

**DIGITAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND ITS POSSIBILITIES:
A CASE STUDY OF YOUNG, EDUCATED BLACK AFRICAN SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS IN
JOHANNESBURG**

by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

LABOR AND ECONOMIC SOCIOLOGY

at the

UNIVERSITY OF WITWATERSRAND

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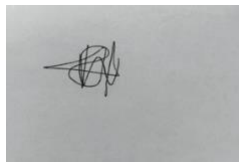
APRIL 2021

PLAGIARISM DECLARATION

I declare that **DIGITAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND ITS POSSIBILITIES: A CASE STUDY OF YOUNG, EDUCATED BLACK AFRICAN SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS IN JOHANNESBURG** is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of a completed reference list.

HLABANGANE WR

Signature:

A square box containing a handwritten signature in black ink. The signature is stylized and appears to be the initials 'WR' with some additional flourishes.

Date: 20 April 2021

ABSTRACT

Social media influencers (SMIs) with the help of their large audience and following have become micro-celebrities on social media platforms. The psychological impact they have on the consumption choices of youth in South Africa and across the global context has been noted with much interest. The role of social media influencers is crucial for the marketing and advertising industry as they learn to adapt to a more intimate and personalized form of advertising. This study focuses on young educated black-African digital entrepreneurs, their lives, work and the reasons behind why they have chosen less conventional opportunities of work over traditional education and work paths to pursue social media influencing more permanently.

KEY WORDS

Social media influencers, content creators, digital entrepreneurship, work, education, black African, Johannesburg.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To God,
for blessing me with a wholesome life and family.

To Mzikayise Sithole, my dear husband,
for being my best friend, consistent supporter, and anchor.

To Professor Nokuthula Hlabangane, my mother,
for faithfully walking this journey with me.

To Mordecai 'Papa' Hlabangane, my father,
for being there with every step that I take.

To Lulamile Hlabangane, my brother,
for always keeping me on my toes.

To uMama noBaba, my parents-in-law,
for allowing me to be.

To Professor Bridget Kenny, my supervisor
for your continued support, encouragement, mentorship.

To my research participants,
for trusting me to share your entrepreneurial journey.

To life,
for its generosity and its never-ending light upon me.

DEDICATION

*This is a praise song dedicated to the **Skhosana** and **Hlabangane** generations that came before me and a heartfelt prayer for the **Sithole** generations that will follow.*

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This study is interested in the space that focuses on digital content creators and entrepreneurs, also popularly known as Social Media Influencers (SMI). The research objective is to better understand the budding entrepreneurs' lives and choices around this uncertain path. While most of the youth is socially and economically excluded from institutions of higher learning and formal job opportunities, why is this middle-class group actively diverging from the norm of a job and higher education? What exactly do they do? Why do they do what they do? On a day-to-day basis, what does their work entail? How do they manage to earn a living? Ultimately, which opportunities are available to them, and which are those that are not?

The main question that the research report seeks to examine is: Why are young educated black Africans transitioning from traditional routes of education and work to pursue social media Influencing on a more formal basis? The sub-questions that support this main question further support this main question by interrogating: What are the pull and push factors behind the transition? What do the lives of the influencers entail daily? How is this new form of work generally understood by the influencers and their communities? What kinds of opportunities do they believe they are exposed to as influencers, that they ordinarily would not be able to have access to?

The rationale of the study is to understand the character of social media influencing as a form of work and the SMIs choice to earn a living this way. Perhaps stumbling upon this unconventional route of work was by chance, or perhaps a combination of factors. Work precarity is key for the group of millennials in whom this research is interested. This research is conducted at a time where unfortunately the formal job market currently is characterized by uncertain and highly unreliable job prospects (Umney & Krestos, 2015, p. 316). It is based on this background that I have chosen to explore new forms of work that young people are pursuing as an alternative and perhaps solution to the existing problems of unemployment, inequality, and socio-economic exclusion.

As Millennials or Generation Y (youth aged between 18- early 30s), (Duffet & Wakeham, 2016, p. 21&22), we live in a time where social media platforms play a significant role and impact on our choices around decision-making. We are likely to make personal decisions with the public in mind. We also tend to find ourselves admiring and growing fond of strangers based on the best parts of their lives that they selectively choose to share with us on social media. Whether these controlled best parts that we get a glimpse of about our peers or a stranger's life are real or not seems to matter less in the digital era. Our minds and social media timelines are flooded regularly with the next person's life using pictures, captions, videos, and diaries amongst other things. The reality of consuming such content regularly or even almost 24/7 for some means we are consistently being influenced to behave a certain way by different people. The massive growth in online communities has contributed to the understanding the important role social media plays in decision making and consumer behavior (Budree, Fietkiewicz, & Lins, 2019, p. 316).

I have become aware of social media influencers (SMI) and the role they play in the digital marketing and advertising space. Social media influencers are seen as role models in the social media space. Their exposure on mass media puts them in a favorable light that depicts them as media personas who are greatly admired by strangers who aspire to be like them or recognize them for a particular reason (Nouri, 2018). According to the Influencer Marketing Hub, there are four types of influencers, these include: traditional celebrities; industry experts and thought leaders; bloggers and content creators; and micro-influencers (Velazquez, 2019, p. 19). According to *Talkwalker.com*, three types of influencers exist on our social media platforms. The first type and top tier are celebrities. These celeb influencers include the biggest players, individual brands, tv, movie actors, sports music stars and social media masters with over 1 million followers. The second type of influencers are the executives. These are macro-level influencers that include public figures such as journalists, bloggers, industry experts and content creators who usually have around 10 000 to under 1 million followers. The third and most common type of influencers are the everyday people. This is understood as the lowest level of social media influencing as the influencer does not gain as much or sufficient traction on their social media platforms. Categorizing SMIs comes with this territory. There is a fine line between these mentioned types as influencers are recognized as micro-celebrities who because of their status, tend to frequently move within the same

spaces as traditional celebrities. While perhaps traditional celebrities prefer to keep relevant by endorsing and informally mentoring the often-young micro-celebrities, the upcoming generation of celebrities enjoys this association as it creates further interest about their lives and subsequently draws more attention for possible work opportunities with brands. An influencer in basic terms can be understood to be a micro-celebrity. This means that as part of the job description or brief, they need to have a style that distinguishes them as they go about their online work performance. As they perform and put themselves and their work on display, it is important that there is an audience that is cheering them on and actively engaging with their content as well as reposting, resharing and creating a buzz around them on social media sites. Their micro celebrity status is maintained by the support of a niche community that supports and engages with their personal platforms. As a result of all this recognition and fulfillment of the job brief, one can reach a stage of monetizing their platforms as they have been successful in building a personal brand for themselves (Guarriello, 2019, p. 1757).

Social media usage is driven largely by the need for internal satisfaction or one's ability to influence or be influenced by interacting with others on social media platforms (Budree, Fietkiewicz, & Lins, 2019). This hunger for internal satisfaction or the ability to influence and be influenced through social exchanges supports the idea that society behaves according to social norms and approval (Budree, Fietkiewicz, & Lins, 2019, p. 315). The need for approval speaks to the need to conform and thus places emphasis on a noticeable type of behavior that one may likely display as they seek to gain and maintain the approval of others.

Generally, people who successfully manage to curate and create attractive online profiles are referred to as social media influencers (SMI). The content they share publicly and their ability to carefully curate their social media platforms places them in positions of being most likely able to attract a significant following or audience on social media platforms. Influencers are powerful because of the psychological influence they have over their audience (Burke, 2017, p. 13). They can distinguish themselves because of the ways they manage to position certain products, services, and their ability to sell a lifestyle in general. The considered and consistent care they take into positioning different things that diverse groups may have an interest in is one way of ensuring that they attract and keep audiences interested. The relationship

between an individual and their followers is likely established because of curiosity on the part of the follower or audience member, relatability, admiration as well as trust. Social media influencers are like strangers who have become our trusted friends that we enjoy spending time with virtually, catching up on their lives and getting advice from (Ramnarain & Govender, 2013). While we perhaps are led to believe that the virtual relationships, we form with influencers occur organically, it is not true. It is part of the creatives' job to form relationships with their audience by engaging and interacting with them frequently. To master this aspect of their work, influencers must spend time and put in a lot of effort establishing and maintaining a relationship with their following. We were not aware for some time that the strangers we have increasingly become fond of and trust, get paid to influence and affect our decisions daily on what we ought to consume and perhaps which good and services we preferably should consider or trust over others. This project aims to study and focus on the often-neglected experiences of the influencers. Through interviews with 12 Social Media Influencers, it explores how influencing is a form of work as well as how influencers find themselves in this type of work, whether by choice or circumstance. I will further discuss the kinds of opportunities that attract young people towards this route of work.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The social media influencing phenomenon is interesting because of its many layers which I have attempted to unpack in this literature review. The influencing space along with digital advancements continues to grow at a rapid pace. As users we are constantly learning new things about it. There is a lot that is yet to be explored about the unconventional space of social media influencing. The gap I have identified in literature relating to social media influencing is that which focuses on young educated black African middle-class influencers in South Africa. Further to this gap that I have identified, there is an additional layer to the gap which I believe is particularly interesting; this additional layer is that which further recognizes that young black African middle-class influencers leave traditional routes of higher education and work to pursue the opportunities associated with influencing. My research aims to contribute towards the gaps identified.

This literature review is one which best supports the ideas most relevant to this research. The literature I have explored focuses on the black African perspective of youth in South Africa, more specifically relating to work and higher education. The review focuses on five aspects: black middle-class consumption complexities; the marketing and advertising industry; social media influencers; changes in work as well as entrepreneurship eagerly explored. These five focus areas are key towards guiding my research that focuses on *Digital Entrepreneurship and its Possibilities* for social media influencers.

Black middle-class consumption complexities in South Africa

I am aware of the complexities of consumption and the fact that it has many levels which can be better understood within a relevant context. There are diverse aspects of consumption and consumer culture that ought to be considered (Iqani & Kenny, 2016). The consumption of goods and services in some contexts is introduced with the possibility of participating in freedoms or opportunities made available through cultural exchanges (Iqani & Kenny, 2015, p. 97). What and how a society consumes, prompts noteworthy interrogations around mobility, class position and identity, inequality, and the terms of freedom which some can or

cannot engage with. In essence, consumption is one way we can see how power plays out and how those who have access to this power choose to use it (Iqani & Kenny, 2015, p. 101).

A black middle-class is one of the striking aspects of a post-apartheid society (Southall, 2016). This so called middle-class that somewhat includes the black African category has many problems and controversies. This inclusion accounts for a minority and subsequently excludes the majority still. The general understanding of the middle-class focuses on a category of people who find themselves in the middle range of hierarchies in terms of their household income, share in wealth, property ownership, occupation, and other similar hierarchical categories (Southall, 2016, p. 1). The 'black middle-class' has been of great interest to the advertising industry, which previously did not concentrate its efforts on as much as it currently does. Southall (2016, p. xiv) argues that 'Black diamonds' are represented through the media and are understood through that lens as elite consumers of products of an advanced industrial society, notably cars, electric goods, computers, tablets and smartphones. This middle-class is a significant role-player in the reshaping of the South African society socially, politically, and economically (Southall, 2016, p. xiv).

The existing body of literature focuses on the consumption of the black middle-class post-apartheid. There are notions that hold true that the black African middle-class consumes for the sake of consumption (Khunou, 2015, p. 92). This I believe is untrue and should not be held as the only truth or version about black African middle-class consumption. Khunou (2015: 90) convincingly writes that: "... reducing the experience of the black middle-class to an undifferentiated mass of conspicuous consumers, foregrounding the tradition of conceptualizing class and general life experience of homogeneous and fixed." Consumption ought to be looked at as a wholistic activity and thus be understood within the fluid contexts it exists as within complex boundaries that are often negotiated by members of whichever class, regardless of race. Material culture is often a topic of interest in transitioning societies (Iqani, 2015, p. 141). Some literature attempts to show the lifestyle intersection between race and consumption (Posel, 2010). Other literature focuses on why the black middle-class are now understood as a consuming class. Racialized economic inequality in South Africa was one of the legacies of the apartheid regime (Iqani, 2017, p. 107). This legacy is one of the reasons why it is not difficult to see an increase in black middle-class spending. The influence of the

global and local socio-economic as well as socio-political contexts, have an impact on one another. Evidence of this can be seen in media culture, finances, and consumption patterns. The Weberian concept of class as an economic position shows how class positioning can contribute to status and power (Iqani, 2017, p. 108).

Consumption in another sense is written about as a form of empowerment for the black middle-class whom post-apartheid was given the freedom to consume in the same or similar manner as the white minority who have access to resources (Iqani, 2012, p. 7). This form of empowerment has been critiqued as limited and to a large extent exploitative as its objective was not to liberate the black middle-class economically, but rather to use them to grow the economy (Posel, 2010). The local and global consumption patterns do not happen in isolation but occur rather in a closely related manner. As markets were created and grew, the black middle-class began to consume more. This increase in consumption, led to accusations and being labeled 'conspicuous' consumers who became slaves to competition and status which was seen to be a shallow demonstration of wealth and perhaps honor in the eyes of others. Conspicuous consumption is critiqued and contrasted against the context of extreme economic poverty (van Wyk & Posel, 2019, p. 2). The understanding that what this conspicuous consumption label attached to the black middle-class fails to recognize is that the different kinds of expenditures that the class became exposed to were not necessarily frivolous. Some of the consumption choices were focused on the investment of higher education (James, 2016, p. 1). The black middle-class had to increase their consumption in order attempt to have a better life than they did under the restrictive laws of apartheid. Similarly, they needed to work to improve their life chances. Obtaining a higher education diploma or degree to gain employment was one route that seemed to be popular for blacks who aspired towards middle-class opportunities and lifestyles. A combination of improved access to education, theoretically removing pre-existing restrictions on upward occupational mobility was key to the rise of the black middle-class (Seekings & Nattrass, 2002, p. 12).

Current standards of individualism, creative autonomy, and self-branding provide the necessary background for appreciating new forms of social media production (Duffy & Hund, 2015, p. 3). Influencers perform having an intimate connection and knowledge with a brand because of their apparent consumption relationship. The influencing narrative is extremely

individualized and often relies on the individual's persona and how it is carefully presented (Iqani, 2019, p. 239). Bloggers' profiles and Instagram feeds can be seen as a space where the contradiction between being both a producer and consumer exist. There seems to be a difference that exists between productive labor and leisurely consumption. This can be confusing at times because in one sense we see a carefully curated space that has above average lighting and a clean aesthetic which requires labor to display the working subject (Duffy & Hund, 2015). The staging of the photo opportunity which is performative and to some degree fairy-tale like is in an indication of a script that is being followed which is prompted by the presence of the camera (Mupotsa, 2016). While in another sense, we see expensive gadgets and brands which include the premium camera, laptop, and smartphone brands (Duffy & Hund, 2015, p. 5). Influencers' crisp images and carefully edited video content romanticizes aspects of work production which include flexibility, self-managing and the 'always-on' persona. These aspects characterize kinds of immaterial labor that increasingly represent cultural work in an era of progressive entrepreneurship and capitalism (Duffy & Hund, 2015). Iqani (2019) shares that, due to the overwhelming power of economic structures, there is a complex tension that exists between influencing being a self-empowering form of work and the exploitative nature of economic powers. It appears that there is at times a blur between influencers being producers of visual content on social platforms and simultaneously also being the target audience of socio-economic aspirations of the western consumption culture.

For this research, I would like to focus on the black middle-class as content and value producers who are partaking in entrepreneurial work, rather than as consumers with conspicuous consumption choices. While the young entrepreneurs influence consumers' choices and are critical to this terrain of class mobility and consumption, they do so as a kind of 'worker' in an unconventional sense. The decisions around purchasing behaviors of consumers have recently heavily been based off the information that is shared and obtained from social media platforms because consumers in general have come to embrace it and deem it a reliable source (Ramnarain & Govender, 2013, p. 1889).

Marketing and advertising industry

Advertising media must position itself in a way that makes brands more appealing and thus recognizable to catch the attention of consumer audiences (Lintvelt, 1994). Personal brands together with their meanings exist within the context of societies where values and qualities are key considerations for consumers. This then means brands need to be sensitive to the context to have relevance within the society (Lintvelt, 1994, p. 97). With the progression of societies and consumer behavior, organizations have recognized the need to integrate social media into the everyday life of consumers rather than having it as a stand-alone platform separate from consumers (Budree, Fietkiewicz, & Lins, 2019, p. 316). The power of advertising has continued to shape and influence society in a particular direction that is best suited for its profit-making vision. This has thus contributed to the culture of consumption and the pace at which it continues to grow.

The main driver behind the marketing and advertising industry is the promotion of goods and services with the objective to achieve and maintain the importance of profits (Ewen, 1976). This industry, like many others is driven by profit and uses an approach of manipulation to create needs and wants that encourage mass consumption. The advertising media has had to develop and master the science of unlocking the human mind to successfully implement the manipulation approach (Ewen, 1976). A culture of consumption is something that contemporary societies have successfully managed to normalize. Companies have taken advantage of instant messaging and social network sites (SNS) as a method of reaching infinite potential consumers across the global community, thus successfully establishing themselves as brands to global consumers (Duffet & Wakeham, 2016). Some brands have been able to cement themselves as local or international favorites or both due to their ability to keep up to date with marketing trends as they continue to evolve.

In recent decades, the marketing industry has specifically paid close attention and targeted the youth. The youth are an attractive market that the advertising industry is focused on influencing. This is because they have identified the youth as a demographically and economically more attractive and rewarding group to focus their marketing strategy towards (Ramnarain & Govender, 2013, p. 1886). The younger generations are an easier demographic to access because they are likely to use social media because they are growing up during this

digital age. Their easy access to endless digital platforms and choices means they constantly have a variety of choices at their fingertips. They can communicate and interact with brands and influencers of choice unlike in previous times where traditional marketing was a single-sided exercise (Budree, Fietkiewicz, & Lins, 2019, p. 317). There are over ten million millennials in South Africa, with much of the middle-class owning a smartphone, three out of four have access to the internet and social media via mobile devices (Duffet & Wakeham, 2016, p.24). The growing usage of social media platforms indicates that social media platforms present a rich interactive platform for marketers to capitalize on as a marketing and communication tool to achieve influence over the purchasing choices of especially youth consumers (Ramnarain & Govender, 2013). The access to the internet and social media platforms contributes to the kinds of consumption culture the youth is consistently exposed to.

The role of influencers has been significant in highlighting that more individuals may have access to a better life if they too work hard. This individualist thinking suggests a better life can be attained if one participates in consumption. This is relevant to the youth as material objects are seen as markers of status (Iqani, 2019, p. 242). The micro-celebrities are being embraced more by the advertising and marketing industry because they are more affordable than traditional celebrities and they have in many instances in their personal capacity have achieved to attract a larger audience and have a greater influence than traditional celebrities (Nouri, 2018, p. 3). Celebrity culture is significant to consumption culture, it is one of the reasons consumer culture continues to thrive. Celebrities sell a lifestyle, ideas and a range of commodities connected to entertainment which promotes and maintains the status quo (Cashmore, 2012). Celebrities and brands have a mutual understanding of using one another to both get what they want. Brands are interested in increased audience reach and exponential revenue, while celebrities are also interested in the attractive pay, which is in addition to the status and acknowledgement that comes with being associated to a global or well-recognized brand (Iqani, 2019).

Brands use social media and influencers to initiate and participate in dialogues with consumers, to foster more instant relations, deliver customer support, create brand communities and connect with consumers by using interactive applications (apps) which

allow the brands to post videos, photos, respond to comments about brand satisfaction, dissatisfaction and other general marketing communication (Duffet & Wakeham, 2016). The internet has made consumers more accessible which further facilitates business to expand its scope and extending its main business through market understanding (Jagongo & Kinyua, 2013). Business owners rarely possess all the skills and knowledge needed to expand their enterprise. Thus, finding people with the necessary skills and getting them to contribute, is a key consideration towards their networking (Jagongo & Kinyua, 2013, p. 214). One can better understand from the above, the amount of thought and planning that is applied by the marketing and advertising industry. The concentration of their efforts on youth and general target audiences has influenced markets in innovative ways.

The marketing industry is given an important form of power using social platforms to interact directly with target audiences. This direct access means being able to move and shift their marketing strategy that relied on one-directional mass messages (one-to-many-communication) to a more personal and interactive exchange with the audience (Budree, Fietkiewicz & Lins, 2019, p.317). The strategic approach by brands to interact with consumers through influencers is a winning formula as it humanizes the brands while also allowing the brand's reputation to be maintained in a positive light, as well the quick resolution of customer service issues and crises handling (Budree, Fietkiewicz, & Lins, 2019, p. 317).

Influencers have recently been placed at the forefront of social media brand campaigns and advertising. They have since become powerful marketing tools because they have their fingers on the internet's pulse and social media listens to whatever they have to say, which is what distinguishes them from ordinary users (Talkwalker.com). Influencing is a powerful alternative to traditional marketing on billboards, tv and radio ads and similar media (Talkwalker.com). The move from traditional media to new media platforms such as social media platforms has encouraged users to become more demanding, more time conscious, information and content intensive and highly individualistic in nature (Ramnarain & Govender, 2013, p. 1886).

Online users appear to trust the judgements and opinions of a friend from social media they have never met or had social contact with over any other source they have access to over the

internet (Ramnarain & Govender, 2013, p. 1887). The power of marketing has moved from being entirely held and controlled by the marketing industry to allowing consumers to be the trendsetters and dominant voice, while the market responds to their needs and wants (Ramnarain & Govender, 2013). Social media has been a force to be reckoned with as it has altered the way the marketing and advertising industry conduct business. Consumers who are the main users of social media platforms have become more trusting of social media marketing and have embraced it as one of the most credible forms of advertising. It is estimated that there are approximately 272 million users across the globe who rely on these networking sites for information creation and sharing. Hence, it is no surprise that social networking sites (SNS) have gradually become the number 1 platform for accessing information (Ramnarain & Govender, 2013, p. 1886). Social media platforms have given rise to social media influencers who have now become key role players in the fast paced, exciting, and equally overwhelming social media culture.

Social Media Influencers

SIMs can be understood as contributors of online content creation, thus forming part of the gig economy which, "...can be understood as a system of economic exchange where organizations and individuals come together to get a variety of work done via digital platforms as intermediaries" (Anwar & Graham, 2019, p. 2). The influencers create content that their followers trust because they perceive them to be experts in their respective fields (Velazquez, 2019). The larger their following, the most likely the wider their reach. Their engagement with a wider an audience is an advantage when it comes to working with brands, advertising, and marketing managers (Velazquez, 2019). The influencers can negotiate their pay and contract terms since their following and engagement with their audience. On the on the one hand, the more experienced and skilled the content creator is, the more choices they have available to them about which jobs to take on over those they are less interested in because of brand misalignment, no creative autonomy or poor pay. When it relates to the contracts, they do choose to be part of, they are likely to be in a position where they can be able to negotiate for a higher salary rate because of their proven success based off jobs they completed previously. While on the other hand, the less experienced creatives are likely to take on as many jobs as possible at a less favorable rate. The reality of inexperienced influencers is that in some instances they are targeted by brands and clients who demand that they market their

brands in exchange for exposure and no pay, like more vulnerable gig economy workers (Anwar & Graham, 2019).

Among the job description of social media influencers is creating brand awareness on a new or existing product or service, brand advocacy, being ambassadors who represent the brand and engage with audience within and beyond their reach (Velazquez, 2019, p. 18). Their constant visibility on digital platforms makes them part of the users' regular dose of consumption. Influencers hold a status as micro-celebrities. Their status affords them opportunities to play a role as media idols who many young people aspire to be like in some ways (van Eldik, Kneer, Lutkenhaus, & Jansz, 2019, p. 1). Their audience following (the consumers) often are likely to replicate the consumption choices of their favorite influencers when they feel they can relate to them on a personal level (Nouri, 2018).

The key aspects that make up the job description of social media influencers seem basic and easy to achieve. However, if it were the case then we could all audition to become influencers. The first aspect of reach is key because with everything the influencers engage on and share, it is important that they achieve a wide reach so that their first point of contact can be wide enough to potentially be able to expand further and reach an even wider audience that may not have necessarily been exposed to the influencer and their work. Engagement is a second aspect. This aspect is a crucial one as it is what distinguishes influencers from celebrities who often are not accessible and lack relatability with their audience and vice versa. Influencers who engage and are relatable to their audience are most likely to achieve success. The third aspect of influencing is having an audience. To qualify as an influencer, the content creators need to have already built an audience that follows their pictures, captions, stories, videos, vlogs, blogs, and other posts on their social media platforms. The audience size usually matters, because the larger the audience, the more people they can reach, engage with, and ultimately have influence over, which is what brands are interested in. Another aspect is recognizability. Influencers need to be recognizable to both their audience and potential audience members to be successful. The more recognizable they are as online figures, the less work they will likely have to do to prove themselves to both brands as well as existing and potential followers. Finally, a key aspect to being a top tier influencer is creativity. One's creative identity is what will do the talking for them. As influencers they will come across

opportunities to work with brands, have a wider reach and grow their audience because of the creative spunk they offer. This is important because it adds to one's identity as an influencer (Talkwalker.com p. 6&7). Content creation is about the originality and creativity of the public figures who present themselves and their content in a way that sets them apart (Talkwalker.com).

Social media influencers position themselves within communities according to their strengths, interests, and opportunities. Some of the influencers' followers belong to communities who either enjoy DIY, cooking, make-up, travel, lifestyle, or gaming content (Eldik, 2019). To gain audiences which do not ordinarily fall within their community positioning, sharing information with a wider audience using Word of Mouth (WOM) is a powerful method of positioning themselves beyond a particular community (Hofman, Bakshy, Mason, & Watts, 2011, p. 65). To collaborate with other influencers who have a wider or different audience reach is another way that the influencers can further gain credibility and audience growth (Eldik, 2019).

Many diverse groups are interested in SMI's regular posts and interaction. Generation Y is one category that stands out when it comes to social media consumption (Duffet & Wakeham, 2016). Influencers play a crucial role in shaping the identity of its audience, which is largely an audience of young people (van Eldik, Kneer, Lutkenhaus, & Jansz, 2019). The micro-celebrities have found confidence and fame with their target audience through the creation of diverse content that they share of their social media platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter. Instagram and YouTube stand out as leading social media platforms as followers and subscribers have shared that influencer videos, visuals, reviews, and other forms of marketing on endorsed, sponsored, and paid partnership content have guided their discoveries of new brands, products, and services (Nouri, 2018). The youth as keen users of social media feel a sense of intimacy and connection with their role models on social media. The connection between micro-celebrities and their audience is what sets them apart from traditional celebrities where the audience experiences a disconnect because there is a lower probability of attainability and relatability (Nouri, 2018, p. 13). There is an interesting differentiation between a celebrities and influencers. While celebrities are paid to show a glimpse of their domestic lives, influencers on the other hand invest their time and creative

energy curating a glossy aesthetic that positions them as celebrities without the accompaniment of celebrity status (Iqani, 2019). This difference further demonstrates the contrast between celebrities and influencers.

For an influencer to increase and maintain their following and stay on track with promoting a culture of consumption, they need to be accessible and engage with their audience by making them feel part of a community. Influencers need to constantly produce content and make themselves accessible to their audience. To some extent, they need to live (or portray) a life that is relatable to their target audience. This can be tricky for the individual, as the lines between one's public and private life can easily be blurred (van Eldik, Kneer, Lutkenhaus, & Jansz, 2019). While for the micro-celebrity engagement and accessibility is part of their job, for the audience it is much more than that. It is personal, and it is a want that has become essential to constantly have their role model(s) create content they can consume by participating in the purchases of goods, using their recommended service providers, supporting them by attending events which they are part of. The influencers will engage with their following as well by liking, subscribing, and sharing their content with others (van Eldik, Kneer, Lutkenhaus, & Jansz, 2019). The roles and responsibilities of influencers are not fixed, they are fluid and require a lot from the micro-celebrities. While some may glamorize this kind of work, it can be argued that much like a conventional 9-5 job and environment, it is not for everyone.

Changes in work

Changes in the workplace in one organization or place do not happen in isolation. Burawoy explains that if we are to understand globalization from below, we need to make the connection between both the global and local context (Bonnin, 2011, p. 192). There is an interconnectedness that is present which does not occur in isolation. The underlying dynamics of change in a workplace relate to leadership, economic opportunity, and access (Bonnin, 2011, p. 192). Race is a key consideration in the workplace especially in the South African context that is that much more complex because of its colonial and apartheid history. There is evidence that suggests that dynamics in the workplace continue to be racially skewed because of the legacy of apartheid (Grant, 2007, p. 93). Although there are a few black people who are appointed into key positions, they remain few. The black minority who are recipients

of empowerment deals and strategies are highly concentrated and in some cases are politically connected to the governing party (Krige, 2012). The few that do exist enjoy overwhelming media coverage as symbols of 'transformation', meanwhile the real transformation within workspaces remains a challenge. These few symbols of transformation are positioned within the managerial and entrepreneurial elite categories (Krige, 2012, p. 30). To become a black corporate capitalist, one requires funding which most black people lack, largely due to being historically disadvantaged financially, socially, and politically are unable to do (Krige, 2012).

On a global scale, the inequalities of the labor market also persist. The precariat is a distinctive socio-economic group that does not fit neatly into Marx's two major classes. The precariat is a class-in-the-making (Standing, 2013, p. 1). People in this category are defined by their relations to production. They are associated with insecure labor characteristics because they move between jobs or do not have the security of long-term employment. Furthermore, the precariat has no or is likely associated with a vague occupational identity. The precariat is in some instances associated with a romantic, free spirit which is non-conforming and rejects the norms of the working class (Standing, 2013, p. 3). This new class comprises in part young people who are presumably self-motivated and possess some form of a higher education qualification or skills which are ideally meant to favor them to secure stable careers and have opportunities which grant them access to social and economic mobility (Standing, 2013, p. 4). This class seeks to gain liberation from its labor, rather than depend on it as a norm. This suggests that the dualism of the informal and formal sectors has less relevance in the present economic context because we see more examples of labor existing in-between and outside of the outdated dualism (Munck, 2019, p. 371). Social media influencing is one such example of labor existing beyond the dual understanding that is limited. Influencers do not necessarily fall under either the informal or formal work binary (Breman, 1976, p. 1874). This is because although they receive seasonal work on a project or campaign basis, they are not necessarily low-skilled workers who neatly fall into the precarious work category (McKay, Jefferys, Paraksevopoulou, & Keles, 2012, p. 40).

What was once understood as stability and economic inclusion that came because of being gainfully employed, has now regressed into a frustrating and unequally socio-economic

reality for most citizens in South Africa as there continues to be a deepened instability and grounds of exclusion that many must contend with. Barchiesi (2017) argues that post-apartheid, restructuring occurred and further contributed to the uneven dynamics which existed, thus adding a layer to the already complex and unfavorable employment and casualization context. The first decade post-apartheid was primarily focused on growing employment opportunities within the informal economy, however, the failure of policies led to a failure in being able to absorb the increasing numbers of young graduate and non-graduate entrants into the economically active population. This failure to prepare and anticipate economic growth has significantly contributed to the living standards of many households that are hardly able to survive above the official poverty levels (Barchiesi, 2017, p. 55). Consequently, there is a connection that exists between the vulnerable nature that is embedded within waged employment and the growth of working-class poverty; thus, it is strengthened by 'atypical' forms of employment that include casual, temporary, fixed-term, part-time contracts, labor broking, and 'homework' which often blurs the line between the formal and informal work binary (Barchiesi, 2017, p. 56). It is understood that while gig work is contributing towards the revolution of work, workplaces, and employment in general, the characteristics of such work continue to be centered around short-term and insecure contractual employment agreements (Anwar & Graham, 2019, p. 3).

The world of social media influencing is a good example of how precarious work is not homogenous. There are degrees of precariousness as well as perceptions about precariousness (McKay, Jeffreys, Paraksevopoulou, & Keles, 2012, Standing, 2013). The precariat lacks homogeneity and is often made up of significantly different elements (Southall, 2016). The endless modes of creative self-enterprise are symptomatic of labor in a post-Fordist era which is characterized by destabilized employment, a rise in casual and contract-based work as well as the logic of flexible specialization (Duffy & Hund, 2015, p. 1). A central concept in neoliberalism has been an emphasis upon flexible labor, that is precarious in some ways and is characterized by multiple forms of insecurity (Southall, 2016, Standing, 2013).

SIMs are a new group of workers who do not meet the standards of formal workers, but they are steadily becoming embraced by both the formal and informal sectors for their work which

is agile and relevant to the changing nature of work and socio-economic context. Influencers affect the buying patterns of consumers because they too are consumers and so, they are perceived to be trustworthy endorsers and ambassadors of brands. They are key in maintaining and in some instances building brand reputation. Their strength lies in their ability to especially influence the circles they move within. Influencing work entails complex dynamics which in some instances influencers may not be aware of. One of the dynamics is that it merges personal identities with those of western brands to sell a culture of consumption which is motivated by material success (Iqani, 2019, p. 242). One's identity and sense of self is sometimes compromised in the name of organizational brand building and alignment.

There are new forms of work available across digital platforms and social media where contemporary ideas of labor have shifted. This shift means there is an allowance for work to be performed during more flexible and unconventional hours, even more so as one takes on multiple platforms as additional income (Guarriello, 2019). It is likely that, "...workers who already are in regular jobs are more likely to use gig work to earn extra income... to do something they are passionate about. Hence, they are also likely to filter jobs and select clients carefully" (Anwar & Graham, 2019, p. 9). The more time and effort one invests in their media career, the more likely it is to produce rewards. Therefore, media personalities spend hours on end in an attempt to perfect their craft and reach a point of satisfaction even while it seems almost unattainable at times. The concepts of self-branding and empowerment are important in a neoliberal work context (Guarriello, 2019, p. 1754).

The more finely tuned one's personal brand is, the better they can attract other brands that are in line with their personal brand. Brand endorsements usually come about this way. A brand endorsement is when influencers become brands in themselves and thus attract bigger and well-known brands who can complement the individual brand by affirming its existence and worth through financial backing and resource sharing so the personal brand's audience together with the commercial brand's audience can find a sweet marketing and exposure point. This is something that brands can then buy into (Talkwalker.com p.6&7). Truly, when one becomes a celebrity or online influencer, while they are most likely motivated by money and freedom or even fame, there is also the aspect of building a name for yourself, building

a reputation, being a brand that is recognizable or even potentially a meme that can be shared across social media platforms (Guarriello, 2019, p. 1775). Oftentimes, there is a thin line between one's personal life remaining private while their work life is displayed openly for the public to either embrace or scrutinize. Often, one's personal affairs is what an audience is likely to have the most interest about and therefore, they find themselves making decisions about what to share and which aspects of their lives are off limits. There is also the question about, where does one draw the line when they are comfortable with sharing openly.

Corporations like YouTube try to encourage people to aspire to always be on connected and sharing across the various media platforms so that they increase their chances of fame and thus subsequently increasing their chances to grow their income (Guarriello, 2019). The lack of interaction or decreased online presence due to personal choices such as needing a holiday from the virtual space comes at the risk of decreased subscribership, sponsorship and thus, ultimately loss of income for that period one is away. Guarriello (2019) argues that few media personalities can afford the luxury of being away and off-line as the social media work style requires one to continuously be building relations and ensuring that the support, they receive is continuous to maintain and grow their income.

In a way, the choice by black African youth to reject work and especially entry level work that is exploitative in nature that is disguised as training and experience is an act of rebellion. This resistance by the youth who for instance unapologetically disapprove of internship conditions and the pay they offer, is similar in some ways to the resistance of Africans who were coerced into performing labor that was exploitative and undignified, thus ultimately taking a stand and demanding more dignified and favorable working conditions (Barchiesi, 2017). The reality of unfavorable working opportunities and uncertainty of being gainfully employed has discouraged young people from pursuing conventional school and career paths, hence to some extent the reason for their eagerness to explore and immerse themselves in the entrepreneurial journey because it appears to be more attractive.

Entrepreneurship eagerly explored

The entrepreneurial route is steadily becoming a popular preference and alternative for black African youth. While the possibilities of success and risk are uncertain, it is nonetheless still

being embraced with great eagerness. This unconventional path is one way by which young people are choosing to exercise their agency away from the conventional structures that remain unreformed and equally unwelcoming. The increase of unemployment is a cause for concern for young people who must actively partake in economic activities. This concern also affects those who have recently joined the labor market and are prematurely confronted with great uncertainty about the future of their income and economic activity in general. Thus, due to these unpredictable factors, there is a clear and sharp rise in casualized and precarious work which is often characterized by low wages and job uncertainty (Barchiesi, 2017). Heightened job instability equally poses a threat to young workers who are relatively highly skilled and equipped for formal work (Umney & Krestos, 2015). Standing (2011) holds true that precarious workers increasingly 'reject laborism of stable full-time jobs' because they have a greater want as well as need to 'work on their own' independent of the existing traditional collective structures (Umney & Krestos, 2015, p. 316). Precarious self-employment has replaced many secure permanent jobs globally as many societies follow the notion that entrepreneurship is liberating, meritocratic and accessible to all. However, the reality is that entrepreneurial earnings are highly skewed as they are over-estimated at both the highest and lowest end of the scale. The low entry barriers, lack of qualification required, and no application process takes for granted that the determination and creativity of an individual will be matched by opportunities, therefore making success an inevitable result of individual effort displayed through neoliberal behaviors (Dy, Marti, & Marlow, 2018, p. 587). This however is not true due to the reality that offline inequalities, absence of appropriate experience, networks, skill, and information deficits are quickly compounded as the internet uses and reproduces structural hierarchies (Dy, Marti, & Marlow, 2018, p. 596). Where gig work is concerned, existing inequalities of education, economic status and one's access to the internet are reasserted (Anwar & Graham, 2019, p. 9).

I adopt the understanding of entrepreneurship that explains it as an activity which is carried out by an individual who seeks or recognizes economic opportunities in the market. The individual uses or creates the opportunities available to them in such a way that he or she can optimize their success by managing and appropriating the resources available in both an efficient and effective way. The entrepreneur's ability to blend creativity and manage resources with the objective to expand into a profitable economic organization for their

personal gain can be achieved through the investment of their time and money (Louw, van Eeden, Bosch, & Venter, 2003, p. 7). The understandings of entrepreneurship are diverse and sometimes complex, especially in contexts which are unconventional. This is the case with social media influencing. There have been numerous opportunities for entrepreneurial activity that have been created through digitization (Kraus, 2018, p. 2).

Young people are in a unique position where they are expected to rely less on hopes of finding a traditional job that they can ideally have for the rest of their lives unlike the post-war generations. There is a greater pressure and responsibility on the individual to seek alternative ways of being employed. Therefore, flexibility and creativity have become more crucial in developing competencies and attitudes which are in line with the entrepreneurial individual (Galloway, Anderson, Brown, & Wilson, 2005, p. 8). The key skills that are important to position oneself as entrepreneurially competent include, "...negotiation, salesmanship, leadership, creative thinking, management of technological innovation, new product marketing, skills in competitive strategy, identifying market opportunities, financial acumen, organization skills and problem-solving skills" (Galloway, Anderson, Brown, & Wilson, 2005, p. 9). These are quite several skills required for one to potentially see themselves as an entrepreneur. Galloway, Anderson, Brown, & Wilson (2005, p. 16) argue that it seems students understand the skills necessary for entrepreneurship. Most students trust that they are well-prepared and equipped for the demands of entrepreneurship.

Social media influencing and content creation is one of the career paths that have come because of digital platforms. This digitization has added a further layer to entrepreneurship. Digital entrepreneurship is a subcategory of entrepreneurship in which some or all of what would be a physical in a traditional organization has been digitized. This means there is a reconciliation of what is understood to be traditional entrepreneurship with an added layer of creating and doing business in the digital era (Kraus, 2018, p. 1). It is assumed that accessibility and neutrality of digital platforms generally encourage entrepreneurial activity, however, it is important to note that it is not an equalizing solution for socio-economic participation (Dy, Martin, & Marlow, 2018, p. 589).

The precarious idea of pursuing one's passion to presumably earn a sizable income from digital media brands is perhaps like the one where one unintentionally comes across this non-conventional form of work to escape from the banality of unrewarding professional lives or perhaps the interest of self-success and self-discovery (Duffy & Hund, 2015, p. 4). The labor field has become more individualized and immaterial in some ways (Dy, Martin, & Marlow, 2018). While creative careers such as the arts and media are often characterized by multiple short-term projects with heterogenous employers and clients (Umney & Krestos, 2015, p. 317), project-based work, despite its inherent insecurity, also gives workers an opportunity to exercise agency over their working lives. They give meaning to their work and therefore give meaning to their lives which is seen as a cool thing. For one to have an opportunity to explore a creative career, there are factors such as personal and structural factors that include family and financial support that are necessary and play a crucial role in one's ability to pursue passion work that often is accompanied by an overwhelming uncertainty and potentially little to no pay (Umney & Krestos, 2015). Having a structure to support one's aspirations and can contribute financially and in terms of time towards your passion project and potential career is a critical factor that contributes to your proximity to success. The creative space demonstrates the interdependency between agency and structural factors in individuals' aspirations (Umney & Krestos, 2015, p. 329). Despite this tension, young people are still eager and more hopeful about the entrepreneurial path than they are about traditional routes of work.

Entrepreneurial activity is often depicted as a contemporary universal solution to global socio-economic challenges such as poverty and social inequality. It is also portrayed as a solution to personal emancipation (Dy, Martin, & Marlow, 2018, p. 587). It is no surprise that with the increased access to technology, there are expectations of greater economic participation for socially marginalized people. The expectation of such an increase in digital technology holds true that underemployment as well as unemployment will decrease, thus creating opportunities for wider economic benefits (Dy, Martin, & Marlow, 2018, p. 586). However, flexible economies result in sacrifices of jobs being outsourced as well as a reduction in pay and benefits which is not a good direction to pursue for most economies (Brown, 2016, p. 11).

The valorization of entrepreneurial activity taken on by heroic individuals who are interested in being freed from state constraints potentially could maximize the chance for innovation and wealth creation (Dy, Martin, & Marlow, 2018, p. 587). It is understood that entrepreneurship is often associated with wealth creation. This therefore means that “organizations, employees, students, mothers, retirees, the unemployed and others” are encouraged to embrace entrepreneurship (Dy, Martin, & Marlow, 2018, p. 587). This understanding is misleading as it leads to other socio-economic challenges around under-employment and additionally contributes towards the problems of outsourcing, contracting and privatization of public sector services (Dy, Martin, & Marlow, 2018).

Conclusion

Globalization and the advertising industry have contributed towards the increase of consumption of middle-class groups both locally and globally. This has forced businesses and brands to adapt to new market conditions (Szcurski, 2017, p. 5). Youth as a key target market for goods and services have contributed towards popular consumption patterns. Black African middle-class groups in South Africa are also consuming a lot more, post-apartheid as an attempt to access a better life. Social media influencers contribute significantly to encouraging the increased consumption of products and services as they work together with the marketing and advertising divisions of brands to psychologically influence their audiences’ consumption behavior. The role of these micro-celebrities is key in promoting and maintaining consumption culture. The culture of consumption is contrasted against a context of extreme poverty and limited opportunities (van Wyk & Posel, 2019).

Black African youth are increasingly becoming exposed to more socio-economic opportunities that allow them to be producers in the production-consumption dualism. Social media platforms such as Instagram, YouTube and Facebook are good examples of this new terrain of cultural production which global brands are increasingly embracing as a strategy to gain access to more local markets because of the saturation global markets (Iqani, 2019). Post-apartheid ideals present a picture of equal opportunity and access to all; however, these ideals have not necessarily been made available to everyone based on merit. Bourdieu (1986, p. 51) argues that one’s access to capital within a social, cultural and or economic setting further contributes towards one’s individual success. He explains that it is an illusion that

perfect competition and opportunities exist equally for everyone and that it is not necessarily a fact that every prize is accessible instantaneously by all. We will engage further with these implications in Chapter 6.

The experiences of many young educated black Africans have proven that having some form of access to the pie is not merely about merit but social capital as well (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 51). As a result of limited access and opportunities some social groups must be more innovative and pursue unconventional and precarious paths to create and/or exploit opportunities whose potential can be multiplied by possessing some form of capital outside of the common understanding of economic capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Social media influencing is one way some are managing to do this. There are pull factors within SMI such as status, self-management and values of a neo-liberal culture that are particularly attractive to the young people engaging this new form of livelihood (Iqani, 2019). The manifestation of push and pull factors present within digital entrepreneurship are relevant and act as a guide to understand better whether it was by chance or other factors which have contributed towards young educated black Africans within the uncharted path of influencing.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Research Question

This research was interested in understanding: Why are young educated black Africans transitioning from traditional routes of education and work to pursue social media influencing on a more formal basis? The sub-questions that support this main question examine: What are the pull and push factors behind the transition? What do the lives of the influencers entail daily? How is this new form of work generally understood by the influencers and their communities? What kinds of opportunities do they believe they are exposed to as influencers, that they ordinarily would not be in a position to be exposed to?

Specific Aim and Broad Objectives

The aim of this research was to explore the reasons behind the transition of the young black African middle-class group from traditional routes of work and education to less conventional new forms of possibly precarious work. The objective was to better understand the push and pull factors that contribute towards the transition and further explore how this (if at all) links to work and higher education opportunities and or challenges.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to focus on the often-neglected experiences of social media influencers whose work cannot necessarily be defined as either formal or informal. It seeks to explore the new terrain of work that is being embraced by young people in a neoliberal society (Southall, 2016). Work in the digital space such as influencing is a good example why the dual understanding of work has been found to be limited in that it does not consider new forms of work. Prevailing theories follow this limitation of either formal or informal rather than understanding that work today continues to unfold as varying multiplicities (Chun & Agarwala, 2016).

Rationale

It was thus important to conduct an in-depth study of social media Influencing as a new form of work that is emerging and does not necessarily fall within the formal-informal dualism that

we have come to understand work fall within. The prevailing theories of work thus far are limited and do not sufficiently account for unconventional new forms of work. This study is important as it seeks to contribute towards new forms of work that are evolving as society evolves in a neoliberal context where individual creativity, self-managing and passion work are embraced (Duffy & Hund, 2015).

Research Problem

Work is often defined as existing primarily within the prescriptive bounds of the formal-informal dualism (Munck, 2019). This is a problem because work is increasingly becoming diverse in its characterization within a changing social, political, and economic context which together with the advancements of technology are reinventing work both within and outside of the formal and informal boundaries. Therefore, the study was attentive in studying new forms of work that are not office-based, secure in a conventional sense, where the employer-employee is more complex and, passion and individual aspirations are key contributors to ones' choice or line of work (Duffy & Hund, 2015). Social media influencing has introduced the dynamics of using ones' talent, personality, tools, and resources to define a new terrain of work in a neo-liberal context (Southall, 2016, p. 17).

Approach and Design

The qualitative approach was best suited for this study as I was interested in in-depth descriptions and understanding of the of social media influencing phenomenon (Bless, Higson-Smith, & Sithole, 2013). I conducted in-depth interviews with 12 participants to gain access to inside information about influencers and the diverse spaces they find themselves part of. Interviews were also suitable because of the social nature of both influencing and interviews. Qualitative interviews for this study were useful in integrating multiple perspectives and learning about the push and pull factors that may have contributed towards the influencers' choices in becoming digital entrepreneurs. This approach is rich in nature and allowed for access to information that was of value to the study (Weiss, 1994, p. 306).

The 12 participants were invited to participate in the study by availing themselves for a virtual interview over Zoom due to Covid-19 limitations. I contacted them over email. The email

addresses I used were those I found on their personal platforms on Instagram and YouTube accounts. The virtual interviews were conducted between 21 August and 8 October 2020. I used purposive sampling as I had chosen a specific criterion to select who the participants of the study are likely to be (Bless, Higson-Smith, & Sithole, 2014). Participants were chosen based on being black African, youth (21-35) and a holding status or occupation as a digital content creator either full-time or part-time. Of the total sample size 3 were male participants, while the rest of the participants were female. This may be because of the nature of the influencing seems to some extent to be a relatively gendered production space (Duffy & Hund, 2015, p. 2). While influencers are generally diverse in race, age, gender, socio-economic status, and other factors, as indicated above, I was specifically interested in focusing on young black African influencers and their experiences and choices. I chose to focus on influencers above 21 years old as they were more likely to have spent enough time in the university or workspace to decide to pursue influencing more formally.

I was able to gain the trust of my participants by being transparent about what my intentions were for the research; to share the journeys of emerging young black African content creators and creatives from a fellow young black African perspective within the space of academia that is predominantly white. This transparency on my part and understanding on the part of the participants gave me access to the participants' experiences and journey in a way that was less formal and less intimidating. Relating to the participants because of race, a similar age and background as well as experiences of social media in general, allowed us to engage openly on issues that mattered to the participants and equally enriched the research objectives. I also shared with the participants my eagerness to explore less conventional paths of education and work which was brought about by the realities facing most young people, more specifically black African youth who continue to be the most disadvantaged within traditional structures of education and workspaces. With this reality being one of the reasons digital content creators have chosen an alternate path, they were equally as eager to share their experiences and are motivated to bring awareness toward this road less travelled, especially in black African communities.

Data Gathering Tools

The interviews were a combination of semi-structured, open-ended, direct, and indirect questions (Bless, Higson-Smith, & Sithole, 2013, p. 195). The interviews each lasted an average of 90 minutes. I used emails, phone, and social media communication with influencers as another possible data gathering tool (Bless, Higson-Smith, & Sithole, 2013). In addition to conducting interviews and using email, I continued to watch the influencers YouTube and Instagram videos, scroll through their visual feed on their online platforms, as well as read text in the form of captions and observe their engagements on topics and with fellow influencers and their audiences. The best approach for this research was triangulation as it allowed me access to an additional layer of depth in the collection of data (Bless, Higson-Smith, & Sithole, 2013).

The selection of the sample is based on the experience of the transition from university or workplace as well as on the knowledge and expertise of the influencers. These influencers were also selected because of their large Instagram following and YouTube subscription backing. A huge amount of cultural production takes place on social media platforms with a major emphasis on Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook (Iqani, 2019, p. 230&231). I have specifically chosen Instagram and YouTube because these are the two platforms with large youth appeal on South African social media.

Data Analysis

I used the interview recordings as the main source of data collection. I also used email communication with the participants as well as observed their engagement (Weiss, 1994). The observations on social media are open to interpretation but can also be read in line with the interviews.

Ethical considerations

In any study conducted, ethics are an important aspect to consider. The purpose of research ethics is to ensure the protection of research participants and avoid any form of scientific misconduct (Wassenaar, 2006, p. 61). Participants were given all the necessary information about the study and consented to participate to be part of it. They have the freedom to refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any point. The data gathered has been and will

continue to be treated with privacy and strictly used for academic purposes. The anonymity of research participants can be guaranteed as their ideas will be protected. They have also been assigned pseudonyms to maintain anonymity for the final research report. All participants and brand names have been changed to protect their identity; this is indicated with an asterisk (*) when the participant or brand name is first introduced. The interviews were recorded after receiving both verbal and written consent of the participants (Wassenaar, 2006). The data will be stored on my password encrypted laptop and stored on my personal iCloud account for backup. The backup is also password encrypted.

Limitations of the study

Conducting interviews virtually due to Covid constraints and considerations proved to be a challenge because of network disruptions. Due to different connections and service providers, there was a loss of signal at times either on my end or on the end of the participant. This made it difficult at times to hear and catch what the participants were saying at certain points. This is one area of the research that I believe could have been stronger. Another limitation is that because I only had the participants email addresses and not their personal cellphone contact, I could not reach the participants immediately when they forgot about the interview day and time. On several occasions they did not join on the initial scheduled day or time. This often delayed my data collecting timelines as I often had to reschedule to dates and a time that would best suit them. Each participant was sent a Part 1, Part 2 as well as a Conclusion link ahead of the agreed day and time of the interview. The fragmentation of the interviews could only happen this way because I only had access to the free Zoom version which meant interviews could only last for a maximum of 30-40 minutes at a time. I was always conscious of time and often had to cut the participants to ask them to join on another Zoom link. Overall, connecting with the participants virtually briefly exposed me to their reality as digital content creators.

CHAPTER 4

DAILY: THE LIVES OF SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS

In this chapter, the lives of digital content creators will be explored in detail with the hope to have a better understanding of what exactly it entails to be a social media creator. The chapter will explore briefly how the influencers found themselves creating content that grew their audience and ultimately resulted in them being recognized by brands and thus being able to earn an income. The demand for influencers is steadily increasing as the marketing and advertising industry move away from traditional advertising and more towards focusing their brand strategy on an individual who prior has built an audience for themselves within a particular niche. The reason for the shift in strategy is the recognition that audiences are better receptive towards relatable figures whose opinions they trust and value over that traditional radio, tv and radio mediums which the advertising industry previously relied on.

As technological advancements have been achieved, so has access to the internet and more portable technological devices. Thus, it has become easier for organizations to reach a wider audience across the globe and simultaneously rope in the youth as they grow up in this digital era where access to information is easily available at their fingertips. Organizations both abroad and locally have caught up to the new ways of involving their consumers and using influencers to understand and equally manipulate their consumption patterns, hence creating a new path of work for digital entrepreneurs. The digital entrepreneurs' roles and responsibilities in most instances require the young entrepreneurs to wear multiple hats as they attempt to navigate the demands of influencing daily. Maintaining consistent communication with their audience and brands requires the influencers to almost always be online. Influencers share what their daily work lives consist of and how they stumbled upon such a career.

Journey to becoming an influencer

Tshepo* is 32-year-old male content creator who specifically specializes in videography and photography. According to his understanding, an influencer is an individual who can convince people or their audience to buy into a particular product or service that they are endorsing. The ability of the influencer to introduce a product or service to an audience with the

intention to get them to consume or use it is a powerful psychological method the influencers apply when engaging with their peers (Burke, 2017). This psychological influence they have is partly attributed to the audience's sense of relation to the individual and to some extent attributed to the need to want to see themselves in the influencer. He explained that an influencer is consistent with a person who has been given a discount code by a brand to share with their audience so that it encourages their following to use the code to purchase a particular brand or product or render the services of a particular company. Thobile* is a 26-year-old well-recognized celebrity make-up artist and lifestyle vlogger. She explains that there are differences in the work that celebrities do, and influencers perform. She knows and understands these differences quite intimately as she in an influencer while her sister whom she shares a close bond is a celebrity. Here is how Thobile distinguishes influencers from celebrities:

Celebrities... firstly, their numbers are massive! Yes, influencers have just as equal numbers, but our roles are different in the entertainment industry... I'm a digital creator, my sister is a celebrity, right. What I do in the space is not the same as what she would do. Why brands would approach her is not the same reason why brands would approach her. Generally, I don't sell an advert on my socials, I sell my connect with people and so that's why brands would come to me. Whereas for my sister who is a celebrity, brands would come to her because it becomes more of an aspirational thing for the audience. Whereas with me, it's more of a community. It's more of a closer relationship with the audience where they feel like they are able to text me, DM [direct message] me and ask me what my experience is of a product. Did I use it? Where did I purchase it? How much was it? Can I recommend other places that sell the same product or other options that may be more affordable...? I sell more of a closer relationship with the audience, whereas [with] a celebrity it feels more out of reach.

(Thobile, Aug. 29, 2020)

While there are both clear and subtle differences and similarities between celebrities and influencers, what they share in common is a public life and persona that can ultimately be used to advantage of the celebrity or micro-celebrity. An influencer's exposure positions them in such a way that allows and encourages them to be held in high esteem by their

audience and recognized by brands for both their personalities and creative flair, thus attracting online work opportunities (Nouri, 2018).

Thobeka* a 22-year-old graphic designer, fashion and lifestyle vlogger on the other hand argues that she is both an influencer and a content creator, depending on the context. Her understanding of her roles as both an influencer as well as content creator are complimentary. Unlike Tshepo's perspective, she does not perceive to be different:

I think my platform is a little bit of both (influencing and content creation) because it is a mixture of very creative content-making, but I also do "influence", so they do draw inspiration from me, they do want to know more about what I'm doing and who I am and all that stuff. I am a little bit of both, an entrepreneur as well as because we've started so many little businesses just from what we've been doing, so we are always finding opportunities to make it more sustainable for us financially. I'm a little bit of everything. When I'm working with brands, I'm referred to as an influencer, when I'm working for other people, I'm referred to as a content creator.

(Thobeka, Sept. 25, 2020)

The micro-influencer further shares how her influencing career began:

When I started posting pictures, it was during my gap year and I had no intention of being, you know, anything along those lines. But I did follow a lot of influencers abroad and drew a lot of inspiration from them... I started posting content and, the first time that I thought: okay, this is interesting and there's something that could be considered work, or I am an influencer now was when I was approached by Student Clothing to do the Student Clothing Style Update* and that was the first payment of R1500. They were like you just gotta post a picture and at that time it was just like oh my god, I just get to do what I like and get a few clothes and money. That's when I encountered that I could be this [an influencer], that's what they started calling me and at the time, about three or four years ago, influencing was just starting to become a little more recognized in SA. I didn't [believe it], it was very bewildering that they would call me that because I had like a thousand followers. I was so small, but I had a pretty good engagement. I thought maybe after a couple of times, maybe this is something I can turn into something else. And then, I met my boyfriend, that's when things escalated, and I became invested in this influencing thing.*

(Thobeka, Sept. 25, 2020)

Tshepo explains what he does as a content creator and how he specifically got to create content for a niche audience. He is a videographer and photographer who focuses on creating and producing travel content. His content creation includes his accommodation and general surroundings when he travels to different parts of the world. For the creatives to know and have a better understanding of their supporters, they need to carve out a niche for their content. It is advised that they position themselves within a particular audience niche so that they can better understand how they (the content creator) can best serve them and in turn receive their (the audience's) support so they can ultimately monetize their platforms. This is important for the content creators as it is one of the main ways, they make a living. It is important that the influencers locate themselves within niches that are more likely to relate to their content and consume it in a way that is of mutual benefit to the influencers, brands that the influencers work with as well as the audience the influencers and brands target their content and goods and services towards (Guarriello, 2019).

Navigating the demands of influencing daily

Influencers' work is multifaceted and relies on the individuals to be creative and multidimensional. Their work requires them to constantly fulfill different roles in pursuit of perfecting their craft. The role they fulfill as employees to brands and peers to fellow collaborators differs from the role they fulfill when communicating with their audience. Duffy & Hund (2015) argue that such contemporary ideals of such work relies on individualism, one's creative autonomy and vision in general are important to recognize as they give clarity on the new forms of social media production. While the roles they play are quite closely linked, there are some similarities and differences that exist. This often depends on the individual personality and what they choose to prioritize or value most about their role.

Mbali* a 21-year-old former natural hair influencer now-turned lifestyle and faith vlogger speaks about she finds most important about her role as a public figure, especially because she realizes her power over her audience's behavior and psyche (Burke, 2017):

I want people to go into my content and walk [away] feeling so much better about themselves and feeling so much lighter, feeling so much happier. I think that is essentially what I want more than anything else. You could easily go into someone else's content that has body goals or somewhere

where you start to feel insecure. For me, I want people to walk into my little corner of my channel or my Instagram and go out feeling like I've gained so much value from this person and I think I really feel like she has really given me this light and I think overall it should be for everyone when you go into someone's content you should feel so much better about yourself and I think that's the influence we should all overall gain or aim to have. It shouldn't be about: 'Oh guys, I'm selling this, I'm working with this brand.' That would be amazing and there are perks of it, I guess you could say, but I think overall the core of everything is just essentially inspiring others and making people feel like they can do something [in a similar light that mimics the influencer's positive traits].

(Mbali, Sept. 15, 2020)

Different influencers have different objectives. Some are interested in making a positive impact in their audiences' lives. Some are mainly interested in enriching their own lives before the lives of their audience. While there is inherent pressure daily for influencers to perform a particular lifestyle, show the best parts of their lives and in general romanticize work production, this romanticization of work production demonstrates the kinds of immaterial labor that more frequently appears to represent cultural work in an era of advanced capitalism (Duffy & Hund, 2015). However, on the other side of the coin, there is equal emphasis (for the most part) that the influencers are also held accountable for their unrealistic depiction of 'reality' on social media. The curation of their feed and picturesque lives is something many users cannot quite relate to. Mupotsa (2016), argues that the fairy-tale like pictures that influencers share are performative and seemingly staged for the main purpose of creating a photo opportunity and not necessarily because that is the true reality of influencers' lives majority of the time.

There are not many conventional structures in place for this kind of work presently, therefore there is a lot of room for informal and unfavorable conditions, especially for the workers. Well-known brands are aware of the power they possess over small-time influencers who are hungry for exposure as well as experience, and so they use that to their advantage. Anwar & Graham (2019) explain that the less experienced workers are likely to accept contract terms which do not favor them much, but because of their desperation to earn experience and build a record for themselves, they are likely to accept many of the jobs (if not all) that brands approach them with. The unequal exchange and power dynamic that exists between brands and influencers remains questionable, much like within the formal sector where conventional

jobs exist as well. While young people attempt to escape the exploitation and undignified labor that overtly exists within traditional structures, they are met with same or similar experiences except on a more individual and personalized level (Barchiesi, 2017). Thobeka recalls an unpleasant experience she had with a well-recognized international jewelry brand:

... it was not a good experience. First of all, they didn't actually want to pay me my rates...but it's that thing where you're a small influencer and you want to build your portfolio. So, if Krystal Jewellers wants to work with you, you're gonna want to take a chance despite them not being so [open and willing to negotiate]. When I sent them rates, they said we're not gonna pay you this. This is what we can offer you. And then, worse at the end of the campaign when it was time to pay, they had not told me that I needed a tax number to be paid, so I was just like, okay, then what? I literally got paid with a Takealot voucher... we ended up buying a mic, which, it was fine, but yeah, that's another thing, just like any other job, there are sides that are not as glamorous because yes, 'omg she's working with Krystal Jewellers, but it was not a good campaign [based on my experience with them].*

(Thobeka, Sept. 25, 2020)

Thobeka's recollection of her experience with one brand is in some ways very telling of the not-so-glamorous behind the scenes of the often overly glamorized perception of this particular entrepreneurial work (Duffy & Hund, 2015). Often, content creators do not openly talk about the disadvantages of navigating this uncommon space openly because of fear of potentially losing deals with brands. While as consumers of content we are led to believe that being an influencer is a dream job, because of its entrepreneurial nature, flexibility, and opportunities (Duffy & Hund, 2015). We are only aware of half the truth about such work because some influencers are intentional about concealing the reality of the daily struggle of this work so that they are not 'blacklisted' by the public relations officers of brands. Thobeka goes on to further share how she has experienced interacting with brands when negotiating for payments using her rate card that stipulates her payment fee:

You know, sometimes brands want you to value their product so much, so they're like we're giving you three Krystal Jewellers pieces that's basically triple your rate [fee], so kinda take that as your value exchange as opposed to us giving you money. A lot of brands will do that, 'til this day, you get approached by big brands that will offer you clothes.

(Thobeka, Sept. 25, 2020)

Due to the unequal relationship that exists between the brands and the influencers, there are still quite a few instances where brands hardly offer influencers who have direct access to the brand's customers and clients a fair remuneration and exchange (see also Anwar & Graham, 2019). What is unfortunate about this is that because some content creators are not open or honest about such issues because they try to maintain a particular status quo around the so-called glamour of influencing. Many fellow influencers who perhaps do not know any better often fall victim to these unfair practices hoping that when their audience increases and their personal brand gains value and becomes more recognized, things will get better. However, because of the silence and perhaps the need to maintain a status and level of envy, influencers do not speak openly about such challenges.

Same job, similar audiences, different personalities

Thobeka explains that influencers are different in the way they choose to approach their work. Some influencers are more intentional than others about what they share and choose to not share with their audience. She agrees that there is some level of performance that is present when influencers share their lives and work with brands (Iqani, 2019):

A lot of the time, there are people, public figures, influencers who are very open about their lives, so you'll get the scripted version which would be the brand work and you know, all the pretty pictures, but you also get the unscripted, them just being themselves, just hanging out with friends, them trying to tell you: 'Guys, I'm having a terrible day and x and x is going wrong'. Crying on camera and just being vulnerable and very open and conversational. And then there's more influencers that are, and I think I fall more on this side, and I think it's very difficult for me to be vulnerable. I will only show you what I want you to see, which is usually work. My profile is for work, it's for you to see and be like: 'oh wow, this looks very pretty, maybe you can draw inspiration from the creativity'. I'm not trying to be a personality, where you know every single thing about me and what makes me tick and you're seeing me very vulnerable. We've tried with YouTube to introduce that element because I was like, I don't want to be this cold person who you just see my pictures, but you don't know who I am, and you can't engage with me. I would say I fall more on the side of the scripted influencer who will show you their work, they'll show you a little bit of their personal life, but not too much for you to actually know who they are, who their friends are and what they actually do on a daily basis. Those are the people who would definitely show a more scripted version of their lives, but like I say, it depends on the influencer. I think there are influencers

who do the personal part really well. I would say like somebody I would mention in that is Mandisa. She has like a lot of lives [public Instagram chats and real-time engagements] where she's just chilling with her friends and they're doing their make-up and you get the essence of her real personality, that's definitely not scripted, that's just her being herself on camera. Whereas with me, I find a lot of anxiety going onto lives because I'm not very personal to people. I'm a very open book, but it takes a lot for me to kinda just sit there and just be personal.*

(Thobeka, Sept. 25, 2020)

Different influencers offer different strengths and value to brands, depending on how the influencer has chosen to position themselves as well as what their audience enjoys consuming the most. An influencer is most likely to focus on creating content that is consumed the most by their following. At some point influencers become aware of their power and influence over audiences (Burke, 2017). This power over their audiences further works in their favor, as being aware of their service offering to big, small, local, and international brands that they can potentially work with means they recognize that brands need them especially since influencing has been embraced as an alternative to traditional marketing (Talkwalker.com). Building a relationship with brands is important for the influencers because relationships often translate to trust which then translates to opportunity and ultimately income. Some influencers work harder than others to build this relationship with brands, while some find it easier because of their existing audience following or experience within the industry. Mbali shares how she went about approaching brands in the earlier stages of her influencing journey:

I used to buy my own hair products. No, let me rephrase that: my MOM used to buy all the hair products for me, so I would review them. For the longest time I would buy my own products and then I think it was in 2018, my New Year's resolution was that I'm not gonna buy and hair products anymore. I'm going to going to get sent hair products, like that's my resolution and step [I took] and I didn't wait for brands to come find me. I told myself I'm going to be the person that's gonna step forward and I found all these brands and local brands especially and I just started emailing them. I started telling them that I'm Mbali, this is what I'm about. I enjoy posting natural hair content and helping people embrace their natural hair journeys. I got a few: 'Yes, we'd love to work with you!'. Obviously at that time it was just: I'm gonna send you new products and that's all that's gonna happen and I was so excited because you need to remember, I used to buy the products*

myself for the longest time. I was like, this is cool, I'm getting packages! It was so exciting in the beginning; my mom was excited for me as well.

(Mbali, Sept. 15, 2020)

While each influencer's journey to working with brands and earning an income differs, what is common is the fact that brands are aware of what they potentially stand to gain by collaborating with influencers whose brands and audiences are aligned and key to their strategic goals. The influencers are key in creating and maintain brand awareness by sharing products and services offered by brands with audiences within and beyond their reach (Velazquez, 2019). How brands select which influencers to work with is not quite formalized yet, however, the pattern they tend to lean towards is that which demonstrates that the brands are often attracted to the influencer's audience, the higher their audience numbers the better seemingly. Brands use social media and influencers to initiate and participate in dialogues with consumers, to foster more instant relations, deliver customer support, create brand communities and connect with consumers by using interactive applications (apps) which allow the brands to post videos, photos, respond to comments about brand satisfaction, dissatisfaction and other general marketing communication (Duffet & Wakeham, 2016). Brands work with influencers to get their products and services to different audiences (Iqani, 2019). They go as far as selecting a brand ambassador to manage the brand's marketing and reputational affairs in different ways. While in the past, brand ambassadors were generally celebrities with overwhelming audience following and support, brand ambassadors have become more relatable and accessible as is the case with Mbali who became an ambassador for a well-recognized local natural hair care brand at 20-years-old:

I never anticipated that I'd reach a point where this is where I'm at. I never thought I'd work for a local brand and be their brand ambassador. I never anticipated that that would be happen and that was just really cool. So many things just started to unfold. Being recognized by bigger influencers... seeing bigger influencers seeing potential in me also just gave me that drive and push. In as much as now, I generally don't say I'm an influencer. I don't call myself that at all because I don't wanna get caught up in the thought of being that, because before anything, I'm just a girl who just loves to share and I think that makes me more approachable to people because I don't like to call myself that.

(Mbali, Sept. 15, 2020)

The fact that the faces and voices of brands are changing signifies a shift in the traditional routes of marketing. What used to be an unattainable ambition for young and ordinary individuals is becoming more of a reality because of the realization that audiences are likely to relate and therefore support products and services of brands whose faces, and voices are like theirs (Nouri, 2018, p. 13). It is important for consumers to see themselves in brands, this affects their consumption choices.

Advantages and disadvantages of being an Influencer

One of the more glamorous aspects of being a digital content creator is receiving elaborate and well-presented press packages that leave audiences further envious of the influencers' lives. Currently, there is a lot of hype about the so-called glamour around being an influencer. Mbali supports this hype by sharing a positive aspect of being granted the opportunity work with brands:

You get the privilege of getting a lot of [material] things and I think that's why a lot of people essentially want to be an influencer. You get a lot of free things, the PR packages, all these things which seem very glamorous, and which seem very cool to receive, which essentially, it really is, but I think it's the hard work you put in... You can't just essentially get more free things... It's really nice, it's like getting a present. My love language is receiving gifts. I just love getting PR packages... it just makes me feel so happy. I feel the most loved when I get presents. It feels like I'm getting presents all the time, which is very nice, it's very cool. I think another thing is going to events. It's taught me to move out of my comfort zone because I just like being at home. I'm such a home body and in as much as it's really cool to get invited to events, everyone sees it as glamorous, I'm very thankful for it because it has taught me to be more social. I've gotten to meet so many people that are influencers as that are just anyone in general where it's so cool... There are so many people I haven't essentially met but I talk to all the time, and I definitely consider them as friends because we can talk all the time.

(Mbali, Sept. 15, 2020)

Dineo* a 30-year-old family and mom vlogger shares what she enjoys about influencer work. While her positive aspects differ from Mbali's, they are equally enlightening. She shares her views on the positive aspects of being an online figure:

You almost have your own family online people that genuinely have your back regardless of [whether] somebody is trying to do something bad [in] your name. They'll be the first ones to let you know and that's a great thing! It creates this sense of family. You know that you're not alone even though I'm sitting at home on my couch. You get to be exposed. You get to learn a lot of things. I didn't know or realize how much I would loooooove editing videos until I actually started doing it. I will take time editing and re-editing it again because it's so much fun. Just that process of having raw footage into a full-on vlog or full-on video or wedding video for somebody else. It's so fulfilling. It's something different from my regular 9-5 where I'm constantly looking at the network, computer screens, hard drives, this, and that and just being able to tap into my creative side. It's really incredible!

(Dineo, Sept. 6, 2020)

With much enthusiasm Dineo continues to share her understanding and the upside of what it entails to be an influencer on a daily-basis and how she approaches the work:

I am doing it because I just genuinely love doing it and if I find products that work for me and make my life better, I am more than happy to share that. It's literally the first thing I want to do, and I feel like as an influencer, at least from what I've seen online, you sort of have to live by certain code. You have to show that you're unboxing, then you have to show what you got and for me, I'm not entirely comfortable with doing that all the time. There are certain brands that specifically ask to send me stuff and share them while I unbox them in a video, and more than half the time I will say no and then there are other brands where I'll say: 'You know what, it looks like fun, that looks like something I would personally use, so I will share that as an unboxing.' Whereas when you're an influencer, and you live your life as an influencer or your life is entirely based on you being an influencer, it's almost like you have to do that because if you don't do that then, you know, the people that are following you don't know what you are using, how are you then influencing them to go and get those products so that you can go and prove to brands that I'm an influencer. In a sense, I don't necessarily have to say I shared about this product and this many people went and bought it and this many people said they loved it. I don't necessarily have to do that. I share products out of the goodness of my heart because they work for me, they make my life easier and if my [audience] go ahead and try it out, that's fantastic! If it works for them, even better. That's basically where it stops for me. I shared it. You tried it. Great!

(Dineo, Sept. 6, 2020)

Much like with every upside, there is also a downside to being a public figure on social media. Dineo shares an important disadvantage about being a well-recognized figure or online user in general. While you get paid receive press packages and all kinds of validation and support from your audience, there are also bullies on the internet who spend time tormenting the lives of influencers:

You get people that are just trolling you on the internet. There [are] a lot of trolls [laughs nervously]. There are people who will physically try and just bring you down on a daily basis, be it disliking your video, be it posting a nasty comment... More than half the time, people that are trolling on the internet it's got nothing to do with the person they are trolling. It's all about them and so they are just trying to bring you down with them. That's just the sad reality of it and, in a way, you get people who try and attack if they realize that what they're doing doesn't affect you, they try and attack your family, just so they can get to you. It's the downside of being on the internet.

(Dineo, Sept. 6, 2020)

There are people on the internet who actively spend their time bullying other people by leaving destructive posts with vicious comments, sending hate emails, or even attempting to steal their identities by setting up fake profiles with the person's pictures. This is sometimes a challenge to manage or prevent because the internet in general is an unsafe space with many unknown users who hide behind their screens and can never quite be traced without much time and effort. The downside of influencing is a harsh reality of cyberbullying that digital content creators learn to navigate around daily either by choosing to ignore the bullies, growing a thick skin, reporting the accounts, or just accepting that the internet is a dangerous place and that there is only so much that they can do to protect themselves against the dangers that exist digitally.

Musa* is a 28-year-old full-time researcher and part-time travel curator and storyteller. She highlights two disadvantages of being a public figure on social media:

So, the disadvantages are the uncertainty and I think another disadvantage is just not knowing... not knowing how the trends will unfold, because you know it might be trendy now, but we don't know how the world is going so I guess that also goes back to uncertainty, is this also really fast. There are so many factors that you can't control, and I think even if you put in the work, you might

not get rewarded. I think another disadvantage is that sometimes social media is so fickle. It doesn't necessarily reward creativity and substance. That's something that I found that sometimes the social media world if I can call it that... It's a very weird space in that for example a bikini photo will get more light more engagement than a photo of a building or you know something else and sometimes you know you might think that my creativity and effort was in taking the photo of the building or almost whatever, then people don't appreciate that your creativity in that instance but when you post photo of yourself in a bikini people engage people love it.

(Musa, Sept. 25, 2020)

Certainty or the lack thereof is a major consideration for the young entrepreneurs as it is from a position of certainty or uncertainty that they will most likely base their decisions. The work they do and the context in which they find themselves in a way forces them to be less comfortable with living with more uncertainty than the average person looking to embrace a more traditional school, work, and life path. The uncertainties creatives are faced with daily go with the unpredictable path of popular culture, income as well as their chosen path's stability in general (Barchiesi, 2017). The fact that Musa and many other creatives are sorely aware of the fickleness of the industry perhaps means that in some ways, they are forced into playing to the tune of their audiences' preferences so that they can stay relevant to both the audiences they influence as well as the brands that are potentially interested in engaging with. This heavy reliance on validation and creative direction from external factors makes the lives and work of influencers that much more difficult because while in some ways they want to be authentic and share content that best represents them in a particular way, they also always must be cognizant of what their audiences (who attract brands and ultimately income) want to see from the creatives. There is a fine balance between creativity and authenticity as well as demand and income.

Conclusion

Influencing is a terrain that is yet to be fully explored. This recent path of work in the South African context depicts the lives of influencers as glamorous and interesting to an outsider as it appears as if all they do is spend time taking photos of themselves and the picturesque places they visit as well as enticing food they eat. They also spend hours making videos and creating content. Their lives look glamorous and perfect in many ways, however, as ordinary social media users we are often not let into the reality of their lives as they as small brands

negotiate and navigate contracts and payments with powerful brands. We often are also not made aware of the long hours and hard work it takes to successfully distinguish oneself from ordinary fellow social media users as well other content creators. Navigating life as influencer daily is different and, in some ways, less predictable because of the multiple hats worn by the public figures as they try to solidify their presence and income within a fluid and less established work and entrepreneurial path.

CHAPTER 5

UNDERSTANDING WORK THROUGH THE LENS OF BLACK AFRICAN YOUTH

Youth unemployment in South Africa is a socio-economic challenge that affects a significant portion of the population. This challenge has seen many young graduates economically excluded and unable to participate in the formal economy (Barchiesi, 2017, p. 55). There currently is a handful of privileged youth who have been exposed to unconventional paths of work that most of the population have not quite caught on to due to their limited access to technology and data. The youth's exposure to social media platforms has been a catalyst towards finding alternate ways to be gainfully employed within an economy that has thus far failed to actively absorb them into the formal job market. New forms of work in a digital era have risen and opened new opportunities for young people to re-imagine work in a world where technology, access to information and instant communication play an important role in shaping their lives daily. The participants in the study are a group of young people who are plainly aware of the reality of unemployment and equally, the reality of work in both in a formal and informal setting and the highlights as well as low lights that accompany such realities. Some of the participants' experiences within the traditional work environment have motivated their decision to make a move towards taking the risk of immersing themselves in the world of social media not just as a hobby to pass time but rather as a viable business opportunity they can pursue formally.

Some influencers expressed that while perhaps the hobby of creating content may have begun as a 'side hustle', which was in many ways informal, they currently find themselves at a transitional phase. They are either at the beginning, middle or towards the end of a transition from informal to formalizing their content creation careers. The transition exists because they are engaging with brands on a more formal or frequent basis and setting themselves up in a more formal and considered way to be more attractive to both their audiences and the brands they wish to work with. The motivation behind the participants transitioning into more formal content creation is because of the demand from their audiences and the identified earning potential they have realized from previous campaign work with brands. There is a sense that the more serious work is in terms of demand and income, the more it is likely it is to be perceived as formal. Some participants expressed that

they were not ready to embrace the content creation hobby as a formal job as they did not want to run the risk of losing the fun and creative burst in the process. In essence, for some, the work remains a hobby for as long as it remains fun.

An interesting finding relates to the answers given by the participants who shared that they understood their work on social media as formal. Some of the reasons they gave included that this is their mainstream of income and that they are registered to pay tax, they have a formal structure in place, they can produce a letter of employment when it is required, they attend meetings, have deadlines to meet and work with brands and fulfill more serious client briefs. What came up often regarding their work being formal was that they enter legal contracts, sign non-disclosure agreements (NDAs) and rely on consultations with legal advisors to ensure that they understand the contracts drafted and initiated by clients and their legal team. Despite the precarious nature of their work, some participants were quite vocal about their work being as equally important as any other formal job.

Formal meets informal

While the decision to move away from traditional work routes is daunting, it is a decision that Tshepo and other participants went ahead with despite its uncertainty. Leaving a traditional job means forfeiting some forms of security that a traditional job may potentially offer and contending with multiple forms of insecurity (Southall, 2016). That alone is a risk that many people often are not willing to pursue for the unknown. Tshepo is however one of few individuals who took the leap. He already had a plan for the next step he would take after voluntarily removing himself from the traditional path of work. He explains how his next step after a formal job came about:

I actually got lucky. When I had these thoughts of quitting and all that stuff, a competition came up with a tour company, that I would travel with them for six weeks in Southeast Asia. So, they'd pay for me to make video content whilst travelling on the tours. When that opportunity came up, I quit my job before I'd even won the competition because I had that much faith that I would win and I was just that fed up that I was literally like, any excuse to quit my job I will take, so I took the opportunity. So, for the first six weeks of 'unemployment' I was already working for a travel company. That made it a lot easier because I was earning money with them, but I wasn't actually

paying for anything on the tour, so I was properly doing what I wanted to do. When I did come back after those couple of months, I already had a good understanding of what I wanted to do to be able to sustain it. I was very fortunate.

(Tshepo, Oct. 8, 2020)

Tshepo was fortunate that he did not form part of the statistics of unemployed youth after he left his formal job at an agency. His luck afforded him an opportunity to travel, earn an income as well as do what he loves. This kind of luck is not common for the average young black African youth in South Africa. Tshepo further shares his experience as a creative within an agency and what led him to his decision to abandon his role for what initially started off as a less formal role as a content creator:

When I first got to the agency, it was still a boutique agency. It only had like ten clients, so each of us only had like maybe two or three clients to manage on our own, but they weren't like massive brands. One of them was FoodnThings but it was in the early days of FoodnThings. They were really open to being really creative and being really different. But then as the agency started to grow, bigger clients started coming along and bigger clients obviously have their set ways of doing things and they don't want to be too radical; they are just okay with just getting by. It was a case of me having crazy ideas and never being able to actually use them. Then like when I got home after a work day to try and work on my passions or whatever, I don't even have the energy to work on the things that I really want to do, so I just felt like I was effectively selling my best hours to a corporation when I could actually just be doing what I love to the best of my ability, rather than selling it to them and then at the end of the day someone else's business is growing and their dreams are being fulfilled and I'm sitting here, tired with all these regrets... I decided if I'm properly gonna realize my potential, I'm gonna have to go out on my own and give it my full attention.*

(Tshepo, Oct. 8, 2020)

Tshepo spoke about the importance of realizing his full potential and having no regrets about how he spent his prime years. Moreover, the fact that the young former employee spent his earlier years investing into another person's business and vision is something that he no longer could imagine himself doing because it somewhat meant that he would always be a slave to his work and never the master of his own work and passion. Tshepo is more interested in doing what fulfills him and ensuring that he invests his skills and passion towards his own vision. This experience of traditional work supports the reality that some people opt

to leave their jobs because they are escaping the little reward that it comes with, thus choosing self-success and self-discovery instead (Duffy & Hund, 2015, p. 4). Guarriello (2019) explains that indeed the concepts of self-branding and empowerment are important in a neoliberal work context, which then means it is no surprise why Tshepo would be interested in them. These are just some of the key factors that are drawing young people more towards less conventional work and less away from work where their future and potential is used for the benefit of a stranger and organization.

Musa who is eager to make the transition from a corporate job to full-time curation of travel experiences as she is aware that becoming an entrepreneur can solve some of the challenges she faces as a full-time employee. She speaks of the benefits and drawbacks of potentially leaving her 9-5 corporate job and weighs it against potentially pursuing content creation full-time:

The first one is flexibility when you are working for someone full time, you're kind of at the mercy of you know when they want things how they want things and so you don't have much leeway and flexibility so that flexibility in terms of time there isn't really that because in a 9-5 job is still a very much traditional mindset of having set working hours which I find problematic. I think if things were kind of output driven if people were just, you know given tasks and complete this task at a certain date and everything in between you decide when and how to do it and so things are still very traditional and fixed and so there's no flexibility in a formal job. Whereas I think being an entrepreneur not to say that you know there's less work in that but there's more flexibility around when and how we work and where we work. Like for instance, in my field anyways I could work from anywhere as long as I have internet connection, but it doesn't have to be fixed to a workspace it doesn't have to be fixed to in between these hours it means your creative juices can flow you know more easily if you're in an environment that you enjoy and you're working at times where you're most productive and yeah I think you have more flexibility and room for creativity. The other thing is I do think that having a full-time traditional job I think you're restricted in how much you can earn whereas if you're an entrepreneur I think you can decide that and work towards it. So, I think there are less limits to how much you can earn when you do things on your own, you're not waiting for someone. Yeah, I think those are the two main things for me like flexibility and earning potential.

(Musa, Sept. 25, 2020)

Musa goes on to point out that while entrepreneurship would be a better path to pursue due to the flexibility and earning potential such precarious work offers (Standing, 2013, p. 1), she, like many other young people need to consider the reality of having their needs as well as their dependents' needs met by the income provided by a stable 9-5 job:

I guess these are the tradeoffs right that people make when they decide to be full on entrepreneurs. Or if they decide to have full-time job, there is definitely probably more security having a full-time job and it's probably the reason why I am still in a full-time job is because I need that security. I have other people depending on me. Kind of, I'm still supporting and contributing to my family. So, for now where I'm at right now in my life, I still do need the certainty of that paycheck. But I also know that even in the traditional workspace there's still a lot of precarity and especially for young people and I'm lucky that I have a permanent job. I'm gonna talk about a contract. Other young people who are lucky to be employed permanently but I think the majority a lot of young people are still on short-term contracts where they sort of every time, they need to be thinking about what's next which I think is exhausting and unsettling you know. To be dependent on an employer and to be dependent on the traditional system and way of finding a job it's also exhausting to have to think; oh my gosh what am I going to do next year for a job?! So yeah, but in general full-time job offers stability and security and that you know every man that can create this match I think being an entrepreneur is more of a risk and you definitely have to work.

(Musa, Sept. 25, 2020)

The reality of employment and its uncertainty is also another important issue that people within the formal sector must contend with, despite its general understanding of work being more secure within the formal economy. Many people accept job offers on a contract-basis because they are not afforded the opportunity of a permanent job. This then means that one is likely to find themselves participating in both the formal and informal economies at any given point of their lives. The formal-informal dualism remains redundant as it does not account for individuals whose work exists in-between as well as outside of the parameters of formal and informal work (Munck, 2019, p. 371). Tshepo explains that his work is a combination of both informal and formal work and gives reasons on why he sees it this way:

It's a huge mix... it's a huge mix. In terms of videography stuff, a lot of the jobs are quite informal. Sometimes I get approached to do work and then I'll get paid in cash at the event or whatever. Then there's bigger like contracts and taxes and deadlines and all that kind of stuff. So, it's a mix

of a lot of things... SARS doesn't know about it [cash payments], so they wouldn't consider it. The place [where he receives the cash payment from] doesn't consider me as an employee... I was basing it on, like I know when the government looks at freelancers and all that stuff, if you're not registered for tax and all that stuff, you don't really qualify for UIF and all that stuff, so we are considered as part of the informal sector.

(Tshepo, Oct. 8, 2020)

The formal sector offers security that the informal sector does not, however, the formal workspace is also in some ways fickle as it is highly possible that at one moment one can be employed through contract work and the next moment, they are unemployed and no longer have access to the benefits and protection offered within the formal economy. As is the case with Tshepo, it is not difficult to see how his work can be precarious at a given point and more formal at another. However, he seeks economic opportunities while rejecting norms, thus falling into a more precarious characteristic, thus forming part of the many young individuals who belong to the class-in-the-making category (Standing, 2013, p. 1).

Informal meets formal

When I asked the participants about how they came across this sort of unconventional work that has not fully picked up in South Africa as it has abroad, the content creators gave a variety of reasons. What stood out was the fact that they were more passionate about this kind of work than they were about their current jobs or potential jobs prospects. In addition, the participants were more interested in working for themselves and less interested in working for other people. Finally, the opportunities available to them as young, black African middle-class citizens in a post-apartheid society appear more within the free for all influencing path than they do in the more conservative and already established paths (Barchiesi, 2017). Tshepo gives more insight on how his journey as a content creator began:

...social media started getting really popular and stuff and then a lot of my friends were like photographers and videographers, so we were always creating content and that's what started my passion with the content creation stuff with the social media. Then I got a job at an agency like I said, where I was able to be part of social media and do content creation. So, it was just my passions aligning.

(Tshepo, Oct. 8, 2020)

Passion and popularity are key signifiers of such a job. For one to have the courage to pursue such work, they need passion, which will carry them in this often-uncertain path. Above that, understanding where social media is headed and the potential opportunities it offers because of its firm popularity with audiences worldwide is another driver behind wanting to pursue the path.

Thobeka has worked with brands for over three years, she shares how she conducts her work relationship with potential collaborators and brands, based off previous experience with established brands. This experience came over time and with a better understanding that brands gain more by offering her products in exchange for her services. She explains that even though she is passionate about the work she does, some exchanges no longer work for her and how with experience she has learnt to navigate around them, so it works in her favor:

I no longer work on trade exchanges. What I'll do if it's a brand that I really like, I'll offer them a [Instagram] story [upload] instead because stories I do charge for but it's not as much work as a [timeline] post of going all the way. If I really like a brand and they tell me we don't actually have a budget, all then I can offer you is a story. Also, for small brands that approach me, start-ups with no budget, especially if it's black women, I will also just offer you a story free of charge. I'll just do it for you because if I can use my platform in any way, as long as someone is not entitled, if you ask me and I see and enjoy your products then I won't mind doing that as well. But for the most part, it's been very hard, but I learn that I cannot eat clothes. And also, as a brand, if you want if you offering to give me clothes, you stand to gain everything while I lose or gain absolutely nothing because a brand giving you clothes doesn't hurt them. They don't lose anything from that exchange, whereas you go through the effort of using your car and you pour petrol. That's another thing, it takes time for me. I have to scout for locations. So now I'm like driving around frikken Melville and you know, I have to spend money on make-up, petrol and all those things and all I'm getting are clothes, while you're [the non-paying brand] getting my audience.

(Thobeka, Sept. 15, 2020)

Some influencers are aware that they the less experience they have, the higher the likelihood of being targeted by brands who demand to work with them for little or no pay. However, because they are desperate to establish themselves and build their personal brands, they sometimes agree to the unfair exchange. This supports Anwar & Graham (2019) argument

that explains that newcomers in the gig economy in general are likely to accept more work even if the pay is not sufficient, while more experienced personalities have the luxury of filtering which work and conditions they will and will not accept based on the client's offering.

There is a lot of emphasis on individual effort and success in the case of Thobeka and other participants. This is supported by Iqani (2019, p. 239), statement that posits that the influencing path and narrative is highly individualized and places the individual at the center in quite an overwhelming way. The creatives strongly believe that the work they do is as equally as important as any other job that is perceived by society as formal. They also highlight that the responsibilities that are expected of other formal jobs are the same as those expected of them. Brenda* a 24-year-old YouTuber, digital content creator and travel vlogger (as seen on her Instagram profile) shares:

I would classify it as formal work. For most people it's a 9-5 where they wake up, they make schedules on how they're going to shoot their content and videos. They make meetings, they go to meetings like any other job. They do regular 9-5 things. But because you're at home and you have control of what you're actually doing, that's where people don't understand because you're basically an entrepreneur without having goods or services like a product. The thing is there's nothing tangible about it... With us, they don't realize we are the product. We are goods and the service.

(Brenda, Aug. 24, 2020)

Since some influencers compare their work to an ordinary 9-5 job that they have more autonomy over means to them it is formal work. This is interesting because to some family members who do not understand the work, it may not necessarily be recognized as a real job, let alone a formal one:

It clicked to my dad that it's actually a job when I was like: 'Nah, it's fine I'll book my own flight and they were like, what?! With what money? You're not a doctor, you don't earn any money'... In black families or families in general, the only time people will start to recognize your job is when you start to earn money. Because, even my sister was doing an internship right, and she, not that I'm flexing or anything, but she wasn't earning as much as I was, but her job was more recognized because it's something they could understand and figure out. But for me, they were like, we don't

get what you're doing but immediately when they realized I can be able to pay my own rent, my own Wi-Fi, my own water... Even when they saw where I live, because I live in a proper apartment... they were like: 'We don't know what you do. What is it?!' But immediately when my parents saw money or saw the fact that I can look after myself, they were like: 'No cool, it's a job. We get it'.

(Brenda, Aug. 24, 2020)

Dineo explained earlier in the interview that because she does not focus on content creation as her full-time job and pursues it as a hobby and side-hustle, she does not see it as formal work. Her formal work is the one which she gets paid to do work daily from 9-5. I went ahead and asked Dineo about how she would feel if her 7-year-old daughter after completing her matric asked her if she could be an influencer and whether she would agree to it. Moreover, would she consider her daughter's request to become an influencer as a formal job or not and why? Dineo responded:

If that's only what she's going to be doing, then in a way I would take it as formal employment where I would tell her how to make the most of it. She must treat it like she would her regular 9-5 career, and that way she must be actively looking for collaborations, actively looking and approaching brands. The thing is, if you're going to be sitting back and saying I'm gonna be an influencer and then you wait for the brand to contact you, you're not gonna be making a lot of money you have to show that can make them want to pay you, so that you show them what you can do for them. And so, if she wants to go that route and actively pour her energy in there, then I would consider it formal work.

(Dineo, Sept. 6, 2020)

It was noteworthy to understand that influencers who work at a traditional full-time job believe that content creation is a side hobby and an informal creative outlet. For them their full-time work is what they consider to be formal. This supports the explanation that: "...workers who already are in regular jobs are more likely to use gig work to earn extra income... to do something they are passionate about. Hence, they are also likely to filter jobs and select clients carefully" (Anwar & Graham, 2019, p. 9). Musa who has a full-time traditional job and curates travel content part-time, shared why she believes the influencing or digital content creation work in South Africa has not reached a stage of being formal:

I consider it informal just because I feel like it's not regulated. I feel like a lot of us are just winging it and if I think about informal workers... those are some of the characteristics that I think of.

(Musa, Sept. 25, 2020)

Musa's assessment of the nature of content creation aligns with Anwar & Graham (2019, p. 3) understanding that gig work is highly informal and remains characterized by short-term and insecure contractual employment. She went on further elaborate on what she meant about the minimal regulation that takes place within the digital content creation space. She recalled an experience with a reputable brand that required both micro and macro influencers to be part a campaign. The pay disparity between the macro influencers and micro influencers because of their level of importance and potential value to the campaign and industry in general was unfair and shocking as the job brief for both levels of influencers was the same. The micro-influencers are one of the four kinds of influencers that according to Velazquez (2019, p. 19) are regarded to form part of the influencer category, alongside traditional celebrities, industry experts and thought leaders as well as general content creators. The difference in pay between the influencers with more experience and those with less stands out in Musa's interview as it alludes to the reality of experience being key in salary negotiations, while less experience means that influencers are expected to accept what they are offered by brands (Anwar & Graham, 2019, p. 8).

Mbali approaches work slightly differently. She perceives working with brands as more of an individual opportunity to learn, grow and receive recognition more than she does as a business transaction. She leans more on the side that believes it is a good for brands to be interested in working with her (Guarriello, 2019, p. 1775). Thobeka on the other hand believes that working with brands ought to become a fairer business exchange as each party involved benefits from the exchange. She understands the power she has as an influencer and the value she brings to the marketing and positioning of brands she works with. Her stance on the work she does with brands as influencer as well as a content creator is that which holds true that it is a formal exchange and thus needs to be handled as such. For Thobeka, this is not just about being a creative who has a passion and flair for what she does, it is also about business (Duffy & Hund, 2015). Mbali's stance differs to Thobeka's as she sees her role as an

influencer from a more spiritual and hobby perspective which is more about fun and adding value:

I'm just enjoying it. I'm just like hey, I don't wanna get caught up in the numbers or anything like that because I think I don't wanna lose this, the value that I add and what God has given me. I don't want to take the platform for granted and my mindset going forward is, I don't wanna be this person where suddenly I'm doing it because it feels like work. It should be fun. It should always feel fun. It should always feel exciting, and I should always have this burst of creativity coming out of me.

(Mbali, Sept. 15, 2020)

Dineo explained that her first instance working with a brand was a foreign and unexpected experience because she had never imagined that a brand would be interested to work with her and her daughter on a campaign. She also shared that because it was her first experience and she had no point of reference, she was not as prepared as she could have been. She was happy to take whatever remuneration was offered to her because she did not realize that brand collaborations were pre-planned and budgeted for by brands, therefore she could have negotiated for a better payment. In her first encounter with a brand, Dineo did not realize that she was an entrepreneur and had to put on her entrepreneurial thinking cap and exercise her negotiation skills and abilities among others (Galloway, Anderson, Brown, & Wilson, 2005, p. 9). However, with experience and more knowledge she handles work with brands in a more formal and considered manner:

I am more prepared now. So, when I get a brand approaching me, I'm able to negotiate in a way that makes it worth my while. Even though I'm not necessarily approaching a brand, I'm able to then talk to them and make them understand why I will charge them a certain amount of money or why I wouldn't accept what they're offering me as compared to back then in 2016 when I was like I'm happy with whatever they're proposing... Right now, I'm more prepared and I am more able. I feel like I am more confident.

(Dineo, Sept. 6, 2020)

Dineo's first work experience with a brand supports the understanding that the less experienced the content creator is, the more likely they are to accept whatever offer is put on the table by a client. With experience comes more wisdom to negotiate with brands and

the opportunity to choose which brands to work with and which ones to turn down (Anwar & Graham, 2019).

Working around the clock and influencer code

The work of social media influencing, and digital content creation remains informal in some ways (Anwar & Graham, 2019, p. 3). There are vague guiding principles and legislation around this type of work as it has only recently been recognized as work and no longer as just a hobby. While many of the participants indicated that they enjoyed being their own bosses and having the freedom of time, it became clear that some are still falling into the trap of traditional roles and responsibilities. Some brand strategies are drafted and positioned in a way that requires for the creatives to constantly be on and alert to earn their money, this one of the characterizations of the cultural work performed within the advanced capitalism era (Duffy & Hund, 2015, p. 6). They do not get to pick and choose when and how they work like they seem to think they do. Thobeka is one of the participants who understands that one of the demands of this kind of work is the demand for them to spend their lives working:

Work never stops. When you're an influencer or somebody in the public eye, your life is your job and so, I oftentimes feel incredibly guilty if I don't post a story letting people know what I'm doing and you see it as well, your engagement drops significantly when you're not constantly updating people, but sometimes I'm just really tired. You feel a constant pressure to always be on and when you're off... a lot of brand strategies require you to constantly be on, active and engaged.

(Thobeka, Sept. 25, 2020)

Digital content creation places a great demand on creatives to consistently be online and engaging with their supporters on YouTube and other platforms to remain top of mind by receiving views, likes and having their content shared which ultimately amounts to income (Guarriello, 2019). While maintaining a constant online presence is key to the success of a creator, it does not take away from the fact that one needs to occasionally take a break from the demands of earning an income by posting their lives. Again, this reaffirms the blurred lines between the parts that belong to one's private space, time and life and the parts that are created to be consumed by an audience (van Eldik, Kneer, Lutkenhaus, & Jansz, 2019, p. 2).

Dineo on the contrary makes a point that is related to the culture of influencing and the demands it makes on one's life and the constant pressure of needing to reach a larger audience and being controlled by the need to constantly pursue and maintain a high or achieve an even higher audience number by committing endless hours engaging and sharing stuff online. She challenges the understanding of being controlled by numbers. Velazquez (2019) explains that higher audience numbers are an advantage when it comes to negotiating income with brands. However, Dineo explains why she does not focus on chasing number as the average influencer most likely would:

I really am not chasing the numbers. And you know what's really funny? A lot of people will say you need to have thousands and thousands of subscribers to make money as an influencer and I'm like: 'That's not necessarily true.' I've made a considerable amount of money from YouTube and Instagram, and I don't even have over 10k [10 000 subscribers] on either of those accounts. I don't have over the thousand people following me. You just really need to do what you do best and just be yourself, because brands can also see through your lies.

(Dineo, Sept. 25, 2020)

Further to challenging the understanding around high numbers and earnings, Dineo also shares that she does not live according to influencer code which is meant to attract brands and set her apart from ordinary social media users (Talkwalker.com). She does not follow a streamlined version of having a particular online presence. Her account is not curated the same way the next influencer's platforms would likely be. She values being able to share her life as a mom without feeling the need to make her platforms only about her work and further to that, she shares what she prefers and not what is determined on her behalf because she is chasing a niche audience:

I am sharing things that I am comfortable with, whereas I feel when you're an influencer, from all the influencers that I follow, looking at their profile, you almost have to have your profile set up, where that sort of streamlines you to say at first glance you'll know this person is a mom, with a whole lot of babies and so I get to share anything I want. Whereas when you're working as an influencer, it has to say the same thing. You can't today share about beauty products and all the make-up and then share tomorrow about nappies. There's a disconnect.

(Dineo, Sept. 6, 2020)

Once more, the idea of a disconnect between influencers, their work and audience comes up. This disconnect seems to allude to the idea that the work influencers do does not in some ways connect to the reality of their audience. There appears to be an understanding that part of it is fake and performed. While some influencers can conceal this fakeness and performance better than others, the majority seem not to have managed to crack the code yet. There is still evidence of their reality and their online presence which does not seem to seamlessly add up. It appears that because this type of work scope is quite vast and open to interpretation both within the bounds of the marketing and advertising industry as well as externally by the rest of the public and audience, how this work is understood is still yet to be determined.

Employee meets entrepreneur

Thobile shares how she understands her role as a content creator. For her, the work she does is formal and of great importance. Equally, the work also requires her to fulfill both the role of being an employee and an entrepreneur with the latter role being more of a true reflection of her role as a creative entrepreneur whose work centers around her individual skills and efforts which is again a neoliberal approach to work (Dy, Martin, & Marlow, 2018, p. 587):

I think 90% of it is entrepreneurial and 10% of it is employee. I say 10% because a brand basically comes to you and tells you: 'This is what our idea is, but essentially it's up to you to create the visuals and make it come to life.' It's especially 90% entrepreneurial in the last five months because we've been in lockdown and all of that. So, the looks and everything that I've been creating has been in my house, they were created in my place. I need to schedule and make sure that I've gotten a photographer, a videographer to come in. I would need to set up the looks, create the looks and then getting them re-touched and then sending them to client. Once the client receives it, it's a full video that's been edited, it is a full retouched image. So, what then they're doing is that they're putting pricing on it or adding to maybe the video. That's why I say it is 90% of it. Also, administrative. People always see the final product and they don't realize like the back end of everything. The admin. You are your own admin, you're your own finance, your marketing, you are your own strategic planner because you need to make sure you stay relevant, you need to make sure that you are communicating with people. You are pushing yourself out to different brands. It's really all me and I don't have a team. I don't have a manager or an assistant. I do everything myself. I just have people I reach out to when I need the help of like a photographer when I need specific

things done. The beauty looks that I've been taking recently, I've been taking them myself with literally, there's no one else in the room. I take them myself. I then send them to a re-toucher... But really, it's all individual. It's all me deciding this is where I wanna take my brand and then client comes on board because they've seen the work that you've put forth already.

(Thobile, Aug. 29, 2020)

Gig work is considered to be informal (Anwar & Graham, 2019, p. 3), however, the young group of participants have differing views on whether the work they do is formal or not. For Thobile, Brenda and others, the work is highly formal, while for Dineo and Musa it is not necessarily formal because the conditions and context around their daily 9-5 daily differ to the less formal space of content creation.

Conclusion

Work in the 21st century has increasingly become more complex as it is no longer about falling into the formal or informal category (Breman, 1976, p. 1874). These two categories have become less relevant over time with the shift from traditional to more fluid work contexts. Young people who are actively moving away from traditional jobs and fulfilling traditional roles are embracing unconventional paths that have minimal blueprint. This move is both exciting and daunting because of its opportunities and challenges. The young creatives who are part of the study find themselves moving quite frequently between the formal and informal economies.

CHAPTER 6

BLACK YOUTH: ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND OPPORTUNITIES

Black African middle-class citizens have been unfortunate because when the transition from apartheid to a democratic government occurred, there were no stakeholders who had the foresight to ensure that the opportunities that would be available to Africans one or two decades after the transition would be favorable and provide opportunities that are not hard to come by, especially for young people (Barchiesi, 2017). The youth in general have suffered from the lack of planning and poor foresight by the ruling government. The legacies of apartheid in terms of disadvantaging the majority as well as young people in this country have persisted. While some young people find themselves in formal jobs and having the opportunity to partake in the formal economy, that opportunity is limited in several ways. The participants of the study expressed that due to the challenges they experience(d) of limited growth, development and income opportunities in the workplace has led to them feeling more hopeful about the entrepreneurial path. The belief held by most of the participants is that they are most likely to have the opportunity to succeed, be happier and create wealth for themselves as entrepreneurs. This contrasts with young black African employees working in institutions that are still predominantly traditional in their culture.

Why take the risk?

Why not take the risk seems like a more fitting question for the eager and success hungry group of participants. They are willing to risk what they know but do not love for what they do not know but love and get excited about. Musa shares why she prefers her content creation path over her traditional job:

The first I can think of is just creativity. That's one major thing that it's [content creation] afforded me... It's a creative outlet and it's something that probably in the back of my mind has always been something important that whatever job that I want to be doing, I want to be able to bring myself into the job and not just kind of take instruction and be told how to do things. I think I'm probably not the only young person who feels that even like I think even if you are in a formal job, you should be you, like you should be given the opportunity to express your creativity and ideas forward. I think a lot of formal workspaces also because of you know the age, like a lot of your colleagues are older than you and have just been doing things very traditionally and I think in general there isn't an

openness to young people's ideas so that one thing that being in the content creation space has afforded me.

(Musa, Sept. 25, 2020)

Musa and many young people are interested in the opportunities that entrepreneurship affords them. There is a belief that entrepreneurship is accessible to all and can be attained and maintained mainly based on merit. However, no matter how attractive the path appears, the reality is that not everyone will experience economic liberation and success like they are led to believe (Dy, Marti, & Marlow, 2018, p. 587). Tshepo who took a while longer than other participants before abandoning his full-time job shares why he eventually took the risk to become a full-time content creator:

I joined a digital media agency, and I was doing social media work and I felt like it wasn't fulfilling enough and that I had more potential than I was able to use at the agency and so I left that to travel the world and be a full-time content creator.

(Tshepo, Oct. 8, 2020)

Tshepo is one of few individuals who had the opportunity to abandon a stable income for a less stable path and income while pursuing fulfillment. However, as he shared in the previous chapter, he was fortunate to be able to leave his job and secure a short-term contract for a more exciting job travelling the world and creating content. Since Tshepo's new career path is seasonal, it qualifies him as falling under the precarious work category (McKay, Jefferys, Paraksevopoulou, & Keles, 2012, p. 40). He shares his view on having fulfilled a role in a corporate job and how that differs from an entrepreneurial role in terms of security motivation and income:

The corporate job gives you security, but I also feel like it makes you a lil lazy because you know that no matter what amount of work you put in, whether it's more work or less work, you're still gonna get your salary at the end of the month. Now, on the entrepreneurial side, I know that the more work I put in, the more I can get out and obviously if I slack, I'm not gonna get anything out of it so that also pushes me motivation-wise in terms of income... Being an entrepreneur, I know that if I grind really hard for a while, I can make way more than I could've made in a corporate job. I make more now than I ever did in a corporate job... In a corporate job I could put in 20 hours in a day, the salary at the end of the month is not gonna change.

(Tshepo, Oct. 8, 2020)

What drives Tshepo towards the entrepreneurial path are the endless possibilities that entrepreneurship presents him with currently. In a corporate job while there is a level of certainty, it is not everything for the young participant. While there is a lot of uncertainty associated with precarious work as Umney & Krestos (2015:316) put forward, Tshepo is willing to look past that because he is interested in more! More money and more reward in general. My follow up question to his response on his experience of the corporate world and how it differs from his current world of entrepreneurship was:

W: Do you see yourself ever going into a corporate position?

T: NOPE [laughs confidently]. Not a chance!

W: So, is this it for you?

T: Yeah, this is it. I've had quite a few offers and like (thinks briefly) ... it has to be...the salary has to be ridiculous for me to turn it down. Right now, there is no job in the world that I would sacrifice this freedom for.

I was further interested in the notion of freedom and how he perceived it as an entrepreneur:

It's a lot of things... I am able to choose my own schedule... now I can take jobs based on what I want to do. I take jobs based on whether I want to take the work. Because I'm in freelance and consulting roles, I get paid a lot more than a normal person would. So, I can do work for this month and make enough money to cover me for like the next six months. I won't have to worry about working for the next six months. For me, that's the kind of freedom that I'm talking about. I can pick and choose when I actually want to work.

(Tshepo, Oct. 8, 2020)

Tshepo's explanation of freedom is quite interesting. The freedom he speaks of is attached to time, income as well as choice. This relates to the ideals of neoliberalism that prioritize flexible labor that the individuals can take on at any hour of the day, while also still having the opportunity to take on multiple jobs if they choose to, this further supports Guarriello (2019: 1754). Much like many young people who express that they want to be their own boss and earn money for themselves and not for someone else, Tshepo seems to have identified

multiple freedoms as a content creator. He is his own boss and thrives on the freedom his work affords him, hence he can say confidently that being an entrepreneur is it for him and does not imagine himself ever going back into a corporate position, unless it was an offer of a lifetime. However, for now, he values his freedom over a conventional work path.

Thobile previously worked in a corporate job for a just over a year realized that she valued the freedom of being accountable to herself. She valued her autonomy and time over being employed and held accountable by someone else:

I didn't like the idea of having to answer to someone else, as what I've been doing day-to-day. I didn't like having the timeframe hours, like a 9-5. I just never at any point in my life wanted growing up from a very young age had ever thought that I would be someone else's employee. So, it just never felt natural to me, and I would always come in late for work. I would take two-hour lunches. I just never liked the institution of 9-5 jobs and so that's why it never felt natural to me.

(Thobile, Aug. 29, 2020)

Thobeka who has no experience in corporate shares Tshepo's and Thobile's sentiment about the importance of freedom. She prefers and enjoys the opportunities being an entrepreneur affords her:

I enjoy the opportunity to be my own boss, having my own freedom to manage myself. I am my own photographer, creative director, manager, and financial advisor... As a 22-year-old, having the freedom to make money and have it on my own terms, like I don't have to go to a 9-5, I don't have to go to an internship where they're going to make me work super hard and they're going to pay me R2000 at the end of all of that. Like, I don't have to endure all of that. I get to do what I like and on my own terms and the freedom of that is very liberating and the opportunity to be creative is really fun. Like you get a brand brief, and you get to kinda decide how am I gonna figure this out. There's a new challenge every time because you need to make it relatable to your audience while still bringing in the brand. I'm still trying to master it, but I'm getting better and better at fulfilling campaign briefs.

(Thobeka, Sept. 25, 2020)

In addition to the basic but significant opportunity of freedom digital entrepreneurship offers Thobeka, Tshepo, Thobile and other young content creators, another major attraction about being an influencer and entrepreneur is that:

You can just be you for a living, you can do things on your own terms.

(Thobeka, Sept. 25, 2020)

The ability to do things on your own terms is an important consideration for the young participants who seemingly feel limited and potentially suffocated by the need to follow rules and conform within the more traditional work paths. While they are seeking opportunities to better their lives at a young age, they are not looking to conform to the status quo, hence their choice to take on precarious work (Standing, 2013, p. 1). This is more so if they will not have the freedom to thrive on an individual level. There is a great sense of individualism present within the participants' ideals and pursuit of entrepreneurial opportunity (Iqani, 2019, p. 239). The young creatives who follow and practice a neoliberal culture find more fulfillment in doing so. Thobeka shares more on the kinds of opportunities she has had as an influencer which she believes she likely would not have had as a young black African just focusing on school and happily following the traditional path:

I think the opportunity to work with brands I would have never imagined to be even considered for, that's the biggest opportunity and it has allowed for an opportunity of financial freedom at a very young, like, I'm not super young, I'm 22, but by 21 I could see myself by 25 I could actually have the things I want. That's the biggest opportunity that I can say this space has created for me because had I just been doing school... fast forward now, the biggest opportunity is definitely the financial freedom... and I hope for more. I hope for international travels and opportunities to meet new people that I admire, and I get the chance to grow... I do have a level of comfort that a lot of 22-year-olds don't necessarily have because you get your allowance from your parents and you do promo work here and there but it's not necessarily enough, so I'm grateful for the opportunity.

(Thobeka, Sept. 25, 2020)

In some ways this chosen path of digital entrepreneurship is quite an attractive one as it allows the young creatives to not only pursue their dreams, but to do so almost on their own terms. They also do not in some instances have to work particularly hard or do things that are

foreign or uncomfortable because they do not believe things have to be difficult for them to prove that they work hard and are after success. Hence, they would rather forgo internship opportunities that would require intense dedication in exchange for a stipend that would not maintain their middle-class lifestyles. This notion challenges the belief that offline inequalities are resolved through digital platforms. Dy, Martin, & Marlow (2018: 596) argue that socio-economic inequalities are compounded and reproduced since the internet uses and reproduces structural hierarchies. This new path of entrepreneurship seems particularly attractive and attainable based off Tshepo and Thobeka's current experiences. It is not hard to see why many other young people aspire towards such a path. It is portrayed as a solution to personal emancipation (Dy, Martin, & Marlow, 2018, p. 585&586).

A world of opportunities

The entrepreneurial journey is exciting and enticing for young people who are interested in individual success and value freedom, autonomy and opportunity over certainty and feeling suffocated in roles and paths that dampen their spirits as Umney & Krestos (2015, p. 316) speak about. The young group of participants are after more. They are not apologetic about wanting to be recognized for their successes. They want to be exposed to opportunities that are ordinarily not within their radar or reach. The opportunities and chances digital entrepreneurship offer are what the influencers are about:

This year [2020] I was able to travel to somewhere that I can't afford to travel to that place. You know even that is something. So, you're given opportunities to do things that maybe you know at this point in your life were not on your list but have been able to speed up that process doing the things that you aspire to. And just for the simple fact that people see you, they recognize you and they think you add value and you know they want they want you to experience something and documented that's one thing and then it's really interesting that the kind of recognition so recognition is another one that I received even in the small ways on social media of someone saying; 'hi I'm doing a content creator series and I want you to be online Instagram live or I am hosting a podcast about travel or about young women who travel or not like you know speak to me on that or I am I'm hosting a panel discussion on domestic tourism and would like you to participate'. The kind of recognition I think that I've received while doing my own thing has been a lot more than I received in my 5 years old being in a in my formal job yeah. And then I guess also opportunities to earn more, and I think for me it's different like you probably speak to other content

creators who do it full-time. In my experience being able to earn my salary but then realizing that I can have multiple streams of income this is another thing yeah.

(Musa, Sept. 25, 2020)

Musa's opportunity to travel and create content is a dream match because her trip(s) were sponsored (which means she did not have to pay to be hosted for several beautiful holidays) while most of her peers must work and make sacrifices to keep up with the middle-class lifestyle, let alone go on multiple holidays. The opportunity to travel for free, create content, getting recognition as well as remuneration for it seems like the dream gig, right?! Many young people who get a glimpse of the influencers' glamorous looking lives are also interested in the same opportunities, and do not necessarily pay attention to the context around the influencers' opportunities. They miss the fact that influencers jobs exist against a context of poverty and limited opportunities like van Wyk & Posel (2019, p. 2) argue. Audiences, neglecting the context and harsh realities, often are not shy to reach out to influencers and creatives through direct messages and in the comments section of their platforms to ask how they too can become influencers (van Eldik, Kneer, Lutkenhaus, & Jansz, 2019).

Okuhle* a 23-year-old lifestyle and couple's channel content creator shares a brief story about how she once jokingly asked another influencer how she could also become an influencer. The response of the influencer who the question was posed to, was her recalling a conversation she had with another influencer that she looked up to and thus advised Okuhle on how she too could become an influencer:

'... just start calling yourself one!' [was the advice she received from the influencer]. I wrote that on my Facebook and also changed my name to 'Influencer [Name and Surname]' and let me tell you, many people started following me after that... There are many brand campaigns I got just from a joke! And I really believe that during that phase, my community on Facebook grew and it also impacted my YouTube channel.

(Okuhle, Aug. 21, 2020)

Okuhle shared that for her becoming an influencer was partially due to her following advice from another influencer to call herself an influencer on Facebook if she wants to become an influencer. She recalls the advice and giggles in disbelief, that such advice worked for her. She

was able to attract a larger following on Facebook which in turn grew her Instagram and YouTube platforms. This growth ultimately then led to brands recognizing her and showing a keen interest to work with her (Iqani, 2019). Much like with Musa, it is highlighted that recognition in this type of work is important, this includes being recognized on a more personal level by consumers who wish to replicate the influencers' consumption choices (Nouri, 2018).

Thobile shares a brief story on how her career as a public figure was kickstarted through her sister who is a celebrity with influence and connection within the media industry:

My sister had worked at Counter Cosmetics previously to being an entrepreneur in her own capacity and so we were at the movies the one time and she was texting. I was like: 'turn your phone off.' And she was like: 'oh no, I'm just talking to a friend of mine Karabo* (who still worked at Counter Cosmetics at the time), and I just told her you're a blogger.' I was like: 'Wait, what?! I'm not a blogger! You can't go around telling people that I'm a blogger and I don't even have a blog!'. So that's when brands started interacting with me. I was already sharing a lot on my socials about my skincare journey, how I was experiencing different products and what-not. Once those relationships or foundations were formed, it just flourished from there.*

(Thobile, Aug. 29, 2020)

Thobile's sister's celebrity status and influence in the beauty industry and celebrity circles was a significant advantage for her because celebrities are considered to be the top tier of influencers as their audience numbers are significantly large than other influencers (Talkwalker.com). Thobile was exposed to the right people and quickly adapted to the culture and understood how she could carve a career for herself by having the right people in her corner:

It plays a huge part, having those connections already. For me, my sister was a huge part, a huge connection of mine into the industry because then from an early age I was exposed to different celebrities. I knew them by name. They had my contact, and so they could easily reach out to me and be like: 'Thobile, I'm going to an event. Can you do my make-up?'. Then people see me doing x celebrities' make-up... Connections do definitely play a huge part, but if you don't have that connection (which is an advantage), you can still make a huge name for yourself without those connections because it's [about] consistency and constantly working at your craft. Someone of*

influence is always watching. It may not be influence in your direct field that you want to be part of, but they could then mention it candidly to a colleague or like a friend who does have direct contact into the space you wanna be in.

(Thobile, Aug. 29, 2020)

In addition to having accessed the industry through her sister's connections, Thobile highlights the importance of maintaining a good presence and reputation once the relationships she has established through her sister's network have taken off. It is important that her brand is relatable and aligns with what brands potentially look for:

People are always watching... They reached out to because they wanted someone that was a good representation of what their brand is and that a lot of people would basically relate to. I was a good fit and they wanted someone with a good digital presence, someone they could grow with. Someone who was really into the art of make-up and making it fun and not always serious. So ja, I was a great fit and literally feel like they're an extension of my family now. They reached out to me, we launched last year November [2019] and we've been growing strong since... it felt like everything had come together in that moment. You know, me being a make-up artist, me being a digital creator and making the conscious decision to really immerse myself [in] both things, make-up artistry and the digital platforms. Not only because at the time I was thinking it is important for me to do both because it's multiple streams of income but then down the line you really see how the dots came together. Like the dots connects with that collaboration and being a self-taught make-up artist to a brand that belongs to one of the biggest franchises in South Africa is crazy!

(Thobile, Aug. 29, 2020)

Thobile's success as a well-respected make-up artist, influencer and content creator in general occurred quite quickly in comparison to the time, effort, and hard work she would have needed to have invested in her corporate journey. What some people never achieve in a corporate space in terms of recognition, remuneration and general fulfillment, Thobile has attained in her entrepreneurial path and space within a relatively short amount of time:

With my journey, it kind of both took place, it kinda just merged both at the same time and grew together to become one thing. On the one end I was doing people's make-up. I started doing different celebrities' [make-up] and on the other end, my personal aspect was that I was posting about it on my socials, not only doing those specific personalities' make-up, but my experience with

the products. So, it grew into one thing together. It's not that I started doing people's make-up and then only a couple of years later the influencer thing started. My journey, it hasn't even been that long. I've been an entrepreneur in its full capacity for about a year and eight months. Everything that you're seeing is everything that you're seeing in a very short space of time.

(Thobile, Aug. 29, 2020)

The opportunities that Thobile has been exposed to by virtue of association and good testimony has allowed her career as an entrepreneur to be in good stead. She is a prime example of the importance of connections and how they can be used to one's advantage to achieve success and establish a name for oneself once the right people are aware of your presence and expertise within the industry. Thobile's social capital played a significant role to her proximity to success (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 51; Umney & Krestos, 2015, p. 326).

Dineo who is an independent vlogger talks about the importance of hard work and networking. These aspects play a significant role in the opportunities and success of an influencer. She was not as fortunate as Thobile when it comes to having the right connections or any connections at all. While Dineo does possess some level of social capital, she does not have social capital that is equal to Thobile's. Recall Bourdieu defines social capital as the networks and relationships which people have access to which assist to maintain class position. There are important distinctions in these resources that differentiate people proximity to 'success' (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 51). Dineo explains what happens behind the scenes for particular people to be chosen for brand opportunities and for others not to be:

I think it's a bit of both, hard work and networking, but I think the majority of the time it's networking. I'm sure you can agree with me when I say, you see a lot of influencers do a lot of work with the same brands and the majority of the time. For example, you'll find Influencer A doing a whole lot of work with Evolution, pretty much all the time, and it's because they have that relationship. They know that person, so they will go to that person. It's not necessarily gonna be about hard work. And then on the other hand, you see this influencer who is constantly buying Evolution products and tagging Evolution all the time but not getting any of their work with Evolution. It's a bit of both in a sense that you have to produce the content, but you have to network almost a little bit harder for them to know you so that they can approach you and contact you. Brands also tend to work with the same people all the time. I think it's their safety net... they know that this person will deliver the work.*

(Dineo, Sept. 6, 2020)

Who you know matters

Cultivating and maintaining relationships is a huge part of the work as an influencer (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 52). Content creators need to constantly negotiate and create opportunities for themselves. They also need to keep in constant contact with their audience to maintain relations with them as brands are interested in your audience engagement rate (Talkwalker.com). One of the skills required by the participants to grow their influencing careers is interpersonal skills. If you fail to master this skill, it may likely limit your opportunities and success. Dineo explains one of the ways fellow creatives unconventionally secure their brand collaborations:

...You get there expecting it to be an event, but you just see influencer guys hovering over the PR ladies and guys and telling them I can do this, I can do that... This is when people get connections and paid partnerships and stuff.

(Dineo, Sept. 6, 2020)

With the reliance of connections and opportunities opening for the group interviewed for this research project, it was not apparent whether the young individuals planned on pursuing this career and entrepreneurial path long-term. Some expressed that content creation and influencing is one of many entrepreneurial ventures they hoped to pursue. Many of the participants have a post-matric educational background; thus, they potentially have a better chance to pursue many other avenues outside of the influencing and content creation path. Thobeka's partner who she met shortly after her influencing career kicked off, has since roped in her partner, and established several small businesses with him within the content creation space. Although this was not something he was originally interested in, the fact that he was constantly expected to take carefully considered pictures of Thobeka like Mupotsa (2016) writes about and help her create content meant that he too was a content creator and so at some point they made it an official partnership and invested more time into the craft and business. However, for Thobeka while this may be a medium to long-term entrepreneurial adventure, she admits that for her partner:

It's not something he'd like to do forever. He's definitely been adamant that he is enjoying it right now, it's bringing in good money but, within the next five years, I don't imagine him still doing this. He'll probably be doing other stuff, more business-related or more aligned with his degree. He studied industrial design, so like product development and all that stuff. So, I think he will move on from it, a lot quicker than I will.

(Thobeka, Sept. 25, 2020)

Whether influencing will still exist in decades or centuries to come is unclear at this stage. However, what is known is that young entrepreneurs are currently happily taking the risk of pursuing this non-traditional path because of the opportunities of freedom, time, choice, and money as capitalism becomes more advanced (Duffy & Hund, 2015, p. 6). The young creatives are more hopeful about this risk than they are about other more traditional routes of work that seem not to offer them the same or equal opportunities because of historical legacies and how structurally they continue to disadvantage black African Youth in less and more overt ways.

Conclusion

It is not difficult to understand why young people are drawn towards the entrepreneurial space, especially with the rise in opportunities available to them. The challenges of economic exclusion as well as unfair labor practices and opportunities do not make it any easier for young people to remain loyal to work paths that do not offer them the freedoms, autonomy, and income they desperately long for. Thus, we better understand how and why they are attracted to entrepreneurship despite its uncertainty. The risk of following a path that is known is higher than the risk of not following a path where one's potential and passion are likely to meet and make sense socially and economically for the risk-takers.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

This research project set out to find out about the often-neglected experiences of social media influencers' lives. The study was interested in finding out how the group of young and educated black Africans navigate their way around digital entrepreneurship daily and the reality and uncertainties surrounding this less established terrain of work. The key topics explored in the study's literature review were; the shifts and progress made within the marketing and advertising industry; social media influencing as a whole; the possible changes in work that confront young black Africans; as well as the possibilities of exploring the alternative path of entrepreneurship.

The qualitative research approach was chosen as the most suitable for the purpose of collecting the multiple perspectives of influencers and gather information about their work and lives which are highly affected by influencing and social media culture. A sample size of 12 participants gave the project rich data in order to achieve the main research objectives. The participants were interviewed in-depth over Zoom between 21 August and 8 October 2020. The interviews were semi-structured and tended to last on average 90 minutes. Purposive sampling was useful for the project as it helped narrow the focus of the research which was interested in the experiences of black African middle-class youth and their transitional phases between traditional schooling and work paths as well as influencing. The core research findings were discussed in chapters 4, 5 and 6.

Chapter 4 on, *Daily: The Lives of Social Media Influencers*, unpacked the roles and responsibilities of the content creators. In the chapter, participants shared how their journey as influencers and or content creators began. This chapter also gave insight on what they do daily as creatives which allows them to translate their skills and abilities into an income. The participants also shared the advantages and disadvantages about their work, which highlighted the contrast between what audiences see on their screens and the lives of the influencers, the reality of the behind the scenes negotiations and in general, the less-glamorous parts of their job. Some participants alluded to cases of a disconnect between themselves and their audience, which in some ways suggests that parts of their work is

performed and to some degree fake as they are expected to fulfil briefs which are paid for by brands who are sometimes removed from the niche audiences of the influencers. It also became clear that there are different influencers with different audiences and objectives, thus, each one ought to be judged individually for their offering and not on a collective basis.

Chapter 5 discussed, *Understanding Work through the lens of Black African youth in South Africa*. This chapter focused on the realities of work in a context of unemployment that largely affects the youth. Due to a large portion of the youth being economically excluded from the formal economy of the country, they have had to rely more on their individual efforts to create work opportunities for themselves. This has led to a hand full of mainly privileged middle-class youth groups using their access to technology and information to create and somewhat participate in both the informal and formal economies through less conventional job paths such as social media influencing. The chapter discusses some of the participants motivations behind the decision to move away from formal jobs to less formal jobs where they have autonomy, freedom and a better earning potential, this is where the formal meets the informal. Some participants argued that their work as content creators within the creative space is formal, despite many other professions and citizens opinions about their work being more of a hobby and less of a job. The seriousness and demands of the influencers' roles and responsibilities on a daily-basis which are likened to any other traditional jobs is the transition phase where the informal meets formal. In the same breath, the interviewees expanded on the expectation placed on them by brand strategies to consistently work and engage around the clock in order to earn their money. There is almost a code that the majority of influencers need to live and swear by in order to ensure that they continue building their individual brands by constantly reaching higher subscription numbers on YouTube and followers on Instagram, they need to work continuously, be visible, engage around the clock and remain top of mind for brands and audiences. This is the bit about not having set hours like a 9-5 job would generally require from you, therefore, being your own boss means that everything relating to your work centres around you and how much attention, time, skills and abilities you invest into ensuring that you are successful in your job.

Chapter 6, the final findings chapter on, *Black Youth: Entrepreneurship and Opportunities* highlights how and why black African youth are more eager to pursue entrepreneurship as

opposed to being interested in jobs that can potentially secure their future long-term. Taking the risk to become entrepreneurs and create jobs for themselves and perhaps other people along the way is what young people are seemingly more interested in. They no longer possess the patience and desire for other people and business entities to determine on their behalf whether they can have opportunities or not, and if they can, the conditionalities around those opportunities. Young people are creating opportunities for themselves are no longer holding back on what they believe they can achieve despite their education, work and racial background. They are exercising agency by defying the odds of unfavourable structural injustices and traditionally exclusionary routes which continue to exist. Taking the risk to be able to do things on their own terms, have the freedom, make the choices that benefit them and earn an income determined by them is what the young group are after ultimately. This neoliberal approach towards their work and lives is the culture that drives the participants. They are unapologetically invested in the individual vision and less on the socio-economic collective vision of the country. The chapter also gave insight on the importance or relevance of connections within the industry, suggesting how 'entrepreneurialism' is also dependent on access to social capital and how influencing may point to new forms of class reproduction, perhaps a subject for further study. Much like in other industries, who you know plays a significant role on how far you can go and how quickly as well as frequently you can secure paid partnerships with brands. Connections are great to have, however, establishing and maintaining relationships with brands is an even more important consideration for creatives. While connections are a huge advantage in receiving recognition from brands, hard work, consistency and being reliable is also considered to be a major deal within the industry. An influencer's ability to deliver creative content is what keeps brands loyal in the long-term. Networking and negotiating is a huge chunk of what it entails to be a creative working with brands to secure an income from month to month.

This study has highlighted that *Digital Entrepreneurship and its Possibilities* is a culmination of factors which contribute towards black African middle-class youth moving frequently between the formal and informal economies. The choice to pursue digital entrepreneurship, more specifically social media influencing and content creation by the young group of participants is in some ways informed by them needing to earn an income or multiple incomes as well as be able to create opportunities for themselves in a context where socio-

economically they are not in the best position to create wealth for themselves within traditional roles and paths. The choice is also based off the need to fulfil their desires of work that focuses on their individual freedoms and financial aspirations.

Studies of precarious work and working class experiences dominate Sociology in South Africa. Here we are able to understand the experiences of black African middle-class youth and how they navigate work under conditions of precarious jobs and also where employment may exist for them but in ways that they feel limit their freedom, wealth and futures in general. This bears on how to understand the effects and implications of these young people's agency under neoliberalism.

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APPENDIX A: ETHICS CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE



SOCIOLOGY AND DEVELOPMENT STUDIES ETHICS COMMITTEE (School of Social Sciences)

CONSTITUTED UNDER THE UNIVERSITY HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON-MEDICAL)

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

PROTOCOL NUMBER: SOCL-2020-01

PROJECT TITLE

Digital Entrepreneurship and its possibilities: A case study of young, educated black African Social Media Influencers in Johannesburg.

INVESTIGATOR

Ms. Wandile Hlabangane

SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT OF INVESTIGATOR

Sociology

DATE CONSIDERED

15 June 2020

DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE

Approved

RISK LEVEL

MINIMAL RISK

EXPIRY DATE

15 July 2023

ISSUE DATE OF CERTIFICATE

19 April 2021

CHAIRPERSON



(Shireen Ally)

cc: Supervisor: Prof Bridget Kenny

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR

To be completed in duplicate and **ONE COPY** returned to the Chairperson of the Department ethics committee.

I fully understand the conditions under which I am authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I 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.



Signature

Date

_____/_____/2021

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER ON ALL ENQUIRIES

APPENDIX B: PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

CONSENT FORM TO PARTICIPATE IN STUDY ON SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS

Title of project:

Social Media Influencers' lives, digital entrepreneurship, and choices: A case study of educated, young Black African middle-class Social Media Influencers in Johannesburg.

Name of researcher: Wandile Hlabangane

I....., agree to participate in this research project on Black African middle-class youth Social Media Influencers. The research has been explained to me and I understand what my participation will involve.

I agree to the following:

	YES	NO
I agree that my participation will remain anonymous		
I agree that the researcher may use anonymous quotes in her research report		
I agree that the interview may be recorded for purposes of accurate capturing of data		
I agree that the information I provide may be used anonymously after this project has ended for academic purposes by other researchers, subject to their own ethics clearance being obtained		

..... (Signature)

..... (Name of participant)

..... (Date of consent)

..... (Signature)

..... (Name of researcher seeking consent)

..... (Date)

APPENDIX C: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

PARTICIPATION INFORMATION SHEET

Dear Social Media Influencer

My name is Wandile Hlabangane, and I am a master's student in Labor and Economic Sociology at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. As part of my studies, I am required to undertake a research project, and I am investigating the choices and circumstances relating to social media influencers, under the supervision of Professor Bridget Kenny. The aim of the of this research project is to find out about the lives of Social Media Influencers, digital entrepreneurship and the push/pull factors that surround this less conventional path.

As part of this project, I would like to invite you to a virtual interview on Zoom. This will involve answering semi-structured interview questions. The virtual interview will take around 60 minutes. With your permission, I would like to record the interview for the purpose of accurately capturing the information for academic purposes.

There will be no personal costs to you if you participate in this project. You will not receive any direct benefits from the participation. There are also no disadvantages or penalties if you choose not to participate or if you withdraw from the study. You may withdraw at any time or not answer any question if you do not want to. The information you share during the virtual interview will be held securely and not disclosed for purposes beyond the research. I will be using a pseudonym (false name) to represent your participation in my final research report. If you experience any distress or discomfort at any point during this process, we will stop the interview and resume another time.

If you have any questions during or 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. The data collected from this research project will be stored on my personal iCloud and will be kept for 5 years. With your permission, the data collected from this research project may be used by other researchers. If you have any concerns or complaints regarding the ethical procedure of this study, you are welcome to contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee- (Non-Medical), telephone +27(0) 11 717 1408, email hrec-medical.researchoffice@wits.ac.za.

Yours sincerely,
Wandile Hlabangane

Researcher: Wandile Hlabangane, 1508681@wits.students.ac.za, 073 756 1710
Supervisor: Bridget Kenny, Bridget.Kenny@wits.ac.za, (011) 717 4445

APPENDIX D: ANONYMISED BIO OF PARTICIPANTS

PARTICIPANTS' BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

NAME* & (AGE)	GENDER	TYPE OF INFLUENCER/ NICHE	FULL-TIME/ PART-TIME CONTENT CREATOR?	INTERVIEW DATE
Nothando (34)	Female	Motherhood and marriage podcaster and blogger	Full-time	21 Aug '20
Okuhle (23)	Female	Lifestyle and couples' content	Part-time	21 Aug '20
Brenda (24)	Female	Youtuber, digital content creator and travel	Full-time	24 Aug '20
Zolani (26)	Male	Comedian, gaming, and lifestyle content	Full-time	23 Aug '20
Rethabile (28)	Female	God-centered, marriage, adventure, and lifestyle content	Part-time	25 Aug '20
Thato (30)	Male	God-centered, marriage, adventure, and lifestyle content	Part-time	25 Aug '20
Thobile (26)	Female	Celebrity make-up artist and interior design enthusiast	Full-time	29 Aug '20
Dineo (30)	Female	Family vlogger, parenting, adventures and some adulting	Part-time	6 Sept '20
Mbali (21)	Female	Lifestyle and faith content creator	Part-time	15 Sept '20

Thobeka (22)	Female	Fashion, YouTuber, creative entrepreneur, and graphic designer	Full-time	25 Sept '20
Mosa (28)	Female	Travel curator and storyteller	Part-time	25 Sept '20
Tshepo (32)	Male	Travel and storyteller / content creator	Full-time	8 Oct '20

(*) All participants' names have been changed to maintain anonymity.

APPENDIX E: PARTICIPANT INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Can you tell me about your higher education and work background?
What did you study?
What are your qualifications?
Do you have work experience? If so, what kind?
2. How and when did the opportunity of influencing come about?
3. What would you say is the role of an influencer in the consumption and production relationship? What is the role of an influencer in general?
4. Can you mention what pushed you away from university or your job?
5. Can you mention what pulled you towards SMI?
6. What are the advantages of being a SMI?
7. What are the disadvantages of being a SMI?
8. What type of security do you believe you would have had if you continued with the traditional route of university and work?
9. Do you understand SMI as informal or formal employment? Why?
10. Which parts of SMI do you believe make you an entrepreneur?
Which parts of SMI do you believe qualify you as an employee?
11. How much of influencing is real life and how much of it is scripted?
12. What kinds of other opportunities have you been exposed to because of the influence you have?
13. Influencers appear to live a life that makes others believe the income you make is significant, would you like to speak on this?
14. What important information about SMI would you like to contribute to the study that you believe was not covered during this interview?

****END****