right to be boring, banal, unmarked and unseen. These vlogs thus recoup the past through the aesthetic technology of the present and in this way, construct another kind of countervisuality.

In contrast to Menzi, who emphasises the 'naturalness' of a South African identity, Michael is more structured and self-conscious in his approach to self-branding. He is more cautious, particular, politically correct about how he produces and performs a South African identity. In particular, his performance of a South African identity is very overt, in comparison to Menzi, who takes for granted a South African identity on a racial basis. Michael has to prove his South Africanness through self-branding, prove that he is "invested in what makes a South African, a South African." For Michael, he indicates that,

> "…I feel like I'm a cultured white male… And when I portray that online by… saying things like "I'm South Africa's favourite White boy" people are like "Oh, wow!" but I'm owning who I am because I can't change it and I'm making it work for the type of content I'm creating..." (interview)

This suggests that Michael employs his social media video to construct a logical fool proof self-narrative in terms of his place and positioning as a young white male in South Africa. Additionally, Michael's pre-occupation with performing particular kinds of 'cultured' whiteness is symptomatic of a post-Apartheid racial anxiety, a nervous condition. To invoke Berlant (1997), Michael represents the "ex-iconic" character, a (white) spectre. White, male and heterosexual, this figure roams the corridors of the new South Africa for both space and place, for relevancy and belonging. His whiteness, the very thing that rendered him invisible, now renders him visible. Due to the Post-Apartheid age, these ex-iconic figures "sense that

they now have identities, when it used to be just other people who had them" (Berlant, 1997: 2). He is now marked where he was once unmarked, rendered visible where once invisible. Thus, his self-branding approach is characterized by an inclusionary nationalism – a nationalism that constructs a space for him to exist, a nationalism that stresses that it is only *this* kind of white South Africanness that will be tolerated in South Africa; a white South Africanness that works in concert with the meta image of the new South Africa. In a turn of events, Michael's performance of race was understood as a visual synecdoche, a part representing the whole, as collective, rather than individual[37]. He doubles as White South Africa and is 'held accountable' at the very most, and has as a backdrop, at the very least, for the social consequences of individuals like Vicky Momberg and Adam Catzavelos[38]. Again, Michael sadly reflected on the kind of constraints he experienced in producing content for South African audiences,

> There is content I would love to create but I know that the South African viewer will think "you're a White male creating this content, you're not allowed to do that" ... so racially things do become constricting and that's fine, I understand it. Even as a male, I know there is content I can't produce simply because I'm a male.

Additionally, this self-branding strategy is one that resists being perceived as a problematic white individual, but as someone who performs an acceptable form of assimilation into new South Africanness. Consequently, he attains the 'right' to be called South African. In this way, he navigates the complexities of the visible white body online. His politically liberal approach

[37] Offline black individuals are often seen collectively, while white individuals are seen as individuals. In Michael's case, his 'whiteness' acts as a disadvantage rather than an advantage for the kind of content he wants to produce.

[38] Both Momberg and Catzavelos were fined for racist hate speech. Catzavelos shared a video of himself on a Greek beach celebrating the absence of black people on that particular beach. He used a racial slur, the K-word, to describe black people. Momberg was accused of hate speech for repeatedly using the same racial epithet on a police officer.

to self-branding is a self-conscious one, fraught with racial unease, and offers insight into the lived reality of a young, white South African male.

"Everything I do is an extension of who I am": Negotiating Offline-Online Identities

While offline, black women do not necessarily enjoy socio-economic importance, online the black female body became implicated in socio-economic networks of platform capitalism. Where there was the capitalist potential for value exchange or conversion, black women and their online social networks were prioritised. One participant for instance, described the economic racial hierarchy within the South African social media economy. The participant noted that brands preferred to work with black women, and at "the bottom of the food pyramid is possibly white males… and males of colour [Coloured and Indian men]."

This relationship cannot be ignored vis-à-vis the mutually constitutive relationship of race and capitalism. Racial capitalism is the process of accumulating wealth and "deriving social and economic value" (Leong, 2013:2) through racial classifications. Hylton White (2020) in mapping out the genealogy of the term argues that 'racial capitalism' first emerged to describe the specific conditions of the race-based capital accumulation of South African Settler Colonialism, but was adapted by Cedric Robinson (1983, cited in White, 2020) to describe the general racial character of modern capitalism. In other words, there is no capitalism without race, and there is no race without capitalism. As Ruth Wilson Gilmore (2019) maintains, capitalism depends on various forms of inequality - inequalities of race, sex and gender - and racism enshrines it. This means that race functions as a technology of capitalism, deployed to legitimise race-based capital accumulation. Where there are capitalist exchanges, there are racial exchanges: these exchanges depend on various forms of acquisition and expansion for white capitalism and exploitation and subjugation for black bodies. If capitalism and race are internal to each other (White, 2020), then even present iterations of capitalism, including digital

iterations, are by no means exempt. Surveillance capitalism, Big Data capitalism and platform capitalism as innovative updates to the software of capitalism, are still ideological manifestations of racial capitalism, and distribute its effects in spectacular ways. Since these innovative forms of capitalism are predicated on processes of datafication and algorithmic architectures, they obscure the biased human contexts of their construction, through the use of algorithms marketed as machine and therefore neutral (Noble, 2018).

Thus, racial capitalism is a productive analytic through which to understand how race functions within the platform economy. On one hand, creative digital citizens are liberated in that they are able to communicate with new audiences on a racial basis. Thandi and Thando, for example, largely attract black women and girls. On the other hand, this digital mode of racial capitalism leads to the commodification of ethnic cultures and the flattening of racial identities, histories and subjectivities into a digital data commodity (Fuchs and Chandler, 2019). Digital racial capitalism thus derives economic value from racial identities and racial hierarchies of inequality, such as through police surveillance technologies and economic redlining, whilst denying that it does so (Noble, 2018). Whist denying, too, the existence of racially biased algorithms based on embodiments, of race, gender, sex and ability (Noble, 2018). As will be seen next, embodiments of race, gender and class affected the participants' performance of authenticity online.

I Can't Fake My Aura or My Spirit: The Conflict of Being Authentic

The quest for authenticity often came into conflict with the desire to grow as a video producer, in line with YouTube's visibility metrics of views, likes, comments and subscribers. Some of the participants expressed a compromising of their authenticity in order to take advantage of a

trend, in order to increase or maintain viewership or even to be seen as "brand attractive.[39]" One of the participants explained the quandary that they found themselves in, when they were on the brink of a breakup with their partner. They had previously filmed many videos of them together and wanted to publish the videos on their channel to retain their audience. They went on, and almost disbelievingly, reflected on how they sold "an image to the world that [was] a lie".

At the same time however, Thando, for example, enthusiastically reported that her authenticity was a large part of her presence on YouTube and that it would be difficult to be inauthentic and maintain an audience:

> If there's anything that's a running thread in my comments section, [it's] "I love your personality, love your energy, I love your authenticity." That's because this - I can't fake my aura or my spirit […] this is just how I am. (Thando, 30, Interview)

Thandi expressed a similar sentiment: after she experienced a serious issue with her skin, Thandi decided to take a break from content creation to allow her skin to heal and shared her decision on her social media. The response was overwhelming. She reflected, with a sense of disbelief in her tone, "I didn't think it would get that much attraction and people would be sending so many messages and DMs[40] saying they relate" (Thandi, 27, interview). The above testimonies exemplify the strategic use of authenticity here as an affective currency that largely characterises platform interactions (Duffy and Hund, 2019). Notice how it is the women whose

[39] Since the South African YouTube community was financially underdeveloped in comparison to Global North communities, brands were not as willing to sponsor or partnering with South African YouTubers. This contributed to a cycle of financial precarity for the YouTubers. As such, video producers had to put in the effort to appear' brand attractive', to align with the values of particular brands in hopes of securing the kind of brand partnerships they desired. Additionally, they had to *remain* brand attractive to maintain these partnerships once they had secured them. This process required extending themselves financially.

[40] A DM is a Direct Message sent directly to a user's inbox, rather than a message left as a comment. DM's are usually reserved for more private interactions. YouTube does not have a DM feature, but other social networks like Instagram and Twitter make use of this function. The latter social networking sites can be said to engender more intimate connections in this regard.

sense of authenticity is deeply rooted in an intimacy and vulnerability. The women are comfortable trading in intimacy, and their audiences as Thando illustrates above, are comfortable demanding it.

"I Have a Story in My Spirit": Constructing Authenticity on YouTube

Significantly, it was through a personalised articulation of authenticity that the video producers were able to reconcile the tensions between the liberation-capture dialectic and still maintain a sense of selfhood. Thando related the conflict in balancing her authenticity mandate and her channel analytics[41]. With a sense of disappointment, she intimated that she preferred to tell stories from her personal experience, however now she might have to "focus on what's trending":

> For the most part, most of my videos, it's like I have a story in my spirit and I wanna tell it... But now it's become a thing of, you also want to look at the numbers [the analytics]. […] I would prefer not to and prefer to focus on the creative side of things... (Thando, 30, interview).

Additionally, even though the participants' personal authenticity was increasingly obscured and informed by platform metrics, they still elected to be guided by a personal sense of authenticity or "a story in my spirit", as an inner rubric. This kind of register, the phrasing of "a story in my spirit" or purpose-driven work additionally corresponds to a metaphysical 'internalising' of authenticity. Authenticity appears to be an internal, spiritual process, rather than a well-thought-out choice or a strategic action. This lexicon has the effect of mystifying authenticity and the creative process, essentially eliding the affective labour of authenticity.

[41] YouTube provides channel analytics in the YouTube Creator Studio where YouTubers are able to track various metrics for all their videos. These metrics include views, average watch time (the average time an audience watches a video, subscribers, subscriber to non-subscriber watch ratio (if the people who are watching the videos are subscribed or not), geography, traffic source and estimated revenue.

Additionally, Thando attempts "to put disclaimers and be as transparent as [she] possibly can be" in order to avoid her fan community having the incorrect perception of her. Again, these are strategies to maintain authenticity, to equalise difference between them and their audience and ultimately, to be read as relatable, to an extent, and therefore easily consumable. As she puts it:

> I shoot news, so that means I travel a lot, so don't think I'm travelling all over the place because I have money… it's because of work, so I'll put that there. I don't want you feeling bad, "Oh, I wish I could travel as much as Thando does," [...] No, Honey, I don't have that kind of money (Thando, 30, interview).

In this regard, authenticity produces a dual effect - on one hand, it homogenises - it nullifies difference between the audience and the producer. At the same time, it feeds into a logic of neoliberal aspiration: "If she is the same as me, then I *too* can easily acquire what she has acquired." Of course, due to the invisibility of both labour and capital acquisition, this process appears effortless and easily attainable to the audience.

The participants also indicated that being authentic served an additional purpose – the need to remain 'true' or relatable, and to not represent a false image of themselves was a means to remain grounded. Thandi, for example, thoughtfully mused, that her personality did not change, "So for me like, it's not a certain persona per se, it's my personality. I just dial it up or dial to whichever level I need it to be for that particular video" (30, interview). Michael equally attested to being "the same person regardless if there is a camera in front of me or not. I might talk in a little bit more of a TV-phone-call way, but I'm the same person." (27, interview). And finally, as Thando put it, "More than not selling a false story to the people, [being authentic] keeps me in check and not to lose touch with my own reality." In this regard, what could being inauthentic mean, especially within a South African context? Take note of the lexicon Thando

employs, and the way she frames and reiterates her economic situation as a form of authenticity – the relationship of authenticity and performances of blackness will be complicated next.

The Platform Self and The Micro-Celebrity

Thando offered how she had become more cognisant of her external physical appearance and behaviour whenever she left her home. She revealed that she did not enjoy that development, but that she struggled to find a balance between allowing her community into her life and maintaining her personal freedom. She expounded, "I wanna continue to live my life… I don't like the fact that people have that much access into your life so much..." In the same breath, she acknowledged that building a following was dependent on her audience knowing who she was, which in itself was dependent on the relinquishing of some of her personal freedom (Thando, 30, interview).

Thandi articulated a similar issue to Thando, in that they were both unable to exercise as much personal freedom as they did before YouTube fame. They also often feared being judged negatively if they did not perform their "dialled up" online selves when they met their followers offline. Thando and Thandi's concerns are characteristic of the rise of the micro-celebrity: micro-celebrity is a term used to describe "the state of being famous to a niche group of individuals, such as individuals online communities or in communities of practice (Marwick, 2013:3). The side effects of micro-celebritydom largely ranged from community-related issues to mental health issues. This development is particularly fascinating within the South African context because it indicates that social media for a large group of individuals is increasingly 'parallel' to the power of television[42], in that the audiences gain similar uses and gratifications from social media (Katz, 1959). The uses and gratification model is valuable in understanding

[42] In fact, for many of the younger generation, social media networks such as TikTok, YouTube and Snapchat comprise 'television'.

what benefits audiences derive from the consumption of media products. The model was first applied to a television environment but is useful when applied to social media use. While television and film celebrities have traditionally been largely inaccessible, social media has produced a space where celebrities can, and certainly to some extent, *have to*, engage in social media use. Traditionally, the inaccessibility of film and television celebrities increased their appeal to their audiences. In contrast, social media celebrities operate on a different, overriding logic of visibility and accessibility that has now come to be expected of traditional media celebrities. By the very nature of interacting on 'social' media, there is an implicit pre-requisite for media producers to engage in "practices of micro-celebrity" (Khamis *et al.*, 2017:5). That is to be sociable, visible and constantly accessible, and to engage in the affective work of authenticity, vulnerability and intimacy with the very audiences on whom their micro-celebrity status depends (Marwick, 2013; Senft, 2013). For YouTube producers, the intimate nature of social media establishes a more personal relationship, a seemingly more equal and attainable relationship than that of the traditional celebrity relationship. These visibility practices associated with micro-celebrity constitute what have been termed surveillance imaginaries. Surveillance imaginaries are mutual agreements, expectations and commitments to be visible, to be seen in everyday life (Lyon, 2017). These imaginaries produce the environment which normalise the surveillance practices that underpin the micro-celebrity, and in so doing reproduce its effects (Lyon, 2017).

Deliberating on the conflicts inherent in her 'new-found fame', the conflict of offline performance articulated itself when Thando acknowledged that she was relocating but needed to maintain socio-economic consistency between her offline life and the online performance. She acknowledged that there was a certain desire to appear "cooler?" or wealthier than one really was. She continued,

> I can't afford to stay in Northcliff now and it's like aw, damn… I've been toying with the idea of just getting a house in Cosmo or Soweto or whatever the case is… 'cause you can't now think of just your real life, you have to integrate it with your demographic there on your socials (Thando, 30, interview).

For Thando, relocating to Soweto or Cosmo would present a socio-economic dissonance, as Northcliff is situated in the suburbs of Johannesburg North, an easily identifiable marker of *established* middle to upper middle-classness, Northcliff connotes privilege, a proximity to whiteness and therefore, within the South African historical context, wealth. In stark contrast, largely Soweto and Cosmo may be associated with *aspirational* lower to middle-classness for Thando and her audience.

Thus, since the online self is premised upon performance, and the repetition of that performance (the self-brand) it is replete with clues as to how race and class are performed in the nation. The online self visually amplifies and agitates the tensions that exist in performing a black middle classness (Canham and Williams, 2016). Two forms of blackness emerge as dominant in the post-Apartheid period and at present compete with each other for importance into the national imaginary. The first, a blackness associated with economic struggle, a socialist blackness or a communal blackness (Khunou, 2015). One only has to look at the prestige enjoyed by the tripartite alliance between the African National Congress (the ANC), the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and the South African Communist Party (SACP) to witness that this blackness maintains legitimacy by remaining attached to national narratives of economic struggle (Ngoma, 2015). The second blackness is an aspirant blackness of neoliberal capitalism that comes to be associated with the new black middle class and the policies[43] of redress that 'made' them (Ngoma, 2015). These tensions are evident in the present

[43] As mentioned earlier, the rise of the Post-Apartheid Black middle class has been directly attributed to the redistributive policies of the ANC such as affirmative action.

political parties – Economic Freedom Fighters and the ruling party, the ANC. EFF claim to fight for economic freedom for all (socialist blackness), and in so doing emphasise that the ANC does not seek to liberate black people, but only seeks to enrich itself (liberal blackness)[44]. Thus, Thando's choice exemplifies the national discursive tensions that exists in performing particular kinds of blackness: a socialist blackness as a symbol of authenticity, as a form of racial fidelity and a neoliberal blackness as a symbol of aspiration. In other words, she has to balance the tensions between appearing "too white" and therefore being unrelatable and unattainable and being too black, therefore not aspirational enough. Thus, this evidences how offline socio-demographics shape online performance through the logic of liberation and capture.

6.5 DIGITAL ENTREPRENEUR AS CULTURAL ENTREPRENEUR

Entrepreneurial Language as Self-Amplification

Digital entrepreneurship practices are indicative of online participatory culture increasingly being 'facilitated', structured and mobilised by neoliberalism. This is particularly interesting as it evidences economic flows or economic influence into so-called 'pure' participatory cultures or cultural work, that are so-called untouched by capital exchange (Banet-Weiser, 2012; Barbrook, 2000). Surprisingly, each participant employed business or strategic acumen, in particular, the use of rhetoric like "strategy, branding, career and business" in relation to their cultural work. For Thandi and Thando, their strategy was particularly embodied in the kind of demographic niche they target - black women of a particular age and class. Thandi commented that she was initially clueless about video production, but she began anyway and figured out what she needed to learn. She stressed that one needed to be a "go-getter" because

[44] This dialectic further expresses through Cyril Ramaphosa and his connection to the Marikana Massacre. As the ex-head of the National Union of Mine Workers South Africa (NUMSA), Rampahosa's allegiance was supposed to be with the mineworkers and their demands. Yet his shares in Lonmin, and his as a capitalist clash.

"if you want something you need to be willing to work hard enough to have it." Notice the emphasis on a sense of self-responsibility and the common-sense externalizing of success as the sole purchase of the individual, rather than socio-economic vectors or environment, reflected in her statement. Thandi's comment evidences a prolific entrepreneurial mindset amongst the participants occasioned by neoliberal capitalism. In offering an exposition on neoliberalism's impact on the individual Peter Kelly concludes that,

> [Neoliberalism] emerges, not only as a means of governing the State, the economy, and civil society, but also as a means of governing in these domains via the rational, autonomous, responsible behaviours and dispositions of a free, prudent, active Subject: A Subject we can identify as the entrepreneurial self (2006: 18).

Kelly's exposition reveals that neoliberalism conceives of the individual as a free, self-governing agent. Individuals are encouraged to think of their lives as "projects that require entrepreneurial investment of time and energy" (Ventura, 2012 cited in Lupton, 2015). As previously discussed, digital citizenship is activated to a large extent by socio-economic networks which are often concealed under the guise of neoliberal emancipatory logics, values systems and attitudes (Gajjala, 2013). The digital ecosystem, and YouTube in particular, by visibly measuring views, likes and subscribers, by encouraging YouTubers to labour towards more, emphasises aspiration, prioritises self-governance and growth. This is similar to the neoliberal state and the contribution of individual self-enterprising workers to contribute to a nation's GDP (Gross Domestic Product) or 'national income'. That the platform demands this level of interaction, of constant work, of self-enterprise reflects on the 'ideal' behaviour of a digital citizen within this digital nation-state.

Similarly, even though Menzi considered his work personal, he frequently made mention to the strategy he deployed in terms of content upload times and content length and the importance

of research for his content production process. Menzi also directly related the strategy necessary in being validated by external stakeholders like brands,

> Brands are not going to find you and discover you; you must find a way to get their attention… So, don't wait, have a strategy. You know it's not just about your good work. [There are] plenty of people creating good work who don't make money (Menzi, interview).

Other participants like Michael, employed explicit business acumen language in articulating their channel mission and goals. As a fulltime YouTuber, he introspectively commented that his major concerns were finances, "growing [his] business and employing new staff or getting new clients." (Michael, 27, interview). Importantly, at the time, Michael was a fulltime YouTuber and had a relatively small following, despite having been producing videos on and off for almost a decade. That Michael was contemplating "growing his business and employing new staff," reveals the extent to which he believed that, despite repeated setbacks and inconsistent success, it was personally contingent upon him, upon his work ethic, to become a successful fulltime YouTuber. In contrast, Thando related the conditions under which she would quit her job and begin YouTube fulltime, "[If] YouTube [was] already bringing in the revenue, and now I'm realising I could get more [revenue] if I had more time. But just *nje*, as like a start up with 7000 subscribers?"

This logic of a "7000 subscriber" start-up, my business and hiring more employees is suggestive of the aspirational mechanisms of neoliberal capitalism, that work to operationalise leisure into profit. Even more significantly, the use of the term "start-up" indexes an awareness of both the entrepreneurial labour involved in social media video production and the adequate response the platform demands for success on the platform. The platform is for "go-getters" as Thandi remarked, and therefore it excludes those who are not hustlers or self-starters. This kind

of language use signals that what is occurring amongst the producers cannot merely be articulated as participatory culture alone. Such developments prompt scholars like Sarah Banet-Weiser to insist that increasingly, "cultural participation is only legible in the language of business" (2012: 89) and through the grammar of individualism. This language evidences a conceptual progression or bleeding of economic, marketing and business terms into the everyday cultural arena occasioned by neoliberal capitalism that evidence a larger phenomenon. In particular, the language use within these accounts evidence the ways the participants have internalized the neoliberal economic imperatives of the platform. That is, they are actively engaged in and interacting with the socio-economic norms of the social economy of social media as more than digital citizens, but as entrepreneurial subjects or *digital entrepreneurs*. These interactions are directly mediating and standardising the ways in which they perform their digital identities. This very strategic level of participation is coded into the platform, and subsequently participation is determined by this neoliberal entrepreneurial code (Lupton, 2015; Elias and Gill, 2018).

"The World Is Your Oyster, You Can Do and Be Anything You Want, Go Be It!": Constructing the Neoliberal Subject

The construct of the present digital citizen, the digital entrepreneur and the millennial are significantly interlinked identities across socio-demographic lines. That is, being millennials who exhibit a certain cosmopolitan, techno-savvy orientation, locates the producers in a position of socio-demographic and ideological privilege. With a sense of excitement and exclusivity, Michael explained how he felt millennials possessed entrepreneurial qualities, noting that ideal millennials are "very side-hustle driven, are about breaking the law and breaking the traditional, are very digitally advanced… [and have been] born into a digital revolution..." (Michael, 27, interview). In order to be considered either a millennial or digital

entrepreneur, one would have to have access to certain socio-demographic privileges, such as education, income or class. In this sense, millennial and digital entrepreneur become a valuable shorthand for socio-demographic privilege, as these categories are essentially attitudes in conversation with socioeconomics. Thus, these terms describe what is essentially a neoliberal subjectivity.

In contrast to the plethora of access, Michael alluded to, Thando explained the attendant complexities of participating in the information age. Anxiously, she reflected on the responsibility of freedom engendered by unlimited access to information. She noted:

> We're burdened with so much freedom to do things, that we don't know how to take responsibility for that freedom and it's wild, and it's burdensome for me… the world is your oyster, you can do and be anything you want, go be it! Oh, but which one? I don't know (Thando, 30, interview).

Importantly, Menzi reflected on the privileges attendant with millennialism or a neoliberal identity when he explained that not everyone possesses the "freedom to exercise choice," that he was given the privilege through good schooling and that "I'm sure there are people my age still doing what people back in the day would do" (Menzi, 26, interview).

What this indicates is that there are links between the neoliberal age of individualism which enables, encourages and structures particular self-governing modes of thinking, being and doing, and capitalizing upon, and ultimately constructs particular global neoliberal identities which could only possibly be enacted through global, social media, participatory cultures. That is, this kind of neoliberal subject is disseminated through the seemingly innocuous, yet reproductive, host of creative cultures. Thus, an ideological subject is produced through non-ideological means. These factors in turn, come together with socio-demographic capital to produce a particular kind of digital citizen - one that is primed to be global in outlook and

economically self-sufficient. Stated explicitly, these digital citizens as ‘empowered’, multiple-choice, *digital entrepreneurs* are the ideal responses of neoliberalism.

Through platform participation, neoliberal platform cultures break down individual identity in order to reconstruct a generic, global, digital citizen, decontextualized from their territorial source, to recontextualize within the context of a general neoliberal, cosmopolitan platform community. A cosmopolitan individual is one who "responds creatively to shifts in patterns of human interaction generated by migration, rapid economic and political change, and new communication technologies" (Hansen, 2010:1). The result is that the participants engaged with the platform as community members or as generic digital citizens. Menzi articulated this point when he reported that he sees YouTube as more of a community project than an individualistic journey:

> Individualism is kind of futile in these spaces. You just have to contribute, literally, no matter how big you get really, you’re just a contributor… contributing to something that's potentially bigger than you (26, interview).

This account reflects the notion that these platforms act as supra nations. That is, YouTube and other platforms function as both nations and states above traditional nations. While Chipkin (2007) argues that the nation preceded the state, since the nation was formed in and through “nationalist struggle for liberation and state power” (2), Berlant argues that the nation is a set of affective, ideological symbols, and is therefore an affect-making machine. Phrased differently, the nation trades in affect, while the state trades in policymaking and in the enforcing of that policy. If, according to Chipkin (2007) and Berlant (1997), a nation is an ideology machine, and the state the policy-making component of the nation, platforms like YouTube function as nation-states. They are nations in the sense that they encourage, construct and reproduce value systems, (van Dijck, 2016) ideologies and culture (Chipkin, 2007). In this

case, the ideology and culture they are producing is based upon neoliberal values of individualism. They are states to the extent that they construct and deploy their own policies and regulations, predicated on existing hegemonies, since as corporations, they themselves are embedded in existing hegemonies offline. As such, despite claims of democratising difference and capital acquisition through neoliberal aspirational logics, by virtue of neoliberal replication and socio-economic exclusion they reinstate the "[im]material infrastructure of inequality" (Wauthier *et al*., 2019:14).

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATION, AND IMPLICATIONS

7.1 Introduction

This dissertation comprised of seven chapters. Chapter 1 sought to present an overview of the conceptual problem of creative digital citizenship and the significance of the research from a digital humanities perspective. Chapter 2 provided a review of the historical literature on digital citizenship, locating creative digital citizenship within an understanding of the practices of digital labour and participatory culture. It introduced the concept of participatory culture and considered the broader question of neoliberal logics and their place in the digital economy. Chapter 3 sought to establish justification for a multi-modal qualitative approach, which involved in-depth semi-structured interviews as well as a visual description. The chapter additionally described the issues encountered in offline-online research. Chapter 4 introduced the participants and their backgrounds and presented a description of their online identities, and a visual description of their YouTube videos and YouTube home pages. Chapter 5 and 6 encompassed the research findings and analysis of the qualitative study. It also articulated the various kinds of contradictions associated with the production of platform publics.

Finally, this chapter presents the core conclusions of the study based on the research questions; provides a summary of the work of the dissertation; considers the limitations of the study and concludes by offering recommendations for future research into creative digital citizenship.

RESEARCH QUESTION 1: What factors affect the digital citizen and their participation in terms of social media video production?

The study found that there were multiple intersectional factors that affected the participation of the creative digital citizen in terms of social media video production. Most significantly, this kind of participation is meaningfully linked to broader socio-economic environments. In particular, the South African economic context which engendered a South-African specific inflection of neoliberalism resulted in a burgeoning middle class, high youth unemployment and certain multimedia access, such as internet and subscription TV. This extends an understanding of the digital citizen from the perspective of Mossberger *et al*. (2008). While this can be read as suggesting that social media video participation is solely the purchase of middle-class privilege, it is more accurately understood as being available to individuals who can *access* middle class social capital. Additionally, these patterns of participation confirm that digital inequality is an extension and expression of broader templates of social inequality (Benjamin, 2019; Noble, 2018; Nakamura, 2013). Moreover, psychological theories demonstrate that middle class privilege includes a middle-class desire, which resulted in the participants wanting to express and represent themselves differently. The 'democratisation' and 'extensive' availability of social media resulted in an opportunity for them to represent themselves through varied expressions, countering the representation on existing mainstream multimedia.

RESEARCH QUESTION 2: What local and global factors affect the video content these digital citizens produce?

Despite the participants possessing various kinds of middle-class social capital, the data revealed that the participants still experienced limitations to some extent by the South African environment. Largely, financial restrictions played a significant role in the kind of cultural publics the participants produced, with many imagining the kind of content they would produce

if financial resources, such as crew and equipment, were no object. In some cases, financial restrictions were evidenced in the low budget shooting style, as well as explicitly mentioned in the description of the videos.

The binary of liberation and capture was a useful analytic to understand how engaging in platform work both liberated and captured the participants. Through the platform, the participants were able to circulate their content to greater audiences and creative expression, but as a result had to engage in various forms of digital labour, experienced a restriction of freedoms, or subjected themselves to various forms of algorithmic surveillance.

In contradiction to claims of the internet, and social media, functioning as a post-geographical location, the participants not only felt the influence, but the reproduction of Global North ontologies. A Global South-Global North geopolitics of knowledge and labour was evident in the YouTube platform environment. Significantly, the Global North evidenced a more advanced ecosystem in two ways - first, this region was cited for possessing more digitally literate communities. Second, and as a result, platforms like YouTube were more fiscally supportive of video producers in these locations than in South Africa. The support was evidenced through Official YouTube sponsored events, YouTube's Partner Programme and Adsense, with participants noting how few South African video producers were engaged in content creation fulltime. The deficiency of Platform-initiated fiscal support informed the development of the South African social media brand ecosystem, in which some participants depended on external brand sponsorship to remain afloat. Moreover, it is these brand sponsorships and conforming to the notion of "brand attractiveness" that also influenced the kind of videos the participants produced.

The participants also conformed to the algorithmic demands of the platform, by analysing analytics. In fact, the study found that despite their resistance, video content was increasingly informed by an analytical approach.

The economic maturity of the Global North YouTube communities additionally forced South African video producers to capitalise on South African-specific content, in which they felt they had a distinct advantage over their Global North counterparts. Though participants resisted the need to be influenced by platform metrics, such as viewership and user engagement, it was incredibly difficult. Some were also influenced by the potential for views due to past video success, community engagement and trends. Again, the presence of the Global North often set the tone for video trends, and on a larger scale evidenced a template for economic movements within the platform – such as the rise of the digital entrepreneur.

RESEARCH QUESTION 3: What kinds of ideas does the term "digital citizen" amongst our particular target group mobilise?

The term 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 of these 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. Due to the effects of globalisation, such as the 'democratisation of information', the terms digital citizen and millennial were additionally characterised as an embodiment of unlimited choice. As such, notions of digital citizenship mobilised the idea that the digital citizen fully matured is the digital entrepreneur, being able to fulfill platform capitalism's requirement to monetise their online interactions and personal networks.

Despite hoping that there would be some kind of resistance in the practices of commercial creative digital citizenship, this particular group did not exhibit much resistance. Though they took breaks from interacting with social media to recoup their mental health and worked on passion projects as a means of taking back power, there were very few acts of consolidated activism.

RESEARCH QUESTION 4: How do these digital citizens conceive of their video production work?

The production of platform cultural publics by digital citizens is a complex cultural process and can best be understood through the concept of "double movements of liberation and capture" (Deleuze, 1989: 68, cited in Hintz *et al.*, 2017). I appropriate McLuhan's view of self-amplification and self-amputation in conversation with Deleuze to explain how their labour embodies elements of both self-amplification and self-amputation. That is, the participants were able to employ platforms like YouTube to amplify their voices and to construct counter-visualities, and in this way they self-amplified. However, they self-amputated by conforming to a self-brand, colluding in the processes of datafication, conforming to an algorithmic template and ultimately, by self-surveilling. Their consistent engagement in various forms of digital labour, from psychological labour to financial labour, also constituted self-amputation.

There was an evident conflict between the material digital labour involved in video production work and the immaterial purpose-driven, passion that motivated them to start YouTube in the first place. Even within video production work that was primarily for the purposes of expression, there was still affective forms of labour involved.

Some participants conceived of their social media work as fulltime jobs or as a career, whereas others saw it as a community project, as a sisterhood, as a type of social activism, as a counter-visuality or a combination of both.

RESEARCH QUESTION 5: How does being a digital citizen impact the offline lived experiences of these individuals?

Participants reported the effects of what I view as their micro-celebrity status, in which they experienced some of the benefits and drawbacks associated with traditional celebrities. On one hand, I found that participants benefitted financially, in varying degrees, from their video production work – through brand sponsorships or events, for example. On the other hand, the offline lives of the participants were largely structured around their online lives as video producers. Additionally, the aspirational logics of a neoliberal society translated online – in terms of the constant digital labour they produced, the content they created, the time and finances expended to maintain a self-image. As a direct result, participants struggled to balance their offline online commitments and experienced a decline in the quality of freedom and mental health.

7.2 Conclusions on research problem

The initial overarching aim of this study was to produce a critical understanding of the South African, millennial, digital citizen who resides in Johannesburg, South Africa and how they produce video content for public consumption.

Through the study, I intended to complicate the definition of digital citizenship to acknowledge the ways in which socio-demographic factors contributed to the identity and practices of individuals online. These socio-demographic factors included race, gender, geographical location, age, class, and education. Thus, these elements revealed the constructed nature of national identity offline. Additionally, I was invested in the capitalist context of platform processes and what these did to communities of practice. The study concluded that socio-demographics played a critical role in the construction of creative digital citizens and the ways in which they were able to both produce and maintain the production of cultural publics. Most

significantly, I 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. These socio-economic factors were found to be both local, such as structural issues of internet access, human capital and resources, and global, such as the impact of Global South-Global North relations. This neoliberal capitalist logic of liberation and capture informed creative digital citizenship practices at every level.

Through the literature review (Chapter 2) and the analysis of the data (Chapter 5 and 6), the participants were shown to experience a conflict between the increasing commodification of their labour, aspirational discourses and their work as passion. The study established that creative digital citizens employed the production of cultural publics to express themselves, construct counter-publics or counter visuality, and to access and establish communities.

In terms of the core aims and objectives of the study, the study managed to contribute to an understanding of the digital citizen and extend Mossberger et al.'s (2008) and Isin and Ruppert's (2015) conception of the digital citizen. This was achieved by situating the digital citizen within the broader matrix of platform capitalism and datafication flows. It was also achieved by foregrounding both the socio-political and geo-political undercurrents associated with creative digital citizenship practices. Additionally, this study contributed to an understanding of the complexities and specificities inherent in the study of Global South vernacular cultures, particularly in positioning the genealogy of these creative digital citizens

at the intersection of Global North and Global South platform politics, and globalized technological flows. It established that the digital citizen cannot be disembedded from offline socio-economic logics of capitalism and its attendant expression in neoliberalism. Additionally, concluding that the socio-cultural structuring of South African neoliberal capitalism is in constant conversation with the platform, the society and its participants and it is this that has informed a platform culture. Thus, online practices need to be re-assessed in terms of the South African context, as well as located within their embedded relationship to the digital economy.

7.3 Limitations of Study

Though the study presents interesting research findings, this study, as all studies do, possesses limitations. An acknowledgement of these limitations will aid in better framing and interpreting the research results. As such, this section presents the limitations that confronted the study, with particular reference to the methodological approach and research design.

Research Design

The study was limited by time constraints in the execution of the methodology. First, the methodology had indicated the desire to observe the participants in their process of creation, or said another way, behind the scenes. Unfortunately, due to the haphazard schedule of the participants and the time limitation of this dissertation, the possibility of undertaking observations proved impractical.

Secondly, the study was limited by the participants who did not possess a Facebook account. As the study was initially focused on Facebook as a platform, the number of participants who owned and regularly used their Facebook account proved too inconsequential for significant research into this area.

Sample Group

Since the prospective candidates were recruited by both email and social media platforms, multiple prospective candidates disregarded the online communication or failed to respond in a timeous manner. This resulted in a small convenient sample size. As such, the sample size is small in comparison to the number of social media video producers in Johannesburg, South Africa.

Though the sample size was satisfactory enough to generate thick, qualitative data; demonstrate conceptual relationships; map significant phenomena and explore core underlying discourses, the small sample size presents an issue of representability and therefore compromises the generalisability of the results. Stated differently, the sample is not representative of the entire South African YouTube community and research results must be applied with caution.

7.4 Recommendation for Future Research Within Creative Digital Studies

The aim of this study was to extend an understanding of creative digital citizens and provide an understanding of how they navigate the production of publics. The following section outlines recommendations for future research into the study of creative digital citizenship and related areas.

First, the research was limited by its socio-economic scope in that it only examined participants who all broadly identified as middle class. The research findings evidenced a positive correlation between middle class privileges, digital citizenship, and the construction of a globalised neoliberal subject. Largely, the study put forth that the burgeoning new Black middle class of the 1990s created a socio-economic moment, which had positive consequences for the black participants in this study, in particular. What challenges might others beyond the middle-class category experience as digital citizens? Further research into the practices of

digital citizenship could explore creative digital citizens from a range of socio-economic contexts, such as a lower income bracket.

Secondly, as this research included both individuals who identify as men and women, further research can explore how various groups in particular perform their gender and race identities through digital means – such as how black women or members of the LGBTQI+ community perform their identities.

As mentioned in the Methodology Chapter (Chapter 3), I occupied the researcher-participant position in this context, I would recommend a researcher who is not part of the YouTube community of practice (Wenger, 2010) to undertake the same research.

This dissertation adopted a critical approach to the conflicts in the present models of neoliberal capitalism within the digital economy. Another strategy could consider alternatives to a neoliberal capitalist ontology and an alternative to platform capitalism as a theoretical framework.

This research approach was largely dependent on Global North bodies of work and modes of being, due to the scarcity of research in this area in Southern Africa. Again, 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.

Similarly, as the Eastern Asian nations possess their own platform societies, such as Youkou Tudou, it would be interesting to undertake research into how users in so-called Communist

nations form digital identities, particularly in the face of capitalist logics and navigate the conflicts within their own contexts.

This study investigated the online identity formations of video producers aged 24-30. A younger group of digital citizens particularly age 16-18 would make for a fascinating study as they represent a group that were ‘born’ into social media platforms. Further enquiry may seek to undertake a thorough cross-platform study of YouTube, Instagram and Tik Tok content creators and specify the differences each ecosystem offers.

REFERENCE LIST

Adebesin, F. & Kotze, P. & Gelderbloom, H. 2010. Impact of usability of efforts to bridge the digital divide. [O]. Available: www.developmentinformatics.org/conferences/ 2010/papers/adebesin.pdf. [16 June 2018].

Abowitz, K. K & Harnish, J. 2006. Contemporary discourses of citizenship. *Review of Educational Research*, 76 (4): 653–690.

Alhojailan, M.I. 2012. Thematic Analysis a Critical Review of its Process and Evaluation. *West East Journal of Social Sciences* 1: 39-47.

Andrejevic, M, Banks, J, Campbell, JE. 2014. Participations: dialogues on the participatory promise of contemporary culture and politics. *International Journal of Communication* 8: 1089–1106.

Angwin, J., Larson, J., Mattu, S., & Kirchner, L. 2016. Machine bias. Pro Publica. [O]. Available https://www.propublica.org/article/machine-bias-risk-assessments-in-criminal-sentencing. [16 June 2018].

Asen, R. 2000. Seeking the "Counter," in *Counterpublics. Communication Theory* 10(4), 424–446.

Bakardjieva, M. 2005. *Internet Society: the Internet in everyday life*. London: Sage.

Banaji, S, Buckingham, D, & Hirzalla, F, van Zoonen, L. 2009. CivicWeb – synthesis of results and policy outcomes. [O]. Available http://civicweb.eu. [10 March 2018].

Banet-Weiser, S. 2012. *Authentic™: The politics of ambivalence in a brand culture*. New York: New York University Press.

Barbrook, R. 1998. The High-Tech Gift Economy. *First Monday* 3 (12 – 7). December [O]. Available http://subsol.c3.hu/subsol_2/contributors3/barbrooktext2.html (Accessed: 19 January 2020).

Beck, U. 2002. The cosmopolitan society and its enemies. *Theory, Culture, and Society*, 19 (1-2), 17-44.

Benjamin, R. 2019. *Race After Technology*. Medford: Polity Press.

Benkler, J. 2006. *The wealth of networks: how social production transforms markets and freedom*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Bennett, W. L. 2008. "Changing citizenship in the digital age". In Bennett, W.L (ed.) *Civic Life Online. Learning How Digital Media Can Engage Youth*: 1-24. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Berlant, L. 1997. *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Berlant, L. 2008. *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Bird, E. 2011. Are we all produsers now? *Cultural studies* 25(4-5): 502-516.

Blank, G. 2013. Social stratification and content production: a response. *Information, Communication & Society* 16(6): 999–1004.

Bosch, T. 2015. Twitter activism and youth in South Africa: the case of #rhodesmustfall, *Information, Communication & Society* 20(2): 221-232.

Bosch, T. 2017. Pictures, protests and politics: mapping twitter images during South Africa's fees must fall campaign. *African Journalism Studies* (38) 2: 71-89.

boyd, d. 2001. Sexing the Internet: Reflections on the role of identification in online communities. Paper presented at Sexualities, Media, Technologies, University of Surrey [O]. http://www.danah.org/papers/SexingTheInternet.conference.pdf. [September 30, 2018].

boyd, d. M., & Ellison, N. B. 2008. Social Network Sites: definition, history, and scholarship. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 13:210-230.

Brügger, N & Milligan, I (eds.). 2019. *The SAGE Handbook of Web History*. London: Sage Publications.

Bucher, T. 2015. Networking, or what the social means in social media. *Social Media + Society* 1 (1). [O]. Available https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305115578138. [1 October 2018]

Bull, G. 2010. The always-connected generation. International Society for Technology in Education. *Learning & Leading with Technology* 38(3): 28-29.

Bukht, R and Heeks, R. 2017. Defining, Conceptualising and Measuring the Digital Economy. The University of Manchester Centre for Development Informatics Global Development Institute, SEED. Paper No. 68. [O] Available at: https://www.gdi.manchester.ac.uk/research/publications/di/di-wp68/ (Accessed: 22 September 2020).

Burgess, J. 2006. Hearing ordinary voices: cultural studies, vernacular creativity and digital storytelling. *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* 20 (2): 201–214.

Burgess, J and Green, J. 2009. YouTube: Online Video and Participatory Culture. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

Braun, V and Clarke, V. 2006. Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3 (2): 77-101.

Bröckling, U. 2015. *The Entrepreneurial Self: Fabricating a New Type of Subject*. London: Sage Publications.

Brown, I; Collins, T; Malika, B; Morrison, D; Muganda, N; and Speight, H. 2007. Global Diffusion of the Internet XI: Internet Diffusion and Its Determinants in South Africa: The First Decade of Democracy (1994 - 2004) and Beyond. *Communications of the Association for Information Systems* Vol. 19:(9). DOI: 10.17705/1CAIS.01909.

Canham, H., and R. Williams. 2016. Being Black, Middle Class and the Object of Two Gazes. *Ethnicities* 17 (1): 1–24.

Carens, J. H. 2000. *Culture, Citizenship and Community: a contextual exploration of justice as evenhandedness*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Castells, M. 2001. *The Internet Galaxy: Reflections on the Internet, Business, and Society*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Castells, M. 2015. *Networks of Outrage and Hope: Social Movements in the Internet Age*. 2nd ed. Cambridge, MA: Polity Press.

Chandler, D & Fuchs, D (eds). 2019. *Digital objects, digital subjects: interdisciplinary perspectives on capitalism, labour and politics in the age of big data*. London: University of Westminster Press.

Li, X., Chen, W., Sang, Y., Lee, N.Y. (2019). Structure and returns: toward a refined understanding of Internet use and social capital. *Information, Communication & Society* 22(10):1479-1496.

Chigona, W., Kamkwenda, G., Manjoo, S., Uses and gratifications of mobile Internet among South African students. *SA Journal of Information Management* 10 (3). DOI: https://doi.org/10.4102/sajim.v10i3.329.

Chipkin, I. 2007. *Do South Africans exist?* Johannesburg: Wits University Press.

Choi, M. 2016. A concept analysis of digital citizenship for democratic citizenship education in the internet age. *Theory & Research in Social Education* (44):4.

Correa, T. 2010. The participation divide among "online experts": experience, skills and psychological factors as predictors of college students' web content creation. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 16(1) 71–92.

Couldry, N., Stephansen, H., Fotopoulou, A., MacDonald, R., Clark, W & Dickens, L. 2014. Digital citizenship? Narrative exchange and the changing terms of civic culture. *Citizenship Studies* 18:6-7, 615-629. DOI: 10.1080/13621025.2013.865903.

Crawford, K., Lingel, J., Karppi, T. 2015. Our metrics, ourselves: A hundred years of self-tracking from the weight scale to the wrist wearable device. *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 18(4-5):479-496.

Dahir, A. 2019. The miscalculations African governments keep making with social media and internet blocks, Quartz Africa. Available at: https://qz.com/africa/1706217/why-do-african-governments-shut-down-the-internet/. (Accessed: 19 January 2020).

Dahlgren, P. & Gurevitch, M. 2005. "Political Communication in a Changing World". In Curran, J. & Gurevitch, M. (eds.) *Mass Media and Society*. 4th ed. London: Hodder Arnold.

Daniels, G. 2017. Scrutinizing Hashtag Activism in the #MustFall Protests in South Africa in 2015. [O]. Available: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-40949-8_9.

Delwiche, A. and Henderson, J. 2015. *The Participatory Cultures Handbook*. New York: Routledge.

Denzin, N.K. & Lincoln, Y.S. 2011. *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*. London: Sage.

Dieng, R. Talking back: African feminisms in dialogue. 2020. Available at: https://africasacountry.com/2020/05/talking-back-african-feminisms-in-dialogue (Accessed: 25 May 2020).

DiMaggio, P., & Hargittai, E. 2001. From the "digital divide" to "digital inequality": studying internet use as penetration increases. Working paper 15, Princeton: Princeton University Center for Arts and Cultural Policy Studies.

Dladla, N. 2018. The liberation of history and the end of South Africa: some notes towards an Azanian historiography in Africa, South. *South African Journal on Human Rights*, 34(3): 415-440.

Dosekun, S. 2019. *Fashioning Postfeminism: Spectacular Femininity and Transnational Culture*. Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press.

Duffy, B. E & Schwartz, B. 2017. Digital "women's work?": job recruitment ads and the feminization of social media employment. *New Media & Society* 20 (8): 2972-2989.

Duffy, B. E & Hund, E. 2019. Gendered visibility on social media: Navigating Instagram's authenticity bind. *International Journal of Communication* Vol 13 (2019).

Du Preez, A., 2018. "Digital Scholarship and Representations of the Self: Exploratory Notes". In du Preez, A (ed.), *Voices from the South: Digital Arts and Humanities*. 1–27. AOSIS: Cape Town.

Du Preez, A., 2010. Performing the virtual double: Notes on self-amputation and self-amplification. *New Media & Society* 20 (8): 2972-2989.

Ellis, C. 1995. Emotional and ethical quagmires in returning to the field. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*. 24: 68-98.

Ellison, N. and boyd, D. 2013. "Sociality Through Social Network Sites", Oxford Handbooks Online. DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199589074.013.0008.

2020. Employment and Labour on New National Minimum Wage rate. 24 February. [O]. Available: https://www.gov.za/speeches/new-nmw-base-rate-come-effect-march-%E2%80%93-department-employment-and-labour-24-feb-2020-0000. [17 May 2020].

English, C. 2013. Online social media in everyday life in Ireland: a qualitative exploration of media use among Irish 25 to 30 year olds during a time of crisis. PhD thesis. School of Communications, Dublin City University: Ireland.

Ferro, E, Helbing, N.C, & Gil-Garcia, J.R. 2011. The role of IT literacy in defining digital divide policy needs. *Government Information Quarterly* 28:3-10. [O]. Available: http://www.academia.edu/7386571/The_role_of_IT_literacy_in_defining_digital_divide_policy_needs. [30 January 2018].

Flew, T. 2011. Rethinking public service media and citizenship: digital strategies for news and current affairs at Australia's Special Broadcasting Service (SBS). *International Journal of Communication* 5.

Flew, T. 2015. Copyright and Creativity: An ongoing debate in the creative industries. *IJCCI* 2(3).

Fish, A and Khalikova, D. 2016. Networked idiots: Affective economies and neoliberal subjectivity in a Russian viral video. *Global Media and Communication* 12 (2):143-159.

Friedland, L. 1996. Electronic democracy and the new citizenship. *Media, Culture & Society* 18(2):185–212.

Fuchs, C. 2013. “Social media and capitalism”. In Olsson, T (ed.). *Producing the Internet. Critical perspectives of social media*, 25-44. Göteborg: Nordicom.

Gajjala, R (eds). 2013. *Cyberculture and the subaltern: weavings of the virtual and real*. Lanham: Lexington Books.

Garman, A., Milton, V.C, & Wasserman, H. 2013. Media, citizenship and the politics of belonging in contemporary South Africa. *Communication* 39(4): 405-414.

Gehl, R. W. 2015. The case for alternative social media. *Social Media + Society* 1(2). DOI:10.1177/2056305115604338.

Gillespie, T. 2010. The politics of “platforms”. *New Media & Society* 12: 347-364.

Gilmore, R. W. 2019. Keynote: Ruth Wilson Gilmore, what is the Racial in Racial Capitalism? Magic, Partition, Politics [O]. Available https://criticism.english.illinois.edu/racial-capitalism/racial-capitalism-symposium-presenter-abstracts. [30 July 2020].

Glynos, J. and Howarth, D. 2007. *Logics of critical explanation in social and political theory*. London: Routledge.

Gouws, A. 2005. *Unthinking Citizenship: Feminist Debates in Contemporary South Africa*. London: Routledge.

GSMA; World Bank Group; Security Identity Alliance. 2016. Digital identity: towards shared principles for public and private sector cooperation. World Bank, Washington, DC. [O]. Available https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/24920.

Hall, R. 2010. *The politics of land reform in post-apartheid South Africa, 1990 to 2004: a shifting terrain of power, actors and discourses*. PhD Dissertation. St Antony’s College, University of Oxford: Oxford.

Havens, T., Lotz, A.D., and Tinic, S. 2009. Critical media industry studies: A research approach. *Communication, Culture and Critique* 2, 234-53.

Hargreaves, I., & Hartley, J. 2016. *The Creative Citizen Unbound: How Social Media and DIY Culture Contribute to Democracy, Communities and the Creative Economy*. Bristol: Policy Press.

Hartley, J. 1999. *Uses of Television*. London: Routledge.

Hartley, J. 2010. Silly Citizenship. *Critical Discourse Studies* 7 (4): 233–248.

Hartley, J. 2016. "A Problem of Knowledge Solved?". In Hargreaves, I & J. Hartley, J (eds). *The creative citizen unbound: how social media and DIY culture contribute to democracy, communities and the creative economy*. 25–48. Bristol: Policy Press.

Harvey, D. 2005. *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Haythornthwaite, C. 2005. Social networks and internet connectivity effects. *Information, Communication & Society* 8(2)125-147.

Hearn, A. 2008. Meat, Mask, Burden: Probing the contours of the branded 'self'. *Journal of Consumer Culture* 8(2), 197-217.

Heilweil, R. 2020. Big tech companies back away from selling facial recognition to police. That's progress. Vox (2020). [O]. Available at: https://www.vox.com/recode/2020/6/10/21287194/amazon-microsoft-ibm-facial-recognition-moratorium-police. (Accessed: 20 August 2020).

Hermes, J. 2006. Citizenship in the age of the internet. *European Journal of Communication* 21:295-309.

Hintz, A., L. Dencik, and K. Wahl-Jorgensen. 2017. Digital citizenship and surveillance society: introduction. *International Journal of Communication* 11 (1): 731–739.

Hintz, A., Dencik, L., & Wahl-Jorgensen, K. 2019. *Digital citizenship in a datafied*

society. Polity: Cambridge.

Hirzalla, F. & van Zoonen, L. 2010. Beyond the online/offline divide: how youth's online and offline civic activities converge. *Social Sciences Computer Review*. [O]. Available http://ssc.sagepub.com/content/early/2010/09/24/0894439310385538. [11 September 2018].

Hjorth, L. & Hinton, S. 2019. *Understanding social media*. (Second edition). London: SAGE Publications.

Hund, E. and McGuigan, L. 2019. A shoppable life: Performance, selfhood, and influence in the social media storefront. *Communication, Culture and Critique* 12:18–35. https://doi.org/10.1093/ccc/tcz004.

Iqani, M. 2019. Picturing luxury, producing value: The cultural labour of social media brand influencers in South Africa. [O]. Available https://doi.org/10.1177/1367877918821237. [11 September 2020].

Isin, E and Ruppert, E. 2015. *Being Digital Citizens*. London: Rowman & Littlefield International.

Jarrett, H. 2016. *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers: Exploring Participatory Culture*. New York: New York University Press.

Jenkins, H. 2006. *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers: Exploring Participatory Culture*. New York: New York University Press.

Jenkins, H., Clinton, K., Purushotma, R., Robison, A.J., and Weigel, M. 2006. Confronting the challenges of participatory culture. The MacArthur Foundation. [O]. Available: http://digitallearning.macfound.org. [June 7, 2018].

Jenkins, H., S. Shresthova, L. Gamber-Thompson, and A. Zimmerman. 2016. *By Any Media Necessary: The New Youth Activism*. New York: New York University Press.

Jurgenson, N. 2012. When atoms meet bits: social media, the mobile web and augmented revolution. *Future Internet* 4(1): 83-91.

Kaplan, A. M., & Haenlein, M. 2010. Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of social media. *Business Horizons* 53(1): 59-68.

Karppi, T. 2014. *Disconnect.Me: User engagement and Facebook*. [O]. Available https://docplayer.net/32521243-Disconnect-me-user-engagement-and-facebook-tero-karppi.html.

Katz, E. 1959. Mass Communications Research and the Study of Popular Culture: An Editorial Note on a Possible Future for This Journal, *Studies in Public Communication* 2(1): 1-6.

Kawulich, B. 2005. Participant Observation as a Data Collection Method. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 6 (2): 1-19.

Kellner, D. 2010. "Reflections on Modernity and Postmodernity in McLuhan and Baudrillard". In Grosswiler, P. (ed.), *Transforming McLuhan. Cultural, Critical and Postmodern Perspectives*. Peter Lang Publishing: New York.

Kellner, D. 1998. New technologies, the welfare state, and the prospects for democratisation. [O]. Available http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/research/kellner/ntd.wd.html. [24 September 2018].

Kelly, P. 2006. The entrepreneurial self and 'youth at-risk': Exploring the horizons of identity in the twenty-first century. *Journal of Youth Studies* 9(1): 17–32.

Kendall, G., Woodward, I., Skrbis, Z. 2009. *The Sociology of Cosmopolitanism*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Khamis, S., Ang, L., Welling, R. 2017. Self-branding, 'micro-celebrity' and the rise of Social Media Influencers. *Celebrity Studies* 8:2, 191-208, DOI: 10.1080/19392397.2016.1218292

Kibere, F. N. 2016. The Paradox of Mobility in the Kenyan ICT Ecosystem: An Ethnographic Case of How the Youth in Kibera Slum Use and Appropriate the Mobile Phone and the Mobile Internet. *Information Technology for Development*, 22 (sup1), 47–67.

Khunou, G, 2015: "What middle class? The shifting and dynamic nature of class position. *Development Southern Africa*. 32 (1).

Kuntsman, A., ed. 2017. *Selfie citizenship*. London: Springer.

Leedy, P.D & Ormrod, J.E. 2010. *Practical research: planning and design*. 9th ed. Boston: Pearson.

Lebelo, MJ. 1990. Apartheid's Chosen Few: Urban African Middle Classes from the Slums of Sophiatown to the Northern Suburbs of Johannesburg - 1935-1985. University of the Witwatersrand.

Leong, N. 2013. Racial Capitalism. *Harvard Law Review*, 2151. University of Denver. Legal Studies Research Paper No. 13-30.

Lessig, L. 2004. *Free Culture: How Big Media Uses Technology and the Law to Lock Down Culture and Control Creativity*. New York: Penguin.

Lewis, C. 2005. Negotiating the Net: The Internet in South Africa (1990–2003). *Information Technologies and International Development* 2(3), Spring. 1–28.

Loader, B., & Mercea, D. 2011. “Networking Democracy?” *Information, Communication & Society* 14 (6): 757–769.

Loader, B. D., Vromen, A., and Xenos, M. 2014. The networked young citizen: social media, political participation and civic engagement, *Information, Communication & Society* 17(2): 143-50.

Bou-Franch, P., Lorenzo-Dus, N., & Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, P. 2012. Social Interaction in YouTube Text-Based Polylogues: A Study of Coherence, Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication 17(4):501–521. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2012.01579.x.

Lupton, D. 2015. *Digital Sociology*. London and New York: Routledge.

Lutz, C., Hoffmann, C. P., & Meckel, M. 2014. Beyond just politics: A systematic literature review of online participation. *First Monday* 19 (7): 1-36.

Lyon, D. 2017. Surveillance Culture: Engagement, Exposure, and Ethics in Digital Modernity. [O]: Available from: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/313744342. [14 July 2020].

Macleod, J., Xu, S., Yang, H & Zhu, S. 2016. Interpersonal communication competence and digital citizenship among pre-service teachers in China’s teacher preparation programs. [O]. *Journal of Moral Education*. DOI: 10.1080/03057240.2018.1458605. [25 January 2018].

Magubane, Z. 2014. Spectacles and Scholarship: Caster Semenya, Intersex Studies, and the Problem of Race in Feminist Theory. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 39(3).

Malila, V, Oelofsen, M, Garman, A & Wasserman, H. 2013. Making meaning of citizenship: How 'born frees' use media in South Africa's democratic evolution. *Communicatio* 39(4), 415-431.

Mainsah, H. 2017. Social media, design and creative citizenship: an introduction. *Digital Creativity* 28(1): 1-7.

Manokha, I. 2018. Surveillance: the DNA of Platform Capital. The case of Cambridge Analytica put into perspective. *Theory & Event* 21(4): 891-913.

Matsakis, L. 2014. "The Logan Paul Video Should Be a Reckoning for YouTube". 3 January 2018. *Wired*. [O]. Available: https://www.wired.com/story/logan-paul-video-youtube-reckoning/. [17 September 2018].

Marwick, A.E. 2013. *Status Update: Celebrity, Publicity and Branding in the Social Media Age*. New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press.

Marx, K. [1884]. 1974. *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*. Volume III. The 89 Process of Capitalist Production as a Whole. London: Lawrence & Wishart.

Maytham-Bailey, S. 2014. *One lens three views - The Zulu Maiden Reed Dance.* Masters Dissertation. University of Cape Town: Cape Town.

McEwan, B & Sobré-Denton, M. 2011. Virtual cosmopolitanism: constructing third cultures and transmitting social and cultural capital through social media. *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication* 4(4) 252-258.

McRobbie, A. 2015. *Be Creative: Making a Living in the New Culture Industries*. Berlin: Wiley.

Mejias, U. A. & Couldry, N. 2019. Datafication. *Internet Policy Review*, 8(4). DOI: 10.14763/2019.4.1428

Miller, T. 2007. *Cultural citizenship*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Mirzoeff, N. 2011. *The Right to Look: A Counterhistory of Visuality*. Duke University Press, Durham & London.

Moor, J. 1985. What Is Computer Ethics? *Metaphilosophy* 16(4): 266–75.

Mossberger, K, Tolbert, J, McNeal, R. 2008. *Digital citizenship: the internet, society, and participation*. Cambridge & London: MIT Press.

Mouton, J. 2002. *Understanding social research*. Pretoria: Van Schaik.

Mphidi, M.H. 2016. *Strategy for South African public libraries to bridge the digital divide*. PhD Dissertation. University of Pretoria: Pretoria.

Msila, V. 2009. School choice and intra-township migration: Black parents scrambling for quality education in South Africa *Journal of Education* 46: 81-98.

Murray, S & Sullivan (eds). 2016. *Somatechnics: Queering the Technologisation of Bodies*. London: Routledge.

Mutula S.M, & Mostert, J. 2010. Challenges and opportunities of e-government in South Africa. *The Electronic Library* 28(1): 38-53.

Nakamura, L. 2013. *Digitizing race. visual cultures of the internet*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press.

Nasrallah A., & Sarkis N. 2020. The Role of Social Media During the Arab Spring. In: Azoury N., Daou L (eds). *Business and social media in the Middle East*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

Narsiah, S. 2002. Neoliberalism and privatisation in South Africa. *GeoJournal* 57: 3–13.

Ngoma, A. L. 2015. *Political identity repertoires of South Africa's professional Black Middle Class*. Masters Dissertation. University of the Witwatersrand: Johannesburg.

Nieborg, D and Poell, T. 2018. The platformization of cultural production: Theorizing the contingent cultural commodity. *New Media and Society* 20(11):4275 –4292.

Noble, S. 2018. *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism*. NYU Press: New York.

Nothias, T. 2020. Access granted: Facebook's free basics in Africa. *Media, Culture and Society* 42 (3), 2020.

Nyamnjoh, F.B. 2013. Fiction and reality of mobility in Africa. *Citizenship Studies* 653-680.

O'Rourke, M & Giffney, N. 2012. "Originary somatechnicity," in Sullivan, N & Murray, S (eds.) Somatechnics: *Queering the Technologisation of Bodies*. Farnham: Ashgate.

Osunkunle, O. 2010. Bridging the digital divide and the impact of new media technologies on development in South Africa. In Soomro, S (ed.). *New Achievements in Technology, Education and development* [O]. Available: http://cdn.intechopen.com/pdfs/10526/InTech-B.

Oxley, C. 2010. Digital citizenship: developing an ethical and responsible online culture. diversity challenge resilience: school libraries in action. *Proceedings of the 12th Biennial School Library Association of Queensland*, 1–11. [O]. http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED518512.pdf.

Park, Y.J. 2010. Introduction: identity, citizenship and power in South Africa. *African Studies* 69(3): 379-383.

Pham, M. 2011. Blog Ambition: Fashion, Feelings, and the Political Economy of the Digital Raced Body. *Camera Obscura: Feminism, Culture, and Media Studies* 26(1), 1-37. DOI: 10.1215/02705346-2010-013.

Phelan, S. 2014. *Neoliberalism, Media and the Political*. London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Pilane, P. & Iqani, M. 2016. Miss-represented: a critical analysis of the visibility of black women in South African Glamour magazine, *Communicare: Journal for Communication Sciences in Southern Africa* 35(1): 126-171.

Plecher, H. 2020. South Africa: Youth Unemployment Rate From 1999-2019. [O]. Available https://www.statista.com/statistics/813010/youth-unemployment-rate-in-south-africa/. [6 May 2020].

Poggiali, L. 2016. Digital futures, analog pasts? Technology and ethnicity in Nairobi. [O]. Available https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2573-508X.2016.tb00009.x. [30 January 2018].

Poster, M. 1995. *Cyberdemocracy: Internet and the public sphere*. Available http://www.humanities.uci.edu/mposter/writings/democ.html. [6 July 2018].

Prensky, M. 2001. Digital Natives, digital immigrants. *On the Horizon* 9 (5): 1–6.

Radebe, M.C. 2016. *Learner integration in former Model C schools in Johannesburg*. Masters Dissertation. University of Witwatersrand: Johannesburg.

Rainie, L., Smith, A., Schlozman, K. L., Brady, H., & Verba, S. (2012). Social media and political engagement. Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project. [O]. Available: http://pewinternet.org/~/media/Files/Reports/2012/PIP_socialMedia AndPoliticalEngagement_PDF.pdf. [6 September 2018].

Rahman, A. 2007. *IAUTL*. Conference Proceedings. [O]. Available: http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/ iautl/2007/papers. [18 July 2018].

Raley, R. 2013. Dataveillance and Countervailance. In Gitelman, L (ed.). *Raw Data is an Oxymoron*. 121–139. MIT Press: Cambridge.

Ratto, M & Boler (eds). 2014. *DIY citizenship: critical making and social media*. The MIT Press: Cambridge.

Raun, T. 2018. Capitalizing intimacy: New subcultural forms of micro-celebrity strategies and affective labour on YouTube. *Convergence* 24(1):99-113.

Romano, A. 2019. "A group of YouTubers is trying to prove the site systematically demonetizes queer content". 12 January. *Vox*. [O]. Available: https://www.vox.com/culture/2019/10/10/20893258/youtube-lgbtq-censorship-demonetization-nerd-city-algorithm-report. [20 October 2019].

SAARF. 2020. *Living Standards Measure*. [O]. Available at: http://www.saarf.co.za/lsm/lsms.asp. [2 May 2020].

Salinas, R. 2003. Addressing the digital divide through collection development. *Collection Building* 22(3), 131-136.

Sanders, L. Facebook's Cambridge Analytica data scandal: what you need to know. *DW*. 21 May 2018. [O]. Available https://www.dw.com/en/facebooks-cambridge-analytica-data-scandal-what-you-need-to-know/a-43071390. [11 August 2018].

Schäfer, M. T. 2011. *Bastard culture! How user participation transforms cultural production. culture*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Schoon, A., & Strelitz, L. 2014. (Im)mobile phones: "Stuckness" and mobile phones in a neighbourhood in a small town in South Africa. *Communicare* 33(2), 25–39.

Schradie, J. 2011. The digital production gap: The digital divide and Web 2.0 collide. *Poetics*. Volume 39 (2):145-168.

Sebastião, S. P. 2015. Digitania© or the disillusion with a digital citizenship. *Comunicação Pública* 10(18). Available https://journals.openedition.org/cp/988?lang=en. [11 August 2018].

Seekings, J. 2015. The Social Consequences of Class Formation among Black South Africans in the 2000s: Evidence from the South African Reconciliation Barometer. Centre for Social Science Research, University of Cape Town. Working Paper No. 356. Available http://www.cssr.uct.ac.za/cssr/pub/wp/283. [21 October 2019].

Seekings, J. 2010. Race, class and inequality in the South African City. Centre for Social Science Research, University of Cape Town. Working Paper 283. Available http://www.cssr.uct.ac.za/cssr/pub/wp/283. [21 October 2019].

Senft, T. M., 2013. "Microcelebrity and the Branded Self". In *A Companion to New Media Dynamics*. Hartley J, Burgess J and Bruns, A. (eds.). Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell. pp. 346 –354.

Sheppard, E, & Leitner, H. 2017. A Tale of Two GPEs: Decentering Macro-geopolitics. *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space* 50(2): 479–483. DOI:10.1177/0308518x17737171.

Sikhakhane, Lubber & Klopper, 2005. The digital divide and access to information and communication technologies: an investigation into some problems in rural communities in Kwa-Zulu Natal, South Africa. *Alternation* 12(1): 43-66.

Southall, R. 2014. The black middle class and democracy in South Africa. *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 52(04): 647-670.

Srnicek, N. 2016. *Platform Capitalism*. Cambridge: Polity.

Statista. 2018. [O] Available https://www.statista.com/statistics/244926/number-of-facebook-users-in-the-middle-east-and-africa/. [15 September 2018].

Steenekamp, C, & Loubser, R. 2016. Active citizenship: a comparative study of selected young and established democracies. *Politikon, South African Journal of Political Studies* 43 (1): 117-134.

Stewart, M. A. 2013. Sensational Kin: Family, Normativity and Women's Weekly Magazines. *Journal of International Women's Studies* 14(4), 47-60.

Sullivan, N & Murray, S. 2009. *Somatechnics: Queering the Somatechnologisation of Bodies*. Surrey: Ashgate.

Terranova, T. 2000. Free labor producing culture for the digital economy. *Social Text Summer*, (18) 2-63:33-26.

Tokumitsu, M. 2014. "In The Name of Love". 12 January. Jacobin. [O]. Available: https://www.jacobinmag.com/2014/01/in-the-name-of-love/. [17 September 2018].

Trillò, T. 2018. Can the subaltern Tweet? Reflections on twitter as a space of appearance and inequality in accessing visibility [O]. Available: DOI: 10.1080/09737189.2017.1420404.

Turner, B. 1993. "Contemporary problems in the theory of citizenship". In *Citizenship and Social Theory*. (ed.) B. Turner, 1–19. London: Sage.

van Dijck, J. 2009. Users like you? Theorizing agency in user-generated content. *Media Culture Society* 31(1): 41–58.

van Dijck, J. 2013. 'You have one identity': performing the self on Facebook and LinkedIn. *Media, Culture & Society* 35(2), 199-215.

van Dijck, J., & Poell, T. 2013. Understanding social media logic. *Media and Communication* 1(1): 2-14. DOI:10.12924/mac2013.01010002.

van Doorn, N. 2020. The parameters of platform capitalism. Krisis.eu. [O]. Available at: https://krisis.eu/the-parameters-of-platform-capitalism/#:~:text=In%20Platform%20Capitalism%2C%20Srnicek%20offers,create%20novel%20forms%20of%20value. [9 June 2020].

Velkova, J. 2016. View of Open cultural production and the online gift economy: The case of Blender. *First Monday* 21 (10).

Villi, M., & Matikainen, J. 2016. Participation in social media: studying explicit and implicit forms of participation in communicative social networks. *Media and Communication* 4(4): 109-117. DOI: https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.v4i4.578.

Vivienne, S., McCosker, A & Johns, A. 2016 (eds). *Negotiating digital citizenship: control, contest & culture*. Rowman & Littlefield Int: Lanham.

Ward, K. 2017. Social networks, the 2016 US presidential election, and Kantian ethics: applying the categorical imperative to Cambridge Analytica's behavioral microtargeting. *Journal of Media Ethics* 33 (3): 133-148.

Warner, M. 2002. *Publics and Counterpublics*. New York: Zone Books.

Wauthier, K., Fisher, A. & Gajjala, R. 2019. Digital Hierarchies of Laboring Subjects in *The Routledge Companion to Media and Class*. Polson E; Schofield Clark, L.; Gajjala, R (eds.) pp. 203-212. DOI: 10.4324/9781351027342-18.

Weber, M. 1946. *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (eds). New York: Oxford University Press.

Wenger, E. 2010. “Communities of Practice and social learning systems: The career of a concept”. In: Blackmore, C (ed.) *Social Learning Systems and Communities of Practice*. London: Springer Verlag and the Open University, 179–198.

White, H. 2020. How is capitalism racial? Fanon, critical theory and the fetish of antiblackness, *Social Dynamics* 46:1, 22-35. DOI: 10.1080/02533952.2020.1758871.

World Wide Worx. 2018. *2018 Social Media Landscape in South Africa*. Report. [O]. Available: http://gullanandgullan.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/13907_GG-Breakthrough-infographic.pdf. [12 August 2018].

Ytreberg, E. 2000. Notes on Text Production as a Field of Inquiry in Media Studies. *Nordicom Review* 21(2):53-62.

Zamenopoulos, T., K. Alexiou, G. Alevizou, C. Chapain, S. Sobers, and A. Williams. 2016. “Varieties of Creative Citizenship.” In Hargreaves, I. and Hartley. J (eds). *The Creative Citizen Unbound: How Social Media and DIY Culture Contribute to Democracy, Communities and the Creative Economy*. 103–128. Bristol: Policy Press.

Zmerli, S. 2010. Social Capital and Norms of Citizenship: An Ambiguous Relationship? *American Behavioral Scientist* 53 (5): 657–676.

Zuboff, Shoshana. 2015. Big Other: Surveillance Capitalism and the Prospects of an Information Civilization. *Journal of Information Technology* (2015) 30, 75–89. DOI:10.1057/jit.2015.5.

VISUAL SOURCES

Constantinides, M. 2019. “Events, South African YouTubers + Famous People - Vlog 5.” 15 October. YouTube. [O]. Available: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pzwhTQhfMko. [21 October 2019].

Gama, T. 2019. “Issa Vlog: A Day in My Life! | Thandi Gama.” 15 October. YouTube. [O]. Available: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GOVbnEJqBmc&t=319s. [21 October 2019].

Hlophe, T. 2018. “How Men Behave at The Reed Dance *Umkhosi Womhlanga* 2018.” 15 October. YouTube. [O]. Available: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A0m2H1huY7o. [21 October 2019].

Mzimela, M. 2018. “Broke Niggaz 46 - Snake Eyes 2.” 1 July. YouTube. [O]. Available: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cqjePSrotM0. [21 October 2019].

APPENDICES

Appendix A

Certificate of Ethical Clearance

Appendix B

Information Sheet

Appendix C

Sample of Informed Consent Form

Appendix D

Semi-Structured Interview Prompts

Appendix E

Sample of Individual Interview Transcript

Appendix F

Sample of Word Coding Process

Appendix G

Sample of Coding Excel Table

Appendix A

Certificate of Ethical Clearance

Research Office

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON-MEDICAL)
R14/49 Ngoma

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE	**PROTOCOL NUMBER: H19/02/23**
PROJECT TITLE	Born on the internet: Creative digital citizenship and digital labour in the digital economy
INVESTIGATOR(S)	Miss P Ngoma
SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT	Arts/
DATE CONSIDERED	15 February 2019
DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE	Approved
EXPIRY DATE	01 April 2022

DATE 02 April 2019 **CHAIRPERSON** (Professor J Knight)

cc: Supervisor : Professor C Duncan

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR(S)

To be completed in duplicate and **ONE COPY** returned to the Secretary at Room 10004, 10th Floor, Senate House, University. Unreported changes to the application may invalidate the clearance given by the HREC (Non-Medical)

I/We fully understand the conditions under which I am/we are authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I/we guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure to be contemplated from the research procedure as approved I/we undertake to resubmit the protocol to the Committee. **I agree to completion of a yearly progress report.**

_____ ____/____/____

Signature **Date**

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER ON ALL ENQUIRIES

Appendix B

Information Sheet

Participant Information Sheet

Good day,

My name is Pumulo Ngoma and I am a Masters student in the Digital Arts at Wits University in Johannesburg. As part of my studies I have to undertake a research project, and I am investigating how social media video producers create video for Facebook. The aim of this research project is to find out how elements like globalization, race, sex, income and education affect social media producers and the videos they create.

As part of this project I would like to invite you to take part in an interview and an observation. The interview will involve questions about your experiences as a South African online video producer and will take about 45 minutes. With your permission, I would also like to record the interview using a camera and audio recorder.

There is a second part to my research process: an observation. The observation will involve spending some time with you as you produce a video for social media. This will include observing the "behind the scenes" of the production process, such as how you set up your camera equipment, how you direct your talent and your own performance in front of the camera. The observation will take about 1 hour.

Once your video is published on your social media channel, I will also analyse it as part of my research in order to understand the difference between offline and online worlds. I would also like to analyse the kind of comments that are posted on your video. If you choose to let your followers know that the comment section will form part of a research study, I am willing to help draft a disclaimer.

Please also note that you can apply for a Creative Commons licence for your work. A Creative Commons licence gives you, the creator, the power to grant permission to others to use your work the way you allow. For example, the Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs (CC BY-NC-ND) licence means that you may grant me permission to use your work for research, but I must

credit you, I cannot change your work or benefit financially from it. You can learn more about Creative Common licences here: https://creativecommons.org/licenses/.

You will not receive any direct benefits from participating in this study, but the research may help you share in the experiences of other video producers like yourself. There are no disadvantages or penalties for not participating. You may withdraw at any time or not answer any question if you do not want to. The interview and observation will be confidential and I will not misuse your information. Your social media name and videos will be visible. The information you give to me will be stored securely on a computer and not disclosed to anyone else. If you decide, I will use a pseudonym (false name) to represent your participation, in my final research report. However, because your video content will appear in the public domain, it may be possible that your comments may be matched to your social media name and videos. The recordings and transcripts you give me will be stored securely on my computer and will not be shared with anyone until identifying information is redacted.

If you have any questions afterwards about this research, feel free to contact me on the details listed below. This study will be written up as a research report which will be available online through the university library website. If you wish to receive a summary of this report, I will be happy to send it to you upon request. If you have any queries, concerns or complaints regarding the ethical procedures of this study, you are welcome to contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee (non-medical), telephone + 27(0)11 717 1408, email Shaun.Schoeman@wits.ac.za.

Yours sincerely,

Pumulo Ngoma
Researcher
iammilorex@gmail.com
082 819 3679

Dr. Catherine Duncan,
Research supervisor
catherine.duncan@wits.ac.za
+27 011 717 4641

Dr. Benita de Robillard,
Research supervisor
Benita.derobillard@wits.ac.za
+27 011 7174647

Appendix C

Sample of Informed Consent Form



Faculty of Humanities
University of the Witwatersrand

Participant informed consent form
Interviews and Observation

Please tick the appropriate boxes	**Yes**	**No**
Taking Part		
I have read and understood the research participation information sheet.	☐	☐
I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project.	☐	☐
I agree to take part in the project. Taking part in the project will include being interviewed and recorded (audio and video) as well as the 'behind the scenes' of my video production being observed.	☐	☐
I understand that Pumulo, the researcher, will record interviews with video and audio components.	☐	☐
I understand that my taking part is voluntary; I can withdraw from the study at any time and I do not have to give any reasons for why I no longer want to take part.	☐	☐
Use of the information I provide for this project only		
I understand my personal details such as phone number and address will not be revealed to people outside the project.	☐	☐
I understand that my words may be quoted in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs.	☐	☐
I understand that my video content will form part of the research data, so it is not possible to offer anonymity.	☐	☐

*Please choose **one** of the following two options:*

I would like my real name used in the research.	☐	☐
I would **not** like my real name to be used in the above, but my **social media name**.	☐	☐
I would not like my social media name to be used, but an **alias**.	☐	☐

Use of the information I provide beyond this project

I agree for the data I provide to be archived at the Wits Faculty of Humanities.	☐	☐

So we can use the information you provide legally

I understand that a Creative Commons Attribution Non-commercial No Derivatives 4.0 International licence means my work can be used only if : I will be credited for my work, my work will not be changed in any way and my work will not be used commercially (for profit).	☐	☐
I agree that the researcher, Pumulo Ngoma, can use my work under Creative Commons Attribution Non-commercial No Derivatives 4.0 International licence for her research.	☐	☐

Name of participant [printed]	Signature	Date
Researcher [printed]	Signature	Date

Appendix D

Semi-Structured Interview Prompts

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW DRAFT QUESTIONNAIRE

DIGITAL CITIZENS

PROMPTS

- What does being a digital citizen mean to you?
- What does being a millennial mean to you?
- How is your offline identity similar and different to your online identity?
- How do you feel socio-demographics influence your video production?
- For example, how does your gender, income, class, education, being South African, being African influence the kind of videos you produce?
- How would you say your "real life" compares to your "social media" life?
- How does your 'real life' *affect* your social media life?
- How do you feel social media affects your 'real life'?

DIGITAL LABOUR

PROMPTS

- What are some of the things you enjoy the most and the least about video production?
- What skills are needed to be a content creator?
- What kind of equipment is needed, and how much do you need to invest in content creation?
- How do you feel you have grown as a content creator in terms of your past skills versus your present skills?
- What have been some of the challenges in terms of accessibility to digital skills for you?
- How do you decide what kind of videos to produce?
- How do you feel your fan community/ followers influence your video production?
- In what ways do global trends influence your content creation?
- What are some of the ways you feel Facebook/ Instagram affect your video production?
- How do you balance video production as work versus video production as a passion/ "doing what you love"?
- What do you think about content producers and mental health?

THE DIGITAL ECONOMY

PROMPTS

- How do you feel about the financial viability of being a content creator in South Africa?

- What are some of your thoughts on unpaid content creation or being paid through exposure?
- What is your opinion on monetizing your content?
- How do you think being a video producer in South Africa compares to the rest of the world in terms of financial benefits and drawbacks?
- What do you think about brand partnerships?
- How do you feel about Facebook Adverts?
- Why do you think some video producers/content creators are successful and others are not?
- What are some of your career aspirations or long-term goals in terms of your channel and content creation?
- How do you feel about your video creation and the sustainability of your channel?
- In your opinion, what would help your channel and others in South Africa be more sustainable?

Appendix E

Sample of Individual Interview Transcript

So, let us start. What are some of the things you enjoy the most and the least about video production? Just the video-editing and all that...

R: I think what I enjoy the most is always the finished... People think I sit there knowing exactly what I'm going to film but I just sit there with a couple of products not knowing what is going to come out of this, and then I'll sit in my chair for about an hour and a half and when I get to the finished product, that's very exciting for me. That's what motivates me to edit, and post and want to show everyone how I achieved that product. What's the most frustrating? I think it's when you have a vision in your head and it doesn't come out exactly as you want it because as you grow you obviously want your editing skills to grow. So you will envision a transition and you don't know how to do it and you start Googling and things are just not working out or your machine is not fast enough or wants to switch off or things like that. I use a... I got a new camera so the size of the footage sort of slows my machine down and...

M: What are you editing on?

R: Premier Pro, and I have a MacBook Pro but the camera I use is a Canon 5D so obviously it can shoot in [inaudible] but yes I still shoot in big files so when it comes to editing sometimes it's frustrating especially when I'm trying to edit an Instagram video. Like this morning, it took me two hours to edit an Instagram video.

M: Woah. As in the whole thing or just a teaser?

R: To just edit a one-minute video.

M: Meaning your computer is slow?

R: Yes, it lags.

M: Wow, that's hectic. That's one of the worst things, or when Premier Pro shuts down unexpectedly and you're just like...

R: Or it freezes. I decide that I'm going to go into the colour editing and my whole screen just goes blank.

M: What about outside of editing? Are there other things that you enjoy? Just about producing videos for YouTube, what do you like?

R: Sometimes it's not that I like the content but seeing how people react to it. When

the finished product is up and if people recreate my look, I know I've done something good because if no one can recreate it, it doesn't make sense. For me the trick is also in when I watch it I think to myself would I understand this thing and understand what I'm supposed to do in an hour, because one minute is initially an hour if you're doing it by yourself so I think it's the reaction. Besides that... hmm. I've never really thought about it.

M: What skills do you need to be a content creator?

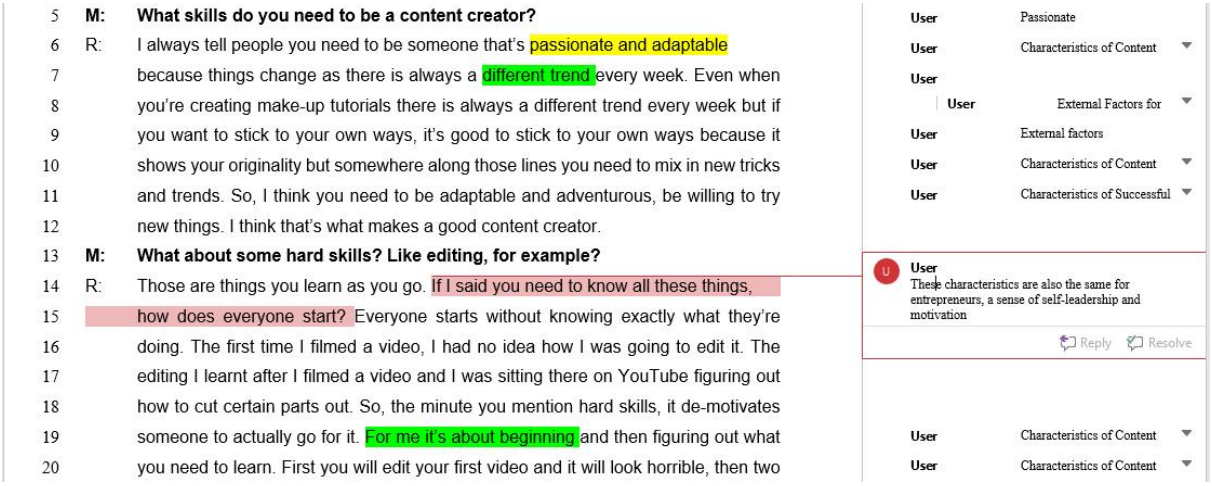
R: I always tell people you need to be someone that's passionate and adaptable because things change as there is always a different trend every week. Even when you're creating make-up tutorials there is always a different trend every week but if you want to stick to your own ways, it's good to stick to your own ways because it shows your originality but somewhere along those lines you need to mix in new tricks and trends. So, I think you need to be adaptable and adventurous, be willing to try new things. I think that's what makes a good content creator.

M: What about some hard skills? Like editing, for example?

R: Those are things you learn as you go. If I said you need to know all these things, how does everyone start? Everyone starts without knowing exactly what they're doing. The first time I filmed a video, I had no idea how I was going to edit it. The editing I learnt after I filmed a video and I was sitting there on YouTube figuring out how to cut certain parts out. So, the minute you mention hard skills, it de-motivates someone to actually go for it. For me it's about beginning and then figuring out what you need to learn. First you will edit your first video and it will look horrible, then two weeks down the line you will learn about things like transitions and that if you put this one like this your video changes and does this. So, I don't necessarily think you need to have these things but you need to have that energy to want to learn. You need to be a go-getter, like if you want something you need to be willing to work hard enough to have it because I know when I started I had none of these things, I had no idea how to edit. Nothing. I remember it took me the longest to use Premier Pro because I always thought it was such a difficult thing, they even tried to teach me how to use it at Vega in my first and second year, and when I left I still didn't know how to use it. But three years down the line I realised that this is actually now my job so I now have to learn and I forced myself to learn how to use it for two days. I wouldn't say you need it from the beginning, I think it's something that you learn as you go.

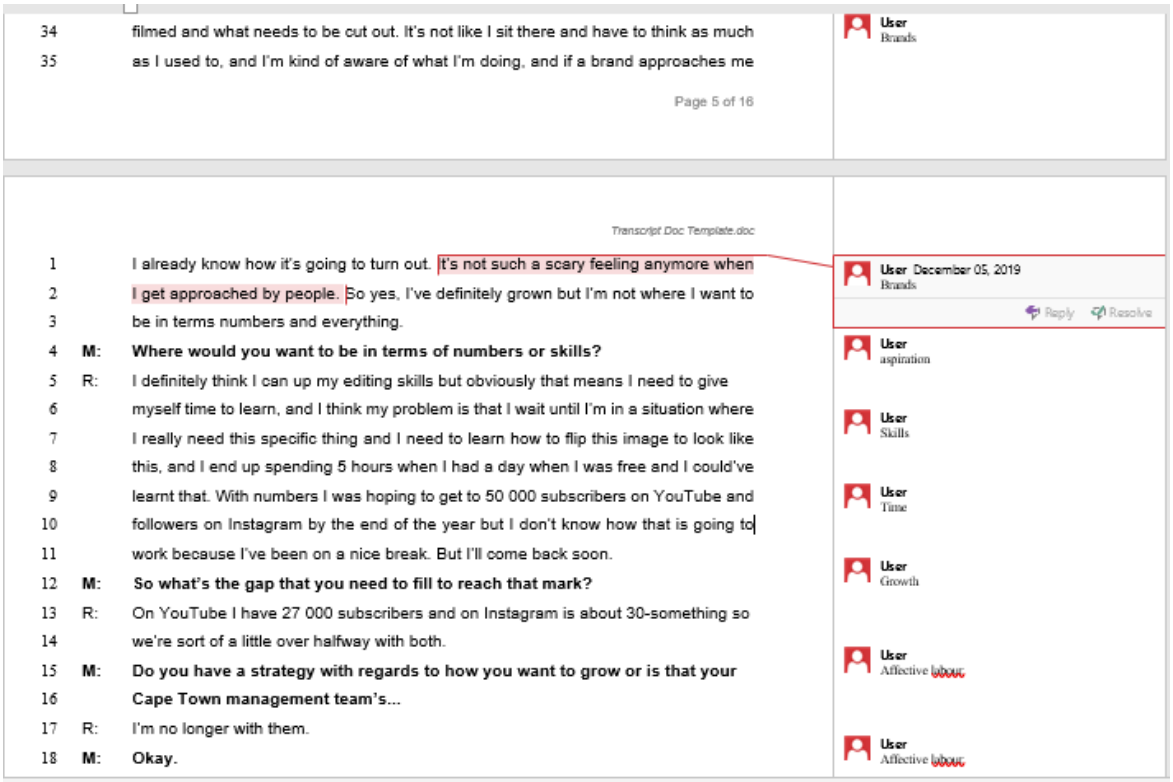
Appendix F

Sample of Word Coding Process



5 **M:** **What skills do you need to be a content creator?**
6 R: I always tell people you need to be someone that's passionate and adaptable
7 because things change as there is always a different trend every week. Even when
8 you're creating make-up tutorials there is always a different trend every week but if
9 you want to stick to your own ways, it's good to stick to your own ways because it
10 shows your originality but somewhere along those lines you need to mix in new tricks
11 and trends. So, I think you need to be adaptable and adventurous, be willing to try
12 new things. I think that's what makes a good content creator.
13 **M:** **What about some hard skills? Like editing, for example?**
14 R: Those are things you learn as you go. If I said you need to know all these things,
15 how does everyone start? Everyone starts without knowing exactly what they're
16 doing. The first time I filmed a video, I had no idea how I was going to edit it. The
17 editing I learnt after I filmed a video and I was sitting there on YouTube figuring out
18 how to cut certain parts out. So, the minute you mention hard skills, it de-motivates
19 someone to actually go for it. For me it's about beginning and then figuring out what
20 you need to learn. First you will edit your first video and it will look horrible, then two

User Passionate
User Characteristics of Content
User
User External Factors for
User External factors
User Characteristics of Content
User Characteristics of Successful
User
These characteristics are also the same for entrepreneurs, a sense of self-leadership and motivation
Reply Resolve
User Characteristics of Content
User Characteristics of Content



34 filmed and what needs to be cut out. It's not like I sit there and have to think as much
35 as I used to, and I'm kind of aware of what I'm doing, and if a brand approaches me

Page 5 of 16

User
Brands

Transcript Doc Template.doc

1 I already know how it's going to turn out. It's not such a scary feeling anymore when
2 I get approached by people. So yes, I've definitely grown but I'm not where I want to
3 be in terms numbers and everything.
4 **M:** **Where would you want to be in terms of numbers or skills?**
5 R: I definitely think I can up my editing skills but obviously that means I need to give
6 myself time to learn, and I think my problem is that I wait until I'm in a situation where
7 I really need this specific thing and I need to learn how to flip this image to look like
8 this, and I end up spending 5 hours when I had a day when I was free and I could've
9 learnt that. With numbers I was hoping to get to 50 000 subscribers on YouTube and
10 followers on Instagram by the end of the year but I don't know how that is going to
11 work because I've been on a nice break. But I'll come back soon.
12 **M:** **So what's the gap that you need to fill to reach that mark?**
13 R: On YouTube I have 27 000 subscribers and on Instagram is about 30-something so
14 we're sort of a little over halfway with both.
15 **M:** **Do you have a strategy with regards to how you want to grow or is that your**
16 **Cape Town management team's...**
17 R: I'm no longer with them.
18 **M:** **Okay.**

User December 05, 2019
Brands
Reply Resolve
User
aspiration
User
Skills
User
Time
User
Growth
User
Affective labour
User
Affective labour

Appendix G

Sample of Coding Excel Table

Page	Comment scope	Comment text
1	people that are in tune with, I don't know, social media spaces	Digital Citizen
1	then I guess create persona's in those spaces…	Digital citizen
1	People don't like us. Well, yeah but I can't pin down an actual definition of what millennials' do, it's people born after a certain period	Millennial
1	I think the most common thing is like the fact that we exercise choice a lot you know? Just exploiting the fact that we have choices.	Millennial
1	We just do, we leave when we want to leave, we have demands, even when we're inferior to certain people, expectations, and kind of see those interactions as two way streets instead of like a charity	Millennial
1	And we have the audacity to kind of exercise them and demand certain things no matter what positions we were in	Millennial
1	in	Content Creator Characteristics
1	whatever	Content Creator Characteristics
1	Some people say that we're impatient because of that or whatever.	Millennial
2	I mean, some people don't have that freedom to exercise choice or the knowledge that they can exercise choice, you know? Like, I know I can do that because I went to varsity and on to a good high school or whatever the case is. So I was taught that I could do that doesn't mean everyone, every millennial knows they can do that	Millennial

9	I remember there was this, there was a terrible article written by some South African publishers, whatever district article writers, and they were saying that South African YouTubers have no originality, there's too much makeup, there's too much couple channels, there's too much. We need some something new, something fresh and that kind of showed what I was saying earlier that it's just like research. Some guy who was writing all this rubbish.	Global South vs Global North
9	There are millions of makeup artists on YouTube, it's a whole department on YouTube called makeup all over the world	Digital Labour
9	And I was going to say that South Africa is still new. So therefore still new to new to YouTube. So to expect originality is a bit weird, because we reference whatever is already established on Youtube, like America is humongous on YouTube, UK as well	Global South vs Global North
9	whatever, they will kind of directly pull from that	Global South vs Global North
9	And like I reference American YouTube, but obviously I added my own elements to that, because I just knew better.	Global South vs Global North
9	conversation	Competition
9	Now let's talk about originality. Now that you guys know YouTube, we understand we've populated YouTube. You know, there's circulation. There's activity. Now let's discuss originality, you guys kind of suck, you're kind of good idea.	Global South vs Global North
10	. I use my cell phone as a third camera for certain stuff that I do for my channel. So cell phone is for me, if you are at your lowest, cell phone is the best thing to do create content, structure content around what you have.	Video Production
10	So don't try to think bigger than what you have at that moment. And then once that goes to eventually get to wherever you trying to be.	Video Production
10	I'm just saying if you are at your worst, sound equipment that's expensive. Even the cheapest sound equipment is not cheap. My roommate has a lapel that uses his cell phone as an adapter. And that cost like 600 Rand, still expensive. The lowest end Canon camera like a 1000D, is still like R2000 that's still expensive. So at your lowest, use your cellphone, use your phone. As a beginner at their lowest. If you're a beginner and you're fucking rich, go buy your lights and your 700Ds and by your soft boxes. But a beginner can be rich, so just because you're a beginner doesn't mean you must humble yourself and get a… you can be a beginner with money and get a 5D in this game. So I'm saying the lowest poorest type of beginner, just your smartphones is your best thing to use.	Video Production
10	I think I was just little more raw when I started, a little more reckless, reckless abandon.	Expression
10	I was just doing whatever the fuck I want, saying whatever the fuck I want.	Digital Citizen
10	I was just reckless. I was just doing whatever the fuck I want, saying whatever the fuck I want. I couldn't give a shit really.	Expression
11	. So when I started my YouTube channel, I was a third year student. And now I'm a TV producer.	Growth