



Exploring YouTube as a distribution alternative for independently produced television formats.

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Thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

In the

DISCIPLINE OF MEDIA AND CULTURAL STUDIES

School of Arts, College of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, South Africa.

November 2023

Supervised

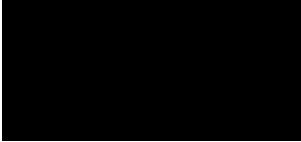
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DECLARATION

I, hereby declare that this research presented is my original work and has not been previously submitted in part or whole for any degree or examination at any other university. The citations and references, and writings from other sources used in the course of this work have all been acknowledged.



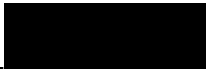
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Date: March 2025

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to acknowledge my phenomenal and formidable mother, Dr. Bongiwe Zulu, thank you for being the epitome of excellence, and for your encouragement and most significantly, for your unwavering support - a true powerhouse.

My sincere appreciation also goes to the following individuals and institution who motivated and assisted me to complete this study. Warmest thanks to my beautiful sisters, Sinazo and Nomonde and to the Zulu and Mbanjwa families. You always reminded me why I started; this motivated me to continue unabated.

I would like to further acknowledge my supervisors and critical readers for their professional commitment through their suggestions and guidance throughout this study. A particular word of thanks goes out to the University of KwaZulu-Natal for paying my first year's remission of fees, thus enabling me to conduct this research study. To all who participated in this study so willingly, and unreservedly responded and assisted in completing research questions which added a wealth of knowledge to my study.

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

4IR	Fourth industrial revolution
AV	Audio-visual
ICASA	Independent Communication Authority of South Africa
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IP	Intellectual Property
NFVF	National Film and Video Foundation
OTT	Over-the-Top Television
PEM	Political Economy of Media
PSB	Public Service Broadcasting
SA	South Africa
SABC	South African Broadcasting Corporation
SEO	Search Engine Optimisation
TV	Television
UGC	User-Generated Content
WIPO	World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO)

TABLES AND FIGURES

Table 4.1: Description of each case study.	.....	Page 80
Table 4.2: Summary of Case Study Interviews.	.....	Page 81
Table 4.3: Codes for the Case Study Interviews.	.....	Page 83
Table 4.4: Summary of Thematic Themes and Sub-themes as related to the Research questions.	.....	Page 87
.....	.....	Page 87

Contents

DEDICATION.....	ix
ABSTRACT.....	x
CHAPTER ONE	1
ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY	1
1.1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.2. CONTEXT.....	1
1.3. STUDY BACKGROUND.....	6
1.4. RESEARCH PROBLEM.....	7
1.5. STUDY AIM AND OBJECTIVES.....	8
1.5.1 Aim	8
1.5.2 Objectives.....	9
1.6 RESEARCH QUESTIONS	9
1.6.1 Main Research Question	9
1.6.2 Subsidiary research Questions.....	9
1.7 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY	10
1.8 DESCRIPTION OF KEY THEORETICAL TERMS	11
1.8.1. Media Convergence	11
1.8.2. Political Economy of Media (PEM)	11
1.8.3. Phenomenon	11
1.8.4. New Media.....	12
1.8.5. Audience	12
1.8.6. Independent Producer.....	12
1.9. CHAPTER OUTLINE.....	12
1.10. CONCLUSION.....	13
CHAPTER TWO	14
LITERATURE REVIEW	14
2.1 INTRODUCTION.....	14
2. TRADITIONAL TELEVISION BROADCASTING IN SOUTH AFRICA.....	15
2.1. The history of labour and television production.....	15
2.2.2 The History of Television Audiences and Advertising Influence	20
2.2.3. Current Broadcasting Challenges: Policies and Participation.....	24
2.3. UNDERSTANDING ONLINE VIDEO DISTRIBUTION.....	28
2.3.1. Towards Media Convergence in Broadcasting.....	28
2.3.2 Convergence Enablers' Neologisms: Cross-media, Web 2.0, and OTT	30

2.3.3. South African Online Audience-Social Media Consumption	33
2.4 YOUTUBE: ADVANCEMENT OF ONLINE TELEVISION	35
2.4.1 YouTube Distribution Platform	35
2.4.2 Monetisation by Online Advertising	45
2.5 LEGAL REGULATORY PROVISIONS GOVERNING ONLINE DISTRIBUTION	49
2.5.1 South African ICT Regulations towards Digital Transformation	49
2.5.2 Regulating Content Globally	53
CHAPTER THREE	58
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	58
3.1 INTRODUCTION.....	58
3.2 MEDIA CONVERGENCE	58
3.2.1 Participatory Culture in New Media.....	63
3.3 POLITICAL ECONOMY OF MEDIA	66
3.3.1 Commodification of media	66
3.4 CONCLUSION	74
CHAPTER FOUR.....	75
METHODOLOGY	75
4.1 INTRODUCTION.....	75
4.2 INTERPRETIVIST PARADIGM.....	75
4.2.1 Epistemology	76
4.3 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH APPROACH	76
4.4 CASE STUDY RESEARCH DESIGN.....	77
4.4.1 Sample Selection.....	78
4.4.2. Summary of Case Study YouTube Channels.....	79
4.5 DATA COLLECTION	80
<i>Table 4.2: Summary of Case Study Interviews.</i>	81
4.6 DATA ANALYSIS	82
4.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS.....	83
4.7.1 Ethical Approval.....	84
4.8. RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY	84
4.9 CONCLUSION	85
CHAPTER FIVE	86
DATA ANALYSIS AND KEY FINDINGS	86
5.1 INTRODUCTION.....	86
<i>Table 4.4: Summary of Thematic Themes and Sub-themes as related to the Research questions.</i>	87

5.5. PRODUCERS’ FUNDING AND CREW APPROACH ON YOUTUBE	119
5.5.1. Producer’s production methods	119
5.5.2. Financing and return on investment.....	120
5.6 MARKETING STRATEGIES TO GAIN AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT AND VIEWERSHIP.....	122
5.6.1 Cross-Media Advertising.....	123
5.6.2 Understanding YouTube Niche and Audience Behaviour	125
5.6.3 The Audience as a Commodity: Addressing PEM.....	131
5.7. CONVERGENCE INFLUENCE ON ONLINE DISTRIBUTION CONVENTIONS	132
5.7.1 Video Quality: production-design, thumbnails, and titles	133
5.8 CONCLUSION	135
CHAPTER SIX	135
CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	135
6.1 INTRODUCTION.....	135
6.2 CONCLUSION	136
6.3 RECOMMENDATIONS.....	137
REFERENCES.....	140
APPENDIX A: EDITING CERTIFICATE	184

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my Grandmother, Ms. D. M. Mbanjwa, who has departed from this earth, but is never forgotten. Your inspiration steered me on. I love you and miss you always.

Finally, this thesis is dedicated to graduates in the media industry. Keep finding platforms to share your talent.

ABSTRACT

The study investigated how the social media platform, YouTube, and its facilitation of online participatory culture can provide opportunities for distribution alternatives for independent video content producers in South Africa (SA). A theoretical perspective was presented on media convergence regarding its dynamics in merging social media platform, audience engagement and participation, as well as online distribution of television formats that are user generated. The other theoretical theory presented on political economy of media (PEM) regarding its dynamics to online media commodification and media control. This study explored how YouTube in SA has been utilised as an online media distribution platform and the role it plays in the democratisation of media. This in response to the needs of a developing South African market consuming web-series online. However, the role of YouTube has been strongly contested in terms of whether it can serve as a commodity, intellectual property (IP), and copyright gatekeeper through normative regulatory policy implementation in SA. The study adopted the qualitative methodology approach which used literature, as secondary sources in addition to primary data from interviews with four purposively selected South African independent producers and their YouTube channels as case studies. A summary of the findings derived from the four case studies revealed that the elements promoting media convergence might be used to explain why television-formatted web-series are distributed on YouTube which allowed the study's case studies of independent producers the opportunity to monetise their content. However, there were restrictions when creating a web-series without considering copyright and government support for safeguarding online distribution for South African distributors. That could also be accessed in other global countries which have their own copyright laws.

Keywords:

broadcasting, distribution, digital, independent producers, monetisation, media convergence, new media, political economies, web-series, video-on-demand, user-generated content

CHAPTER ONE

ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY

1.1. INTRODUCTION

This study explores YouTube as a distribution alternative for independent South African producers regarding television formats. The study background, problem statement, aim and objectives, and the key questions guiding the study are presented in this chapter. The overview of the literature review and methodology, and the key terms of the study were elucidated. Moreover, the approach to gathering and analysing data findings through the qualitative methodology and theoretical principles to attain the research objectives and to answer the research questions, were described. Lastly, the chapter layout and the conclusion to the chapter are provided.

1.2. CONTEXT

The audio-visual (AV) medium transitioned from linear broadcast television to over-the-top television (OTT), and presently to video-on-demand¹. This shift in distribution methods with the advent of new media technology potentially enhances distribution opportunities for independent producers² (Williams, 2012). During the 19th century, countless inventions such as cinematography, and the jukebox were introduced (Locksley, 2009). Thereafter, mobile phones, the world-wide-web, audio cassettes, the laptop, HD television, DVDs, user-generated content (UGC), and podcasts assumed roles in the world of media (Locksley, 2009). Locksley (2009) avers that digitisation enhances, yet also bypasses traditional models and platforms by introducing two-way, bottom-up, lateral content distribution and production with new devices. Consequently, Locksley (2009) adds that new media is a recent addition enabled through internet-connected mobile phones, provides a fourth screen to those of film, television, and personal computers.

¹Video-on-demand: AV content you can watch anywhere at any time usually on online streaming and video platforms such as YouTube and Vimeo.

Traditional mass media industries are presently facing a changing and competitive media landscape and are forced to be adaptive because of the advent of new media, which is made attainable by the accelerated advancement of digital technologies. According to Nhedzi (2018) and Salamzadeh *et al.* (2019), marketing and cross-media usage help grow content sharing, Moreso, rising consumer involvement, the ubiquity of information, and shifts in the media value chain have superseded the platform-bound business approach through media convergence. This study thus contributes to the growing body of scholarly work that addresses new media models of distribution platforms, in particular web-series by reviewing and analysing current and previous literature about convergence and consumer involvement. Moreover, in order to generate data based on lived experiences, this study will make this contribution by exploring case studies of four South African independent producers using YouTube to distribute their web-series. In the recent past, predominantly established filmmakers could produce publicly accessible content; however, presently any aspiring individual with access to a video camera and editing software can produce a variety of digital video projects, share, and garner an audience that is online.

New media has facilitated communication to be part of interaction, regarding sharing and messaging between producers and the audience, which contrasts traditional media communication platforms that do not allow this process. In traditional media, the objective was to send a message out to be received rather than receiving feedback (Luoma-aho, 2010). The recent growth in new media platforms and development in digital technological advancements have provided online avenues to access audiences beyond traditional television screens through media convergence. Consequently, the change in distribution strategies elicited by the development of new media technology may increase distribution prospects for independent producers (Williams, 2012).

The interaction between producers and viewers can be democratised primarily through digital technology and the internet, making it a two-way form of communication (Hesmondhalgh, 2019). According to Jenkins (2008, p. 137), the: “internet has evolved into a platform for

²Independent producers: Content creators who produce, create, and distribute their own web-series or shows online without traditional television broadcasting support or funding.

consumer participation”. Considering this view, technological productivity has become a material foundation of participatory democracy, hence engendering an increase in involvement in user-participation and engagement.

Thus, writing and broadcasting are now executed by the people formally known as the audience, now write and broadcast which converts television viewers into online audiences and producers (Press & Livingstone, 2006; Luoma-aho, 2010 & Wilma, 2018). The timeline of development from traditional to present distribution transformation is explored further in the literature review section. As the barriers to publishing dissipate such that screenwriters can now participate through technology, a notable trend develops towards the integration of User-generated content (UGC) (AL Mohammad, 2017). Accordingly, social media has developed into an internet-based platform that fosters simpler engagement and communication for users. Social media also enables users to create and share their own content, building on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, the creation and exchange of UGC (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010 & Dollarhide, 2021).

Social media websites that stream videos include YouTube and Vimeo which allow individuals to distribute content such as web-series - thus promoting ordinary people’s innovations. Recently, independent producers who experience difficulties accessing opportunities to work on traditional broadcasting television, have been creating their own web-series and sharing them publicly online (Sehl *et al.*, 2016 & Zhang, 2021). According to Williams (2012), this provides a voice to those who are not represented in traditional entertainment, as well as providing new opportunities for independent producers. Moreover, YouTube which is the second-biggest search engine after Google and is the world’s largest digital video on-line social media platform for sharing video content, can provide a platform for independent producers’ projects to potentially become profitable, develop into television shows, and contribute to launching careers in the media industry (Williams, 2012; Wattenhofer *et al.*, 2012 & Duffett, 2020). Jenkins (2008, p. 274) affirms that: “YouTube is a site for production and distribution of grassroots media” and that on YouTube: “participation occurs at three distinct levels - those of production, selection, and distribution” (Fuchs, 2014, p. 61). Therefore, allowing users to produce and categorize UGC, build a channel, view and comment on videos uploaded on social media sites. YouTube participation occurs through mobiles and all technological devices and blogs, facilitating conversation which is attractive for marketing (Boyd and Ellison, 2008; World Wide Worx, 2015; & Duffett, 2020). Increased internet accessibility and technological

advancements like digital video camera devices are driving the increase in demand for the most widely used social video platform in South Africa (SA), YouTube (Mc Innes, 2023). As a result of this growing trend, more individuals are now producing content rather than just consuming it in SA (Acquisto, 2020). Jenkins (2008, p. 18) states that: “Web 2.0 is both pleasure and exploitation, both a space of participation and a space of commodification”. This active participation of independent content producers and the process of content commodification was explored in this study.

Due to the various choices of content, it is getting harder to classify online users according to their interests in the content they wish to consume. Since the media that individuals consume is becoming more fragmented and the communities they belong to are clustering in different ways, instead, rather than passively absorbing whatever is broadcast by a limited number of content creators, consumers may decide what information they want to be exposed to and control the sources they receive (Williams, 2022). According to Kapoor *et al.* (2017), the significance of social media to many stakeholders has drawn substantial interest from researchers in a variety of domains. They maintain that it includes information systems and that numerous studies examined the effectiveness of online communities and social media as marketing tools, while others have examined different facets of social media such as the benefits, dangers of using it, and the negative stigma it carries in the workforce (Dwivedi *et al.*, 2021).

Therefore, given the dynamics that exist on the internet and social media, communication-related phenomena that the internet represents are being increasingly researched daily. A study by Newhagen and Rafaeli (1996) stated that the internet is relatively new, and acts as a multimedia, content-based interactivity, and is potentially a great business prospect and is still proving to revolutionise and grow its functions even in today’s society. Therefore, research on this new phenomenon is necessary for consumers and producers shifting from the television medium to the internet (Dennis & Kahn, 2023). The rate of growth within this medium means that as rapidly as it grows, so should related research and knowledge. Kraut *et al.* (2006) comments on how the internet is being incorporated into users' daily lives, and its potential implications on the development and maintenance of social relationships, political and psychological functioning, education, and consumer behaviour - all of which are being studied by social scientists. Whilst also Dennis and Kahn (2023) assert that the internet presently supports human communication through social media, also AV transmission enables people to

work collaboratively at different locations and supports access to digital information through a variety of devices.

The "cultivation theory" was created by theorists like George Gerber in 1969 to explain how audiences are exposed to television on a regular basis and why viewers are so fascinated by it (but not its attendant technologies as a phenomenon). Scholars, Press and Livingstone (2006, p. 176) posed a question worth noting: "in an age of new information and communication media, why persist with a theory that was developed in the age of mass broadcasting?" adding that, theoretically, in the digital age, television needs to be reconsidered. Traditional television is a medium that, while influential, is not responsive to change or engagement. While social media has allowed for audience engagement and responses (Shahbazneshad, Dolan & Rashidirad, 2021). They also offer new revenue streams for the content provider. Regardless of where and how consumers are consuming material, digital advertising strategies allow content producers to select the viewer or audience and present preferred adverts in front of them (Alexander, 2022 & Goliger, 2022).

The case studies selected for the study have taken a traditional medium format (web-series) and shifted to distributing it online which asserts Andrea Press and Sonia Livingstone's' (2006) question of why people still persist with a theory such as traditional television in an era of people who are experiencing widespread broadcasting. Since scholars are turning their attention and research to new media, while attempting to apply television traditions to this new field (Press & Livingstone, 2006; Fuchs, 2021).

Governments have published a *White Paper* in 2020 on future regulations to advance current broadcasting regulations. The regulations now include on-demand services, and broadcasting services on the internet. These new media services have more influence and therefore an increased amount of content from SA is encouraged even though there is less regulation than traditional media. Consequently, South African Information and Communications Technology (ICTs) have amended regulations to adjust to the new shift in social media which now also services the functions of traditional media being accessible on online platforms and on smaller devices; and with changing media environments new platforms are invited.

Many of the well-known media companies have expanded into e-commerce and creating web domains (Stanyer, 2001). This was achieved through the implementation of new media

therefore, a study on regulatory benefits and implications for a South African producer online is required. Past studies conducted on web television concentrated on how media conglomerates utilised the internet as a secondary content distribution channel, in addition to mainstream television to increase their financial exploitation of conventional television content and their online presence (Majek, 2012).

1.3. STUDY BACKGROUND

The South African television industry consists of a value-chain of service providers whose input stems from content creation to programming, production, distribution or exhibition phase and sales. This study focused on the distribution aspect of the value-chain in local television. This component of the industry is responsible for ensuring that television content reaches its target audience. Within the value-chain, independent producers are reliant on funding and content distribution from traditional television channels. The main broadcasting outlets in SA include the Public Service Broadcaster; namely, the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), eTV, Multi Choice, Moja Love, and community television stations. Yet, broadcasters continue to confront challenges; for example, Multi Choice that is facing notable new competition with online streaming since 2015 (Jadwat, 2022). Also, community television stations contend with changing media landscapes, limited licensing, and broadcasting costs (ICASA, 2004; Hweshe, 2010; Abiolu and Teer-Tomaselli, 2018 & McLeod, 2018). Furthermore, television content is seasonal and relies on continuation and renewal which is influenced by television ratings, finance, and viewership (Miller, 2010).

Mzansi Magic provides an increase in local content although emerging independent producers might experience challenges with the difficult administrative processes with one-way communications and lengthy timelines (M-NET Submissions, 2023). Furthermore, in 2023 DSTV operator Multi Choice reported a loss of 100 000 customers due to inflation and load shedding and a drop in premium subscribers declining by 6% (Mochiko, 2023). Moreover, broadcasting channel acquisition practices usually disadvantage independent or emerging producers who are reliant on funding and distribution from channels by retaining ownership of their content (Treffry-Goatley, 2010; SABC Independent Producing Sector Terms of Trade Guidelines, 2018 & Independent Producers Organisation, 2021). They restrict independent producers' ownership and intellectual property (IP) outside of these stations in addition to prohibiting them from gaining financially from their original content (Treffry-Goatley, 2010

& NFVF, 2019). Moreover, South African film and television graduates may potentially become discouraged by the lack of opportunities to gain practical experience since established production companies are better positioned and favoured to distribute content through traditional television networks (NFVF, 2019).

Although there are funding opportunities available to the South African public and include the NFVF funding, web-series, TV formats (pilot), TV animation, training grants, and films. Funding is however available once a year and a limitation of about 15 projects are successfully funded, and not all are awarded to television content. Moreover, production companies such as Black Brain, Stained Glass and Bomb Productions are the predominant production companies that produce shows on channels for SABC, Mzansi Magic, eTV, Vuzu and MTV (Stained Glass, 2021; Black Brain, 2022 & Bomb Productions, 2023). This suggests that one needs to possess experience on a few projects and a credible production track record. Considering, a key problem faced by SA is the highest unemployment rate globally with 35.6% of newly graduated youth (Neufeld, 2023). This includes film and television graduates whose opportunities within established distributors are limited and cannot be afforded to all unemployed youth in SA.

The limitation in open opportunities such as government funding or traditional distribution platforms has left those with little experience on production projects, and those without a credible production track record needing alternative spaces to produce and share their creative content. During production shoots most employers' contract freelancers which implies that employees are faced with seeking further employment after a show is cancelled or a project is complete (NFVF, 2022). Therefore, it is imperative to explore the importance of creating knowledge-based economies and spaces in the industry to share more content. Consequently, it is also necessary to consider how individuals with access to Wi-Fi or data can watch content on their phones, rather than traditional television, this will be elaborated upon in Chapter 2 section 2.4.3.

1.4. RESEARCH PROBLEM

According to Toffler (1980), information technology would foster mass customisation, dis-intermediation, and media convergence. As such, YouTube has contributed as a distribution site allowing audiences to participate and become the producer, transitioning from a trend of

exclusion to inclusion. This is advantageous for targeted audiences to view content at their convenience and allows them to binge-watch. The advantages of binge-watching include stress reduction, the ability to watch whenever you want, the creation of a sense of community around a series, and the absence of advertisements (Selvakumaran, 2022). Present studies focus on online advertising, YouTube as a marketing or education platform in SA. Since this is a limited but growing area of study of the role of online streaming services and interest for independent producers in SA. It is imperative to note that YouTube has faced its challenges despite the growth of online advertising which include monetisation of vast content and unauthorized copyright content and regulation (Lever, 2015). Furthermore, content distributors face challenges on YouTube to make their channel viewer-oriented and well-structured through metrics and changing algorithm, search-engine-optimisation (SEO) titles and descriptions which are essential elements required to guarantee YouTube distribution that is successful (McLachlan & Cooper, 2023 & Simmonds, 2023). Furthermore, the concerns of South African traditional media retrenching and now opening up the industry (Tanswell, 2021), has found producers migrating elsewhere (YouTube) which creates questions about profit, copyright, and IP protection in online distribution.

1.5. STUDY AIM AND OBJECTIVES

1.5.1 Aim

The research aimed to explore how independently produced content can use YouTube as a distribution platform, and essentially monetise from it. The rationale concerning the research objectives is informed by a gap identified in the South African traditional television industry distribution value chain, and consequently exploring how to fill this gap considering the rapid growth in media distribution platforms. Thus, the study examined media convergence which is developed from technological forms of distributing information online. More specifically how television content is hosted through the online video distribution platform, YouTube to reach SA audiences outside of traditional television screens while further accessing their YouTube audiences, how to monetise their content through YouTube, and potentially negotiating ownership of intellectual property (IP). It further explores using YouTube as an alternate distribution route considering the steadily increasing number of internet users in SA of 43.48 million total internet users and 25.80 million being YouTube users in SA as of January 2023 (Kemp, 2023). The study explored television formats such as drama, news, magazine and talk

shows through four independent producers who utilize YouTube for content distribution. Therefore, the main focus was on investigating how the digital video sharing platform ‘YouTube’ functions as an alternative distribution means for independent South African producers, and what insights can be gained from their experiences by using YouTube to distribute their work. The key areas of focus are stated below.

1.5.2 Objectives

The objectives guiding the research were:

1. To examine the role and significance of YouTube’s online streaming services in the distribution of independently produced South African web content;
2. To investigate government policy intervention within online distribution and streaming services for independent producers in South Africa;
3. To ascertain business and marketing strategies utilized by independent producers for successful distribution of web-series or shows to maximise viewership and monetize content; and
4. To determine how media and technological convergence are perceived in terms of relationships between medium, technology, and quality of content; and if they affect quality, format, and audience engagement of the selected shows.

1.6 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1.6.1 Main Research Question

How does the digital video sharing platform ‘YouTube’ function as an alternative distribution means for independent South African producers, and what insights can be derived from their experiences using YouTube to distribute their work?

1.6.2 Subsidiary research Questions

1. What is the role of YouTube distribution in facilitating independent producer participation and dissemination of online content as experienced by South African producers?

2. What influence does National Government policy intervention have on online content regulations for independent producers in South Africa?
3. How are the business and marketing strategies utilized for successful distribution of web-series or shows to maximise viewership and monetize content for independent producers?
4. How does media and technological convergence influence the relationships between medium, technology format, and quality of content pertaining to the distribution of independent content on YouTube?

1.7 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Considering the rapidly expanding digital video streaming platforms, this study contributed to the body of knowledge on media convergence. It explored shifts in traditional model's content distribution due to increased use of new media distribution platforms in SA. The main goal was to gather and expand information that reflected the lived experiences of independent producers who are currently making their imprint in the South African media industry's distribution sector, even if it is not through the doors of famous production firms or broadcasters. Through investigating how online video channels provide content creators a way of organising content and building an online following through subscriptions and social sharing and decision-support-systems based framework for online video channel management and content creation (France *et al*, 2021). Moreover, researchers in SA tend to examine the use of social media for academic purposes and engagement opportunities between teachers and students in learning experiences (Kutu, 2021). Hence there was limited attention on YouTube's effects and significance as a distribution platform for independently produced television formats especially for South Africans. In addition, literature on social media and YouTube is within the American media environment. Therefore, this research envisioned contributing towards closing this gap in literature with research findings related to the South African media context. In addition, this study centered on independent producers who shared their own specific experiences about distributing video content in SA beyond the more formal traditional broadcasting processes. Accordingly, this research intended to generate data which enlightens processes of accessing audiences through distributing on YouTube in SA. Also, the research contributed to knowledge based on government interventions towards online distribution in SA and media convergence that has shifted from traditional broadcasting to users being able to share their own content on YouTube as a discourse through its objectives.

1.8 DESCRIPTION OF KEY THEORETICAL TERMS

1.8.1. Media Convergence

Media convergence is the process of combining mass communication, including conventional media, print, broadcast, new media, the internet, and portable and highly interactive technologies through digital platforms, in order to adapt to new technology (Team Leverage Edu, 2021). Nicholas Negroponte initially used the term *Convergence* in 1978, stating that the fundamental elements of media convergence are modern devices combined with technology, social media, and the internet form the basic structure of convergence in media (Team leverage Edu, 2021). Media convergence also involves a change in economic, social, and cultural paradigms that force consumers to seek new information and connect among dispersed media sources (Jenkins, 2008). The study focused on the merging of communication outlets such as traditional television to new technology by adaptation to new media and digital platforms.

1.8.2. Political Economy of Media (PEM)

According to Collinson (2003), political economy is concerned with the interaction of political and economic processes within a society - the distribution of power and wealth between different groups and individuals, and the processes that create, sustain, and transform these relationships over time. The PEM focuses on media industries and their practices, further focusing primarily on media companies' ownership patterns, organisational structures, and business operations. Moreover, the way practices are shaped by governments' laws, regulations, and other policies impacts these business/regulatory interrelationships not only on media content and audiences, but also on societies (Wilding *et al.*, 2018). In this study's context it would be the dissection of creative economy, YouTube monetisation, intellectual property, and the relationship with online distribution with the law and government.

1.8.3. Phenomenon

A phenomenon is defined as a singularity or marvel in whichever context it is put in (Hauser, 2017). In a scientific context, it is something that is observed to occur or to exist (Sheldon, 2022). This meaning contrasts with the understanding of the word in general usage, as

something extraordinary (Wigmore, 2017). In the context of this study the phenomenon is based on media convergence and new media.

1.8.4. New Media

The term *new media* refers to digital media which are interactive and incorporates two-way communication which involves some form of computing as opposed to traditional media such as the telephone, radio, and TV. New media emerged by combining an older traditional medium with computer chips and a hard drive which became digital interactive media (Mc Luhan, 2005). Manovich (2001) describes new media as new cultural forms which are native to computers or rely on computers for distribution such as web sites, multimedia, digital video, and interactive computer installations. The study centered on interactive and distribution new media on social media and using YouTube as a television format distribution service.

1.8.5. Audience

Audiences are considered as consumers and the target market whom the advertisers and producers aim to distribute for. The study examined consumers and target audiences as those who actively engage and consume content even on YouTube.

1.8.6. Independent Producer

An independent producer is classified as a television content producer. In the context of the study, it is regarded as a freelancer qualified to produce and write according to television format content.

1.9. CHAPTER OUTLINE

Chapter 1 - Orientation to the study: This chapter provided an overview outlining its research aim, purpose, and background context. It also included the context and concept of media convergence, YouTube's distribution and emergence, and the significance of the study. This chapter additionally emphasised on the research objectives and questions that were being investigated. Moreover, an explanation of crucial theoretical terms was included.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review: This chapter reviewed previous literature and sources that contributed to the importance of technological advancements and their impact on how television-like web-series are distributed.

Chapter 3 - Theoretical Framework: This chapter examined the overarching theoretical framework, namely media convergence and the supporting theoretical framework, political economy of media.

Chapter 4 - Research Design and Methodology: The methodology chapter focused on the research design, research paradigm, methodology, and data analysis. Additionally, it provided a detailed explanation of how data was gathered, interpreted, and analysed in accordance with the research questions, and objectives. This included explaining the rationale for using the case study approach, data gathering methods, sampling, and limitations. Finally, the study's ethical considerations were presented in this chapter.

Chapter 5 – Key Findings and Data Analysis: The chapter presented data analysis and main findings from a qualitative perspective.

Chapter 6 – Conclusion and Recommendations: This final chapter offered the conclusion and the appropriate list of recommendations.

1.10. CONCLUSION

The chapter (1) provided an overview of the study which included the aim to explore how media convergence and distribution shifts from traditional television broadcasting to YouTube. While social media platforms are witnessing user-growth, much still needs to be researched about YouTube as a distribution platform and its potential benefits and challenges. Additionally, how particular independent producers build audiences, finance their work on YouTube, and bargain for possible IP ownership, were described. The next chapter (2) provides a review of relevant literature to the topic in question.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter (2) commences with an historical analysis of the traditional television media landscape in SA and how it has affected conditions of access to participation in media as presented in this chapter. Thereafter, how the post-apartheid media sector is presently increasing production opportunities to include particular demographics is also explored. This chapter is divided into four sections. The first section focuses on the significance of audiences in traditional mass media, their relationship to advertising and how this relationship affects media democratisation. Furthermore, the difficulties within traditional broadcasting that influence the rise in the use of alternative video distribution platforms to access South African audiences are included. The first section concludes with details on the processes and key stakeholders, the current state of broadcasting and challenges.

The second section explores the effects of media convergence in shifting the role of television broadcasting and internet video distribution on South African social media due to increased use of new medias. Furthermore, an exploration of the development of social media, the transition from traditional television to smaller screens for video-on-demand (VOD) and user-generated content (UGC) are included. This section also provides an examination of SA audiences, their social media usage and access to online and new media marketplaces. Lastly, the section concludes with a review of web 2.0, OTT, transmedia and cross-platform distribution neologisms as they have a key role since the development of media convergence. Thereafter a look into research done in other countries such as USA and Nigeria that changed their media landscape to enable internet distribution and media convergence is analysed.

Furthermore, the results of studies on YouTube as a distribution platform for audiences and independent producers through UGC, audience engagement, online advertising for an online audience and user participation are included in the third section. The final and fourth section of this Chapter examined ICTs in SA in relation to digital transformation as well as the legislative and regulatory framework controlling online distribution. Moreover, the application and any legal concerns of laws, regulations, licensing requirements, copyright protections and intellectual property rights on social media and online distribution are investigated.

2. TRADITIONAL TELEVISION BROADCASTING IN SOUTH AFRICA

2.1. The history of labour and television production

Unpacking the historiography of broadcasting entails clearly defining television and broadcasting in context, and probing into past broadcasting trends, socio-political and economic dynamics. Moreover, it requires acknowledging the influence of Government laws in shaping the then fledging industry that led to the emergence and implementation of strategies for broadcasting in SA presently. Peters (1999, p. 7) defined the term *Broadcasting* as: “the distribution or transmission of programmes, information, and AV material through television, radio, or any electronic mass communication medium”. Television is defined by Bevan (2008, p. 2) as: “a mass medium through which narratives through different television formats are shared”. Television dynamics, programmes, and structure, are integral in the ideology of South African broadcasting media, including its emotional and social relevance to its audience.

Although the process of establishing television began in the 18th century by Scottish inventor Alexander Bain, television broadcasting in SA was only introduced in 1976 through the establishment of the SABC (Bevan, 2008, p. 1 & Taylor, 2018). The first channel, TV 1, and the establishment of the second phase later included a second and third channel added for the Black population was only introduced in 1981, which was promoted by the SABC's inauguration of TV2/3, the first Black ‘Bantu’ television service (Cultural Industries Growth Strategy, 1998; Wiederroth, 2012 & South African History Online, 2021). It is relevant to question whether the undue delay to introduce television in SA has consequently affected technical production capabilities, programme availability, and exclusion of new crew and producers in the industry to date. In addition, due to the discriminatory apartheid system the then state perceived television as a threat regarding how the exposure to television content would disrupt the apartheid regimes suppressive agenda and they would not be able to control South Africans as they feared imported movies with racial mingling and foreign influence through the broadcasting media (Corrigan, 1974 & Nixon, 1999).

Albert Hertzog's who sternly opposed television, criticized the government's decision of planning to use television as a propaganda tool to control and promote its interests to those who could afford a television set (Tomaselli, 1988 & Erasmus, 2009). A fundamental question posed by then state President Nico Diederichs was whether: “television will reinforce the

existing status-quo or act as an impetus for social reform which would cause an impact on the economy, political order, and social structure” (Corrigan, 1974, p. 28). Subsequently, different communities had differential access to television due to its cost and discrimination tactics. However, its phased-in introduction advantaged some white South Africans who experienced new access to previously denied income and job levels (Corrigan, 1974). According to Smith (2016), broadcasting institutions were organised and functioned under the control of invisible elitist groups whose ideologies and value systems permeated media companies. Thus, media content was based on profitability, and it used television narratives as a medium to promote oppression and indoctrinate people that a racially divided SA was advantageous (Kolbe, 2005). The Progressive Party MP Helen Suzman called the service slanted and propagandistic, affirming that television should provide time for all dissenting groups as cited in Tomaselli (1988).

According to Smith (2016, p. 1), licensing was not the only limitation set during the oppressive regime of apartheid: “Underpinning the story of South African television is the dialectic of separateness associated with apartheid broadcasting policy, the country’s isolation from global media, the connectedness to the transformation of post-apartheid broadcasting, and concept of the rainbow nation”. Smith (2016, p. 3) adds that: “since there was exclusion of Black people in broadcasting due to media’s objectives to working toward creating unity for white Afrikaans-speaking TV viewers, the separateness of (apartheid) had affected the agenda for a more connected and functional existing post-apartheid broadcasting landscape”. The structure of the SABC, established in the 1936 Broadcasting Act, which does not mention Black people at all, presumed a national consensus between the English group and the Afrikaans group (Hayman & Tomaselli, 1989).

Broadcasting censorship legislations were policies entrenched and influenced by government’s discrimination which affected creators and aggregators content before it reached television screens as it was used to rule and watch over Black South Africans. Much of the media’s content had been deemed undesirable under the Publications Act of 1974 which included 20 laws to restrict publications from radio, and film, among others. Provisions under the Publications Act 1974 further stated that undesirable non-newspaper, stage shows, artwork, and photography would be found unlawful. According to this Act, all loopholes, and rights to appeal in a court of law were closed, and offenders would be imprisoned, fined, or banned. Nixon (1994, p. 2) described this as the: “most drastic act of cultural protectionism in the

history of medium”. This meant that Black South Africans were denied opportunities on television and that there were restrictions on what was screened for audiences. As a result, this created a shortage of opportunities for other races to enter TV platforms. Consequently, SA is now left to undo restrictive apartheid laws, and afford more opportunities for those who were singled out and denied in the television medium (Cultural Industries Growth Strategy-Government, 1998).

The implementation of the RSA *Constitution* (1996) which provided for an independent authority to regulate broadcasting in the benefit of the general public, was one of the most significant legislative events since the IBA Act of 1993. As stated by National Association of Broadcasters in South Africa (2014), the 1976 broadcasting statute was replaced by the 1999 broadcasting Act, thus the SABC underwent a metamorphosis to comply with the new broadcasting policy. It further stated that due to technical advancements in the way the public receives and consumes content, there have been substantial economic and social shifts that have led to changes in broadcasting services such as content delivery or production.

Through television broadcasting history, it is evident that television broadcasting during the apartheid era was controlled to benefit those with economic capacity and government funding to create content which limited access to the broader society. Additionally, the media primarily served a societal elite with politically oppressive agendas. That deepened the quest to agitate for democracy among Black people (Wasserman, 2020). The television industry’s practices were driven by apartheid laws which created an economic climate favourable to the White minority while excluding the Black population. Hence, opportunities for the development of skills in AV production such as producing, scriptwriting and editing were reserved for the White minority. Also, it was common for media to exclude and limit Black South Africans' access to and documentation of the latest advances (Wasserman, 2020).

In 1956, a regulated subsidy system was established in SA to reward successful film ‘box office’ performances. A set portion of the production costs from the box office revenue was eligible for a return (South African History Online, 2021). Also, the government and large corporations condoned to retain South African cinema for white people such that 60 films were screened in Afrikaans between 1956 and 1962 (South African History Online, 2021). Which meant that the people who benefited from the financial incentives were white owned

production companies, and crew. In 1994 during the birth of a democratic South Africa, academic debates were centred on South Africa's economic future which emphasized the restructuring of; modes of production, the international debt, the 60% unemployment rate, and 40% the illiteracy rate in SA during the apartheid era (Howe and Le Roux, 1992; Shire, 1992 & Teer-Tomaselli and Tomaselli, 1994). Furthermore, labour markets in SA from 1950 to 1994, imposed a series of social and economic constraints on South Africa's four racial groups (Black, Coloured, Indian, and Asian). Mariotti (2012) states that White people were employed in skilled jobs, and Black people in semi-skilled and unskilled jobs due to apartheid's job-reservation policy.

In spite of the suppressive legacy of apartheid, post-apartheid prioritized goals to guarantee that formerly marginalized communities would have better access to media. A number of legislative and regulatory measures were undertaken to help attain these goals. Fourie (2002, p. 27) lists these measures as: increased support for community media as an attempt to: “give disadvantaged black communities a voice as well as the opportunity to produce their own media, in their own languages”. Furthermore, the restructuring of the SABC, increased support for community media, and the establishment of the Media Development and Diversity Agency to enhance the community media sector and extend the media's reach to under-represented audiences. The agency's mission was to assist local print and broadcast media through grants, but it had struggled with a lack of funds resulting from maladministration (Wasserman, 2020). Moreover, empowering Black people to enter the media sector revealed a shift in the ownership of commercial media. Even though there were significant changes to the media landscape during the transition from apartheid to democracy. Critics of the political economy of the South African media have noted that these changes seldom transformed media's preference for elites. For instance, Sparks (2009, p. 213) as cited in Wasserman (2020) describes the post-apartheid changes in ownership and employment of the South African media as an: “elite renewal process”, with one group of elites replacing another, instead of a more significant opening up of the sector to all economic levels of communities (Wasserman, 2020). It was encouraging that Dr. Ivy Matsepe Casaburri, the first Black woman chair on the board of the SABC, which was until then controlled by white Afrikaner men, was chosen in November 1993, Dr. Matsepe-Casaburri later became Minister of communications in the South African Government from June 1999 - 2009 (SA History Online, 2021 & South African Government, 2023). Since then, opportunities for the development of skills in AV content creation were provided in 1996 when Leon Schuster's *Panic Mechanic* became South Africa's highest-grossing production to the

amount of R16 million empowering an inclusive black and white cast (South African History Online, 2021).

Naspers propelled the country's to begin with pay-TV channel, M-Net, in 1986, clearing the way for what would be Africa's computerised obsequious TV benefit, named DSTv. The first M-Net decoder was called the Grinel and came with a inaccessible control (Ndlovu, 2023). The system used a signal to block access for non-subscribers (Hadebe, 2017). Through 'New Directions' (1996) programme launched by M-Net, a few promising young directors at the time, including Barry Berk (Yizo Yizo), Dumisani Phakathi (Waiting for Valdez), and others, got their start in SATV in gaining practical production experience (South African History Online, 2021). The first commercial free-to-air television station, e-TV, launched in 1998 but later sparked criticism for disregarding its promises to commission local content. To promote the South African film and TV industry, local broadcasters like e-TV, M-Net, and SABC were mandated by the Government to purchase a specific percentage of the programmes they air from local SA producers and directors. This is despite foreign programmes being less expensive. e-TV had stopped airing local documentaries, and the network had partially disregarded promoting and hiring South African filmmakers in favour of more affordable US programmes. Although, e-TV commissioned several sitcoms, documentaries, and the well-known local soapy Backstage, it still limited jobs opportunities in the SA television industry due to its preference for foreign content such as drama series produced overseas. This did not create conditions of production and distribution favourable for black people to participate or enjoy benefits of providing industry services, but just be audiences (South African History Online, 2021).

The history of censorship and subsidy meant that the apartheid government subsidized white production companies to produce content for the white South African population before TV was even launched in SA (Coetzee, 2019). Therefore, content production, distribution, technology, and skills in SA lay in the hands of a few who also had government support through subsidy and censorship. It is evident that in SA, mass media policies from the past were shaped by excluding Black people (Coetzee, 2019). The few opportunities for Black creatives were dramas produced and rebroadcast in Afrikaans on KykNet, and English on SABC (South African history online, 2021). *Jim Comes to Jo' burg*, directed by Donald Swanson, was the first South African movie with an all-Black cast. When it was first released, it was prohibited

from screening to Black South Africans. (South African History Online, 2021). However, when the Bantu film industry was founded in 1970, the Black films were of poor quality and were screened mainly in churches, schools, and beer halls which further fragmented the industry.

SA also suffered from poor financial management in the film industry. The insurance company, Sanlam, bought a considerable stake in Ster-Films in 1962. Then by the time ‘Suid-Afrikaanse Teaterbelange Beperk’ was established in 1969, funding and distribution of movies in SA were monopolized by a single, powerful corporation. Based on the quantity of tickets sold, B-scheme movies were eligible for a government subsidy that paid out a maximum of R70 000 (South African history online, 2021). Many of the vernacular films were made of random clips that were assembled to reap the benefits of the subsidies. There were numerous subsidy scandals involving dishonest people and businesses who made low-quality movies to profit from the system. Finally, under then President P. W. Botha government conceded that there was insufficient funding to support movies that were in production by December 1989 (South African history online, 2021). With the issue of finances, the SABC was assisted by a foreign financial firm, thus it reviewed its position in late 1996. Significant staffing, internal production, and programme cuts were proposed in the accompanying *Mc Kinsey Report* which was published in March 1997. By the end of 1997, the SABC started to restore some financial stability, due to the adoption of these recommendations. The changes implemented in 1996 and 1997 further solidified the SABC's reliance on private financing sources, which raised significant practical and political difficulties concerning its ability to fulfil its public service mandate (Barnett, 1998).

As media ownership had not been fully decentralized the exclusion of Black South Africans who faced the challenge of finding ways to overcome the legacy of apartheid was confronted by new barriers to enter in the television broadcasting space (Scharnick-Udemans, 2017). Just to enjoy meaningful cultural expression and financial opportunities in today's media industry.

2.2.2 The History of Television Audiences and Advertising Influence

From the review of television production history, it is noticeable that broadcasting to South African audiences as perceived by the apartheid government, was a threat to the Afrikaans language. Until 1978, the programme was entirely supported by license fees as advertising emerged at a later stage (South African Broadcasting Commission, 2023). Dr. Albert Hertzog

maintained that advertising would make (non-white) Africans unhappy with their oppressive condition; as this posed a threat as it would disseminate the philosophy of communism and spread immorality and disorder (Nixon, 1999).

Significantly, Black South Africans used television programmes as part of their general utopian discourse in their lives. The exclusion and silencing of a social group marginalize and distorts the narratives being told (Esquivel *et al.*, 2002). Furthermore, in terms of Black movies, the genres that were accepted glamorized gangsterism or a shift from urban to rural ideals. The fact that “no Black picture produced by a white corporation was ever banned” was thus not surprising (Tomaselli, 1998, p. 69). Furthermore, Bond (2010, p. 42) concurs that: “voices of Black South African women were often left out of the historical accounts that describe the political and social workings of pre-colonial South African society, the apartheid regime, and the anti-apartheid resistance movement”. Therefore, audiences did not get to see their true reflection on television. In SA, Tomaselli (1988), criticized censorship, control by the state through unequal subsidies for Black and White films, restrictive patterns of film distribution, access to the industry, and restrictions by financiers - both domestic and international. Censorship meant silencing, manipulation, and propaganda; therefore, post-apartheid creatives are rectifying Black stories for black audiences. Tomaselli (1988) adds that the control by the state was not to deny the role of police surveillance with regards to filmmaking and cinema in SA, but rather to look at the effects of pervasive censorship on South African audiences and thinking. Additionally, this tended to be produced by White-owned production companies who produced film and television content to control various Black population audiences (Tomaselli, 1988).

In many post-apartheid television shows, coexistence was an ideal as whiteness dominated in ruthless ways to crush liberal thinking (Smith, 2016). In 1999, SA's broadcasting legislation included 18 objectives to, among others, promote social progress, moral growth, and nation-building to audiences who access television. Thus, this new era of television contributed to promote strengthening and enhancing the political, social, cultural, and economic fabric of SA audiences. Television as a medium has been instrumental in entertaining, and informing depending on the content delivered, its nature enriched social and economic aspects influencing audiences (Wilding *et al.*, 2018). South African television needed to reflect and engage with individuals' life-experiences, cultures, languages, aspirations, and artistic expressions that are distinctly South African (Dias, 2022). Broadcasting laws and policies were influential in

creating separatist narratives about South African realities, thus determining the type of television audiences (Black, European, Indians or Coloured) (Teer-Tomaselli and Tomaselli, 1994).

The SABC redeveloped its television stations in February 1996 to put an end to apartheid television (Barnett, 1998). The spirit of unified broadcasting and nation building TV was explicitly represented in new channel IDs, with the SABC's new trademark being *Simunye: We Are One*. As in the past, the new portfolio varied and integrated various language groups in various proportions on various channels rather than segregating Black and White audiences on isolated channels. The IBA Triple Inquiry's (1996) discussions about the appropriate scale for organising broadcasting cannot be isolated from the discussion of language in the new SA. Given that the former SABC's policies of different channels and programmes for various racial and ethnic audiences were largely based on a language policy. Consequently, the reformulation of the language philosophy behind broadcasting was crucial to the public broadcaster's transition in the 1990s (Barnett, 1998). The formerly mainly Black channel CCV-TV was relaunched as SABC 1, the White channel TV 1 as SABC 2, and the third channel became SABC 3. The two Nguni languages, Zulu, and Xhosa, as well as English, was prioritized for SABC 1's programming, which has a broadcast footprint that included almost half the SA nation. The three primary Sotho languages - Sepedi, Sesotho, and Setswana - as well as Afrikaans was covered by SABC 2, which would have the largest audience and cover around three quarters of the nation. SABC 3 would then be an English-language channel (Barnett, 1998).

Around 1994, the SABC was primarily dependent on commercial revenue, with only 28% of its income from licenses and 72% from advertising. Furthermore, the SABC's financial situation was predicted to be in a state of flux, exacerbated by the expenditure for the importation of equipment and technical support resources. Thus, operating expenses in SA were greater than in most Western economies (Teer-Tomaselli and Tomaselli, 1994). The public media sector relied heavily on advertising. According to Barnett (1998), the purpose of programming in South African commercial broadcasting was to provide advertisers with audiences within white specific demographics. Therefore, it had an inherent bias towards audiences who were economically privileged which skewed the type of audiences and marginalised the poor further (Bosch, 2017 & Wasserman, 2020). Additionally, due to historically capitalistic patterns of wealth accumulation and unequal income distribution, a very

small percentage of the population in SA possesses the demographic characteristics that advertisers require. The relationship between the financial requirements of commercial broadcasting as a process of commodification on the one hand, and the structure of the market for broadcasting services in SA on the other, was often fine-tuned in economic understandings of media democratisation (Fourie, 2003). The affluent, predominantly white minority, who for a long time served as the primary target audience for advertisers, now faced stiff competition against included black audiences because of the proliferation of channels and diversification of ownership (Phiri & Hossain, 2022).

There were more media outlets opening because of the fall of apartheid and the re-regulation of broadcasting than there were rising advertising expenditures (Barnett, 1998). As there was no guarantee that more stations will result in more viewers or listeners. However, the proportion of white viewers decreased which saw an increase in black viewers, this meant significant financial implications for the SABC (Barnett, 1998). Although the demographics of the nation's population were reflected in its new television programming portfolio, it did not correspond to the ideal commercial demographics. This specifically for a broadcaster who was still reliant on advertising spending. The main target market for the South African advertising sector continued to be white people. Due to the modifications, advertisers had less access to wealthy consumer audiences through the SABC's television services. As a result, in 1996 the distribution of advertising expenditure across various media forms such as radio underwent significant transitions due to the evolution of television audience characteristics; hence, TV advertising spending fell in comparison to other media (Barnett, 1998).

Teer-Tomaselli and Tomaselli (1994) upheld that revenue should be supplemented through advertising and state allocations, both of which potentially impinge on the independence of broadcasters. The SABC should have lessened its reliance on advertising as it had monopolized a large portion of the available share of advertising spending, therefore limiting the possible recruitment of new broadcasters. According to Barnett (1998), advertisers and commercial broadcasters made a clear distinction between public service broadcasting (PSB) and commercial broadcasting. Commercial broadcasters should be exempt from public service obligations so they could focus on their primary task of bringing audiences to advertisers and profits to shareholders. Moreover, according to Teer-Tomaselli and Tomaselli (1994) with soap operas and German serials translated into Afrikaans, it was more affordable to import content than to develop it, which had serious ramifications for national programming. Consequently,

PSB genres were similar - a result of inadequate and inconsistent funding. Ultimately, this section highlighted the significance of advertisers, and the influence audiences had in determining advertiser spending. Moreover, the section discussed politics of democratising content distribution while servicing needs of advertisers, and a rise in a heterogeneous audience whose fragmentation is not simply along ethnic lines anymore but consumerist and socio-politically, culturally engaged. This history provides a background informing the study's third question, which examines monetisation and marketing which and will be explored in section 2.4.2.

2.2.3. Current Broadcasting Challenges: Policies and Participation

To attain better perspective of television broadcasting in SA, a review of regulatory issues was conducted by the researcher to explore why independent producers use an alternative platform for distribution. Regarding television production, SABC and Multi Choice - Mnet have long been the primary employers in the Television industry in SA (Cultural Industries Growth Strategy-Government, 1998). The loss of 9867 permanent positions and 5 169 freelance jobs in 2018 was because of broadcasters' contributions to unemployment as drivers of employment in SA (Business tech³, 2020). The industry structuring resulted in job losses accompanied by a decline in the production of local content and infrastructure investment within the industry. Which demands a restructuring of the television organisation to ensure its sustainability. Furthermore, the industry is considering cost-cutting alternatives such as freezing salary increases for three years, which is aligned to the Basic Conditions of Employment Act in 2020 and 2021 (Business tech³, 2020).

The first Quarterly Labour Force Survey (2021) revealed that young people continue to experience difficulty finding employment in SA. Officially, there was a 32,7% unemployment rate. This percentage was 46.5% among young individuals aged 15 to 34, which indicates that in the second quarter of 2022, nearly one in every two youths in the labour force remain unemployed and they constitute 59,5% of the unemployed population (Statistics South Africa, 2022). The media industry's unemployment statistics, furthermore, have fuelled the need for more creative economies in SA. Even with political, economic, and regulatory shifts in SA, the democratisation of television and media does not always lead to a significant economic revolution.

The political-economic reform of the South African media was first on the agenda of then incoming ANC administration, but marketization of the industry did not necessarily promote democratic goals (Wasserman, 2020). Streaming services and online distribution have been introduced in, SA. However, streaming services are being considered as a saturated market (Nicolaou & Fei, 2019). The saturation is a result of traditional television companies have already entered the market; US cable provider Comcast now offers Netflix. Moreover, the attention span of individuals is limited, and free diversions like YouTube caused saturation of the market. However, streaming giant Netflix reported that in its 2022 stats that it had lost 970 000 subscribers in the previous quarter; while competition has risen sharply as a result of the saturated market that streaming services have become (Forristal, 2022).

Moreover, according to Manzenze (2021), international filmmakers are focusing on South Africa's Western Cape region because of its breath-taking locations, low production costs, and Government tax deductions. However, the local industry in the entire country is struggling to maintain control even though this industry has enormous potential to boost the local economy through employment, skills development, cash injections, and tourism. South African sites are sought after by foreign filmmakers because they are unique and cost less to produce than those in the United States and Europe. Additionally, the government assists foreign filmmakers by offering effective licensing services and tax rebates with the tax payable by a foreign entertainer is a final tax levied at the rate of 15% on the amount received by or accrued to any person who is not a resident (South African Revenue Service, 2004 & Manzenze, 2021). Even if the industry is still facing obstacles, the major players in SA such as KwaZulu-Natal Film Commission and the NFVF, who are assisting the sector to acquire financing, develop talent, and assist the filmmakers in marketing and promoting their work. Through grants and loans, they provide finance for the creation of movies, television series, and documentaries (NFVF, 2023). This implies that because there is funding available from the NFVF between one-hundred thousand rand to a million rand, SA will have more talented people, filmmakers, or production companies that will be able to produce more content (NFVF, 2023). Also, The

³ Business Tech3. 2020. Job cuts, fewer leave days, and wage freezes at the SABC. [Online]. <https://businesstech.co.za/news/business/447806/job-cuts-less-leave-and-wage-freezes-at-the-sabc/>

South African Government under the Department of communications and digital technologies intends to mandate that internet streaming providers like Netflix, Showmax, and Amazon offer a minimum of 30% local content (Ferreira, 2020). It is important to determine whether this will be adopted and whether it will result in positive outcomes, but it might help make SA content more noticeable and valued (Manzenze, 2021).

Former Minister of Arts and Culture, Nathi Mthethwa stated during a meeting with local film stakeholders that SA should increase the spaces available for telling its own stories (Newswire, 2015). It will intensify environments that are supportive of broadcasting, including the development of digital theatres in townships and rural areas. This must be done in conjunction with the creation of new distribution systems for films, as well as local content distribution strategies and channels (Gauteng Film Commission of South Africa, 2015 & KwaZulu-Natal Film Commission 2017). While policies vary across countries, the main policy tools used to promote local content include domestic content mandates on video distributors and various forms of subsidies (Blackburn, 2019). Distributors of material (such as television broadcasters) are generally required by content requirements to meet minimum quotas for carrying domestically generated content (Blackburn, 2019). Moreover, distributors are required to fund a specific number of locally created original works as part of requirements for domestic content production. The Independent Producers' Organisation (IPO), founded in 1996, canvassed the Government, broadcasters, and lawmakers to transform the South African broadcasting services (National Association of Broadcasters, 2014). However, to date the National Integrated ICT Policy Green Paper includes convergence of internet and media and policy and regulation digital technologically converged society (National Integrated ICT Policy White Paper, 2016)

The SABC currently follows the Broadcasting Act 4 of 1999 mandate which revised the apartheid broadcasting Act of 1976 by integrating multi-channel distribution systems into the broadcasting framework, in addition to: “encouraging investment, and fair competition in the broadcasting sector” which therefore fostered new media distribution (Broadcasting Act 4 of 1999, p. 14). According to National Association of Broadcasters (2014), it has been about twenty-three years into independent regulated broadcasting, a regulated industry sector that acknowledges its challenges, including facing rapidly growing digital disruption. Admittedly, social media success stems from technology, and social media strategy requires speed and flexibility. However, digital divide even in developing countries led to the lack of access to

basic computing tools such as desktops and broadband internet access (National Association of Broadcasters, 2014, p. 230). Therefore, slowing digital transformation.

Although the SA Government objective was to guarantee that everyone had access to distribution services and facilities, only 14 million South African households have access to TVs (National Association of Broadcasters, 2014 and Cronje, 2022). In comparison to internet network which reaches 38.13 millions of SA's population in 2022. Presently, broadcasting in SA extends to subscription channels including Naspers, and Multi Choice, and Community TV (Soweto TV, Gau TV, faith broadcasting), among others. Since the advent of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), the fields of education and employment are expected to undergo a rapid transition but due to the enormous digital divide, its advantages for SA youth and the economy will remain a misconception (Development Bank of Southern Africa, 2022).

Despite migration to embrace inclusion after the 1994 democratic elections, television viewing is still hindered by the legacy of the apartheid past (Smith, 2016). Furthermore, key factors such as mismanagement of big public broadcasters which have resulted to retrenching staff, Western monopoly, cadre employment, and corruption within the media space restrict opportunities for many producers. This implies that the shift towards transformation, to redressing past media production and distribution inequalities was futile in terms of showing representation and change (Smit, 2016). Despite the fact that television and advertising revenues continue to rise, worldwide, shifts in viewer behaviour are frequently less dramatic, and organisations are more adaptable to change than unpleasant predictions would have us believe. Furthermore, because to the arrival of modern digital streaming, total worldwide consumer expenditure on traditional television and home video has declined and will continue decreasing in the coming years as it is evolving at a slow pace (Wilding *et al.*, 2018). However, television organisations have a long history of working in hybrid environments during structural transformations such as the introduction of new streaming services (Lancefield, 2019). Therefore, television could successfully coexist with online distribution platforms allowing audiences and variety of viewer choice and producers for to further branch out to digital distribution.

This section addressed the study objective on the contribution of YouTube distribution to enabling independent producer involvement by looking at broadcasting, ICT regulation and the challenges broadcasting brings to participation. It included a presentation of the historical

performance of traditional mass media and the current difficulties it encounters within the media environment. As some demographics were excluded, gaps in broadcast opportunities, talent, and audience participation, all of which would attract advertisers, were created. Furthermore, government intervention in skills development, ICT infrastructure, online market saturation, local content production, and distribution avenues resulting in a demand for new distribution channels. It further presented South Africa's broadcasting history and exposed the current challenges experienced in broadcasting.

2.3. UNDERSTANDING ONLINE VIDEO DISTRIBUTION

2.3.1. Towards Media Convergence in Broadcasting

The traditional mass media industry is facing a changing media landscape that has converged to digital media. Mc Luhan (1962, p. 31) was credited with coining the term "global village" which has become a popular term in studies on new media. The phrase was used in connection with new media predictions about how increasingly interconnected societies will emerge because of global media, facilitated by electronic devices like telephones and television, thus developing an electronic age. Mc Luhan's theory of the electronic age developed in 1962 is pertinent to the current technological society that has emerged from traditional forms of communication to the convergence of information communication technology (ICT) such as cell phones or computers (Hendricks and Olawale, 2021). Mc Luhan (1962, p. 32) further conceptualized "The Medium is the Message" as what was more important than the content of programs was television medium itself. The evolution of medium appeals to audiences and transforms the new age through the digital medium and business models that allow for digital television (Olos, 2003). It further allows audiences the opportunity to emerge as content producers who can interconnect through digital distribution services thus potentially gaining access to the global village.

According to Hartley (2008), consuming is now a source of value-creation rather than only a component in digital culture; it has moved along the value-chain of the cultural industries from the author, the producer, the text, to the consumer. Therefore, under such a model, media consumption has changed from being a 'read-only' activity to a 'read-write' which allows participation (Burgess and Green, 2018, p. 54). Media convergence which is aligned to advances in new technologies have impacted the way in which people can consume media

(Stollfuß, 2018). Brown (2020) describes this as the cord-cutting-revolution as television is dying through the growth of digital streaming services, as well as when younger audiences move away from traditional media to new media. Brown (2020) adds that as more internet devices become adopted by consumers as part of the television experience, the more traditional television becomes less relevant. Users who are adapting to video-on-demand do so as a matter of convenience. This shift from traditional to new media consumption and the further mediation of platforms is due to the increase in UGC in which a greater share in the upcoming converged media is envisaged, which will potentially create opportunities (and challenges) in the media markets (Salamzadeh *et al.*, 2019). Furthermore, users are empowered by new media to participate in the value-chains for the production, distribution, and display of media content. In addition to internet providing a delivery of the media content to the target market, and the distribution channel access to audiences, this has created further opportunities for producers who have not had access to big media companies to distribute in SA which was monopolized by large media production companies. This minimizes the cost of using the production facilities and makes it possible for anybody to have their own home studio for production (Salamzadeh, Markovic and Masjed, 2019).

The development of internet availability and usage in emerging economies is linked to the accelerated growth of digital video ICT platforms like YouTube. This growth in access to digital video platforms and internet is mainly attributed to the irrevocable smartphone proliferation and other mobile device growth (Duffett, 2020). The DSL lines, cable modems, and other technologies that offer greater bandwidth are, nevertheless, being used by an increasing number of computer users to upgrade their connections. In addition, new technology developments are enhancing picture quality. Treske's video theory (2015) predicted that a growing number of computer users will be able to watch movies on their computers with a viewing experience similar to television in the upcoming years. As a result, the internet will allow movie studios to distribute their films directly to consumers, cutting out established intermediaries like cable companies, and broadcast networks (Litwak, 2000).

Additionally, social media, a significant aspect of the new digital media discourse, can best be understood when Web 2.0 has been defined (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Web 2.0 is defined as the advent of social media forming UGC content, mass interactivity, and collaboration to broadcast and creation (Gauntlett, 2017). The term *social media* illustrates how users share and distribute information on the World Wide Web. However, for a website to be classified as a

social network website, it must contain a certain set of qualities (Boyd and Ellison, 2007, as cited in Cox, 2010). These include a user profile and tools for connecting with other users and leaving comments on each other's pages (Lloyd, 2013 and Baruah, 2012). New media as used in high-profile industry negotiations, is a term primarily referred to in the distribution of made-for-broadcast television programmes through the internet or on mobile phones. Substantial economic and social shifts have led to changes in broadcasting services in terms of content and delivery. In addition to significant international technology advancements on how the public receives content (National Association of Broadcasters, 2014).

The future of the job market is going digital, however, SA's level of digital literacy is still not stable. Digital literacy is defined as the ability to use information and communication technologies (ICT) to find, create, and communicate information, requiring both cognitive and technical skills (Hanekom, 2020). Hanekom (2020) describes the digital literacy divide as being attributed to historically created infrastructure disparities that were exposed during the Covid-19 pandemic in SA. Further, learning digital skills will enable individuals to establish their own businesses, through the digital revolution as digital technologies are considerably increasing productivity for industries which positively impact the economy (Development Bank of Southern Africa, 2022). Furthermore, for the digital revolution to have a strong digital ecosystem to produce benefits, the digital infrastructure requires funding which is not always accessible (Development Bank of Southern Africa, 2022). Moreover, according to Teljas, Johnson and Enlund (2007), ICTs offer distribution models for emerging independent producers on the web and access to audiences who possess devices such as smartphones or computers with access to internet connectivity. Therefore, researching the audience and societies in which they are grouped, assists in understanding what policies to employ to better accommodate digital change relating to audience and market (Kurawa, 2011).

2.3.2 Convergence Enablers' Neologisms: Cross-media, Web 2.0, and OTT

Meikle and Young (2011) propose that there are four dimensions within *convergence*, two of these dimensions are relevant to the study. Namely, **social convergence** - the growth of UGC and web 2.0 services like Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook; and **textual convergence** - which is the repurposing of media to a trans-media model in which media content is dispersed across multiple media platforms. Rich (2018) *explains* how Twitter and Instagram have been used to promote users YouTube videos with applications on Instagram that allow for users to attach

their YouTube channel. Moreover, video URL on their Instagram page or to post a short trailer to promote their video on Instagram or Facebook, through a promotional page which is considered textual convergence. Cross-media, which is the distribution of content amongst different media and social TV platforms where people share their television experiences with others on social media websites, are also relevant to the present study.

Some researchers have presented an additional perspective by emphasizing the dynamics in cross-media production processes as a social media that cascades from one to another media platform. Cross-media which is also termed *cross-platform* and *cross-post* pertains to the proliferation of online identities across social networks (Rogers, 2017). Since its inception, YouTube has offered facilities for embedding content in other websites including blogs, hence it has never operated as a closed system (Cox, 2020). By 2017, professional social media promoters and entertainers were using a variety of well-known social media platforms, including Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, and YouTube to operate in a dynamic, real-time cross-platform environment. According to Burgess and Green (2018), this cross-platform model of practice multiplies the creative and relational labour necessary to sustain a strong presence, however, it also reduces these creatives' reliance on YouTube. Large multinational firms that have emerged as a result, having advanced the process of cross-media concentration by permanently altering market dynamics and structures in the media industry (Meikle and Young, 2011; Sparviero *et al.*, 2017 and Dwyer, 2010).

Jenkins (2006) compared commercial media which is fund-based through investors, and grassroots media which has a low funding base. In convergence culture both commercial and grassroots media interconnect. This is where the power of the media producer and the power of the media consumer interact in unpredictable ways. The ways in which this occurs is through participatory culture, media convergence, and collective intelligence which all flow as content across different media. This signifies a correlation between multiple media industries and the migratory behaviour of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they desire (Jenkins, 2017).

Neologism- Newly created ideas and terminology that emerged recently from new media and convergence culture.

New media comprise of channels that use internet and web-based technologies to transform broadcast media monologues (one-to-many) into social media dialogues (many-to-many) (Locksley, 2009, p. 2). Consequently, social media supports the democratisation of knowledge and information that transforms individuals from mere content consumers to content producers (National Association of Broadcasters, 2014). The shift from the use of desktop apps and web browsers, which were features of Web 1.0, precipitated the transformation (O'Reilly, 2010). Web 2.0 provides users the opportunity to participate actively in social interactions and contribute to the evolution of the web by creating new types of websites and business models (Shuen, 2008). Through its various new features, users upload pictures and videos, share what is on their minds, and tag others in various posts. In addition, they, inquire about job interests, view job offers, network, and showcase work (among others). Moreover, Web 2.0 is made possible by technological improvements such as internet connectivity through enabled connections such as WI-FI, hotspots, data bundles, hotspots, and broadband (Shelly and Frydenberg, 2011). It promotes web-based social media platforms, including online social networks, creating, and maintaining online communities, collaborating to create and share information, and designing other UGC (Fuchs *et al.*, 2012). In the globalized era of '24/7' communication and collaboration, users create opportunities and share their experiences in real-time (Solomon and Schrum, 2007). As a result, it has produced what Shuen (2008) calls the DIY (do-it-yourself) self-service forum which invites other users to participate in the individual's digital space. As Hanna, Rohm and Critterden (2011) assert, the real power of the social media ecosystem is that we are all connected. According to Web 2.0 designers, the internet offers a substantially greater type of advertising appeal because it is not about consuming media products, but rather performing actions that are directly related to marketing communications, such as looking up information that services advocating for greater democratisation (Sparviero *et al.*, 2017).

The OTT service is defined as an application that is provided to the end-user over the open internet (Jarvey, 2018). It refers to film and television content provided through a high-speed internet connection rather than a cable or satellite provider with subscription services such as Netflix, Amazon, iTunes, HBO, DSTV now, Disney Plus and Showmax (Halton, 2019). This subscription and streaming-based service has digitized and shares the same functions as social media. Apple also started producing original content for OTT streaming service, which will also include channels from networks like HBO and Showtime. The service is accessible through an app on smart TVs and on Apple devices. Presently, Netflix has about 150 million

paying customers and thousands of episodes, including original programming (Mc Cabe, 2019). Notably, the researcher of this study does not explore OTT as a distribution alternative because it goes through the same procedures as broadcasting when it comes to funding processes, selecting producers, and content to be aired by the channel including distribution.

Convergence has established social connectivity providers, personal media interfaces, content capture, and sharing tools (Raimund *et al.*, 2008). Content on TV has a significant influence on user-readiness to engage in facilitated social interaction regarding the future social TV 2.0 agenda. Lastly, more people are finding reasons to change from traditional TV due to increased choices at their disposal and another factor is convenience.

2.3.3. South African Online Audience-Social Media Consumption

Ferreira (2018) maintains that *Business Insider* released an article on YouTube as the top streaming video service in SA by an enormous margin, and that SABC 1 was the most watched broadcast channel. Furthermore, YouTube was at 87%, Showmax 6%, and Netflix 5% as top streaming service. Furthermore, internet use in SA in the beginning of 2023 was at 43.48 million which is 72.3% of the total population, with 25.80 million social media users - an increase of 357 thousand between 2022 and 2023 (Kemp, 2023). Moreover, Google's advertising resources indicate that YouTube had 25.80 million users in SA in early 2023. YouTube ads reached 69.3% of SA's total internet user base in January 2023 (Kemp, 2023). Thus, these numbers translate into YouTube audiences that independent producers are targeting for their web-series where audiences can watch content on their phones and on social media platforms. In convergence media, every important story gets told, every brand gets sold, every consumer gets courted across multiple media platforms (Jenkins, 2006). The success of marketing and the distribution of content of a brand is dependent on consumers' active participation on the platform.

Nevertheless, estimating the number of audiences created through video-sharing is still challenging. There is a wealth of information available about the users of social networking and video-sharing websites like YouTube and Vimeo, also the number of videos that are viewed on those websites. Comparing and contrasting their audience with those of other AV providers, either linear or on-demand, is a more difficult undertaking. Time spent, which is the primary indicator in the AV area, is only partially used as a measurement method in the online

service industry. Additionally, the metrics used to determine screen time data are occasionally unreliable - the amount of time spent watching television is compared to the amount of time spent online, regardless of whether or not that time is spent watching videos. The time spent watching videos on the internet includes screening of many different genres (Children and Parents: Media Use and Attitudes Report, 2022). Depending on the website, several methods are used to determine how long people spend watching videos (Blazquez *et al.*, 2018). Lynne *et al.* (2007) mention that content on television has a significant influence on users' readiness to engage in facilitated social interaction on social media which is a future social-TV 2.0 agenda. In addition, they suggest that this agenda of convergent services blending communication, data, video and mobile with the objective of messaging, tagging, and sharing TV content by addressing users' needs for spontaneous socializing sharing of TV, potentially is part of the solution for an industry (Lynne *et al.*, 2007).

The commissioning and distribution processes in SA's entertainment industry was worth approximately R7.4 billion, 1.75% of GDP, and 0.8% of the global industry in 1998 (Watson, 2020). This included broadcasting, film, and music industries. According to the South African Film and Television Industry report of 1998, The South African Government for 2 years used the interim film fund worth R10 million to stimulate new projects in the industry in 1997/8 - they received 605 funding proposals but only 165 were funded. According to Statista, SA's television industry in 2014 was R88.68 billion, in 2021 R155.64 billion, and predicted to contribute R170.53 billion in 2023 as entertainment and media revenue (Watson, 2020). The African entertainment and media sector has entered a new era following more than a decade of digital disruption. It was expected that in 2019 internet access in SA would have expanded to R76.2 billion, and in 2023 it forecasted to reach R77.7 billion making digital media: "the greatest contributor to SA's total entertainment and media revenue" (Myburgh and Stuart, 2019, p. 16).

Wirtz (2014) describes media markets value-chain as a content-creation producer formulating ideas, acquiring rights, seeking finance, scheduling, and budgeting. Then production producers finalize production budget, and book facilities. This is followed by scriptwriting, filming, choosing, and buying programmes, and conducting marketing research. Broadcasters, channel selection, bundling, transmission, and delivery to telecom companies comes next. The choice of technology for signal transmission, decoding techniques, network ownership, broadcasting sales, video-on-demand, interactive services are the final step. Here, producers send finished

product to broadcasters which then ends up with telecom operators. The TV mobile value-chain, however, entails a slightly shorter approach with creative producers, auto creation, aggregators, channels, video-on-demand Platforms, internet, computer, and mobile devices, among others (Navio-Marco *et al.*, 2017). Content producers are given the option of whether to use channels as an aggregator or to place content as video-on-demand to distribute on the internet, or even on mobile devices. A value-chain's focus is the broadcasting sector as it provides a platform for producers and produced material to be displayed for audience to consume.

Commonly, social media are highly accessible and scalable - easy to get to and can be used to reach large numbers (Appel, 2019). Moreover, social media can stand as a function of a country's technology culture and government. A country's particular social media profile is determined by three (3) factors: technology (the infrastructure enabling social media), its culture (shared value), and Government (institutional rules and regulations) (National Association of Broadcasters, 2014). The attitude of the Government of the country toward the specific social media and the promotion of local content reaching viewers will both affect how popular a social medium is in that country. Cultural norms and values also impact social media usage and popularity (National Association of Broadcasters, 2014). To suit and consider cultural differences, a business is expected to modify the social media components of its international marketing strategy. What is local in the age of social media nearly always becomes global, and general issues rarely remain as such. Content like television that is not 'free television' is referred to as new media (Kackman, 2011, p. 16) which have functions to capture audience engagement such as ad spend, click bait and funding. This section encapsulated the study objective to determine how media, technological convergence, and the genre of the shows are perceived in terms of relationships between medium, technology, and content quality; and if they have an impact on the quality, format, length, and audience engagement.

2.4 YOUTUBE: ADVANCEMENT OF ONLINE TELEVISION

2.4.1 YouTube Distribution Platform

Online distributors such as YouTube and Hulu were focused at buying web-series episodic digital entertainment that appealed to advertisers and attract audiences through technology,

creativity, and power (OECD, 2012). Digitisation and convergence culture, according to Jenkins (2006), integrates new and old media, web 2.0, and transmedia which places a demand on TV broadcasters to adjust content to various distribution channels with content accessibility.

Since the emergence of “mass self-communication” users can act as their own media outlet (Manuel Castell’s (2009), cited in Fuchu’s (2009, p. 97). The *Broadcast yourself*⁴ YouTube platform has remained a threat to traditional television with content advances that defy established television format and genre conventions, and the way content is packaged while still attracting audiences. Genres are cultural categories that surpass the boundaries of media texts and operate within industry, audience, and cultural practices (Askehave and Nielsen, 2004). Genre theory investigates changes in content distribution that emanate from changes in digital technology by interpreting its effects on the genre. Standardised television format and genre codes and conventions on a digital platform navigate texts by looking into the various genres (Chandler, 1997). The genres which inform the study are firstly drama, whose format attributes investigate series duration, three to five-act structure, screenwriting, episodes, and branding. Secondly, talk-shows which rely on host and guest relationships, interview style, segment structure, and studio setting (Industrial Scripts, 2021). Lastly, magazine and news which is not coherent nor uniform to one form of television genre which includes live event coverage, reports, and recaps, while also integrating talk shows, entertainment, and drama formats (Bignell, 2012).

Genre codes and conventions are formed to attract audiences and keep them engaged. Therefore, it is important to relate non-conventional genre, codes, and mixed content genre effects on non-television platforms, and the ability for media texts to be re-used in both traditional and online platforms whilst remaining culturally relevant and engaging to identify content effects on commodification for online audiences and financial success for independent producers (Mittell, 2001 & Carlsson 2019). In contrast to YouTube, which is not dependent on time slots, traditional TV broadcasting rely on genres for generating programmes since they are essential to text delivery, genre time slots, and what interests’ viewers (Mittell, 2001). The norms, epistemology, ideology, and social ontology of a society is dynamically embodied in rhetorical genres (Mittell, 2001). Ultimately, audiences influence genre, format, and how TV format convergence is affected (if at all) on digital media (Du Plooy, 1995). To determine one’s niche⁵, it is necessary to consider an appropriate genre that is relatable. YouTube top genres and niches in 2023 include Gaming, how to guides and tutorials, personal finance, lifestyle,

and even educational videos (Rana, 2023). While YouTube top paying niches for 2023 include making money online, digital marketing, personal finance, education, tech, and gaming (Tube Ranker, 2023). More people prefer UGC than traditional content to be distributed on YouTube (Burgess and Green, 2018).

It is crucial to consider how local content impacts people on technological platforms since technology can facilitate the development, identification, preservation, and usage of local content (OECD, 2011). Furthermore, as communities change through time, what is significant will also alter (OECD, 2011). A genre approach to the understanding of TV programmes is concerned with both the cultured form, notably structural and iconographic elements, and the inner form, consisting of subject, themes, attitudes, and values contained in or conveyed by a particular type of programme (Du Plooy, 1995).

According to McKay (2018), paid television will soon replace traditional television which is dead and will be impacted by trends on YouTube, which has 2 billion subscribers globally and is transforming the entertainment sector. As online content creators and digital platform firms use direct interaction with customers impacted by creative advertising, paid content models and monetisation opportunities, traditional television is put under pressure to reinvent itself (Boehm *et al.*, 2018 & Blank and Reisdoff, 2012).

YouTube, a free online video sharing medium was argued to offer a more promising and inclusive distribution approach, especially for emerging producers (Ruggiero, 2000). Social media is of particular significance to this study because despite the disruption it has caused in allowing participation from audiences and producers without exclusion, it continues presently to be the most popular kind of media in use.

Distribution is motivated by a need for productions to access target markets. Countries such as the United States of America, and participants in Europe have shown growth in independent producers' distribution on YouTube (Michaelsen *et al.*, 2022). Moreover, other top countries

⁴ Broadcast yourself - YouTube's slogan, as it allows people to broadcast video content themselves.

⁵ Niche - A niche is the main genre and format of your content and the target audience that it attracts. This depicts how much advertisers are willing to spend depending on your niche. i.e., Finance, entertainment, make-up video formats.

utilizing YouTube are India, Indonesia, Brazil, and Russia. There are four channels based on subscriber counts: new or not enough data - 0 to 1 000; established - 1 000 to 100 000; popular - 100 000 to 5 million; and highly popular - more than 5 million subscribers (Briggs, 2018). The top three (3) subscribed channels on YouTube which would be categorised under highly popular include T-series at 213 million subscribers, YouTube movies at 150 million subscribers, and Coco melon Nursery Rhymes at 133million subscribers (GMI Media Insight, 2022). Traditional television is losing most fans in favour of the internet after YouTube showcased the first television broadcasting online in Romania (Nicoleta and Tasente, 2012). Furthermore, YouTube appears to soon surpass television as the most-watched format in the United States of America since the platform has seen an increase in viewership with 247 million users and 467 million users in India due to the prediction over user preferences on online content (McKay, 2018; Nicas, 2017; Solomon, 2017 & GMI Blogger, 2022).

In consideration of YouTube in the South African context, technological convergence could emphasize that a digital shift is important for independent, developing producers who are now restricted by highly competitive, traditional distribution gatekeeping (Department of Telecommunications and Postal Services, 2016, p. 35). However, convergence theory will need to discard its assumption that the theory ensures engagement, and that participation is imperative in creative economies. This is due to progressive executives in advertising who experience difficulty reaching a shifting market, thus media converged industries often face the challenge of finding ways to make their platforms stand out from their competition, coupled with the fact that there is no way of assuring audience loyalty (OECD, 2013). Moreover, Abiolu and Teer-Tomaselli (2018, p. 5) state how: “television viewing developments in pay-television services such as Multi Choice and Netflix are heightened by internet technology and online streaming catapulting the South African media-scape into a higher competitive level which cripple’s monopoly but helps in growth in the media-scape”. Consequently, new media users are also moving to subscription-based YouTube premium to avoid adverts on the platform which gradually disintegrates the relationship between online advertisers and new media platforms (Atamaniuk, 2020).

According to Blazquez *et al.*, (2018), there are five key and distinctive traits that online platforms have in common. The first is the capacity to organise new kinds of participation or business based on the gathering, processing, and editing of significant amounts of data and the ability to create and shape new markets to challenge traditional ones. Secondly, engage in

multisided markets while exerting variable levels of control over face-to-face contacts between user groups. Thirdly, to gain from the services' increased value as more people use it. Fourthly, to make it possible to reach users quickly and efficiently through ICT. Finally, to play a substantial part in the development of digital value, particularly by capturing important value and doing so in a variety of ways, including by facilitating new business initiatives and developing new strategic dependencies and data accumulation.

It is critical to investigate YouTube's algorithm and what is used to direct user behaviour by recommending videos for viewers to watch for channels to garner subscribers. This has the potential to alter content producers' marketing approach. Furthermore, YouTube's algorithm acts as a distinctive trait as mentioned by Blazques to reach users quickly and efficiently and to organise new kinds of participation and creating new markets to challenge traditional ones. YouTube's video ranking methodology determines the recommendations, which considers the subject matter of the video, its length, key terms in the video title, the number of views, and the video's ability to hold audience's interest (Cooper, Stavros and Dobele, 2019). Algorithms that seek to discover subjects, most common keywords, and most viewed videos develop trends that are the most popular videos in large marketplaces. Trend maps and lists are intended to uncover these patterns, and to send more visitors to certain videos, which reinforces the trends (Rainie and Anderson, 2017). However, for many internet users, it is unclear how algorithms operate. As previously stated, YouTube is a UGC content source with a high degree of automation. The first six weeks of a video's life are crucial for targeting, engagement, and gathering analytics. The algorithm also ranks videos lasting under two minutes as being noticeably worse (Cooper, 2021).

Due to algorithms, massive volumes of data and pictures are gathered and used for online pattern monitoring and profiling of people whose search queries and browsing histories are combined with cookies and related technologies like fingerprinting to track and identify people online. Moreover, apps on mobile devices manage behavioral data from smart devices such as location and other sensor data, posing new challenges for privacy and data protection (MSI-Net, 2016 & Majeed *et al.*, 2022). Because of their secrecy and unpredictable nature, algorithms engender widespread concern (Rainie and Anderson, 2017).

Algorithms also influence online distribution provisions as algorithms not only have a direct impact on the right to privacy and data protection, but they also highlight difficult issues for

society regarding how to uphold fundamental human rights and dignity in the face of rapid advancing technology, such as the right to freedom of expression which embraces the right to receive and impart information (Gstrein and Beaulieu, 2022). Although the use of algorithms in certain situations may be permissible on the grounds of national security, it also creates issues regarding fair trial requirements that need to be resolved. Beyond the algorithms themselves, social media and video-sharing platforms use semi-automatic or automated content removal and filtering techniques that may have an influence on freedom of speech and thus raise questions about the legitimacy, legality, and proportionality of the rule of law (Blázquez *et al.*, 2018 & Gstrein and Beaulieu, 2022). In addition, concerns regarding the criteria used to identify whether films are extremist or display obviously illegal content are increased by the automatic filtering systems and other tools that Facebook and YouTube have implemented to eliminate extremist videos, posing the question of private censorship (Blázquez *et al.*, 2018).

Additionally, the following YouTube ranking factors can help better understand how the search algorithm works: channel video views, channel subscribers, likes, comments, number of domains linking to or embedding from the video, percentage of positive ratings, keyword match in title, estimated watch time, and average views per day since content publication. Consequently, videos that rank well receive more views than those that do not, because searchers tend to click the top results (Briggs, 2018). The video suddenly spreads rapidly across other platforms and gains popularity as a viral video on YouTube, also increasing subscribers (Allocca, 2011; Briggs, 2018 & Cooper, 2021).

New media theory further conceptualizes the implications of digital technology and its influences on users. The audience is key and therefore the algorithm is directly influenced by user-behaviour. Therefore, it is suggested that a channel's titles should not be misleading to viewers, otherwise they may turn off the videos. Finally, it is also recommended to give the video a chance to be used in different search queries on Google which can be done by making videos that answer questions someone might search for on Google (Schmidt, 2021). Video titles, thumbnails and descriptions are more important pieces of metadata for a video's discovery. These main pieces of information assist viewers to decide which videos to watch. A thumbnail provides the creator an opportunity to convey in a few words because the viewer should choose to watch their video amongst the many others in the search results. Hence the importance of a quality thumbnail to grab viewer retention and identify with thumbnails (Sarika, 2020).

The growth rate of the free application YouTube in SA is driven by the increasing penetration of data capture and storage technologies such as digital video cameras and digital devices that have influenced the increasing trend in which people are becoming content creators and not just consumers. Since 2005, the sole service that allowed internet users to make their videos available to a user community was provided by video-sharing websites like YouTube. Its key characteristics include open (subscription-free) access for everybody, lack of platform involvement in the selection of published content, algorithmic or human content curation, advertising-based funding, and ex-post audits of rights holders or the platform's own initiative (Lee *et al.*, 2019). In addition, it may seem like a great opportunity for content creation and distribution regarding opportunities presented to South African YouTube creators including the YouTube Next Up programme. However, the programme further reveals that to be considered as a qualifying candidate, YouTubers need to have one or more eligible channels. The channel(s) should have between 10 000 to 100 000 subscribers and at least 3 pieces of original and native video content uploaded in the last 3 months (Nefdt, 2021). This is a disadvantage to creators who struggle to acquire subscribers and video traction, and therefore will miss out on funding opportunities. Furthermore, Burgess and Green (2018) observe that one of the biggest issues for the platform's future has always been a crowded online video market which allows anyone to upload a video on the platform, sustainable profitable growth, and bandwidth costs. This causes a fundamental dilemma since platforms unevenly foster and safeguard new power and responsibility connections between users and platform providers - which are more vulnerable to regulatory and governance issues. Like any businesses that rely on user co-creation, YouTube has had to continually strategize to maintain its size and rate of growth (Burgess and Green, 2018).

Williams (2012) contends that as a new media writer and producer working on original independent, sponsored, and branded entertainment projects, this is an entertainment medium without a lot of history or precedent. As soon as one road to success is established, others in the market swiftly replace it and render it obsolete. The question of how to make a popular web series is also relevant because, in reality, what works for one show cannot necessarily be replicated by another. According to Lockley (2009) and Anwar *et al* (2020), traditional media like radio and television will still be the most efficient means of disseminating in-depth information on issues of healthcare and education. Even so, YouTube and social media has proven to also deliver healthcare (Covid-19 information) and education (online learning).

Digital technology accessibility has revolutionized traditional forms of education, enabling students to learn from the convenience of their homes (Development Bank of Southern Africa, 2022). This implies that people have access to any kind of data they require and anytime they require it, eliminating time and space restrictions and fostering culture and public interest. The coronavirus pandemic has demonstrated that, from a technological standpoint, fair access to the most recent digital technology is required. Evidently, the pandemic regulations were designed in such a way that they required the nation's workforce and students to move away from traditional office and educational settings and instead work within alternate digital platforms (Development Bank of Southern Africa, 2022).

Research pertaining to YouTube tends to focus on new or social media as primary to marketing, innovative business models to reach consumers and, broadcasters using it to monitor audience feedback. In addition, its use in assisting in tertiary learning in SA. For instance, Duffett *et al.* (2019) explored social media regarding its efficacy for marketing reasons in SA with over 90% of the largest brands in SA utilizing Twitter and Facebook and found that just over half (51%) of brands reportedly planned to increase their social media budgets. Also, Roodt *et al.* (2014) examined YouTube as an academic tool by lecturers at higher-education institutions (HEIs) in SA as a learning tool in the classroom for an innovative and cost-effective way to bridge the gap between students and their teachers.

The findings of the study indicated that 93% respondents indicated that they use YouTube and of the 14 who confirmed that they use YouTube, 64% use YouTube for both social and academic purposes, while 21% use YouTube purely for social reasons. While 20% of the lecturers stated they are active participants which includes posting videos, commenting, and sharing videos on YouTube for teaching (Roodt *et al.*, 2014). Moreover, Abiolu and Teer-Tomaselli's (2018) research highlighted how large corporations have the potential to increase their earnings and enter new international markets because of modern ICTs. They also acknowledged how internet-mediated platforms and social media provide media creators and broadcasters use these tools for measuring and tracking audience reaction in SA. These reports did not describe the potential of social media as a primary source, but instead emphasized how different services benefit from it. Balakrishnan and Manickavasagam (2016) attributes this to a lack of YouTube research in developing economies, especially considering the rapid spread of social media there, whilst the growth rate has started to fall in numerous developed countries as a result of market saturation.

Additionally, 2022 represented a crucial turning point for the entertainment and media sectors as total worldwide entertainment and media revenue increased 5.4% in that year. That is a substantial slowdown from the 10.6% growth rate in 2021, when countries' economy and industries were beginning to recover from the disruption brought on by the COVID-19 epidemic (PwC Global Entertainment & Media Outlook, 2023). In addition, developed nations have superior internet access/speeds and ICT infrastructure (such as broadcasting technologies, wireless networks, online, computer, mobile, and satellite and transmission systems) compared to developing nations, which may cause differences in sociocultural and usage behaviour particularly in Africa (Lesame, 2013; Duh and Struwig, 2015 & Padayachee, 2017).

More research on YouTube is required to employ digital video ICT channels as successful advertising media (Duffett, 2020). Every media has formal requirements that affect the texts it produces; however, YouTube offers visibly expert evidence that is still relatively approachable, as evidenced by its enormous popularity. Even though many other early media creators were amateurs⁶, they have never previously had unrestricted access to the tools of production and distribution. An original text can easily grow enormously with the use of a camera phone, a webcam, a video-recorder, a computer with inexpensive editing software or other combinations, and an internet connection (Burgess and Green, 2018).

YouTube has recently moved into the premium subscription model of content with YouTube TV (a subscription-based service with DVR functionality offered in partnership with the major TV studios), YouTube black, YouTube new voices, and YouTube partner programmes (Burgess and Green, 2018). The YouTube Partner Programme, which allows creators to share in advertising revenue generated by views on their videos, was launched in April 2007 (Hamedy, 2017). At first the programme was invite only, then opened to all users from the 20 countries where the programme was available in 2012 (Schroeder, 2012). In 2018, in an effort to address mounting issues with problematic content, YouTube announced that creators could only turn on monetisation once they hit 4 000 watch hours' lifetime views (Gotch, 2023) which went through a review process.

⁶Amateur - Beginner professional branching into the film and television industry utilizing low budget equipment and available resources.

YouTube clearly represents a disruption to existing media business models as it is emerging as a new site of media power. However, it is also frequently used as a platform for public debates about new media and the internet as a disruptive force on business and society, particularly with regard to young people as a major player in the new economy and potential cyberbullying (Ito *et al.*, 2008).

Similarly, mainstream media discourses about YouTube have the power to define the issues that may later be stipulated in policy, in law, and even in material form (Sparviero, Peil and Balbi, 2017). Broadcasting worldwide, including SA, has witnessed major growth but researchers could not anticipate the growth of new media and its implications on television viewing (Newman, 2022). Wasserman (2020) states that due to advances in technology, YouTube which is appearing on more TV screens may soon surpass traditional television as the most watched format in the USA, and this may subtly change how we perceive television (Solomon, 2017).

Other researchers, however, who have spearheaded studies in their countries on new media distribution, including Emwinromwankhoe (2020) who focused on Nigeria revealed that convergence has had a beneficial impact on broadcasting in that it generates more opportunities as more platforms for distributing broadcast content are online. This convergence has caused the traditional broadcast media to transform rapidly (Emwinromwankhoe, 2020). From an empirical perspective, YouTube is the third most used social media platform in Nigeria with a viewership of 81.6%, with internet penetration rate at 50%, whilst internet access generated by mobile devices is at 73.4% (Varrella, 2021).

Further, Kim (2010) who focused on the topic of *UGC content revolution: critique of the promise of YouTube*, analysed the evolution of YouTube from a commercial and financial standpoint. Kim established that YouTube's culture and meanings are complicated as a result of its institutionalization - the trajectory of new media technology, which is manipulated by market and political interests, rather than by the desires of amateur users who are becoming professional creators.

This project explored YouTube from the perspectives of an agent, an institution, and a text - each perspective highlights tensions and conflicts between the private and the public, between institutions and individuals, between amateurism and professionalism, between narrowcasting

and broadcasting, and between user-generated content (UGC) and professionally-produced-content (PGC). Kim explored YouTube as a democratising and interactive UGC medium through a critical study of challenges discovered in the growth of YouTube. Since amateur users leverage YouTube's accessibility and convenience, they could actively participate in the creation of media content, system of distribution, consumption, and feedback. As such, users can exchange videos and thoughts on YouTube, which is a community feature. However, this feature's primary pattern has shifted from being truly communal to becoming a promotion tool (Kim, 2010). A further study by Vytiaz (2018) concluded that YouTube does not fully substitute traditional television, but instead complements it.

Additionally, Foster's (2020) UK study investigated the popularity of YouTube videos and the reasons that motivate viewers to watch. Although the results were not generally applicable to all YouTube users in the United Kingdom (UK), they contributed to understanding the popularity of online videos, user behaviours, and variables affecting consumers' decisions. The conclusions were also relevant to people using and producing YouTube videos. Combining the survey and metadata results, the main finding was that users are rarely influenced by popularity-related information when deciding to watch a video on YouTube. However, commercial promoters will understandably want to increase the popularity of their videos for reasons including self-promotion, monetizing, marketing, information services, and political election campaigns (Foster, 2020).

This section highlighted trends which provide insight into the potential growth in user experience and engagement for creators distributing content on YouTube in different parts of the world. Moreover, they pave the way towards television broadcasting convergence. As well as genre and niches on a non-traditional distribution channel.

2.4.2 Monetisation by Online Advertising

YouTube presence includes an audience for productions on a tight budget (Finch, 2019). YouTube's video recommendations, capacity to embed videos on other websites, and search engine functions enable content revenue sharing (Blazquez *et al.*, 2018). Due to the ease of binge-watching online video, these new online streaming companies have changed how viewers perceive television content and how it is generated and distributed (Burroughs, 2015). Even though YouTube is more popular in first-world countries like the United States of

America, SA's expanding internet user population of 43.48 million (Kemp, 2023) makes internet advertising an appealing option, evidenced by digital ad spending increasing by R952 million and with YouTube's potential ad reach in SA increasing by 500 thousand in 2023 (Goosen 2018 & Kemp 2023). According to Zhou *et al* (2016, p. 3), "YouTube's approach is based on the hypothesis that video advertising now enables online services to offer a real alternative to TV-screen advertising". The increasing use of OTT distribution platforms including YouTube, which suggests that South African audiences are increasingly accessing video content on smart devices (Ferreira, 2018 & Mapitsa, 2022). Even though community radio and television have an increase in audience, new media and television still have the highest growth trends in media ad spending (National Association of Broadcasters, 2014, p. 16). Furthermore, O'Reilly (2010), a theorist on Web 2.0, asserts that from a user-perspective it is more valuable when more people participate because participation increases revenue and profit (Blank and Reisdoff, 2012, p. 538).

Importantly, Jenkins, Ford, and Green (2013, p. 127) view the fact that: "companies are often profiting from audience labour, but it's critical not to paint this as exploitation, denying the many ways audience members benefit from willing participation in such arrangements", adding that: "free labour may be meaningful and rewarding". These scholars overlook capitalism and its profit-oriented mind set, and do not overlook the consumers or audiences that interact with commodities daily (Fuchs, 2014). The notion of digital labour on social media arises from users who can be thought of as digital workers on the social media platform since users contribute to the majority value of any given social media platform. This is related to the idea of participatory culture, which is: "a [concept] frequently used to designate the participation of users, viewers, consumers, and fans in the development of culture and content" which will further be discussed in section 3.2.1 (Fuchs, 2014, p. 64). Jenkins, Ford, and Green (2013) contend that most platforms do not pay users and audiences for their work but rather they are exploited as digital labourers helping platforms garner profits. This remains true for without users' free labour and content-building on social media there would be no platform. However, users use the platform for engagement, and if they are attracting advertisers, they are informed that the platform should inherently be for pay-users.

YouTube also has an analytical suite for audience insight and performance to boost reach and visibility (Ullman, 2014: 3 & Duffett, 2020). Chu *et al.* (2022), however, maintains that

YouTube has not seen much success in luring viewers to their long-form content stating that it is primarily due to YouTube AdSense being heavily optimized for short form content. Despite YouTube being advertised as an ad free platform until 2009 (Jackson, 2011), YouTube's advertising has become extremely aggressive and pervasive from the moment you arrive on the site. One sees 30-second ads that pre-empt and interrupt content, banner ads fill the bottom of an in-play video while banner ads/paid-placement videos populate the right column. Potentially, viewers may leave if comparable long-format advertising strategies are used. The user-engagement for short format content allows Google to offer a significantly higher number of ad impressions per hour than users would tolerate in long format shows. Google's AdSense is uniquely suitable for short-format, low cost-per-impression content. Trying to expand into long-form original content can only result in financial waste and brand dilution (Farrell, 2014).

In SA, web-series are becoming more popular and frequently attract internet viewers with South African YouTubers, namely Web fitness series by Celeb Peter Cilliers, creator of Six Pack Factory who has 1.45 million subscribers, 93.4 million views, and earns over R50 000 a month by uploading one exercise video a week to his channel (Business Tech, 2020). This is excluding the revenue made from sales of his own products through the channel. Furthermore, 20-year-old Caspar Lee who has over 6 million subscribers, all from his diary entries on his YouTube channel, gets over 5.7 million views per month (Bratt, 2017). Lastly, Rob the Ranger, a wildlife specialist and star of the game ranger web-series, uploads wildlife footage to his channel: *iDube Rob the Ranger*, had a huge 200% growth in subscribers over the past years since 2012 to date (Bratt, 2017). Rob, who is a member of the YouTube Partnership Programme, has had success since starting to monetize his channel in December 2012. His profits from his 1.27 million subscribers have quadrupled till today (VidIQ, 2023). This is in comparison to other South African channels such as Thierry Cassuto *Zanews*, who were initially doing well in 2013 with over twenty-thousand subscribers each but were inconsistently posting and presently have limited audience engagement (Business Tech, 2020). Considering that YouTube will only allow you to monetize once you have 1 000 subscribers and 4 000 hours' watch-time.

Major video platforms work to promote the emergence of creators or producers who, after achieving a certain level of recognition, regularly provide specialized original content and have signed broad licensing agreements with the platforms. These agreements specifically

incorporate giving producers' access to a share of the advertising money earned by their videos, possibly along with a minimum guarantee (Blazquez *et al.*, 2018). Content creators have always been subject to YouTube's Community Guidelines, which cover nudity, hate speech, and other misuse of the platform such as consumer scams. Additionally, the platform has commodified advertiser-friendly content guidelines which it uses to maintain a safe environment for advertisers, and with which content creators who wish to share advertising revenue must comply against producing violent and extremist content (Gesenhues, 2018). The platform's (increasingly automated) methods of operationalising these guidelines have generated intense controversies, particularly problematic intersection between content regulation, values-based community governance, and the sociotechnical management of advertising (Burgess and Green, 2018). The top three highest grossing YouTube channels worldwide of 2020 is *Ryan's World* earning \$29.5 million, second *Mr Beast* at \$24 million, and third *Dude Perfect* at \$23 million (GMI Blogger, 2020).

Meanwhile, what is important to note is that a new medium of entertainment has emerged because of new web-based production and distribution model (Newman, 2023). The rise of new media has also piqued the interest of traditional media players such as newspaper publishers, television stations, advertisers, and other traditional media companies who have begun to use new media outlets available on the internet (Shah, 2023). Broadcast television does not shy away from supplementing their video content with longer text content on their website, whereas traditional newspapers now also embed videos or video hyperlinks to attract website visitors on their online publications. Local content which has local audiences, has attracted bigger numbers in terms of investments. The National Association of Broadcasting (NAB) notes that investments such as sponsorships and advertisers are above and beyond regulatory requirements which is led by audiences who resonate with local content (National Association of Broadcasters, 2014).

The user's engagement with society is determined by his/her relationship to space, which in this domain reflects their subjectivity (Dwivedi *et al.*, 2022). It is important to adopt a strategy that balances the diversity of participants and co-created media space while researching a dynamic cultural system like YouTube (Green, 2009). The above section focused on identifying the business and marketing strategy independent producers use to successfully distribute web series to increase viewership and monetize content. In addition, the significance of YouTube's online streaming services in the distribution of independently generated South

African web content was evaluated. This section highlighted audience engagement as the new content providers as well as a commodity that draws internet advertising. The YouTube algorithm is also explored for a better knowledge of how and the best practices to distribute on YouTube.

2.5 LEGAL REGULATORY PROVISIONS GOVERNING ONLINE DISTRIBUTION

2.5.1 South African ICT Regulations towards Digital Transformation

The consideration of noteworthy legal provision is based on outlining the legal framework for online distribution and whether it protects independent producers' intellectual property and copyright when distributing on YouTube. How does government decide what does and does not get regulated, especially in a world of self-expression, where YouTube has its own guidelines (Mc Kenzie (a), 2020)? One might even argue that these online video streaming services have channels much like broadcasting stations, which would mean they should be subject to comparable regulations and older traditional broadcasting norms.

The discourses of copyright infringement that drive discussions and business negotiations over the uploading of traditional media content to YouTube are replaced by the process of redaction (Burgess and Green, 2009). While some of the uncertain videos are marked as private or taken down by users, the bulk are marked as inaccessible due to allegations of copyright violation (Burgess and Green, 2018). Concern about regulating free access media engendered the most renowned of media studies to engage in debates which acknowledge the usefulness of the context of online AV distribution (Mendel, 2017). The central principle of the ICT Policy *White Paper* (2016) outlines aims to transform SA into an inclusive and innovative digital and knowledge society with interventions to facilitate inclusive digital advancement. A technological approach in distributing content would mean complying with safe content. Research reveals that legal regulatory provisions are required to safeguard the rapid growth of users on new media platforms and the open internet (Stasi, 2019). Jenkins (2006) and Boyle (2017) asserts that because there are a few multinational media conglomerates controlling nearly all sectors of the entertainment industry, this anomaly has led to differing views on whether media is currently under excessive regulation or inadequate regulation. Therefore, these questions' whether regulation enforced by government can be successfully accomplished

in a digital world. Further, Gantchev (2003) and Rønning *et al.* (2006) offers that as an economic mechanism, copyright law is designed to establish the correct balance between the time that creators invest in the creation of their works and to appropriate the market value of their work while considering the legal implications and regulatory functions that govern producer content.

Regulators such as the Compliance Complaints Committee, the Advertising Standards Authority and the South African Broadcasting Complaints Commission are expected to regulate social platforms as the number of internet users has risen dramatically over the past years in SA (Kemp, 2023). This will boost the quantity of pertinent local material to be readily available to satisfy the growing demand for internet connectivity to access recently made content through legal regulatory provisions governing online distribution and ICTs in SA towards digital transformation (OECD, 2011). The supply of AV material over electronic communication networks is governed by South African law primarily through two distinct regulatory frameworks that were approved in 2020. The South African National Assembly's formal adoption of the 2022 amended Films and Publications Amendment Bill (FPB) Act, 1996 (Act no. 65 of 1996) which provides more clarity on the regulation of online commercial distributors and the processes that they are required to follow to distribute content in SA (Ongeso, 2022). Furthermore, the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPI Act) which sets conditions for responsible parties to lawfully process the personal information of data subjects by protecting personal information and one's right to privacy.

The Act defines processing as collecting, receiving, recording, retrieving, distribution or sharing of any such information (Du Plessis, 2021). The aims of the Acts are to protect online distribution users and audiences from child-pornography, domestic-violence, hate-speech regarding films or online games, people's privacy, and by blocking non-compliant online distributors when complaints are received about explicit content (South African Film and Publications Amendment Act, 2022). The process of classifying content is guided by classification standards, which are used to rate and categorise each film and online game before they are released to the nation. Every five years, the standards are thoroughly evaluated and publicly scrutinised to ensure they are in line with current legislation and child development theories that serve the interests of residents and society as a whole (Kamineth, *et al.*, 2020). According to Boyle and Jenkins (2021, p. 521), "One who, with knowledge of the infringing action, induces or significantly contributes to the infringing conduct of another is referred to as

a contributory copyright offender”. When the primary offender can be monitored, and there is a clear and preventable direct financial benefit, indirect liability for another’s copyright infringement arises (Ditch, 2009). Furthermore, the Acts launches a barrage of consumer warnings to inform the public in advance of the kinds of content they may expect to see in a movie or video game. Unless it contains unlawful content, the content is neither blocked nor filtered; instead, gives viewers caution before it is made available (Kamineth *et al.*, 2020). Conversely, the FPB directive can be argued as a means of support and safeguard for people and companies in creative industries who are being starved of revenues lost through the sharing of their intellectual property on online digital distribution platforms (Browne, 2019). Mudau’s (2014) research based on the UGC copyright protection for online content, whose findings were highlighted from a South African perspective, pointed the challenges of UGC online copyright. Claims for copyright infringement encountered difficulties and costs; suing every single offender might be costly and ineffective for copyright holders since there may be millions of infringers. Many infringers would only be responsible for little damages, but litigation is expensive. Enforcement could be exceedingly challenging for local courts to effect court orders to take down or limit access to an illegal website hosted on a foreign web server. As such, copyright conflicts have always been a source of platform power struggles, balancing the needs of copyright owners and common users (Mudau, 2014). To streamline the classification of commercial online material, the Film and Publication Board is collaborating with the creative and distribution sectors. This involves giving online service providers the option to self-classify using SA’s classification system or to request for accreditation of an acknowledged and compatible international classification system (Kamineth *et al.*, 2020). Former Director-General of Nigeria, E. S. Nwauche points out how copyright protection may be necessary for Sub-Saharan countries but is not enough to develop viable domestic industries within entertainment in developing countries, concluding that if there is no copyright protection, these industries will disappear (Rønning, 2006).

The Baker Mc Kenzie (a) (2020) legal firm asserts that the requirements for the alterations to films and publications amendments, as they stand, have major implications on online distributors. It was observed that the FPB was harshly criticised as it moved through the legislative process. Commentators termed it as the Internet Censorship Bill which was referred to in the context of the FPB’s attempt to regulate harmful content violated the right to freedom of speech (Mc Kenzie (a), 2020). Furthermore, online distributors will be required to register with the FPB and submit all content for categorisation under the new legislation and FPB

standards for pre-distribution classification until permission for self-classification has been obtained by the FPB. According to Baker Mc Kenzie (a) (2020), the regulations give a new definition of an internet service provider, which means that internet-based businesses will also need to comply with difficult administrative procedures for the registration and classification of content. They will also need to register as internet service providers with the FPB since the laws covers the purchase, rental, and streaming of content on several digital platforms in SA.

Baker Mc Kenzie (b) (2020) also drew attention to particular difficulties with rule 3I (Films and publications Amendment Regulations, 2022, p. 19), which states that the FPB: “may impose any restrictions it believes essential for the better attainment of the aims and purposes of the PB” when issuing a registration certificate. The criteria for self-classification, according to Baker Mc Kenzie (b) (2020), will be exceedingly challenging when supplying material on a worldwide scale, and content providers must ensure that all South African information is categorized in accordance with the PB's classification guidelines. The firm stated that this is at odds with international approaches regarding the classification of content on international platforms. This is where the platform owner is given complete autonomy over its self-classification decisions, provided that robust codes and procedures are in place for dealing with content that does not deserve constitutional protection (Mc Kenzie (b), 2020). UGC content would be governed by the Films and Publications Board, which might also ban non-compliant online distributors. Online users in countries such as Tanzania have expressed outrage about their electronic and postal communications online content restrictions 2018 (Dark, 2018). The restrictions, which were designed to combat false news and hate speech, mandated that internet cafes install surveillance cameras, that contributors' information be kept on file for a year, and that online content creators pay over \$900 in registration and licensing costs (Boda and Ramoabi, 2022).

The SA legislation Copyright Act no. 98 of 1978 (as amended) (“the Act”) protects the author’s moral and economic right to assert authorship over the work, and the right to protest against any infringement on the specific workers’ rights (Dyiamond, 2022). The right to the work is the author’s moral right. A piece of work as art is protected by copyright if it may be used commercially, and if performing or allowing others to perform any of the prohibited activities in relation to the work will harm the author’s reputation. In contrast, copyright protects the expression of ideas rather than just the ideas themselves due to the economic motivation in doing so (Law Teacher, 2013). To do this, South African courts have determined that when

thoughts are expressed in words on paper, copyright does not exist prior to a tangible production of material. The mix of ideas and the way they are expressed constitute an integral aspect of the work under copyright law (Levenstein and Tucker, 2005). Other key contributions support policies to enable competition in the ICT product and services sector, effective spectrum management, and productive internet use with an emphasis on concerns relating to access to internet connectivity (Cameron, 2016). In contrast, there are laws such as the Performers Protection Act and SA Copyright Act no. 98 of 1978 (as amended) governing the protection of the original author's intellectual property, monetisation policies, copyright violations, and AdSense that are adopted and used as mechanisms for content producers to increase their potential views, monetise, own, and protect their distributed work (Graves and Lee, 2017; Blazquez *et al.*, 2018 & YouTube, 2023). Conversely, a copyright directive passed by the European Union legislative (Article 13) which holds digital platforms accountable for material posted without copyright licenses in order to protect artists and publishers whose work has been dispersed on the internet (Browne, 2019 & Kleinman, 2019). However, the reforms are criticised by favouring publishers who rely on interspersed copyright material to engage audiences by highlighting points and sustaining quality content (Feiner, 2019). They are now faced with implications of regulated copyright claims which will affect user revenue for content producers who are already required to pre-finance their content which hinders creative industries (Blazquez *et al.*, 2018 & Browne, 2019). Governments are expected to support the concept of openness in cases where the public sector data is deemed to be freely accessible for use unless specifically exempted for the protection of national security interests, individual privacy, the preservation of private interests, or were protected by copyright, or the application of national access laws and regulations (OECD, 2011).

2.5.2 Regulating Content Globally

Due to the creation of UGC content inevitably involves frequent copying of text, images, and data, the protection of these works restricts the development of new types of internets. In light of this, it is challenging to find and apprehend infringers. Additionally, the fact that not many copyright cases are contested, lessens the likelihood that UGC content would be the target of infringement claims. Nevertheless, the international community has created a few agreements in response to these and other difficulties in the digital era (Mudau, 2014). The primary legal issues that social media and video-sharing services raise according to Blazquez *et al.* (2018) include, firstly, the difficulty in reaching a consensus on a single legal term of video sharing

and what the term covers and how this can fully allow for a correct assessment for the duties and rights associated with these legal matters. The European Commission (EC) proposed a definition of *online platform* in the public consultation that was launched in September 2015. This categorised it as an enterprise operating in two or multi-sided markets that utilises the internet to enable interactions between two or more interdependent groups of users in order to create value for at least one of the groups. Further, the EC distinguished that video-sharing platforms include YouTube and Dailymotion (Blazquez *et al.*, 2018).

The second problem relates to Competition Law's relation to market access; for instance, national legislation for service operation may need to be modified to accommodate the sharing economy (Blázquez, *et al.* 2018). Given their multifaceted character, such platforms' market strength must also be given additional consideration to implement competition legislation, as well as an accurate evaluation of the relevant market in which they compete. This involves two relationships: one upstream between the platform and its users through the provision of free services in return for the gathering of data originating from the users' free input; and one downstream between the platform and advertisers. Thirdly, due to their special function in transmitting and presenting AV information digitally and their potential influence on users' opinion-forming processes, social media and video-sharing platforms are raising additional legal issues regarding basic rights (Blázquez, *et al.* 2018).

Given the territorial nature of copyright laws, a South African business would be permitted to sell video cassettes to a consumer who uses the internet from India. If so, this clashes with the home video rights recently granted to an Indian distributor. When referring to distribution through the internet, the concept of territory could lose practicality and relevance. Anyone with a computer may access the internet from anywhere in the globe and download content from any computer server (Litwak, 2000). The question arises that when you attempt to limit an internet distributor to selling products in one country, how can they or you monitor distribution outside their territory? In order to reduce the likelihood of a video being downloaded in countries where the indigenous language is not spoken, and in the light of the fact that many popular movies and television shows are in English, the granting of internet rights to the distribution of the video is restricted, such as not allowing translations (Litwak, 2000). The regulations of various countries must be considered when distributing a movie internationally, therefore piracy is not the only issue. Further questions include: Are you, as an independent producer exposing yourself to potential civil and criminal liability if your web-series is

downloaded by computer users in 'France' and the content of the video violates local censorship laws there because there is no local distributor with the knowledge and incentive to comply with local regulations?

How should we regulate video online distribution when it is easily accessible in so many different countries? The ability of national governments to effectively enforce statutory copyright against foreign content providers is challenged by the internet's extensive reach. As a result, to keep up with technological advancements, international copyright law has been modified. In accordance with the national laws of a particular country, international copyright protects the work of an author around the world and offers protection against unauthorised use in that country (Kumar, 2023). The International Copyright Order was established in 1999 to protect the authors and owners of works protected by foreign copyright and to offer safeguards that cross national boundaries. Notably, the World Trade Organisation (WTO) passed the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects in 1996 (Mudau, 2014). A disagreement in international laws is one of the outcome's related characteristics. There are minimum levels of protection in each country for copyright holders (Mudau, 2014). Copyright and other IP rights are typically provided for by national legislation in individual countries. Countries with individual regulations on digital online distribution which allow for audiences all over the world to access one's copyright becomes a problem when they must intervene on punishable offences. However, The World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO) Copyright Treaty is a special agreement under the Berne Convention which deals with the protection of works and the rights of their authors in the digital environment, which protects all digital copyright works in most countries. The 1886 Berne Convention for the Protection of Literary and Artistic Works (Berne Union) offers further solutions to the problems posed by emerging digital technology. On 23 March 1975, SA joined WIPO. In October 1977, it was announced that SA would no longer be allowed to participate in WIPO operations. After a resolution was made to this effect by an Extraordinary Session of its Coordination Committee convened on 29 July 1994, SA resumed its membership in WIPO and its subsidiary entities (World Intellectual Property Organisation, 2022). Although this protects SA IP with the rest of the world, there are countries which are not a part of the treaty, therefore regulations will not apply in every country. Which would remain an issue for independent producers.

One of the main criticisms of the application of traditional copyright law to online content is that it often restricts the circulation of valuable creative works (Holmes and Ganley, 2007 &

Mudau 2014). Adhering to copyright regulations in the digital environment is a challenge because it is possible for users to make exact replicas of works and distribute them instantly. The process driven by policies created and entrenched to encourage liberalisation, deregulation, privatisation, and capital investment is known as neoliberal globalisation a key element in the convergence of the media and communications markets (Hesmondhalgh, 2013 & Jin, 2013). In particular, the deregulation of the media and the telecommunication sectors, is the process that led to the removal of the existing barriers and the establishment of new comprehensive rules for competition in the emerging markets (Sparviero *et al.*, 2017).

There are still notable challenges with copyright protection in the open internet when considering online distribution. Like in the UK and USA, South African copyright law provides statutory defenses to allegations of infringement. Similar to *fair dealing* laws in the UK, in SA permit user's access copyright works without the owner's consent. Furthermore, implied licenses frequently safeguard the fundamental uses of UGC on social media. An implied, non-exclusive license for other users on the same network is generated when a person uploads his/her work to a website and then publishes it. If a site owner uses a YouTube video for personal use, the fair dealing provision will not shield him/her from copyright infringement (Mudau, 2014). In addition to this, music rights are also controlled under the YouTube copyright distribution law as many movies include soundtracks that feature music that has been licensed. It is possible that the contracts did not give the independent producer permission to share the song online. Since Internet dissemination of music is regarded as a public performance, performing rights societies may be owed payments for online distribution of music (Litwak, 2000).

Further, YouTube's internal copyright policy of which a copyright infringement by the owner of the content has been reported, YouTube removes the video and applies a copyright strike. If a person receives three copyright strikes in 90 days, their account will be cancelled, as will any linked channels. This policy is designed to comply with external frameworks, is managed through complex automation mechanisms like Content ID which matches uploaded content against a database of copyrighted material (Solomon, 2015). Such mechanisms are essential for maintaining the protections afforded to platforms under the DMCA, which is the Digital Millennium Copyright Act, which provides a safe harbour for such intermediaries who act in good faith to remove infringing content once they become aware of it. However, Content ID regularly flags non-infringing videos (Solomon, 2015). The counter-flagging measures are

rarely utilized, and most creators are unaware of their rights to reuse material, especially under *Fair Use* provisions with an overall effect on creativity. The doctrine of Fair Use is intended to reduce the burden on creators and allow them to build on each other's work, allowing them to reuse, remix, critique, and parody limited portions of other creators' work without the need to secure explicit permission (Aufderheide and Jaszi, 2011). Creators are required to get their own legal counsel if they are unsure of what to do because YouTube cannot advise on whether to contest a claim or not. Not to be taken lightly, disputes should only be utilised when you have full legal authorisation to use the material in your movie. If one repeatedly or maliciously misuses the dispute procedure, one's video or channel may be penalised (Burgess and Green, 2018).

This mistake results from opponents not adhering to the process by which content is transmitted. It is sometimes asserted that the legislation attempts to censor. It ignores the reality that, in a democratic nation, there is not explicitly prohibition of content unless it is illegal and undermines societal cohesion through hate speech, the instigation of impending violence, war propaganda, or child pornography (Kamineth *et al.*, 2020). Consumers are choosing to access news, information, and entertainment online because of media convergence. At the same time, a substantial transfer in power has taken place (Kamineth *et al.*, 2020). Citizens now have the option to communicate their thoughts widely on social media, eroding the gatekeeper function of filtered information traditionally held by traditional media (Chattopadhyay, 2018). This section explored the objective pertaining to government policy intervention within online distribution and streaming services for independent producers in South Africa.

CHAPTER THREE

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the theoretical framework of the study is presented. The first theory informing the study is Henry Jenkin's (2006) media convergence theory which focuses on converged ICT concepts such as convergence culture, media democratisation, and participatory culture. Three ideas - media convergence, participatory culture, and collective intelligence - are related in a way known as convergence culture. Media convergence and participatory are two of the themes explored in the chapter. Other researchers such as Flew, Sparviero, Peil and Balbi, and Meikle and Young who have also applied Jenkins theory are supplemented throughout the media convergence section too. Participatory culture explores audience participation and producers who distribute on online platforms. Although media convergence includes the democratisation of media as it expands access to information, it however does not consider the economic implications, power dynamics between audience and digital media conglomerates, commodification processes, and shortcomings (if any). Therefore, this study applies the political economy of media (Wasko, 2012) as a second theory which provides an in-depth explication of the process of media content commodification in digital platforms. The theorists informing The Political Economy of Communication Media Theory is informed by Janet Wasko and Vincent Mosco.

3.2 MEDIA CONVERGENCE

The Media Convergence Theory developed by Henry Jenkins (2006, p. 5) defined it as: "the flow of content across multiple media platforms, co-operation between multiple media industries, and migrant behaviour of media audiences". Further revealing that media audiences will go anywhere in search of the entertainment experiences they desire. Jenkins (2006, p. 6) continues that "new media technologies lead to lower production and distribution costs, an expanded range of delivery channels, and the enabling of consumers to archive and recirculate media content". Convergence further involves a shift of characteristics that were previously separate (Meikle and Young, 2011). Moreover, Sparviero, Peil and Balbi's (2017, p. 3) recently theorised media convergence as a: "wide range of different developments and transformations

at a technological, industrial, cultural, social, spatial, and political level". As a result of convergence, 4IR trajectories are now embraced.

Flew (2008, p. 28) maintained that media convergence theory is a development of traditional media through new media (Web 2.0) and avers media convergence as follows: "the interlinking of computing and ICTs, communication networks, and media content that has occurred with the development and popularisation of the internet (Web 2.0), resulting in the emergence of convergent digital media products, services and activities" (Pavlik and Mc Intosh, 2018). Jenkins (2006, p. 15) aptly described convergence as that of many homes experiencing the "perpetual tangle of cords" of "home entertainment" centre's (laptops and iPods). This demonstrates that media content can increasingly be accessed across multiple devices which is functional to consumers who are becoming producers and distributors of media themselves. Convergence, in which digitally transmitted narratives replicate conventional content across different digital platforms, further alters the interaction between current ICT-industries, markets, and consumers (Flew, 2014). Flew (2014, p. 183) describes this as the: "blurring of lines" between media forms. Due to the rise of media convergence, transition processes and implications of digitization are now key topics in published research, government regulations, and business papers (Sparviero, *et al*, 2017).

Convergence of the media is a transformative phenomenon. As a result of computerisation, established sectors, technology, and standards have undergone significant transformation (Kubis, 2011). Computation, communication, and content are *The Three Cs* key concepts of media convergence. A smartphone is an example of the three Cs: a computer that enables every user to share content to communicate with others. The boundaries that traditionally separated the industries related to mass media, telecommunications, and computers are being crossed by businesses. This is because of the much-discussed trend known as digital convergence; and Google has made it possible for converged networks to monetise. Thus, in this study the researcher examined media and technological convergence influence. Furthermore, examining the relationships between medium, and technology pertaining to the distribution of independent content on YouTube and the role of YouTube distribution in facilitating participation and dissemination of online content.

Jenkins (2006) describes two types of media convergence: technological, and cultural (a component of participatory culture). Video is an example of technological convergence since

it combines various media types into one digital media form. Jenkins (2006) points out that we (producers and consumers) increase their potential relationships and make it possible for them to move between platforms. There are various facets to cultural convergence; for example, cross-media and transmedia which move stories across various media platforms. Technological convergence is a fundamental aspect of media convergence and a requirement for the creation and growth of other convergence forms (Sparviero *et al.*, 2017). Due to technological advancements that gave rise to the digitisation of data, a creative economy, and digital revolution. Technological convergence can be considered as expanding the possibilities for television-esque programming which relates to web-series employing standard television formats to reach South African consumers. Moreover, this occurs without being constrained by fixed traditional television broadcasting programmes (Sparviero *et al.*, 2017). All types of digital media, including speech, sound, text, and film, were no longer limited to a single device. As such, the fundamental idea behind technological convergence is that all types of material are progressively being stored and transported on the same format, making them all interchangeable (Miller, 2011 & Sergio *et al.*, 2017). Jenkins (2006) emphasizes that audience participation is key. Due to the engaged audience and their participation in the creation and distribution of the work, this also is applicable within the South African media environment. However, what was once considered new media (traditional TV, radio, magazines) is now driving audiences with the introduction of newer media (Online streaming, podcasts, blogs). And this could potentially grow towards different platforms of viewing such as the growth of Facebook Watch being a huge competitor for YouTube in just under a few years (Owens, 2020).

Notably, although convergence is frequently applauded, and encouraged, it is not a simple process as there is uncertainty of the forthcoming of media and technical advancement in society and their intended outcomes. Convergence started to become a phenomenon in the late 1990s, but sectors related to all media and information-related activities that might interact before that time included the internet. As De Sola Pool (1983, p. 23) emphasized, this leads to: “increased connectivity between media and the erosion of formerly fixed boundaries”. The theory of convergence has been further criticised as it represents risks such as fragmentation of markets and user-risk within the new media space as there is an insufficient guarantee for a successful outcome offered to producers (Appelgren, 2004 & Wilding *et al.*, 2008). Jenkins (2006) does, however, contend that his theory of convergence is a process and not an endpoint; meaning that there is still more to be studied as media progresses over the years.

The internet is both the infrastructure that makes data services possible, and parts of it are owned and controlled by different groups in this convergence. According to Sparviero, Peil and Balbi (2017) position, the internet was not an opportunity, but rather a threat to those who provided the infrastructure and to the audience of media companies who collaborated to deliver AV content. De Sola Pool (1983) further elaborated on the concept of convergence modes to explain why the blending of print, broadcasting, and the telecommunications would create havoc considering the existing first amendment and intellectual property approaches to regulate the media (Hay and Couldry, 2011). Since then, the concept of convergence has raised new issues regarding intellectual property, such as how to control free speech and defend these rights in online and digital marketplaces. According to Maikori (2016) the convergence process creates specific regulatory concerns as it moves forward since the combination of divisions between telecommunications and television affects both carriers and regulatory authorities. Content that was previously restricted to individual networks may now be delivered on a variety of infrastructures and delivery platforms due to convergent content delivery mechanisms.

As governments often apply separate standards of content control to television broadcasting, print media, and the Internet, this introduces the possibility of a regulatory conflict (Maikori, 2016). The following are some of the primary challenges that regulators have when attempting to regulate content: the applicability of governmental regulations online, and locally produced content quotas, ownership and competition-related intellectual property rights, programming guidelines for conduct, censorship, free expression, data sovereignty where digital information is subject to the laws and regulations of the country in which it is held, is a jurisdictional problem to (Maikori, 2016). Therefore, every administration or digital media platform must choose how to respond to convergence. However, in light of convergence, how can governments time their responses to convergence, though, knowing that networks will almost certainly migrate towards IP-based convergence in the coming years? Consequently, local cultural, political, and economic circumstances influence how and when to implement regulatory change (Maikori, 2016).

Moreso, in today's digital era, the media and television industries suffer a huge income loss because of the availability of copyrighted works on publicly accessible and downloadable websites (YouTube) (Jha, 2020). However, online platforms with millions of users and uploaders may discover that, occasionally their platforms are being exploited to publish

information without rights or authorisation. Since there is so much content on these sites, human oversight is possible (Jha, 2020). It is necessary to strike a balance between the rights of copyright holders and the protection of free expression and the propagation of ideas for socioeconomic progress. The court determined that social media platforms acting as intermediaries are immune from liability for user-uploaded infringing content as long as they take immediate action to disable access or remove the content upon learning of the infringement through a specific URL. This is because the intermediary is not responsible for determining whether the content is legal or illegal. Courts recognised that there could be content online which is authorised, licensed, or comes within the purview of fair use (Jha, 2020).

The emergence of conglomerates in new media like Google and Apple raises new questions about how they relate to ownership and content controls that have typically been grounded on the organisational boundaries of the media sector (Kümpel *et al.*, 2015). The issue of new media and old media platforms and services being subject to the same regulations raises the debate about equality. Since the broadcasting industry has always been subject to strict types of regulation, so there is a historical tension between locally based media and global media sites like YouTube. The threshold of influence for media content and its producers, or when media is big enough for regulation to be appropriate, is becoming increasingly important. This is in the light of the fast growth of UGC and modest online distribution channels such as blogging and online video hosting (Flew, 2014). In order to examine the power dynamics in monetisation, as well as media and state interactions; identifying the key players in the media industry is important. This is because the lines between platforms, its services, devices, and content are indistinct.

YouTube is now mainstream media, but the media business is complex and rapidly changing. On the platform, user profiles have for some time been referred to as channels. YouTube has experimented with various advertising models from pre-rolls to in-display ads to channel sponsorships. Furthermore, on YouTube, there are five types of advertising: overlay ads, skippable video ads, non-skippable video ads, and sponsored cards. Brand associations with popular YouTubers and cross-platform influencers are expanding part of the social media marketing industry (Duffy, 2019). The actions of media consumers are hindered by corporate efforts to influence such actions in order to better serve their own financial interests. Therefore, convergence serves to expose the continuous conflicts within capitalism about how best to

harness technical advancement for the purpose of generating private profit by capitalizing on consumer-desires (Zheng, 2022). Furthermore, it effectively makes media users work for media investment through paid or sponsored posts. This is through empowering users so that they are far less easily moulded to fit established corporate agendas (Sparviero *et al.*, 2017). Consequently, it is necessary to identify the business and marketing strategies utilised for the distribution of web series or shows successfully in order to increase viewership and monetise content.

To determine how media, technological convergence, and the genre of the shows influence relationships between medium, technology and quality of content, run-time, is significant in terms of computing distribution and economic convergence. These objectives entail the convergence theory in order for collected interview data and existing reviewed literature to be adequately explored during data analysis.

3.2.1 Participatory Culture in New Media

The globalisation of communications has allowed individuals to communicate and share content from any part of the world. Jenkins (2006, p. 243) defines participatory culture as: “allowing artistic expression, engagement, support for creating and sharing creations with each other where members believe their contributions matter”. As the circulation of media content - across different media systems, competing media economies, and national borders - depends heavily on the active participation of the consumer, consumers are encouraged to seek new information and make connections between dispersed media content, where producers and consumers have transformed into participants who are expected to interact with each other according to new set of rules. Participatory culture therefore can be argued as a key principle of convergence culture and therefore also media convergence because of their participation on these media platforms (Jenkins, 2006). As a result, more users are participating and producing web-series which is an emerging form of storytelling and shaping digital disruption (Jenkins *et al.*, 2006 & Keltie, 2017).

A 'participatory culture' is one in which "fans and other consumers are invited to actively participate in the creation and distribution of new content" (Jenkins, 2006, p. 290 & Delwiche and Henderson, 2013). YouTube advances that in practice, the economic and cultural rearrangements that the participatory culture stands for are as disruptive and uncomfortable as

they might be potentially liberating (Jenkins *et al.*, 2006). Questions such as who gets to speak, what compensation or rewards are available for creativity and hard work, and the uncertainties surrounding various forms of expertise and authority are raised. All of these issues have come up repeatedly in discussions about the value and legitimacy of popular culture (Burgess and Green, 2018). Carpentier (2011) dissects the idea of participation by examining the social processes in which new participatory cultures have emerged over the past ten years. In addition, to the roots of those processes in older histories of power struggles involving media resources, which may not have undergone as much change as first thought (Hay and Couldry, 2011). Jenkins' (2006) version of the internet is one where a convergence culture fosters interactivity among innovative media developers and active media users (Hay and Couldry, 2011). Moreover, independent producers have entered digital spaces that allow opportunities to participate as users. Participatory culture, speaks to the way media consumers can engage, comment, and affect culture in new ways, a cultural convergence. A great illustration of participatory culture is the video sharing website, YouTube (Jenkins, 2001 & Osei-Hwere and Osei-Hwere, 2021).

Since audiences may now create their own media and share it with others attributable to the growing accessibility of digital, networked, and mobile media technologies, relationships between producers and consumers, authors and audiences have changed. Therefore, contributing to the changes in television since the 1980s are particularly relevant to the issue of authorship. While television studies abandoned the author as a viable avenue of inquiry, television itself now began to focus on its authors (Lotz, 2021). However, it has gone far beyond enshrining only established film directors as television auteurs. The showrunners, who are also writers and producers, were credited with television authorship. New media, however, does not abandon the author but rather gives the author a platform to create a profile, description and choice in distribution allowing for the author and audience to engage and create a community to allow viewers and authors to witness how viewers receive content and respond to it (Appel *et al.*, 2019). To acknowledge the relationship between media power, state power and economic sectors, helps facilitate in understanding new media, and government and intellectual property monetary gains for independent producers. Consequently, independent producers could therefore further be cognisant of policies for producers, competition, audience needs, advertisers, productions, and the online society when it comes to distribution (Wilding *et al.*, 2018).

Media economics are interested in how media companies use available resources to suit the informal and environmental aspirations and requirements of audiences and society. It is concerned with the variables that influence the creation of media goods and services, as well as the distribution of those consumer items (Wasko, 2012). Young and Regnart (1992, p. 22) posed the question of: “*what influences our selection of media*, besides parental control, religion, beliefs, and programming choice?” Societies’ structures influence, the individuals, and their choices and in return are influenced by media which is controlled by societies and their social change. YouTube is used in a variety of ways by various users and has always been a medium for amateur⁴ and professional creation, creative consumption, fandom, curation, and distribution (Cayari, 2011). YouTube has expanded the scope and complexity of both its business activities and the restrictions it has over the platform’s participation conditions. These tensions have been the foundation of YouTube’s cultural generativity and expansion, as well as the source of many of the conflicts between stakeholders and regulatory regimes that define its platform politics (Chau, 2010). These tensions over commercial participatory cultural politics illustrate the many and varied ways YouTube matters to culture, society, and the economy (Burgess and Green, 2018). Jenkins (2009) maintains that alternative media, fan, and activist video cultures paved the way for the early embrace, quick adoption, and diverse use of platforms like YouTube. However, accessibility is another area in which the user community has played a major role. This is a vital ongoing issue, especially as platforms like YouTube have become progressively less like websites and more like apps which are hackable, even on the web (Burgess and Green, 2018).

Consequently, like all media, YouTube only really makes sense when understood in the context of everyday life, and this is true through the patterns observed in how audiences were utilizing traditional media content (Shah, 2023). According to Bruns (2008) due to open and participatory web and digital media tools like blogging platforms, audiences no longer need to rely on auxiliary media forms to respond to the culture around them, implying that the everyday experience of media audiences may need to be reviewed to include new forms of cultural production that occur as part of ordinary media use (Burgess and Green, 2018). Employment and production strategies are common in almost every business where mass customization is popular, but this approach takes on a new meaning in digital media economy, because consumer labour is commodified directly into the service being delivered (Kackman *et al.*, 2011). However, many producers worldwide have been slow to react to the emergence of

participatory culture, and the gap is a result of unequal access to opportunities, knowledge, and insufficient accessibility for many (Jenkins, 2006).

Despite the absence of adequate internet infrastructure, particularly terrestrial connectivity in many areas in SA, internet penetration growth has accelerated recently (Widhiarto, 2011). Additionally, the SA Government has prioritized access to free public Wi-Fi through its intention to provide an alternative means to broadband access as many South Africans lack access to data and internet services (Illidge, 2022). Many internet service providers and private businesses have noticed this demand. Hence the service is now available throughout all the provinces. Free Wi-Fi is available in select chain restaurants and coffee shops, including Mug & Bean and Wimpy, certain petrol stations, airport corporations, and hotels. ‘Amafreezone’ features secure open access Wi-Fi to places in over 1 000 locations state-wide, and ‘Always On’ Wi-Fi has a countrywide network in most popular hangout areas. Also, ‘think WI-FI’ a non-profit organisation has built more than 200 free wireless internet sites in under-serviced communities in the Western Cape, Eastern Cape, Gauteng, and Mpumalanga (Hes, 2021 & Vuk’uzenzele, 2021). This has allowed audiences to have free access to digital viewing in most areas which promotes innovative digital logistics for content producers and encourages participatory culture and minimises the digital divide.

While media convergence addresses the distribution of content across numerous media platforms, participatory culture places emphasis on the role of audiences. It's also important to consider the media economics that must adapt to these new media markets in order for independent producers to monetise. Therefore, the exploration regarding PEM in the study identified economic policy, and the relationship between media policies relations for consumers to commoditise, and how the selected case studies benefited as distributors on YouTube in the next section.

3.3 POLITICAL ECONOMY OF MEDIA

3.3.1 Commodification of media

The investigation of how online content creators transform their productions into consumable products for audiences to attract advertisers is key to the political economy of communication media and the study. The political economy of media theory advocated by theorist Janet Wasko

(2012) who focused on the political economy of communication, the environment, and media, explains it as the method by which video content and online streaming platforms are commercialized. Theorist Vincent Mosco (2009) further defined it (2009) as the social and power dynamics that shape the production, distribution, and consumption of resources that may promote audience feedback, or ability to control other people, processes and replies from the intended audience. It also provides insight to how those within this market chain operate (Abiolu, 2017). Mosco (2009) continues further to define distribution as the idea that corporate decisions concerning new media goods are influenced by consumer choices, such as the websites we visit, and the television shows we watch. Additionally, it encourages people to consider how details about these decisions and even the attention to media becomes information that is offered for sale in the market. Examples of PEM include how fewer large media companies can control the diversity of content or how global marketing companies have increased their influence in the media industry by utilising new technologies of surveillance and measurement techniques to gather insightful consumer data. “It would also lead us to consider the extent to which activists can use new media tools like social networking sites to resist the concentration of power in business and government” (Mosco, 2009, p. 29.).

Key concepts that inform “newly converged businesses” or PEM include the following according to Wasko (2014, p. 262): commodification/commercialization - Resources for media and communication have evolved into commodities, or goods and services that are offered to consumers by profit-driven businesses for instance YouTube and TikTok. These platform businesses compensate users for the videos that they post on their platforms. Synergy/diversification - As media firms have developed, additional new lines of business have been established as part of a process of diversification. Media industries frequently start with a sizable number of distinct businesses, but today these sectors are generally controlled by enormous media-entertainment conglomerates that engage in a wide variety of diverse activities. Additionally, there is a chance that the numerous companies that make up these sizable, varied conglomerates may collaborate to promote their goods more successfully, creating a synergy that increases profits and lowers risk such conglomerates can be seen as Facebook, Instagram, Messenger, and WhatsApp which are all social media sites owned by Meta Platforms Inc. (Roy, 2023).

Integrating horizontally/vertically - As media organisations have gotten bigger and more successful, they frequently have added businesses that are in the same industry. In addition to

diversifying their lines of business, many enterprises have also integrated vertically by acquiring businesses at various stages of production or in the same supply chain due to new distribution technologies and deregulated marketplaces i.e., the convergence of news channels distributing on traditional television and then uploading the news episode on YouTube for online audiences to watch. Concentration - The amount of rivalry in different markets is one of the main problems facing the media industry. The stated objective of capitalism is a competitive market. This is particularly important for the media industry, where the dissemination of news and public information is essential for informed civic participation and where the supply of varied entertainment may promote cultural and individual growth. It is evident that a small number of corporations control the media landscape in many instances (such as the worldwide market for blockbuster films). PEM challenges the illusion of the competitive marketplace in late capitalism by demonstrating the real degree of competition (or lack of competition). The effects of such media concentration are of great interest to political economists as well, i.e., YouTube directly competing with Facebook watch and or TikTok competing with Instagram reels Wasko (2014).

The political economy analyses the commodification of communication platforms and media content. Therefore, it differentiates between the relationships and types of contracts between YouTube and independent content providers in SA. The Google-owned YouTube application offers essential functionality like searches, profile creation, content rating, grouping, and audience location (Mansell, Amp and Nordenstreng, 2006 & Van Couvering, 2017). Using the PEM approach the study explores how connections between economic and political allegiances influence the roles played by social institutions like the media, and how these influence societal growth and transformation (Fourie, 2007). Understanding YouTube's video distribution practices in relation to South African ICT regulations on content distribution, and how independent producers use this platform, are central to this study. However, to understand the power of the media and its political economy, considerations such as media ownership, structure and concentration need to be unpacked. Political economy explains the rise and spread of various corporate power structures in the communications sector (Mc Chesney, 2008).

Commercialism will continue expanding as new digital technologies are introduced (Mc Chesney, 2008). Therefore, a company's level of revenue production from advertisements increases with the length of the chain of ownership and media concentration within it (Trappel and Meier, 2022). For instance, Naspers will produce more revenue than other companies in

the South African media landscape due to its multiple chains of media production and distribution through video, print, and new media (Abiolu, 2017). Commodification and an analysis on the various monetisation strategies available on YouTube are significant for the promotion of new media platforms. Web 2.0, in its promotion of these features of internet use, is itself open to significant criticism. Particularly the way it validates a kind of advanced, promotional entrepreneurial capitalism that binds users to profit-making service providers through the exploitation of users' labour (Sparviero *et al.*, 2017). Web 2.0 also promotes the development of new types of dependence between people and companies. Web 2.0 can then profit excessively from that dependence by monopolizing and dominating the network activities that enable important aspects of human sociality. In addition, Web 2.0 demonstrates that there is no common ground between traditional and new media in the battle for corporate dominance and control over the technologies that distribute information across cultures and create meaning from it (Sparviero *et al.*, 2017).

The underlying rationale underpinning the development of Web 2.0 has been attributed to the internet boom crisis. Furthermore, revealing the massive surplus in data network and data traffic capacity, represented a sizeable investment for telecommunication providers that they were unable to recover or even break-even on costs (Schaff, 2002). Hence, one of the main challenges the owners of this infrastructure faced following the crisis was figuring out how to make it viable again. Following that time, Africa has seen the highest rates of bandwidth expansion, outpacing growth projections and experiencing the fastest increase in global internet capacity. Strong internet traffic growth is fueled by a combination of new internet-enabled technology, expanding broadband penetration in developing economies, higher broadband access rates, and bandwidth-intensive apps (Mzekandaba, 2022). In order to create a truly broadband internet, there were ongoing pressures to expand, grow, and upgrade the network, particularly at the consumer end. Mosco (2009) asserts that when political economy focuses more on media texts and less on labour involved in media production, distribution, and consumption of commodities, it shows the significance of the media text as a commodity. Rather than only emphasising the significance of labour in production and distribution (Abiolu, 2017). But fundamentally, the goal of corporations that offer telecommunication infrastructure remained the same; to spend money building networks that would enable those businesses to reap substantial profits from other people using the networks (Sparviero *et al.*, 2017).

Newspapers and television are part of the mass media, which has severe shortcomings when promoting a democratic society. Because of their enormous, fixed expenses (publishing facilities and television studios), businesses must target mass markets in order to remain profitable. As a result, they treat individuals like an audience to be used rather than as citizens who have a duty to participate in discourse (Cunningham and Potts, 2008 & Leadbeater, 2008). The following objectives attempt to generate economic value (Ozanich and Wirth, 2004 & Flew, 2011): the repurposing of media content across various platforms, the cross-promotion of media content across platforms, the development of brands, and the exploitation of subsidiary rights within PEM.

Some of the advantages of PEM include: the creation of labour convergence, which brings together trade unions from separate areas of the communication industries into one large union representing journalists, broadcasters, technicians, telephone workers, and those employed in the high-tech world (Mosco, 2009). The development of integrated unions that span the converging media and information technology industries provides the resources to better face the power of transnational business. A second labour strategy is the formation of worker associations which emerge out of social movements that aim to address a significant problem. How social movements use new media to counter the transnational political economy. In this respect, the growth of what Marx called the General Intellect lives on in information-rich and media-savvy movements that resist and demonstrate alternatives to the status quo. To this among workers who develop new movements and organisations in the world of informational or knowledge labour, primarily those who produce media content.

The emphasis on media institutions is understandable because today's global media conglomerates are very powerful. Companies deepen revenue stream when they take the same content and repackage it for use and reuse by subsidiaries that extend across the print, video, film, and new media sectors (Mosco, 2009). Mass media are important because they are the immediate site of commodity production and because they play an important, indirect, role, through advertising media, in the process of commodification throughout the economy. Therefore, indicating that the audience is the commodity. Two principal dimensions of media commodification to consider are: the direct production of media products and the use of media advertising to perfect the process of commodification in the entire economy (Mosco, 2009). Dallas Smythe (1977) took these ideas in a different direction by advancing the claim that the audience is the primary commodity of the mass media. According to him, the mass media are

constituted out of a process which sees media companies producing audiences and delivering them to advertisers. Therefore, audience labour or its labour power is the chief product of the mass media. In essence, companies can package and repackage customers in forms that specifically reflect both their actual purchases and their demographic characteristics. Companies want to market their products to this specific sector with as little advertising spilling over to people who would not be interested or able to buy (Mosco, 2009). This is a major refinement in the commodification of viewers over the earlier system of delivering mass audiences and it has been applied to practically every communication medium today, including the Internet, where social networking sites like Facebook provide detailed information on users. Political economy of media extends the analogy further by addressing the use of new technologies to expand the process of measuring and monitoring audience activity, and the introduction of pay-per channel, per-view, and per-song services. Moreover, political economy of media examines how audiences respond and resist with file sharing, blogging, social networking, and other forms of media use that aim to counter the prevailing commercial system (Mosco, 2009).

Some of the disadvantages faced by political economy of media is political economy thinks of power as a resource that is structured or rooted in, what Mahon (1980) called, an: “unequal structure of representation,” a feature built into a system that rewards market position with privileged status within social hierarchies. Economics does not consider many of the significant socioeconomic determinants of productivity, including corporate structure and ownership, access to information, education and training, and social background. It tends to ignore the relationship of power to wealth and thereby neglects the power of institutions to control markets (Rothschild, 2002). Digitization expands the commodification of communication content by extending the range of opportunities to measure and monitor, package, and repackage, information and entertainment. The packaging of material in the production of a video has provided a flexible, but limited, means to measure the commodity, and monitor purchases.

Challenges to the commodification of communication arose when what political economist Bernard Miège calls flow type communication systems arose, most importantly television (Miège, 1989 & see also McAllister and Giglo, 2004). How does one package a television program for sale to a viewer? Initially, commodification was based on an inflexible system of delivering a batch of broadcast channels into the home with viewers paying for the receiver

and for a mark-up or increase in the retail price of products advertised over the air (Mosco, 2009). This system did not account for differential use of the medium or make any clear connection between viewing and purchasing. It amounted to a system of delivering generic programming to a mass audience which was marketed to advertisers for a price per thousand viewers (Mosco, 2009). Each step toward the digitization of television has refined the commodification of content, allowing for the flow to be captured or, more precisely, for the commodity to be measured, monitored, and packaged in ever more specific or customized ways. As this medium has become digitized, companies can now offer many more channels and package them in many different ways, including selling content on a per view basis. Material delivered over television, the Internet, or some combination of these, and other new wired and wireless systems can now be flexibly packaged and then repackaged for sale in some related form with the transaction measured and monitored by the same digital system. Internet entrepreneurs learned the hard way that charging for content can be a risky business indeed. Technical, management, marketing, and consumer demand problems can often get in the way. Nevertheless, the growth of pay-per-view television, satellite-delivered subscription radio, video delivered over the Internet, and the rise of the iTunes pay-per-song system, which has made Apple the largest commercial distributor of music, demonstrate that new media commodification has made substantial progress (Murray, 2003; Lynch, 2004 & Thrift, 2006). This progress has been assisted by intellectual property laws that permit content owners, increasingly large enterprises, to control the use of content and even the formats through which content is delivered (Mosco, 2009).

Consumer choice is no longer constrained by limited spectrum or channel capacity, forcing customers to choose from a small number of options available to them. Instead, the economic repercussions of this market expansion have increased creation of all forms of video material, especially niche and specialty types (Blackburn, 2019). Internet distribution has great promise, but its commercial viability has not yet been demonstrated (Litwak, 2000). Moreover, in order to understand links between: "the dominance of profit orientation in the media, their close connection to the advertising industry" and whether this relationship influences the nature of online content likely to be monetized, claims regarding the myth of 'free media' are explored (Richter and Graf, 2015, p. 26). When political economists think about the commodity form in communication, they have tended to start with media content. Specifically, from this point of view, the process of commodification in communication involves transforming messages, ranging from bits of data to systems of meaningful thought, into marketable products (Mosco,

2009). However, the questions informing this research are how independent producers distribute content on YouTube, and how they monetize from this platform? Social media is not only a marketing and networking medium for companies and brands; however, monetisation features and tools have not been made clear for users. YouTube bills advertisers based on the number of ads impressions and shares this revenue with the YouTube content producers. Due to the platform's four billion daily video views, there is a significant business opportunity to earn money by producing video content for YouTube (Abhijit-Vhatkar, 2016).

Abhijit-Vhatkar (2016) recognizes that there are many options to gain an income from YouTube, as witnessed by those who become YouTube entrepreneurs. Some of these ways include partnership programme - Creators are able to earn money by monetizing their work with adverts by signing up for the YouTube Partner Programme. When a creator permits adverts on their YouTube videos and viewers watch those commercials, YouTube and the creator of the video divide the money, which helps both sides continue in business. According to Sweatt 2023, the creator gets 55% and YouTube gets the remaining 45%. Affiliate marketing - The technique of promoting and selling another company's goods or services in exchange for a commission is known as affiliate marketing. Affiliate marketers on YouTube have made the decision to advertise affiliate items through videos they produce for their YouTube channels. Therefore, companies must make sure that the affiliate items they choose will appeal to the kinds of viewers and channel subscribers who watch their videos (Geysler, 2022). Product promotion - includes any video you create is in some sense attempting to sell a brand product to your target audience, this can be done by stating that it is a paid promotion or placing the product in your video (Klass, 2022). Web site traffic creation - this can be achieved by Run paid ad campaigns, Engagement on social media, hired influencer collaboration, content marketing, SEO strategies and explore traditional marketing like TV, radio, or mail (Rogers, 2022).

As new media expand opportunities to commodify content PEM was chosen as a theory for the study because PEM is grounded in the process of digitization, which refers specifically to the transformation of communication, including data, motion pictures, and sound, into a common language and the power dynamics that impacts monetisation for independent producers distributing on online platform (Mosco, 2009).

3.4 CONCLUSION

This chapter (3) provided the study's theoretical framework which was centred on media convergence and the political economy of communication in the media. It is noteworthy to understand what influences people to watch YouTube videos and to further understand entrepreneur opportunities on YouTube. Since people watch YouTube videos that help with strategy and planning for YouTube business. They access information on particular topic, for entertainment, and because they are open to alternatives to traditional forms of entertainment. YouTube entrepreneurs must understand the target audience and niche area. YouTube generates revenue because users from all over the world view the content that YouTubers submit on the internet. It receives funding from sponsors to run various commercials alongside videos. However, the usage of algorithms creates distinct problems with regard to content access. Video-sharing websites and social media follow the same economic rules as traditional media, but unlike traditional media, they place a strong emphasis on catering to user preferences as part of their business model because the services in question are primarily financed by advertising the next chapter (4) presented the methodology to describe how data was elicited to realize the aim and objectives, and to answer the research questions.

CHAPTER FOUR

METHODOLOGY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Mysers (2009) states that a research method is a strategy of enquiry which moves from the underlying assumptions to research design, then to data collection processes. Further, measuring who will be most relevant to participate in data collection and how the data will be analysed, are significant. This chapter explains who will be studied, and how the data gathered was utilized to address the research objectives and answers the questions concerning the problem under investigation (Coolican, 1995). The chapter discusses the research paradigm, approach, design, sample selection, processes for data collection and analysis methods. It also explains the ethical considerations, reliability, and validity. All the details are expanded upon under the relevant headings in this chapter.

4.2 INTERPRETIVIST PARADIGM

The researcher applied the interpretivist research paradigm as a lens through which to ascertain philosophical assumptions reviewed through case study interviews. An interpretivist paradigm is a philosophical perspective “which centralizes human meaning and knowledge claims” as according to Dean (2018, p. 3). This paradigm is relevant in the study as a lens through which the researcher makes sense of convergence and the political economy of converged media through the perceptions, experiences, and individual knowledge of selected participants who are independent producers. The participants’ web-series formats are traditionally viewed on television screens. However, the format conventions were altered by the producers to fit a specific budget, targeting online audiences through these altered genres. The interpretivist paradigm is based on understanding the world as it is from the subjective experiences of the participants of the study.

According to Walsham (2006), the design and data gathering concerning interpretive case studies are guided by theory. The approach utilised is deductive because the researcher was guided by existing theories. Which are analysed through case studies to provide insight into an issue. The aim was to examine and interpret emerging digital trends through subjective experiences situated in social contexts of media consumption regarding online distribution.

Also, to explore opportunities and constraints that exist in South Africa's online video distribution ecosystem.

Interpretivists believe that data needs to be collected and interpreted in context as it promotes contextually rich data-elicitation and construction of knowledge (Dean, 2018). Thus, interpretivism is concerned with the in-depth understanding of phenomena. Accordingly, this study investigated the social phenomenon of new media which is central to digital broadcasting as an alternative for independent producers (Dean, 2018). In order to strengthen the validity of the research findings, the researcher assessed the common threads between the case studies to distinguish the pros and cons of YouTube to determine its suitability as a distribution platform for independent producers in a South African context.

4.2.1 Epistemology

Epistemology is rooted in phenomenology. A researcher's interest in knowledge and evidence is based on questions about what might constitute knowledge or proof of entities, organisations, or social reality (Mason, 2002). Since epistemology is a theory of knowledge, it addresses the principles that the researcher utilises to make-sense of social phenomena in order to create new knowledge. Hence, to determine precisely what the researcher could view as evidence or knowledge of social matters, epistemology serves as a guide to discuss philosophical difficulties. For instance, what are the necessary and sufficient conditions for knowledge acquisition? What are the sources? What does it look like and what are its boundaries? According to Matthias and Neta (2020) Epistemology seeks to answer such questions on social issues, including what qualifies beliefs as being justified, and is one's own mind's justification internal or external. The researcher's epistemological view in this study was shaped by the distribution, resources and monetisation knowledge found on YouTube and its mechanisms used in this platform. The researcher's other epistemological concern was traditional broadcasting in the South African industry, which was considered as a challenge that required to be reviewed and addressed.

4.3 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH APPROACH

The research utilised a qualitative methodology that sought to explore insights derived from experiences of participants who use YouTube to distribute their work. The nature of:

“qualitative research often focuses on how people or groups of people have different ways of viewing reality” (Hancock, 2009, p. 6). According to Hancock (2004, p. 398), “qualitative research investigates the meaning of social phenomena as experienced by the people themselves through why and how people make the decisions the way they do”. It produces findings derived from the real-world settings where the phenomenon of interest unfolds naturally engendering richness and quality of information (Patton, 2002).

Importantly, the qualitative research approach for this research was used to gain an understanding of underlying opinions, and motivations of online distribution on YouTube by independent producers instead of a traditional broadcasting medium. Hence it was most suitable for study. Potential challenges and techniques are part of the research process. A descriptive research approach of how individuals experience a phenomenon, is how the researcher aimed at understanding how individuals' lives are organised and structured. Descriptive research describes a particular phenomenon aiming to describe a pattern (Singh, 2022). In this regard, qualitative research, by its eliciting and evaluating the responses of the sample population, enables generalisations of the findings as Participant-centred data collection, and interpretation of data move from specifics to broad themes (Khaldi, 2017).

4.4 CASE STUDY RESEARCH DESIGN

Research design is defined as a plan of action to be employed for data collecting and analysis in order to assess a certain viewpoint (Mc Combes, 2021). Furthermore, it is a strategy for gathering data to answer the research questions (De Vos, Strydom, Fouché and Delpont, 2005). Yin (2016), details on how case studies in their methodology address the *how* and *why* questions in phenomena under study. Therefore, this research utilized a case study research design to highlight the information that may be garnered from a specific participant. The method to obtain data entailed purposely selecting a group of individuals rather than from a statistically representative sample of a broader population. Furthermore, the employed data collection method included structured individual interviews with four participants - chosen by using purposeful sampling. This is because they were relevant to the study since they distribute their content on YouTube.

Each case or participant presented data regarding a different television format, as well as demonstrating the difference in subscribed audiences to their channels. Yin (2016, p. 139) contends that the method of case study is: “more beneficial to study programmes and people but would be less beneficial to study events and processes”. Therefore, in order to strengthen the research, the case study approach on a person(s) concern *how* they do *what* they do successfully. This approach enabled the researcher to gain incisive insight into the research topic, unlike merely focusing on events. The participants who form case studies stem from a background of producing and distributing on YouTube, which is a new media phenomenon which the study explored. In a case study the single case is typically selected to illustrate an issue in a detailed setting which this research shared. Through the case study research design, the researcher further explored the extent to which independent producers perceived media and technological convergence to influence the quality, format, and length of content distributed by South Africans. This approach allowed the for first-hand knowledge through producers’ (interviewees’) experiences. Each experience shed insight on how the independent producers employed successful distribution plans by looking into their viewership analytics through their averaged numbers viewed on each episode. They also included distribution strategies on YouTube to understand challenges they confront on this platform.

4.4.1 Sample Selection

A sample group is a small group of participants who are not chosen at random for qualitative research (Hancock, 2009, p. 7). This understanding means that the chosen sample group needs to add value and deepen the argument or question to provide rich information and assist in exploring the problem being investigated. A sampling size of four case studies were utilized, which included four popular television formats that are now being adapted for YouTube. Hence, the study applied non-probability purposive selection. The sample should reflect the specific features of the population if it is sufficient (De Vos *et al.*, 2005) as conclusions about the population are frequently derived from the data (Leedy and Ormrod, 2005). The selection of an independent producer who represents different television genres distributed on YouTube aided in accurately reflecting online distribution. Furthermore, considering SA does not contain a significant number of YouTube television content distributors with a significant subscription, a perspective from four case studies of supports in the data derived in the conclusions. Qualitative research approach does not recommend using a particular number of samples rather

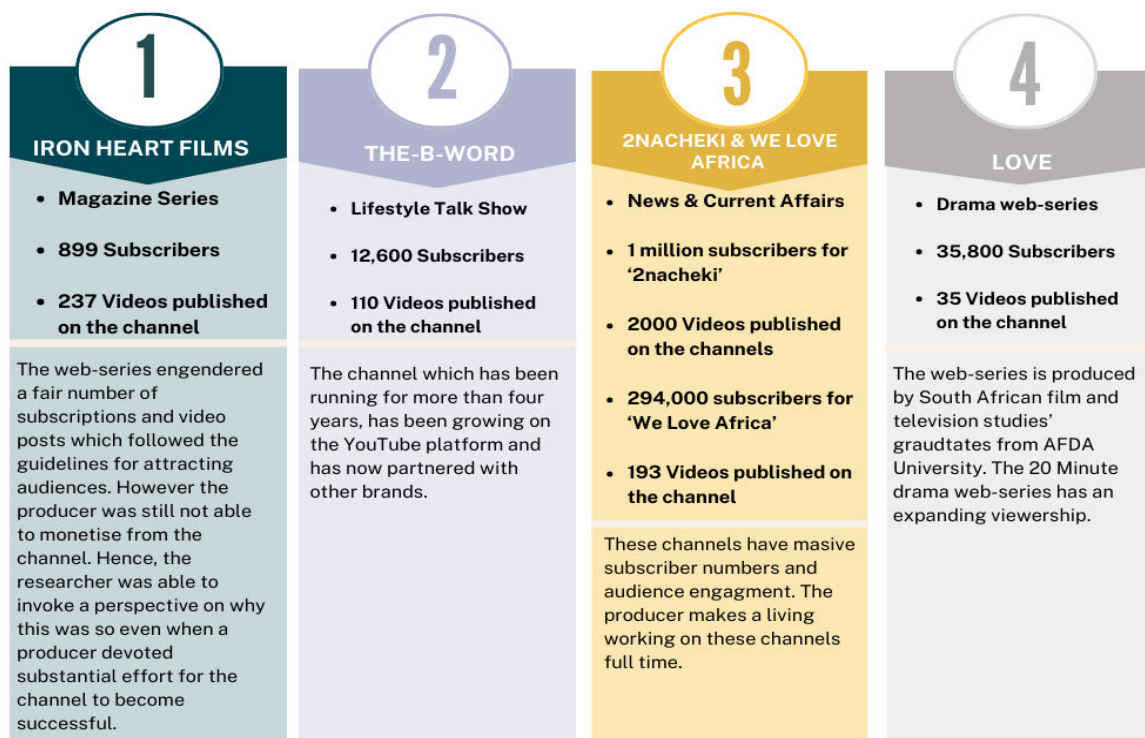
it is generally varied on the type of data to be collected therefore four participants can be justified as a case study (Campbell, 2015 & Subedi, 2021).

This study's sample inclusion criteria were selected based on a growing viewership ranging from 180 views to 10 million views on their distributed web-series. Furthermore, the cost-effective budget included utilising resources already available to them to film, whilst having high audience viewings was noteworthy to the researcher. Also, because participants had more than two years' experience with distributing online, they were aptly placed to address how YouTube served as a distribution alternative. Interviewing the producers of the shows was anticipated to yield relevant data because they are creators, and managers of the content distributed online, in addition to being thoroughly acquainted with the YouTube platform.

To avoid bias, the samples were representative of the population from which they were drawn being a heterogeneous group. The four case studies had similarities and one common feature; they had minimal budgets but had strong viewership between episodes, with views in SA ranging to 10 million views. However, what set them apart was that they studied different degrees in their undergraduate years in university, the different genres, and formats they would distribute including the different target markets, resources, and skills. For the purposes of this research, YouTube requirements for channels that can seek to monetize content and strong format performance is determined. This was based on a channel subscription that surpasses 1 000, a growing or steady audience viewership, and audience engagement demonstrated by their views for the case studies. However, one of the case studies had a subscription of less than 1 000 but has a viral video with huge audience viewership and reach.

4.4.2. Summary of Case Study YouTube Channels

The below table 4.1 offers a description on each case study:



4.5 DATA COLLECTION

Interviews were conducted in the study to gather information. Gill *et al.* (2008) claim that interviews offer in-depth understanding of a social phenomenon by examining experiences, motives, and viewpoints from particular individuals relevant to the study. The study conducted in-depth interviews by posing open-ended questions to evoke contextual understandings of web-series distributions. The interviews assisted in defining and dissecting interviewees' perceptions and experiences, which provided in-depth knowledge on internet distribution, specifically regarding South African independent producers. The data collection process was conducted to elicit incisive insights from all participants who were asked similar questions during one-on-one interviews. The benefit of one-on-one interview is that the researcher was able to control the dynamics of the discussion and engagement (Nyumba *et al.*, 2018). However, it may have been equally intimidating that the researcher's presence may affect the quality of data elicited from an interview process, but the setting and conduct of the interview contributed to enhanced interactive involvement from participants.

As a method of data collection, the four case study participants were selected as follows: The researcher conducted a thorough investigation on YouTube for SA television equivalent

content with high audience viewership and with different genres. The researcher then contacted Participants 1/LG, 3/KH, and 4/ZI using social media, requesting contact information to request their involvement in the study. The researcher had already obtained participant 2/BK contact information therefore she was contacted directly. The Participants consented to participate in the study, and future communication, such as interview dates and times, was arranged.

Table 4.2: Summary of Case Study Interviews.

Case Study 1	Participant 1/Lg [Male]	Interview Type: Zoom call interview Date: 2 November 2021 Length: 45minutes 14 second's long interview Recording tools: Recorded Zoom and voice note recording on cell phone
Case Study 2	Participant 2/Bk [Female]	Interview Type: Face-to-face interview Date: 3 November 2021 Length: 46 minutes 18 second's long interview Recording tools: the interview was conducted by utilizing a cell phone to record the conversation.
Case Study 3	Participant 3/KH [Male]	Interview Type: Zoom call interview Date: 25 November 2021 Length: 1 hour 30 minutes long interview Recording tools: Recorded Zoom call and supported by voice note recording on cell phone. However, there was an error when exporting the final file for the zoom call video and therefore could not be saved.
Case Study 4	Participant 4/Zi [Male]	Interview Type: Zoom call interview Date: 3 December 2021 Length: 41minutes 15 second's long interview Recording tools: Recorded Zoom call and supported by voice note recording on cell phone. However, there was an error when exporting the final file for the zoom call video and therefore could not be saved.

The researcher also took notes of salient information during the interviews. Furthermore, interview dates were negotiated according to the participant's schedule. The consent forms were administered through emails prior to the interviews. Participant 3/KH interview was

conducted by zoom call due to him being based in KwaZulu-Natal and the researcher being based in Gauteng. Whilst Participant 1/LG preferred to be interviewed on zoom call in order to record the session for his YouTube channel, and Participant 4/ZI was also interviewed through zoom due to his unavailability for a face-to-face meeting. Lastly, Participant 2/BK was interviewed in a face-to-face setting.







4.6 DATA ANALYSIS

Data included recordings of interviews, which were then transcribed, and key word observations shared by all participants were identified and annotated. Yin (2016, p. 143) describes analysis as: “examining, categorizing, tabulating, testing or recombining evidence, whilst it as a matter of giving meaning to first impressions, as well as to final complications by taking impressions and observations apart”.

Thematic analysis was used to examine themes evident in the data in order to find any aspects or variables influencing any positive outcome or difficulty participants may have generated, and to understand their behaviours, actions, and ideas (Alhojailan, 2012). These behaviours related to the methods used for distribution and promotion, the creation of content, pre-financing plans, available resources, the potential crew involved, platform policies, and advantages and disadvantages for independent producers on YouTube. The application of theoretical framework theories is based on the topics. The political economy of the media and media convergence were positioned appropriately. The political economy of media were categorised under themes related to finances, copyright, intellectual property, advertising, and commodities. Media convergence was categorised under themes related to online distribution, YouTube, video, and employability. Data patterns (themes) were found, examined, and reported using thematic analysis which meticulously arranged and described the findings through an analysis (Braun and Clark, 2006). The researcher followed the procedure which consisted of six steps: firstly, familiarisation with the data, secondly, creating preliminary codes, thirdly, looking for themes, fourthly, evaluating themes, fifthly, defining, and naming themes, and lastly, compiling the report. There were six themes coded by the following colours:

Table 4.3: Codes for the Case Study Interviews

Codes for the Case Study Interviews

1	<i>Entry and Employability into the Broadcasting Space</i>	
2	<i>Online video distribution</i>	
3	<i>YouTube Distribution Tools</i>	
4	<i>Copyright and Intellectual Property</i>	
5	<i>Political Economy - Monetisation on YouTube</i>	
6	<i>Government Regulatory Provisions</i>	

4.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Akaranga and Ongong (2013, p. 8) state that ethics within a study refers to conduct that distinguishes between what is: “acceptable and what is unacceptable”. In other words, Ethics is a set of rules that pertains to the norms of behaviour which guide moral choices which can allow for a wide range of ethical positions (Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill, 2011).

Ethical decisions and clearance in this study adhered to the ethical standards established by the University (UKZN) which was provided by UKZN’s Research Ethics Committee to ensure minimal risk due to human participation in the study. All data collected from the participants were acknowledged through sources. To ensure that the research would protect the rights of participants who are the subjects of the study, ethical consideration was paramount. Participants may not be affected by the research, therefore the right to privacy was adhered to, and the researcher’s reporting of the findings should not be misrepresented. This ensures that the participant’s identity and information remained confidential, and that the students, staff, and the university are protected.

In order for the researcher to ensure the right to privacy, and to promote the welfare of the participants and communities who assisted in the study, signing of consent forms is necessary (Berg and Lune, 2017, p. 43). Concerns about research ethics revolve around various issues of harm, consent, privacy, and confidentiality of data. Therefore, in this regard, the chosen participants' consent was obtained using an informed consent form, which included a written

statement in legal document format. Further, the nature and purpose of the research project was explained in detail verbally and in writing (consent form), confidentially, intellectual property and anonymity were guaranteed and declared in writing by the researcher to the participants of the study. The participants were given the choice to participate or not. They were also notified on the process of recording the interviews, the nature of how the data will be used, and the requirements that the participants must be aware of prior to the interviews. Also, participants had a right to access information with permission, and had the right to withdraw from the research process at any stage without being penalised. None of the participants withdrew from the study.

The researcher provided assurance of confidentiality and protection of participant's anonymity by recording subject names as pseudonyms; 1/LG, 2/BK, 3/KH and 4/ZI when reporting data. The participants original channel names were used as they made mention of them during the interview, therefore original channel names were used. Lastly, after the research had been concluded according to the Policy on research ethics at the University of KwaZulu-Natal which states that: "*data* on which any research publication is based such as video and phone recordings used to acquire data should be retained in the School for at least five years after publication" (University of KwaZulu-Natal policy on research ethics, 2014. p. 14). Therefore, any recordings, transcriptions, written notes, or any other document containing the participants' information was archived in password protected files. Participants were informed that the final copy of the research study was open for their perusal on request. The research further attached appendices which included the consent form template, edit certificate, ethical clearance certificate and Participant 2/BK transcription.

4.7.1 Ethical Approval

Ethical clearance was provided for this research which involved human participants under the approval number HSSREC/00003248/2021.

4.8. RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

Validity as a term is referred as: "the extent to which an experimental measure of adequacy reflects the real meaning of the concept under consideration" (Babbie *et al.*, 2011, p. 122). It is essential to ask how we can confirm whether a particular measure adequately reflects the

authenticity of the data collection and findings. Within qualitative research: "the amount to which an account accurately portrays the social realities to which it relates is referred to as validity, also known as credibility and trustworthiness" (Porter, 2007, p. 83). Since the study utilised a Thematic analysis method, Lincoln, and Guba (1985) advocate member checking as a means of improving accuracy in qualitative research, arguing that credibility is inherent in correct descriptions or interpretations of events. The member check interview is a more participatory technique of member checking and using the interview transcript and data analysis on individual participants, as well as the emerging results (Birt *et al*, 2016).

We test the validity by: "comparison, reference and noting patterns similar to former research done" (Babbie *et al.*, 2011, p. 124). The data was analysed according to a recognised data analysis process as explained in Section 4.6 above. The participants were not coerced, manipulated, or intimidated in any way to answer any question in a particular manner. The responses were well documented and presented in an authentic manner. A recorder was utilized to ensure that every response was recorded during the interviews, and that all transcriptions were captured verbatim. In order to ensure that the study adequately reflected participants' reporting of their real-life experiences, the researcher accurately transcribed and translated in English as the language the interviews were held in was in English. Case Study Participant 2/BK was given their documented transcript to verify and to member check which is a method used to: "validate, verify, or assess the trust- worthiness of qualitative results" (Birt *et al*, 2016, p. 1802). The transcript was sent to the participant through submission of an emailed transcript draft to the participant, in which the researcher received a return email assuring that the transcript was correct. Research reliability is the process of determining if a qualitative research study is reliable or trustworthy (Golafshani, 2003). It is a method of assuring or evaluating the study's quality. The involvement of primary and secondary supervisors in this study also further assisted to accomplish this.

4.9 CONCLUSION

This chapter provided clear indication of how the research methodology was applied, and how data collection processes were conducted. It further indicated why particular methods were preferred over others. The research aim, objectives, and questions were in line with the

methodologies that were chosen. Ethical considerations, validity, and reliability were also outlined. The next chapter (5) presented the data analysis and key findings. The research data was interpreted by observing patterns to assess why a pattern may or may not occur, and why the occurrence transpires so regularly. This described the benefits and concerns of the process, as well as identified the challenges and kinds of assumptions and representations that the data led to (Coolican, 1995).







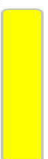
CHAPTER FIVE

DATA ANALYSIS AND KEY FINDINGS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter reports on the findings from the four in-depth interviews. The data from the interviews is categorised based on the alignment and appropriateness of the theme and sub-themes as presented in table 3 below. Ultimately, the research carefully analyses the data through the consideration of the objectives, and knowledge discourse of the theoretical framework through a thematic analysis.

Table 4.4: Summary of Thematic Themes and Sub-themes as related to the Research questions.

	Research Questions	Themes	Sub-Themes	Codes	Theories
1	What is the role of YouTube distribution in facilitating independent producer participation and dissemination of online content as experienced by South African producers?	5.2 Entry and Employability into the Broadcasting Space	5.2.1 Industry Networking 5.2.2 Employability limitations 5.2.3 Broadcaster and Producer Agreement, and its potential Risk		Media convergence
		5.3 YouTube Distribution Tools	5.3.1 YouTube SEO 5.3.2 Consumer Turned Producer		
2	What influence does National Government policy intervention have on online content regulations for independent producers in South Africa?	5.4 Producers Perceptions of Government Online Regulations	5.4.1 Intellectual Property Protection - Copyright is territorial. 5.4.2 Online Distribution Regulation In SA		Media convergence & Political Economy of Media
3	How are the business and marketing strategies utilized for successful distribution of web-series or shows to maximize viewership and monetize content for independent producers?	5.5 Producers' Funding and Crew Approach on YouTube	5.5.1 Producer's Production Methods 5.5.2 Financing and Return on Investment		Political Economy of Media
		5.6 Marketing Strategies to gain audience engagement and viewership	5.6.1 Cross-media advertising 5.6.2 Understanding YouTube niche and audience behaviour 5.6.3 The Audience as a Commodity: Addressing PEM	 	
4	How does media and technological convergence influence the relationships between medium, technology and quality of content pertaining to the distribution of independent content on YouTube?	5.7 Convergence influences online distribution conventions	5.7.1 Video Quality: Production-design, thumbnails, and titles		Media Convergence

5.2. FINDINGS

5.2.1. ENTRY AND EMPLOYABILITY INTO THE BROADCASTING SPACE

The first theme offered insight on employability and entry into the broadcasting space which addressed the study question 1 on the role of YouTube streaming services in the participation and dissemination of locally generated South African web content. It highlights participants' experience in the broadcasting space which focused on their motivation in migrating to YouTube. These were new opportunities for interaction with new technologies that cultivated the relationship between public broadcasters and their viewers (Lefowa, 2016). Public broadcasters can now offer larger areas for current programming or a platform where novel ideas for various genres can be piloted because of digital technology for independent producers.

5.2.1.1. Industry Networking

The first sub-theme identified was *Industry Networking*. This was a recurring theme addressing traditional broadcasting distribution and the entry opportunities offered to graduates, producers and scriptwriters. The findings of this study revealed that the majority of the participants found employment in the broadcasting industry through networking and contacting those in the sector to assist them enter the media industry. Participant 3/KH however, graduated in information technology and began working as a software developer who then migrated to YouTube as a hobby that ultimately became a source of generating revenue.

Participants 2/BK and 4/ZI were industry graduates, and although participant 1/LG went to film university he could not afford to complete and graduate. Nevertheless, the participants were employed or offered internship opportunities due to their networking while at university. The following answers from the respondents validated their networking within the industry:

Participant 2/BK: *“I graduated in early 2017 and I think in terms of formal employment I was able to do an internship through a connection that I had, so networking in the industry quickly became important about who you knew. Then I became unemployed or self-employed for a year and a half and I got a job that’s not related to the industry that would supplement income to put into YouTube. SA is a country that is full of talent, but opportunities are very scarce and there’s so much competition you are competing with the hundreds and thousands of emerging talents and you competing with the people at the top who get preference with these roles.”*

Participant 1/LG: *“It’s about who you know that one opportunity turned to many opportunities. The first gig I did, I emailed Brandon Jack who is a big director and*

producer who did a movie and a lot of ads. I just emailed one day from school . . . - next thing he replied and said he is shooting a commercial come through and that was my first set. Being proactive and reaching out. When you are a freelancer, you are the business, so you always be marketing your skills, talking to people, asking them what they are working on.”

Entry into the traditional broadcasting industry as highlighted by Participants 1/LG and 2/BK above validated that networking was essential and advantageous. Although the findings suggest networking as an advantageous for job entry, literature ascertained that there is unconscious bias in recruiting and hiring (Anderson, 2015; Carnahan & Moore, 2023). Also, as mentioned above by Participant 1/LG “*it’s about who you know*” meaning that getting opportunities is a subjective process, which means people hire based on their personal preference or impressions about a person’s skill/education, gender, race, class etc. Which emphasises the subjectiveness or potential biases that come with opportunities reliant on “*who you know*”. This raises concerns about diversity as individual producers who have proven to be reliable and with good reputations have increased chances of gaining access to better opportunities. This further emphasises the problem of inequality faced in the industry particularly in SA as expressed by Participant 4/ZI who took long to enter the industry without any networking advantages: He/she said:

Participant 4/ZI: *“It took 2 years and a half. So, I graduated 2015/2016, 2019 I got my first job. I went to auditions at the time it’s the only thing I use to do, and that one role was even luck.”*

Transformation and promotion of diversity is guided by legislation such as The Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act 4, of 2000. This is despite efforts by South African organisations to either advance the number of females and new talent in the industry or level the playing field by promoting diversity and creating more opportunities by means of collaboration. These organisations include Swift, WIFTI8 and the NFVF to correct the disparity between men and women within the film industry. A good example is that of the NFVF former CEO Zama Mkhosi who envisioned a sustainable and more diverse film industry because she believed in attracting new talent, granting access, and allowing participation to broad and diverse representatives (Mkhosi, 2016). As Participant 4/ZI supported:

“I think with government there are a lot of opportunities like web-series. I think the main issue is compliance, people don’t know that as much as you’re a youtuber, if you

don't have a business structure it's pointless. I know with NFVF I think we've gotten two funds for web-series, uhm and its literally just for the internet. So, it's just a matter of identifying the business entities that come with it."

Although Participant 4/ZI validates collaboration claims, the NFVF (2015) still faces challenges which include distribution of content, especially female-owned content, through independent production companies. Furthermore, film companies that end up dependent on government funding for film and TV projects for emerging filmmakers are awarded funding for a maximum of only four projects a year. Other barriers that film and TV directors face include financing their films and responses to their proposals as NFVF and as Participant2/BK confirmed:

"I have actually looked into some job opportunities within traditional media because now they are looking at more content producers. So, I think they're there but quite limited and it is quite competitive as well."

Consequently, for most creators in the television and film industry, networking and gate keeping remain barriers to entry since this is a network-based industry (NFVF Transformation Report, 2022). Although the present study is on South African participants, a similar explorative study was conducted in Canada. Knight, (2022) investigated the opportunities and challenges in networking in the broadcasting industry. The goal of Knight's study was to pinpoint the causes of Black and Indigenous Women of Colour, who were discriminated against from networking events in the film and television industry. In a selection procedure, the researchers chose 40 volunteers from across Canada from the film and television industries. The study revealed that women considered networking events as worthwhile since they might lead to both short and long-term career progress, provide new professionals with a foothold in the sector, and assist in their recognition within the industry. The participants described the instant advantage to their careers of attending networking functions. They highlighted it as influential in increasing representation behind and in front of the camera and encouraging new and safer production methods for movies and television. However, despite being aware of the benefits of networking gatherings, some participants expressed the lack of diversity, micro-aggressions, failure to address historical shortcomings, absence of demographic information of events, and lack of professional development. Thus, Knight (2022) revealed that the negative experience discouraged some from attending future networking events.

Knights' results are similar to the study's findings as SA faces the challenge of limited networking events in the media space, thus limiting access or entry. Networks and gatekeepers remain sizeable hurdles to transformation in an industry appreciably based on relationships, referrals, and word of mouth (*NFVF Transformation Report, 2022*). This is especially challenging in the context of film and television networking events and expos that only occur in Cape Town and Johannesburg which create exclusion for emerging producers based in the other seven provinces (*Fame Week Africa, 2022*). Furthermore, according to Geertsema (2008) SA's media faces challenges in agitating for change to ensure equal and fair representation to the entire population. Thus, an alternative distribution platform that does not gate keep equal representation is necessary (Musetsho, Nicoleta and Dobrin 2021 & Holten, 2022).

Lastly, Participant1/LG also expressed that he did not possess a full academic degree qualification in television. Also, participant3/KH, did not have any media qualification while Participants 2/BK and 4/ZI do. This demonstrates that the accessibility and availability of positions for independent producers on YouTube as non-graduates can also still distribute.

5.2.1.2. Employability Limitations

The findings further suggest employment *limitations*. Participants established that entry level can be through a 2-year wait, unpaid internship or a one project opportunity which might not guarantee full-time permanent employment. As participant 4/Z1 and 2/BK noted:

Participant 4/ZI: *"It took 2 years and a half, so I graduated 2015/2016, 2019 I got my first job."*

Participant 2/BK: *"The internship was behind the scenes and wasn't necessarily what I wanted to do, and also it was an unpaid internship. At the end of that period, I was offered a formal employment on the next production, but I declined because I did not want to go down that path, I wanted to focus on creating and directing."*

Participant 2/BK above, commented on her first industry experience which was an unpaid internship, and she was not offered employment in accordance with her skilled set. Participant 4/ZI was unable to secure employment for 2 years. Participant's responses are reflective of youth unemployment in SA, which unemployment in SA is one of the highest globally. It was

discovered that impediments included the lack of information, limited access to job training, frictions in labour markets, and employers' reliance on referrals through professional networks for hiring (Shaw and Wheeler, 2022) which this study also discovered the same. Lack of information, limitation to access and frictions was also experienced by the participants, as per sub-theme 1 on networking. Moreover, graduates could face the challenge of time and money required for applicants to submit their applications in person due to the distance between applicants' place of residence and where employment is located (Kerr, 2017). Additionally, South African schools conduct erroneous and inconsistent assessments of students' progress which restricts employers from depending on students' educational background to distinguish potential candidates for possible job prospects (Shaw & Wheeler, 2022). As a result, meaningful participation, and inclusivity in the industry for the majority remains fanciful (*NFVF Transformation Report, 2022*). Therefore, emerging producers in SA who are unemployed, retrenched, or confronted by barriers regarding access, explore YouTube as an alternative. Moreover, there are ways to apply and obtain current technological strategies to mitigate the obstacles that young South African employment-seekers experience.

Responses from participants indicated that even if one was able to enter the industry, it was a short-term opportunity which forced them to seek employment elsewhere. This is yet another limitation for a new graduate who does not network or find a production set that is hiring for multiple seasons. Hence, the factors that led participants to choose YouTube as a means of distributing their web-shows. Responses also indicated the positive transformation to utilising YouTube in SA. The supporting responses are presented below:

Participant2/BK: *"I graduated performance theatre and screen and the measures I took was a lot of auditioning, even before graduating and studying I had been auditioning, that for the most part was pretty unsuccessful and after hearing a lot of no's for people to put me on their platform and that didn't work out in the long run. So, I started my own platform to do what I wanted to do. I decided to put all my energy on my platform."*

Participant 2/BK further stated: *"I think there are a lot of opportunities for emerging content producer. Like I said it's so accessible to anyone, you don't even necessarily need to be qualified in any production to actually start on YouTube . . . I work a lot with video producing and video editing and it was through starting my YouTube channel that I gained those skills. Those are things I did not know how to do because I studied something completely different but now the bulk of my work and the*

opportunities that I get that sustain me and my business is through the skills I've gained by doing YouTube. There are so many opportunities on these streaming platforms and they still emerging especially in SA where it's so new."

Participant1/LG: *"And I thought okay what's the best way to market my business, so I made videos so it could lead to me getting more business. Continued . . . But another reason why I started doing it, after I dropped out, once you leave film school it's like you know nothing."*

Participant 1/LG further expressed: *"I started watching youtubers when I had a 9 to 5 job and discovered it would be nice to live off it and make content for brands. I tried it but it's hard to crack for subscribers, and for brands to notice you. I'm sure you'd have to have 5 000 people for them to be like, okay. Also, I like producing videos."*

Participant 4/ZI: *"It stemmed from being an artist who couldn't get work so I started shooting my own monologues and putting them on YouTube and every time I would go to castings a lot of actors would ask me if we could do some stuff together. So eventually . . . I just took everyone and put them on the show, and it just sort of just happened. It's not something that was planned out to the T. As you can tell the structure of it is that; we shoot one episode, we produce that, we check it out, and the cycle continues like that, and we shot the whole season and started distributing one-by-one. We shoot one episode, release, write a new script release that, it was quiet a slow process and it wasn't really conventional."*

Participant4 /ZI further stated: *"Skits are doing really fantastic on YouTube. The platform is the most universal platform because what it does allow is connect the entire world to you, so it's not necessarily a level of distribution like Showmax which is limited to x amount of people. The fact that you can connect yourself to the entire world is absolutely fantastic; for example, 'Love' has people from Nigeria, UK, USA, and it's like so broad. Distributors like DSTV would have never been able to get half those people watching the show or even interested in the show. It's a good platform that's consistently growing and I do feel as though with the lack of influence in SA, there is a lot of room to grow but the majority of South Africans still don't have internet, and that's something we always need. You know that there's people who still rely on SABC, and that's their medium. There're crazy possibilities and plenty of opportunity for*

development in SA in that regard. I think if you look at something in America, for example, when people call themselves youtubers it's not like I'm a youtuber, they say it with zest because they are able to sustain their lives doing things online. I think SA is slowly going to get there. there are people already getting paid for just their YouTube channels and creating content."

Participant 3/KH: *"I think even to leave my work took some time. I had to make sure that I had enough money and that I'm sure in what I'm doing, I treat it as a business, and it can sustain us for a long time. Mostly when you make content it's like music; people get bored, and then someone else who is fresh will come into the space. But our approach was that we build it as a media company, we always introduce new people and people are always interested. When we started there wasn't a lot of people on YouTube, so we were doing YouTube to get discovered, and it was even easier to get a lot of views on YouTube, but now competition is very high because a lot of people are flocking onto YouTube."*

Short-term employment exposed the industries' lack of professional development to build up experience in SA. Television seasons can run for 24 episodes or more for drama series or magazine shows which is the nature of the industry. While news networks and sporting shows run continuously which provides long-term opportunities for professional development. Evidently, having the appropriate connections is favoured in the highly competitive industry, as noted by participant 1/LG and 2/BK who recognized that if you are an emerging independent producer starting with no existing connections in the film and television industry, to reach where you intend to go you must work considerably harder. Since access to human networks is limited in SA and barriers prevail for many producers, YouTube can be considered an alternative as attested by the participants (Dziba, 2017).

5.2.1.3. Broadcaster and Producer Agreement and its potential Risk

The sub-theme *broadcaster and producer agreement and its potential risk* explored whether as an employee of a show produced on traditional broadcasting channels should have IP rights, copyrights, or royalties for the work executed. The following articulations emerged:

Participant 1/LG: *"When they are commissioning you, they are financing the show and if they want to get another production company for season 2, and you signed the*

contract that's how it is and the only power you have is saying no. The implications of saying no however mean that your content would not get broadcasted and filmed."

Participant 1/LG further detailed: "They could give you money and you could run away with it. If you don't want to lose your IP, then you need to take out your own money then you have legs to stand on and license it for this amount or a year then you can do the heavy lifting like licensing and selling it. If you want that, you have to learn the business side of film and TV. We like being creatives, but we don't want to learn the business side of it. Multi Choice is not a monopoly; they are the only people buying content. So, if no one else is buying you can't really go anywhere else; you don't have a lot of leverage - it's either take it or leave it. It's nice now that we have Netflix, but they also do the same thing, if they finance the show, they own it forever. Unless if your deal says we are co-financing it we both can earn equity."

Participant 3/KH: "But the broadcasters are the ones taking the risk and taking out the money for production which is even a bigger risk. I think it's almost similar with YouTube; it can happen that you might create something today and obviously I have to pay the production team that created the work. But I'm investing my money on producing knowing it might not do well. Because it happens that you create something but doesn't do well for six months and then it only becomes discovered after a year and then starts to make returns. As long as a video is online, it makes money, but I think it's a risk taken by the person who is a production manager at that time. If I say let's create this show and fund from my own pocket. I'm not sure if I'm going to make returns. Normally if you are an actor or presenter once you have done the work you will want your money, and you are not really sure if the show will do good or not. Unless there is an agreement that you get paid based on how a show performs, and at that it's very difficult to monitor because as I said content might not perform well at first, but long term it does. Maybe after 2 years that's when people start discovering it; or after 3 months, it will generate money from your video because people will watch when they watch on YouTube."

Participants 4/ZI views: "And there's the Copyright Amendment Bill. Actors are breaking and without enough money and its hard; and it should move that way because honestly without the actors and the creatives there wouldn't be a show. But the problem is we literally have only 1 buyer."

The participants stated that there is a risk that traditional broadcasting takes in commissioning producers' works therefore understanding why broadcasters retain the IP of the show. Broadcasters retaining IP is not the ideal preference for the participants but due to financial challenges faced by producers, they find themselves having to lose ownership of their IP to broadcasters. Participant 3/KH suggested how it should work the same for productions that distribute on YouTube; as returns and viewership numbers are not promised, therefore the broadcaster and production company commissioning the show are taking the risk through terms of trade as performance is uncertain. This is also identified by Zoellner (2022, pg. 590) who stated that: "The financial dependency on broadcasters for income, the uncertainty of success, and the intense competition within the sector place a significant amount of economic pressure on independents, especially in the development stage of production." Arguably, broadcasters therefore have no choice but to commission larger production companies in hopes to garner higher returns. However, that further causes high inequalities in economic and cultural power. This set-up creates practices in the television industry focused on economising development activities and to manage the risk and uncertainty of the commissioning process (Zoellner, 2022: 592). Additionally, in the findings, industry graduates have familiarized themselves with the business of creative industry on YouTube. This explores opportunities in production companies and those presented by screenwriters as the traditional media market is competitively aggressive as asserted by Participant 2/BK previously. This idea was further drawn by the perceptions expressed below:

Participant 1/LG: *"When clients want a video, they put restrictions but if it's your own video then I like to have that outlet because there is no brief, no one can tell me what to do."*

Participant 3/KH: *"Broadcasters are the ones who have tried to approach us because what we have mostly for, We Love Africa and 2 nacheki we couldn't avoid it because sometimes we have agreements with those companies and they try to control you and we have been avoiding having someone control our narratives, and everything we want to do. We are fully independent. We tried to do something different from what mainstream media is doing. Because mostly our two channels, apart from Howzit Mzansi, is just entertainment but these ones are focusing on Africa on education and everything that is African. We tell our own African stories, so we have been avoiding*

being influenced. We go against things that are Western. We even find that people want to invest but we realise that they want a certain percentage but once they own a certain percentage they start to control.”

As noted above, Participant 3/KH built a strong brand that television broadcasters approached him as an online distributor. However, he resisted partnership due to the control traditional broadcasters could exert over him.

Participant 4/ZI further revealed: *“Looking at production companies . . . in the SA commercial space platforms we have the opportunity to really express ourselves in a manner that isn’t confined.”*

Both participants 3/KH and 4/ZI revealed that migration of content moves digitally, and individuals have the freedom to create what they want in the space. Although they are fully independent on YouTube, Participant 3/KH alludes to attempting something different and innovative to mainstream media patterns. Furthermore, Participant 3/KH notes vital aspects such as western influence and control, stating: *“We even find that people want to invest but we realise that they want a certain percentage but once they own a certain percentage they start to control above.”* Bennett (2015) supports Participant 3/KH assertion on account of, there is a question of how the realities and practicalities of television production affect ideals once there is western influence and control. In which, Zoellner (2022) argues that there is therefore no freedom from state influence, monopoly power, market forces, and fear of prosecution.

5.3. YOUTUBE DISTRIBUTION TOOLS

The second recurring theme concerning the role of YouTube distribution in facilitating independent producer participation and dissemination in the study was *YouTube distribution tools*. This theme emanated as a result of the participants' opinions on the employability restrictions and the YouTube distribution choice that were mentioned in section 5.2.3. This theme addressed YouTube dissemination for independent producers in SA, creating for the application, platform resources, and its' algorithm. These tools allow for producer participation recognised as participatory culture. The participants' positive perception of the site was based on the findings, which also inform the subtheme of YouTube SEO's.

5.3.1. YouTube SEO

Participant 3/KH asserted below to the sub-theme of *YouTube search engine optimization (SEO) mentioning, analytics, tag, thumbnail, video quality, upload schedule, and audience*. The applications indicated by participants on viewing time, titles, who and where their audience is, when to post, and what languages are most effective. This assists independent producers by giving analytics to be able to better operate as their own broadcasting channel. The participants articulated the following:

Participant 1/LG expressed: *“The things that I’ve learnt was like audience retention, with the analytics you can see people only watch the first minute or you can see that people watch a lot from 3 minutes to 5 minutes then you can see that . . . oh . . . okay . . . people are interested in this more. Let’s say if you make a 1-hour video and people only watch from 30 minutes to 40 minutes then you know that all of this stuff sucks, people only want this, I can even make a cut down the video and re-upload it at 30 minutes the video will blow up even more, it helps knowing how long your videos should be . . . also, sometimes longer videos work better than shorter videos. Which I don’t know how that works, maybe they play it while they are cleaning, I don’t know how that works because you would think that short videos are better but not really. Also, like meta data, you have to write the description and the file name when you upload it like ‘how to shoot weddings’ needs to be in your file name and description, in the title, even in the meta tags so that it’s easy to find. So, it’s a lot of work because you have to type all these different questions that are similar to your title so you can find it.”*

Participant 3/KH: *“YouTube has analytics right, which gives you all the information you need. YouTube buddy and video IQ are tools to know how to spy on your competition. Let’s say you have a channel that does similar content to mine, I want to see which tags are used by the channel and how many views are accumulated and how much it uploads. Those tools will spy for you on those channels and reveal the background of those channels. In terms of analytics, it will tell you how to tag the thumbnail and tell you if your video is good quality or not, they can tell you the best time to upload, so it will tell you that your audience mostly are live, and I know the best time for uploading one of our channels is 4pm on Mondays. So those are the analytics, so when you post at this time your audience is online. But you should always make sure that your video is performing well within the four hours because the analytics are there. They tell you that a lot of people are consuming your content are based in other*

countries, like you get that mostly our audience is from UK and the USA and maybe 30% are from SA and the other 25% from the rest of Africa. But the benefit of your audience being in other countries is that there is something called a CPM that I explained earlier. So, in those countries their CPM is like 10 times better than the CPM from Africa because they are English speaking countries and the advertisers, they spend a lot of money better than our advertisers. Meaning that if you create content that is being consumed in the UK and USA, you make much more money than the content you consume locally.”

Participant 4/ZI: “With engagement, I think to connect with the audience is another thing where you know if you put up a video and they can like and dislike, give their comment about how they feel about it and that’s the engagement process. I feel that’s the real difference where you know if someone doesn’t like something they can tell us that I didn’t like this part, but people don’t really do that. The only other thing I can think of is the premier option when you are about to release something you can have this whole countdown thing, and you can be live at the same time, and they can comment as the show goes on. I think for me it’s that the engagement factor, but I think there’s a level of engagement with your audience different from broadcasting.”

From the above it is evident that distribution characteristics and the social engagement embedded on the YouTube platform have been prevalent in allowing creatives the space to create, produce and distribute whilst having free access to audience and viewership. A key component of YouTube’s brand identity is the platform’s openness to anyone, even members of under-represented groups (Burgess and Green, 2018). Furthermore, despite the positive distribution tools offered on YouTube as suggested by all the participants; Losifidis and Wheeler (2016) contend that due to privacy concerns brought on by merger activity and the concentration of power in these digital giants, social media economics run counter to the claims that consumers have transformed into producers and that digitisation promotes greater freedom and citizen empowerment. Previously, media markets and regulations were segmented based on how they were delivered in contrast to telecommunications, which was governed by economic principles with an emphasis on fostering investment and providing reasonable access to the network (Dwivedi *et al*, 2021). In the past, broadcasting was subject to content regulations to encourage a variety of content. However, as a result of technological convergence, previously separate types of media have converged with the internet serving as the greatest and most disruptive example (Michalis, 2014). Participant 3/KH’s description

identifies that YouTube offers independent producers a platform to market themselves, to stand and act as their own production companies and reach target audiences by optimising content through its SEO's. This seems to suggest that businesses are bridging the gaps that once separated the mass media, telecommunications, and computer industries. This is due to digital convergence which in turn was adopted by Google that allowed for converged networks to monetise as evidenced by Participant 3/KH (Losifidis & Wheeler, 2016).

As Participant 4/ZI further highlighted, through likes and dislikes features, YouTube provides audiences a means to let independent producers know if they enjoy their work. Also, establishing a premiere countdown increases audience interest and encourages people to consume material as participants. The participants also offered their understating of YouTube's algorithm. From their responses it was evident that they did not fully possess a comprehensive understanding of YouTube's algorithm feature, as revealed below:

Participant1/LG: *“The mysterious forces that must push your video so more people can see it.”*

Participant4/ZI: *“The algorithm game is always changing. I think that's something that needs to be studied consistently, but from like what I was saying, and you also mentioned with regards to social media having a certain timeframe? It's a window of when something goes up that it needs to reach a certain number of views or certain number of comments. But at the same time, our episodes have lived for more than three years and only last year or year and a half ago did it start reaching its audience proper. Because as much as there is an algorithm, there's a surge . . . So, if someone is searching for someone else's name, just make sure their name is embedded in it. From the very beginning we would list all our cast and all our crew. There is always a caption area where you can hashtag and stuff.”*

Thus, with an altering algorithm Participant 4/ZI describes the way in which algorithms potentially influence audiences to watch their distributed videos. Participants further indicated what value they bring to YouTube:

Participant2/BK said: *“YouTube gives us a platform and a space, so we are basically renting space on their platform, and they are exposing us to or giving us the opportunity to be exposed to build our own audiences so that's the value that we create. In terms of the value that YouTube gets from us? Well without independent creators or production*

companies or anything, YouTube would not exist, so the creatives are YouTube's bread and butter. Also, our originality and our creativity are the two biggest values I think as creators we give to YouTube."

Participant 4/ZI: *"For me I wouldn't want to speak to YouTube or the internet alone. I think we were given the platform to create other things, like using what we have as a reference. Like look, this is what we have for you, and we are able to do adverts and short pieces of content for corporates; you know just by showing the stuff that was done online. So, it's a brilliant place to start, and of course the main thing with YouTube, is literally just consistency."*

Conclusively, the responses emphasized how participants considered themselves as businesses as testified by Participants 1/LG and 3/KH. Research has identified that the advertising industry is looking for efficient techniques to maximise return on investment when it comes to social media. This was fostered by social media's increasing importance and advertising agencies dedicating more of their media resources to social media (Mir and Zaheer, 2012). This supports Participant 4/ZI's assertion which demonstrates content for advertisers and media conglomerates through expressive means online. This is further supported by Mir and Zaheer's (2012) recognition that today's cross-platform communications for social media branding depend on media relations tactics from both traditional and digital PR, as well as social interaction, content marketing, brand publishing, media relations, SEO methods, and creativity. As brands require content plans that incorporate marketing activities and tools because they are utilising YouTube for advertising and marketing, the easiest way to do this is to work with a production company that is familiar with YouTube (Mir and Zaheer, 2012). Participant 2/BK said: *"YouTube gives us a platform and a space, so we are basically renting space on their platform whilst producers are YouTube's 'bread and butter' as they are dependent on producers to distribute on their platform."* Therefore, there is a necessity to understand the platform and the way audiences work because they have access to information as the participants do.

Moreover, because of its accessibility and user-friendly broadcast-yourself design, YouTube's technological and social aspects encourage the creation of a participatory culture among its users, enabling them to create and share content. According to Chau (2010: 67), the Henry Jenkins *et al* (2009) participatory culture framework is characterised by five elements being:

Relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, Strong support for creating and sharing one's projects, Informal mentorship, A belief that contributions matter, and a sense of social connection. Firstly, due to its minimal entry barriers and accessible involvement curve, YouTube is a relevant arena for independent producers as the participant below validates Chau's claim:

Participant 1/LG: *"It's great, its growing, literally everyone has a YouTube channel now, now we have the opportunity to make our own content . . . you don't need to talk to commissioning editors, you just get a Gmail account, and you just click upload. Which opens up a world for all types of content, I've realised that if I want to Google something, I like watching the South African review of it, versus watching stuff from America, you get direct experience, and look at how people are making money."*

The popularity of each user video rises as a result of their participation which is measured in terms of view counts. Members who feel comfortable participating in a comment thread sign up for a free account so they can leave comments, interact, and rate video segments as Participant 1/LG suggests in the above extract: *"you just get a Gmail account, and you just click upload"*. Most of the user involvement is accounted for by these activities, which are also essential to know how the community functions. Feedback interactions motivate content creators to produce more videos, but they are critical in the ways video content is circulated within the community (Chau, 2010).

Participant 3/KH: *"There is also something called watch time which when people are watching for longer tells the algorithm that, this video is interesting let's suggest it to other people, who may have an interest in content like this. Those people might even be people who are not subscribers - most views on YouTube they don't come from subscribers they come from people who haven't subscribed . . . When you create content, you create content that will be favoured by YouTube because YouTube wants people to always be sitting on their platform. You don't want to create what will influence people to leave their platform right? So that's why your video has to be interesting that the quality you were referring to, that yes it won't be too perfect, but the quality should be there so that the viewer can watch it. And it must not have bad quality because bad quality results will affect the watch time and a viewer won't watch the video for long."*

Strong support for producing and sharing one's projects is the second characteristic according to Chau's participatory framework. YouTube's primary function is the sharing of video content as Participant 3/KH confirmed above. In addition to a clear and user-friendly interface, it also provides many tutorial films to assist new users at different levels of involvement. Hence, the style of the home page is designed to simplify access to popular information quickly. *Informal mentoring* is the third characteristic in which How-to-videos on a range of subjects are one of the primary categories in the enormous volume of user material. One of the most well-liked themes is how to participate in the YouTube community instructional video clips as participants affirmed below through their consumption of how-to/educational video on YouTube.

Participant 1/LG: *"I mean I like watching tech videos, I watch a lot of HD videos, whenever there's a new iPhone or new laptop, those are my shows. I realised that I love tech a lot, funny videos, videos about filmmaking, podcasts, obviously I love things that are educational and entertaining at once, short films I do watch some of them, movie trailers."*

Participant 4/ZI: *"Geez, I just watch tutorials hey, to be honest because I do a whole lot of self-taught stuff."*

The fourth characteristic is *a belief that contributions matter*. Visitors substantially benefit the community at every level of engagement from watching a video to making answer clips as Participant 1/LG affirms in 5.6 cross-media advertising. Participant 1/LG describes how he *engages communities on Facebook and therefore creates his videos answering to audience's* questions as Chau (2010: 71) describes as "response clips". Participant 3/KH and 4/ZI further supported audience engagement claims:

Participant 3/KH: *"They have to feel like they are family because engagement is important, you have to engage, that's where your content becomes viral because you have to engage . . . so, it's always about posting something relevant to your target audience so you can't go post something about doing make up it's not that when it's not their audience."*

Participant 4/ZI: *"I think the only people who comment and stuff that I've seen is like "Yoh, love the show from Ghana" and stuff like that that's the kind of stuff I've seen"*

and messages. I think for me it's that engagement factor, but I think there's a level of engagement with your audience different from broadcasting."

Every view is considered by the database and the most popular videos are highlighted on the home page as Participant 3/KH described above as: *"YouTube pushing its algorithm to suggest videos to people if it is performing well"*. Additionally, as Participant 3/KH emphasised and as acknowledged in Chau's literature, YouTubers are more likely to maintain subscribers and increase views if they consistently read and respond to their audiences. Lastly, *a sense of social connection* is created on YouTube, but a limited number of social networking features are accessible to promote member connections. Members receive notifications anytime a new video is broadcasted on a subscribed channel, and registered users are given access to a customised profile, friends list, and subscriptions list so they can keep track of their favourite channels. As all the participants perceived, independent YouTube producers have developed several creative strategies for encouraging cooperation and support despite debates that YouTube is not intended to be a Web platform for real-time communication and teamwork.

Participant 3/KH further stated that new competition and innovative applications are competing with the YouTube platform to get their audience tuned in as articulated below:

He said: "But at the moment I really feel as though Facebook is really coming to take up space of YouTube. That's why you even find YouTube being more innovative now because there are new platforms coming in like TikTok, and Facebook . . . Because Facebook is rewarding creators 10 times better than what YouTube is rewarding them. And on Facebook it's easier for a campaign to go viral, unlike on YouTube. This is because on Facebook they have a share button so it's easier if you put content now it's easier to become viral because it's actually good for creators because they have more alternatives if my content doesn't do well here, I can distribute it anywhere else. I feel there's more money online for me then on traditional media because the space is not very big."

YouTube faces competition against online video distribution platforms such as TikTok and Facebook because they financially reward better than it. Also, it is easier for a campaign to go viral on the Facebook platform (Grierson, 2022). However, similarly when using YouTube, the video product is also argued to disseminate to markets considerably quicker because knowledge spreads rapidly and has the potential to go viral (Prasad, 2018). However,

notwithstanding Prasad's (2018) claims, Participant 3/KH's Facebook assertion was further sustained by Participant 4/ZI who supported the views of TikTok and Facebook pushing viral videos and monetisation therefore validating the idea that competition for YouTube platform: He said:

"I think its brilliant that we are moving in that direction and just not only on a Netflix front but from a very low-end film maker or content creator who doesn't have access to those things. But you know the fact that you can do that on YouTube, you can do it on Facebook, I think Instagram really need to jump on that and TikTok I think people are doing that a lot on TikTok. So, the fact that the very same platforms that are used the most are getting you paid then that's dope . . . Being in charge of your own finances is key and I think that's for a creator to be able to be in charge of their own future in terms of how they monetise stuff."

The participants' findings on Facebook suggested interesting views on YouTube versus Facebook distribution as comparative platforms. YouTube and Facebook are the two largest social networks online which users use each for various reasons. Smythe asserted in 1960 that to assess that PE was primarily used as a communication strategy to investigate the structure and policies of communication institutions in their social settings therefore studying questions arising from administration, funds, production, organisation, and control policies; and studies developing in these areas were essentially limitless (Wasko, 2012). Many of the fundamental issues in media and communication studies continue to be relevant today despite the swift shift in media ecology. As a consequence of concentration of media, convergence further erodes the lines separating different media industries and permits businesses to amass power across industries. Private media's corporate and profit-maximising practices have evolved to more aggressive tactics as they try to increase their market worth (Losifidis and Wheeler, 2016). With the help of YouTube, unique content producers may now easily distribute their videos and start their own social media businesses. However, Facebook has recently improved its live streaming and video capabilities making it a beneficial online platform for social media creators as further recognized by Participant 3/KH and 4/ZI. Facebook's feed may contain sponsored or promoted videos that appeal to viewers to garner views but arguably, YouTube is the most popular site for producing videos and receives more views than Facebook.

Distributors on YouTube can also advertise goods and make money by working with businesses. However, Facebook has a higher impression share than YouTube in the debate that

Facebook increases reach on social media if you want more people to see your videos, or you can buy Facebook likes. Conversely, you can also choose to buy YouTube subscribers to gain popularity and go viral (Grierson, 2022). A continuously expanding consumer culture has emerged because of the commercialisation process which also involved the rise of advertising. Market concentration has resulted from this and one of the main difficulties is the extent of competition in the various media industries. The exploration of industrial sectors is highly pertinent even though several of these industries are converging and merging (Wasko, 2012). Due to media convergence as demonstrated by participants having more options for video distribution platforms, social media platforms share the characteristic of being broadly available and cost-free across all socioeconomic spaces and the corporate sector. Social networking sites are considered technologies of revolutions by technology experts like Tapscott (2015) because they allow for production and consumption overlap so that consumers will turn into producers. As a result, consumers are free to engage in economic activity on an equal footing which will further be discussed in the next section (Tapscott and Williams, 2006).

5.3.2. Consumer Turned Producer

This sub-theme relates to how YouTube does offer independent producers to sustain a participatory culture, as the platform afforded Participant 4/ZI a space to distribute when he could not secure employment (Chau, 2010). Producer participation refers to the producers' perceptions in utilising the platform and its understanding in potential benefits and challenges. YouTube's online platform is user-friendly and is enabling consumers to also become creators. Pursuant to the participants' views on the use of YouTube, they were asked about their consumption of YouTube content and the genre of their shows as this contributes to the sub-theme of *consumer turned producer* which is also seen as UGC. All the participants were YouTube viewers as elaborated below:

Participant 2/BK: *"I am a very hungry and well-fed YouTube viewer; YouTube is probably one of my primary sources of media consumption. I think traditional television is very much making its way out and platforms like YouTube and your other online video services like Netflix is where the future of content is going. I have a varied taste from vlogs to lifestyle content, social commentary and to comedy entertainment and film narrative and web-series. I would classify my content more a bit of a variety channel . . ."*

Participant 3/KH: *“There are types of videos I create but do not watch, but there is content I have an interest in. We have four channels. ‘2 nacheki’ and ‘We Love Africa’ are almost similar. We are focusing on Africa, so it’s not only based on SA, but also Africa in a diaspora. We also have ‘Howzit Mzansi’ that focuses on entertainment, and then we have another channel which focuses on rural areas. We discovered talent in Nongoma such as guys called ‘Focus Gal Focus’, maybe you have seen their videos as some have appeared on - SABC - they do skits.”*

Participants above affirmed that they are YouTube viewers who have become YouTube producers and content creators creating UGC from starting of as the audience. However, Participant 4/Z1 suggested previously, that in SA there is much of room to grow but the majority of South Africans still do not have access to free internet therefore we need to be cognisant of this situation such that we become proactive to agitate for change to support people who are marginalised. The participants further supported the idea of converging to online and streaming services below:

Participant1/LG: *“. . . I like Showmax and Netflix, there’s no ads, I watch what I want when I want, and I’m not tied to the 8 pilot . . . It’s also opening opportunities for a lot of people, we can’t all be going to SABC and Multi Choice. Having competitors is good for the industry in terms of money that’s coming in, opportunity and types of content, and people. Now you can start your own Netflix because there are programmers who literally sell a template and you can just name it and upload content and now people can download it on Google Play or iStore and they can pay a subscription for your content. So, you don’t need Netflix money to have your own Netflix. It’s great - the more content the better.”*

Participant 2/BK: *“Online is inevitable and it is the future, and not only is it going to happen it’s already happening; the migration of content to a digital space is already happening, that’s probably going to be the primary or the biggest source of content viewing in the future. Get into it early so that you can reap the rewards. People who have built big brands in traditional media, be it big films, they are now coming onto a space like YouTube because they see the brand value and opportunity there. It’s very affirming as a creator to see big brands coming onto YouTube, where we all are on the*

same playing field. I'm glad I started when I did but wish I started a little earlier. The best time to have started was 5 years ago and second best is today."

Participant 3/KH: "The opportunities are endless; these platforms are very big if you know how to use them properly. If content is online, it means you can watch it at your own time, anywhere, anytime. I could be talking to you while also watching something on my other phone. Right, so it's that advantage which is that digital content is always mobile as you can access it anytime you want. Digital platforms, unlike traditional television, has a certain time - at 20:00 I have to sit and watch TV but here it's different because I can bump into any video I feel as though there's a lot of advantages and also the digital economy is very big. If you keep these platforms as a business, there's a lot of money. You are in control, unlike where on traditional television if you have an idea you have to first go and pitch but on this eco system everything is here, it makes platforms easy because of its ecosystem."

Participant 4/ZI: "Even not having access to broadcasting, people can get access on YouTube, Netflix, and Facebook. Your creative mind is more open and endless on those platforms . . . and the fact that you are getting paid . . . I think that's very revolutionary in terms of the direction of where the world is going."

Participant 4/ZI continued: "It's a platform with no restrictions with regards to the way you create your content. We just use self-expression. We weren't really thinking about conventions, it was just . . . (pause) I want to do a show and this moment feels like it needs music, or this part needs - a score - so essentially that's not necessarily a convention . . . That's what's very nice about YouTube you don't have anyone lingering over your head about conventions."

As part of the main focus of the research analysis, a consideration of independent producers when exploring user-engagement was key. Participant responses above on the sub-theme related to the democratisation that comes with media and technological convergence noting watching content at your own convenience and creative freedom. Thus, asserting the role of YouTube and dissemination of online content for independent producers. The evidence above confirms that competition is what drives audiences onto the online spaces. The more the competition, the more the content available to consume. Participants' online familiarisation

with the creative industry has enabled them to take advantage of opportunities presented by production firms and screenwriters in a cutthroat media environment. As a result, it is common to analyse the role of state intervention in safeguarding independent producers who are joining the market in the following theme. The idea of self-expression and the absence of policing based on genre conventions in online distribution were mentioned. Participants maintained that creative limitations on new media are fewer than in traditional media. Thus, the perception of YouTube, to an extent, influences content-creation and distribution. Users have access to a larger variety of identity expression options due to social media's increased technological affordances. However, self-expression still needs to be confined to what the viewer will want to watch, hear, and engage with, thus, a study on viewer behaviour towards certain content on a producer's channel is imperative. The idea of self-expression and no creative policing based on genre conventions in online distribution shows participants' perception of the platform which informs how they choose to approach the platform as they develop the content.

5.4. PRODUCERS' PERCEPTION OF GOVERNMENT ONLINE REGULATIONS

5.4.1 Intellectual Property Protection - Copyright is territorial.

The next theme that was coded from the interviews is: *independent producer's perceptions on copyright and its influence on intellectual property and the creative economy and whether or not protection is prevalent on YouTube*. The following themes demonstrate that regulation of content distributed through online platforms is specific to countries. The discussion draws insights from practices in first world countries while also placing focus on: *SA Government intervention concerning its regulatory provisions on online video content distribution for independent producers*. This discussion is aligned to the second research question of this study. For this section, Participant 3/KH raised a new point and emphasised on the transnational nature of online video content and the role of government regulation in the following:

"It's a bit difficult to regulate things happening online because if someone has a YouTube channel it doesn't mean it is being consumed by South Africans only; other countries are the same. Tomorrow I can wake up and decide that I don't want my channel to be South African and change it so that its UK. So, government doesn't really have much control on things happening online, but they do know how to protect certain individuals especially children. But I don't think they will be able to protect these things

when their own . . . Government doesn't really have influence on these platforms, unless if there are laws that agree and placed on these companies that offer those services."

This extract identifies the argument between government regulation and regulation implemented by media platforms. Although many support that government should actively regulate the moderation of social media platforms to attain fairness, balance or other values other factors need to be taken into consideration. Such as, speech on social media directly tied to violence may be further expected to be regulated by government. However, there is fear, as past broadcasting regulation by governments have filtered freedom of speech and texts which can be seen as a barrier. Others worry that social media leads to filter bubbles that preclude democratic deliberation (Samples, 2019). Moreover, Social media managers regulate the content on a platform, but the platform does not host everything that is posted on it, social media platforms aren't owned by the same companies. Participant 3/KH's extract illustrates the separateness of social media ownership.

"I don't think it's really the internet that can protect you because remember the internet is owned by everyone right because it's a connection of networks. So, it has to be these institutions. In terms of a video to monitor these platforms are not owned by the same company like for instance Facebook owns WhatsApp and Instagram if you copyright something with them, they will be able to block it on all of their platforms, but they don't have access to twitter right? So, you have to also copyright on twitter and on YouTube and on Tik Tok because those are different institutions. So, for now I feel as if it depends on those companies who own those social networks how they address the issue of copyright."

Moreover, as participants raised previously the concern of competitiveness on social platforms, this suggests that those who are unable to distribute video content because of extensive regulation on YouTube "can find a home for their speech somewhere else on the internet" (Samples, 2019, p. 7). Therefore, video sites like 'Live Leak' or 'Vimeo' with willingness to host graphic content will deliver videos to viewers just as effectively as YouTube suggesting that alternatives can continue to come into existence to meet user demand for differing standards of moderation. Subsequently, if the platforms regulate too much, their competing platforms will start to attract their former audience. Nevertheless, it is reasonable to question whether government regulation addresses the issue or makes it worse, even if industries regulate their own markets (Samples, 2019).

The participants' excerpt of the policy recommendations emphasised the significance for copyright protection for independent producers which needs to come from the YouTube platform itself as countries have different distribution regulations. Therefore, a video will not be regulated everywhere which means your intellectual property stands the risk of being published in other countries without any penalties as Participant 3/KH mentioned. For instance, Legislation such as the NetzDG law which was enforced at the beginning of 2018 in nations like Germany compelled to establish procedures for reviewing complaints about the content they were hosting which involved removing anything that was illegal within 24 hours. Furthermore, there are publishing progress reports every six months, and fining individuals and businesses up to €5 million and €50 million for not complying to these requirements. The General Data Protection Regulation which was also enacted by the European Union established guidelines on how social media platforms may retain and utilise user data. Additionally, it has acted regarding copyright, requiring platforms to ensure that no content infringing copyright is hosted on their websites (BBC News, 2020).

When using the service, YouTube offers the following works that are covered by copyright protection: AV, music compositions, TV-shows, and online video. The World Intellectual Property Organisation's guiding principles for copyright law on the internet are accepted as *the legislation* defending any author's right to be acknowledged as the work's creator, distributor, or public audience by whatever means as well as their only right to grant permission for others to use the work in any way (WIPO, 2022). The purpose of the restrictions is to prevent the infringement of the author's rights through copyright protection; the author sets limits on the number of copies, encrypts the work so that only the owner of the key can access it, enters into online contracts granting permission to use the work and establishes clearing centers with which the author licenses their rights to the work in exchange for the clearing center accepting payment (Kolisnykova and Lekhkar, 2018). Another idea derived from the data is the impact of copyright strikes on YouTube distribution.

Participant 3/KH identified it as: *“First thing on YouTube if a large portion does not have original content, they will take away your monetisation away. Another thing if you want to have original content there is a tool that shows you all the videos that match your content. You can either serve them with a copyright strike and if you get three copyright strikes your channel becomes terminated forever. You can either send*

copyright strikes or you can warn them that after seven days you are getting copyright strikes.”

Participant 3/KH's views suggest that a user must obtain the author's permission before downloading content. The service then automatically checks the content for copyright infringement utilising Google ID algorithm that was developed for YouTube Content ID that detects violations and alerts the person about it. Subsequently, to elaborate further on Participant 3/KH views above; if the system has detected a violation, then in accordance with the procedure, the person has the right to appeal, which should indicate and prove the permission granted by the right holder, after which the system will flag the video as not infringing the copyright (Ciampa *et al*, 2022). Consequently, minor copyright violations result in a ban on monetisation remuneration for views accumulated by the video.

Participant 4/ZI further stated: *“Like for example, I think 4 out of the 10, if not 5 out of the 10 episodes, have copyrights issues so we couldn't even monetise, our most viewed episode we can't even monetise because yeah.”*

Systematic violations result in the final blocking of the account without the possibility of its restoration, YouTube has these provisions in place which are applicable in every country (Kolisnykova and Lekhkar, 2018). Although US courts will handle the case in the event of a dispute, YouTube copyright is subject to the laws of the host country from which the video was submitted (Kolisnykova & Lekhkar, 2018). In the US, 'Bona Fide' analysis judges consider factors in the context of each case, being originality and origin of the work.

Participant 3/KH described: *“Let's say I feel like I have rights to use this content or maybe it's a false claim and I own the content I want to dispute. Then there's copyright that fall under fair use. Let's say I'm doing something educational, but I also want to reference with something that is copyrighted, that the intention of this video is not focusing on what they are claiming but the intention of the video is to educate and for promotion. Then it's up to you as the copyright owner.”*

Although it is possible that a video is monetised while also being protected by the 'fair use' principle, Participant 3/KH's excerpt illustrates the use of videos for commercial purposes as rarely regarded fair. Also, borrowing small pieces of material from the original work is more likely to be considered fair use (Kolisnykova and Lekhar, 2018). YouTube receives many requests for the removal of videos from copyright holders. As noted in court judgments, before filing a video removal request the copyright owner should check whether the use of his work

in the video is in good faith. That is why there is a procedure for requesting a copyright holder to ask the user to verify the alleged fairness of the content for which the removal request is required (Kolisnykova and Lekhkar, 2018).

Participant 3/KH: *“If you don’t release a claim and I feel entitled to the video I can put another dispute and this time for the second time I will then receive a copy right strike because they are disputing it for the second time. And then if there’s a third time that when you go to court and you go and resolve it in court.”*

Thus, supporting research acknowledges Participant 3/KH viewpoint above by highlighting that even though YouTube’s platform is available in different countries and regulated according to these countries’ rules, an independent producer is still able to litigate or report copyright infringement and take it to the US court to settle the dispute as per the terms of using YouTube platform (Kolisnykova and Lekhkar, 2018).

5.4.2 Online Distribution Regulation in SA

The following sub-theme that emerged from participants’ responses is ‘online distribution regulations’ which stems from findings related to *ownership, privacy, and piracy*. Promotion of digital information is one of the regulation-related issues in SA's media ecosystem. The South African Government’s content regulation is in addition to ICASA's mandate regarding the production, distribution, and consumption of local content. These ensure that media outlets support locals by promoting and developing local industries. It also calls for a: “diverse and vibrant media sector to promote fair competition” (RSA Government Gazette No. 37803, 2014: 6). Following the growth of electronic communications, social media platforms and the availability of digital content, it was deemed necessary to extend the functions of the Films and Publications Amendment Act (FPAA) to cater for the creation, and distribution of online content in an attempt to regulate harmful content (Business Tech, 2020). The participants affirmed that the Film and Publications Act was laudable as reported below:

Participant 1/LG: *“People in the film industry should realise that you can’t just record people and just put them up on media and make money. Obviously putting measures in place is great.”*

Participant 2/BK: *“The process of uploading a video on YouTube after the passing of that Act has changed the way of things, we have to go through to actually publish a*

video including certain checklists; does this have certain language? is there violence? is this video for adults? is it inappropriate? At the end of the day the internet can be a very dangerous space because it's easily accessible to children, therefore guidelines should be followed."

Participant 3/KH: *"I feel it's a bit difficult to regulate things happening online . . . but they do know how to protect certain individuals especially children."*

The purpose of the findings based on Copyright and Laws promulgated by the SA Government was to expand the selection of best practices for the efficient protection of the author's rights while utilising the YouTube video service. Participant 2/BK emphasised how the process of uploading a video on YouTube after the passing of the FPAA has changed the way to publish a video; this includes considerations about language, age group, and video-appropriateness, among others. The findings suggest that since the internet is easily accessible to children, guidelines are expected to be strictly followed as described by Participant 3/KH above. In 2018 it was estimated that 8.8 million videos were removed, with 93% of them being done automatically by computers, and 3.3 million channels and 517 million comments were also further deleted on YouTube (Hills, 2018). Hence, employees are employed by YouTube worldwide to set policies, monitor content, and remove unsavoury content.

The mandate set in place by SA Government translates into the protection of individuals especially children on the internet. It is also strengthened by the POPI Act passed (2020) in SA which protects all individuals' information. However, the question remains as to how to regulate online media companies for one country when platforms are available worldwide? The perspective of government intervention essentially protects children from violent content material, but it cannot fully regulate copyright for independent producers online. However, Participant 1/LG contended differently on general government intervention stating:

"If Government wants to regulate content and approve everything, then that is going to be a really big problem as already a lot of Government things don't run properly. If they can help with defamation then we can sue people properly, then that's good."

Although Participant 1/LG offered a valid argument, copyright laws in SA are not suited to create an equitable balance that appropriately protects the rights of both website owners and content providers in the case of infringement and defamation. This is because there is no clause

that permits the transformative use of copyrighted material by someone who has a YouTube channel that is consumed by other countries. IP rights are restricted to suit the economy, culture, and politics in which they were formed. Within IP a particular level of information ownership was deemed acceptable at the expense of a freely accessible content collectively owned and managed by online users (May, 2010). Participant 2/BK further shared her stance on what role government play for online distribution below:

Participant 2/BK: *“I think the best thing they can do especially a national government, is honestly just put out more resources especially when it comes to funding. Were at a place now where SA as a whole job creation and unemployment is just at an all-time low, YouTube is a place where people can actually create their own businesses . . . it’s a platform but in order to grow and sustain we need monetary funding. The government as I’ve seen with the Gauteng provision for funding social media and digital stuff as well and so that’s good, but we need, more money, and more of those consistently every year. And also, there are so many barriers and so many little hurdles that you have to go through which to be fair if you want to give someone R100 000.00 that it’s going to the right place and that they know what they going to be doing and have a financial plan.”*

Participant 2/BK excerpt exerts how local government in SA is implementing support in political economies for online industry. However further considerations such as the overall benefits of intellectual property protection (IPP) on political economy (PE) which includes increased foreign direct investment, technological transfer, international trade, and economic growth need to be considered. Conversely, this beneficial effect on PE is dependent on several external conditions, and how these interact with IPP to advance PE development (Yang, 2017). It is commonly recognised that the following elements are necessary for an effective access policy and a well-balanced communication system: a communication system that reflects the diversity of a society, media diversity (a true choice should be available between various mediums, such as television) (Van Cuilenburg, 1998). The benefit of such a definition of an effective or balanced communication system is found in its applicability regardless of the type of medium used (Yang, 2017). Controlling access is crucial for this reason. The following theme focuses on how independent producers develop and distribute content for monetisation on the YouTube platform.

Participant 1/LG said: *“One of the good stuff is you own the content and its yours and if you want to take it down you can take it down but, the piracy part sucks, piracy is big even the big studio started with piracy they also need to use what they have which is going onto YouTube and reporting the video . . . Because what if I got locked out of my channel and wanted to open a new one with my content? So how are they going to know if it’s me opening a new channel?”*

Participant 2/BK added: *“In terms of restrictions, it depends on what you make, I have had some things flagged because YouTube said this might be a bit of a questionable kind of content because I do like to view into some of my topics a little bit more deep, less PG with some of them. And also, advertisers are very particular about the kind of videos that they want their ads to play on. So, YouTube will be strict on that. Again, do I have to dilute my creative direction or the things that I want to talk about? But you do have the option of not monetizing those videos as well. So, it’s about choosing and juggling what you will let go off.”*

Participant 2/BK: *“It’s very tricky because as an online creator I want my work to be protected at all costs; there’s a lot of time, there’s a lot of money, and artistic integrity that goes into every piece that I put out there. But at the same time, I have also benefited from those free downloads.”*

Participant 3/KH also said: *“I got a copyright strike because I didn’t know you couldn’t post someone else’s content, so I received a copyright strike. That’s when I learned you cannot post someone else’s content. When you just on YouTube it’s different because you are not on a YouTube monetisation programme; your policies will be different, because with a YouTube monetisation programme sponsors are paid to watch your content so there are things advertisers won’t be happy with seeing in your content. So, we lost the channel that had a hundred-thousand subscriptions but sometimes you learn along the way. Now information is out there in terms of copyright, unlike before. They even release videos on policies, and they tell you what to do. I remember another thing that used to happen now and then we would lose our monetisation because the content was not original as they want you to have original content so that there’s value in the content . . .”*

Participant 4/ZI: *“I think it’s YouTube. I download stuff from YouTube all the time, so I guess I’m speaking from that front as well, so it’s like its open game for the world. If you wanted to be exclusive about it you can put it on Vimeo instead, make your own community, and that’s where people would go if they wanted to do something like that, but YouTube is for the world.”*

The participants believed that protection from the open internet ensures that their intellectual property was not being redistributed. However, on platforms such as YouTube there are features that allow audiences to freely download and redistribute copyright work by a different online user. Conclusively, the advantages of the platform include owning the content you distribute and taking it down if you want. The disadvantage is that people can pirate the material content you distribute by uploading it onto their YouTube channels. YouTube introduced a new system for copyright protection for video clips as class lawsuits against YouTube/Google escalated. In response to pressure from a number of significant traditional media companies including Disney, Viacom, and Microsoft, to accept a set of guidelines that will determine how copyright laws and anti-piracy measures should be applied to online videos and music, the new video filter system was developed.

Concerning media convergence, Dwyer (2010) asserts that commodification and digital copyright tactics have become the new standard in capitalist relations and this trend is being reinforced by huge media companies. The entertainment-communication-information sector is ingrained in both the functioning of the global economy and the larger financial system. Investigating media consolidation for increasing trends in complex ownership contracts is necessary to understand the effects and consequences of those downloads as participants 4/ZI and 2/BK mentioned as being able to freely access online video material. There are significant ramifications for media markets, media corporations and ultimately the content that media outlets deliver to viewers. In terms of how media companies are organised, a new financialisation tendency has emerged (Dwyer, 2010). Markets in the creative industries are undergoing dynamic change, driven by globalization, technological and societal developments, and a more entrepreneurial-oriented system of public funding (Loots *et al*, 2022). However, when it comes to the media industries, Jenkins (2004) identified the key points of tension at the convergence of technology and content. The lessons are applicable and transferable to the change that arts and cultural productions need to undergo in the 2020s (De Souza, 2020). In order to reconfigure cultural aesthetics and economics, the arts and culture sectors must

continually interact and collaborate with one another. For the arts and cultural sectors to transition to reflexive digital distribution models, it will be necessary to also share the resources and tools for production and replication. This will put the existing systems of distribution, ownership, and copyright to test the significant distribution disruption generated by digital technologies as emphasised by Participant 1/LG and 2/BK above (De Souza, 2020).

In relation to music and content copyright and its effects on AdSense and monetisation. The following comments expand on the underlying sub-theme.

Participant 2/BK said: *“The cons in terms of copyright . . . we have to use free copyright music on our content. And if it doesn’t get flagged then the money that is generated through those in build ads will go to the actual artist which is a con for me a creator who wants to use that song. Cause now I have to either change my creative direction or I can keep it on, but the money is going to go to someone else, but it is a pro for other artists who have their IP being used.”*

Participant 4/ZI added: *“As soon as the channel gets monetised, then all these copyright claims started to pop up, that’s the con side of it.”*

The data from the participant 2/BK reflects that Copyright - free music is made available for distributors on YouTube; however, it influences the creative direction of a show. With elements of ownership, piracy music, and content copyright, its effects on AdSense and monetisation on YouTube are challenging. Even though the majority of these social media websites were launched without the pressure making profit, the industry narrative in 2009 maintains that monetisation was necessary for the survival of websites like YouTube and Warner Music Group (Snickars and Vonderau, 2009). However, other media content producers have been reluctant to partner with YouTube due to the site's alleged controversial stance on copyright. This issue was handled by Warner Music Group by allowing YouTube users to utilise its music and video content in their own video compilations, provided that Warner and YouTube split revenues from any accompanying advertising. When Warner Music Group terminated its contract with YouTube in December 2008, it cited the inability to reach licensing agreements that appropriately and fairly reward recording artists, composers, labels, and publishers for the value they deliver (Snickars and Vonderau, 2009). This shows that Warner Music Group was not happy with the amount of YouTube money it was receiving. Even when Google acquired the site, the video-sharing service took a while to persuade other major media corporations to

relinquish control of their content, as a result, independent producers that distribute on YouTube today still face music copyright difficulties as elaborated by Participants above (Snickars and Vonderau, 2009).

5.5. PRODUCERS' FUNDING AND CREW APPROACH ON YOUTUBE

5.5.1. Producer's production methods

This theme was curated based on the findings to *ascertain business and marketing strategies utilized by independent producers for successful distribution of their web-series to maximise viewership and monetising content*. Monetisation relates to question 3 of the study. A social media entrepreneur utilises social media as a platform to monetise the content they create. On digital platforms, Katsimete and Eldas, (2020) elaborate that content creators and publishers have discovered methods to monetise their work. The first sub-theme that emerged from the participants' responses was producers' production methods. The following excerpts explain:

Participant 1/LG: *"I shoot by myself, no sponsors yet so I do it because I like it so. Obviously, I saved up and I got my first camera, and I was shooting stuff, and I had my laptop and I bought lights and lenses."*

Participant 2/BK: *"Until very recently, it's just been me, I've been a one-woman-team doing everything, but I recently hired an editor for my next batch of videos to help me just to edit the full-length videos, so I have more time to focus on other aspects of the business."*

Participant 4/ZI: *"The number of people working used to fluctuate; sometimes we had 10 people, sometimes it was just 2 people; because I had to equip myself so that I don't have to really rely on people to do anything - just the main people, or just myself and Dibi. Everyone would come and go for a long time until episode 7. I think at that point we had created a network big enough to have people believe in the vision. People have come and gone, and yeah, I think the vision changed for some people. Some people think it was something it wasn't because of how high the production value was, but people get on set, and they expect to see a whole production van, and then when they get there it's not that then they leave."*

Participant 3/KH shared his perspective: *“It’s very difficult to maintain a lot of things if you are alone, and also creativity runs out. I don’t come from any media background or any production background. Even today I am still learning so that’s why if I find someone who comes from this same background, I always want to listen to them because I want to learn because there are a lot of things involved in the I things . . . So ‘We Love Africa’, ‘Howzit Mzansi’, and ‘2 nacheki’, I own them, I am alone. And then ‘2 nacheki’ I have a partner who is Kenyan. We also have ‘Eye Gambia’, a big media house with two partners, but the other three I am alone. I have a team; there is a guy who handles everything like production, script writing, everything. ‘2 nacheki’ and ‘Will of Africa’ are managed by one team in Cape Town; two guys in Cape Town and then there are five or six in Kenya. Then three in SA and five in Kenya. But some do voice-overs, some do present, some shoot, and some do script writing. The script writers are based in SA and another editor is in Kenya because you can do your part and then share it. Whenever I get time I do some editing, even though I’m not that good with editing.”*

The Participants 1/LG and 2/BK’s above extracts are evident that independent producers are able to work by themselves without a team in the beginning of their productions. Participant 3/KH subsequently recognized a different perspective about the tendency of how working alone without the assistance of a team restricts creativity. However, Participant 4/ZI reports that he was able to find assistance because volunteers came forward to his production but left once, they realised they lacked a well-established team and sophisticated production facilities.

5.5.2. Financing and return on investment.

Participants further elaborated on financing below:

Participant 2/BK said: *“So, it’s very straightforward for most of the time that I’ve been on YouTube, which now will be 4 and a half years. I financed myself but also from a lot of sourcing from already existing things because again it’s just so easy to start YouTube, you don’t need the best or fanciest equipment to actually start. Over the years I’ve been able to work with one or two brands which enables me to gain back some returns of the investments. I’ve made my own channel, and also create long term partnerships.”*

Participant 4/ZI shared: *“Anything that’s requires you to shoot is a budget. We put out money to make sure people ate, and to get home after shoot. Because no one was getting paid so at least since I was taking time out of their life, I wouldn’t be taking any finances from your life. So, I tried to make sure everyone is catered for and has food and that they can get home safely. As time progressed, we used our own funds to make sure we were able to produce a decent episode. I pitched to ‘JnB Hive’ to get equipment for the business and as a return we would create content for them too. The equipment bought elevated the production value immensely from episode 5 of their web-series. At first, we would shoot very unconventionally, but after episode 5 that’s when we started to take it seriously with regards to how to approach and how we planned for the rest of the season. Then afterwards casually people would come in and say here is R3 000 to wear this shirt. Those were the only mediums of trying to fund the show, and for most part it was free, and even locations were free, nothing was really paid for - they just had to ask. That was our system, for 10 episodes we didn’t spend above 50k.”*

Furthermore, Participant 3/KH also added: *“It did not require a lot of budget back then, because you can even start with your cell phone and start creating content so when we started 2016/2017, I wasn’t making original content. I would take the video from twitter and post it on YouTube, and it would make 2 million views and R30 000.00 in revenue. I was making money in that way but not really spending the money to finance the show. I would spend money on data only, and I already had money that I had made on YouTube, and also at that time I was working somewhere else. The money I was working to get wasn’t used but I used that money when I took up YouTube work seriously. I ended up building and even financing it myself. Another advantage there is, now that everyone is focusing on YouTube, is content monitoring. People now want things like talk shows and most podcasts are doing very well. The advantage about that is revenue, you get YouTube revenue from AdSense which is straight from YouTube; most youtubers earn revenue from AdSense. But also, there is revenue that comes from sponsors. I feel shows, especially talk shows are easier to get sponsors, even though we are still new, it’s another stream of revenue.”*

Furthermore, Participant 1/KH supported the idea: *“Firstly, it’s not that expensive, it’s easier to start, and it doesn’t require a lot of funding and there are massive returns.*

You just need to also analyse the competition as well because there are always new guys coming in, but it depends on the type of content that you are doing.”

Casually people and brands would come in and give money and merchandise to wear on their show as promotion tactics according to Participants 2/BK and 4/ZI. The marginalisation of past amateur film-making attempts has been changed significantly by digital filmmaking, according to Jenkins (2006). This notion elevated the production value immensely for their web-series. The participants further suggested that independent producers without sponsorships and who don't meet the monetisation criteria during the development stage pay for their online web-series by utilising savings and available resources. However, a challenge that could arise is having to raise the capital if the participants are unemployed and also having to recruit a dedicated team to film without compensation. Furthermore, as Participant 4/ZI affirmed, the necessity of a budget which emphasises the need for independent producers to find effective means to pre-finance their show as filming takes hours and many positions must be filled by a production team which has financial implications for sustenance. The participants' responses reflected Jenkins (2006) literature, that these nonprofessional filmmakers are people who wish to enter the industry on a small budget, as amateur filmmakers are creating content commercially or in good enough quality to distribute on specific platforms. These films are regarded as amateur because they were made by inexperienced filmmakers, on a small budget and distributed in non-commercial channels. They continue to be amateurs in that they do not profit from their labour. According to Shane Faleux (2005) as cited in Jenkins (2006), creatives must be given the opportunity to display their work, give everyone involved the chance to realize their dreams and perhaps open the industry's eyes to what can be accomplished with a small budget, committed people and untapped talent as Participant 4/ZI also shared similar thoughts. This enhances the participants' claim that resources can be distributed on a limited budget, and an audience can be created. Since digital editing is simpler than video editing, amateur artists have more freedom to directly modify their work. Even amateur filmmakers may now duplicate the special effects found in commercial films because of home computers (Jenkins, 2006).

5.6 MARKETING STRATEGIES TO GAIN AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT AND VIEWERSHIP

5.6.1 Cross-Media Advertising

The next theme derived from the findings was *fundamental marketing strategies* employed to generate and draw audiences to maximise viewership and monetise content for their channels. The first sub-theme to arise from the findings was utilising cross-media social media platforms for marketing producers web-series. The participants averred below:

Participant 1/LG: *“I started asking people through their comments what type of content they would like to see and then I formed questions and got insight that people who are watching are young and are into filmmaking and acting. I think all the analytics gave me all of the information that I needed, even that viewership was between 14 and 25 years of age. Then I saw that it’s actually mostly males, and then I realised this is who my market is. I can’t just be everything to everyone, and that informed my content. I also did research; I went to Facebook groups, film-making groups, and found out what questions people are asking. Also asking what kind of videos people want to see . . . that’s how I did my marketing.”*

Participant 2/BK: *“Diversifying the platforms that I use and the platforms that I distribute my content on . . . So, knowing that my full videos and the hub add heart of ‘The B word’ stay on YouTube. But using things like Instagram and social media platforms like TikTok where I reformat and repurpose that content to exist on those other channels to go and attract and meet new audiences and bring them back to YouTube.”*

Participant 3/KH: *“We do use Twitter, we do use Facebook and Instagram to market but remember I said that about over 90% of the views they don’t come from external sources, they come from suggested videos so if you want to make it on YouTube aim that your algorithm is favoured. It will suggest my videos . . .”*

Participant 4/ZI: *“MTN is not making Twitter free anymore. We did use up a lot of the advertising on Twitter. But while Twitter was free the numbers would really go up, because this guy Kholi put up a tweet and had his team tweet stuff and collectively drive numbers to go watch the episodes and would share snippets of very dramatic moments or funny relatable moments within the show and they would take and make their own captions. Twitter was our main way of marketing . . .”*

All things considered, cross-media; the use of other social media platforms assisted all participants in marketing and attracting audiences since audiences use multiple social platforms. Meanwhile, making the full video available and only accessible on YouTube as cross-promoting videos through other social media platforms as the participants did; increases views, and gets more traffic on the YouTube channel. Setting social accounts on other social platforms and marketing your YouTube channel expands brand exposure on social media (*Unbox social*, 2020). It is also important to determine what audiences want to see and what other platforms allow for commentary and text discourse on analytics as mentioned by Participant 1/LG. Moreover, Participants 1/LG, 4/ZI and 2/BK utilised a cross-media marketing strategy that allowed for diversifying the platforms that they used to distribute content material. According to Hilde *et al.* (2011), researchers hold up the participants' claims that adverts using multiple media show more favourable audience responses than those using only one. This is done through forward encoding that occurs when an advertisement in one medium influence' a consumer's interest to focus on an advertisement in another medium acting as a teaser to draw attention to and increase curiosity for the advertisement in the other medium (Edell and Keller, 1989 & 1999; Dijkstra and Van Heuven, 2002; Bronner, Neijens and Van Raaij, 2003;). Moreover, an ad-memory trace is kept when consumers view an advertisement for the first time (Keller, 1987). The ad-memory trace will affect how the next ad is processed when they are exposed to the same or a related ad in a different medium. Therefore, when people are exposed to cross-media advertisements rather than single-medium campaigns, forward encoding may be more common (Voorveld, Neijens and Smit, 2010).

Additionally, Participant 4/ZI commented that marketing using the free Twitter service enabled MTN to connect its users on social media. MTN with time further implemented a daily limit on the amount of free bandwidth users may use to explore Twitter. However, the demand' on Twitter's network from its 13 million users had become enormous, making it impossible to zero-rate that data due to the presence of video and photos (Rangongo, 2018). Hence, users were gradually excluded from free usage of channels. For a successful YouTube marketing strategy, you must take advantage of the latest features, trends, and upgrades available on the platform as suggested by Participant 3/KH below:

Participant 3/KH suggested: *“The marketing strategies are the ones I mentioned in the beginning that have a good thumbnail, your video should market itself, if you have a good thumbnail, have a good title, your video will get discovered and once your video*

gets discovered, a lot of people will watch that video. Remember I said that YouTube doesn't want people leaving their platform, so you can create content with 20 videos and still won't be discovered and won't be found by anyone but once you create one viral video YouTube will start also recommending your old videos, the ones people weren't watching so its algorithm markets itself."

Participant 2/BK: *"... of those people who post and go viral it's not really a viable way to create income but at the same time we are in a place where again, you don't need to rely on YouTube alone to create income. Like I said there are brand deals as long as you have a good, engaged community and you align with the brand you can actually make some serious money in the digital community."*

Conclusively, as Participant 3/KH noted, by making your description and titles search-friendly, you can improve your YouTube SEO and YouTube marketing plan (Unbox social, 2020). According to Becker (2022) to improve YouTube SEO, make sure all your video descriptions are keyword optimised. Furthermore, the participant mentioned optimising YouTube video thumbnails for better results as Cowley (2020) states that it will give viewers a favourable first impression of your content. By including a visual representation of the video's content in your YouTube thumbnail, you should entice users to click and watch your video.

5.6.2 Understanding YouTube Niche and Audience Behaviour

The evidence in the responses below provide insight into the sub-theme in which findings explored YouTube *audience behaviour* expectations, YouTube advertisers, monetisation, brands affiliation and the English language.

Participant 3/KH commented: *"YouTube in terms of money is still new in South Africa, so there's not really a lot of money, its only now where you see that brands are into digital. So, you mentioned something about languages and how we set them up. It depends on our target audience; you can't use local languages in Africa - countries - we need to use languages like English, and you'll have subtitles in French. YouTube gives you analytics; there's a tool called 'Tube buddy' which tells you about those who consume your audience - maybe 70% speak English, 20% French, 5% Zulu. So, when you create content even in English, you need to also translate captions in these languages so that they also feel accommodated. Continuing with the language of English is the*

biggest language, right? So that means first thing when it comes to advertisers YouTube differentiates like this - a niche; like for instance entertainment and news, entertainment, and finance, are different niches, meaning that advertisers who advertise don't pay the same for those niches. Once your channel content is in English it will attract the right advertisers who are willing to pay more money and also if it's the right niche. For instance, anyone can go on YouTube and watch a video on entertainment, but that person is not guaranteed that he/she is going to spend. For instance, the adverts that will pay are general adverts because a person watching an entertainment video whether dance or comedy sees general adverts because it checks the affordability of the viewer but when it comes to a niche like someone who has videos in financial education or news, you know that person is someone mature, learned, grown, and working - meaning that person can afford it. YouTube has something called a CPM which is what you earn per 1 000 views. One of the reasons we focus on content like - that is because you can have 1 million views on content on entertainment and have hundred thousand views on content with a niche that I was talking about, and you make more money because the advertisers will take you seriously so you won't have OMO or KFC ads - they will be playing adverts that are willing to bid. YouTube quality needs to be good because if the quality is good that's what lets the viewer sit more on the video."

Participant 2/BK: "Your online audience is where the money is, not necessarily the size of the audience but how you engage and connect with the audience as the creator will help leverage when talking to brands and sponsorships. Those are the people who want to support you. So, if you want to approach brands and be completely different content wise, they would be more inclined to support you because of the para-inclined relationship. So, the online audience are everything because they also empower you to create businesses or different opportunities for yourself."

Participant 2/BK continued: "It's a simple relationship: I'm the creator, I create my content and put it on the YouTube platform. The advertisers then can approach me directly to collaborate whether it's featuring some of their products or actually creating a video concept completely around their product. I have the audience, so the audience will come to watch my video. I'm a bit more of a reliable source. Audiences also watch the ads that are inbuilt into YouTube to support the creators. That's another thing that

benefits YouTube, because the more the people watch the adverts, the more they will get paid.”

Participant 3/KH highlighted how YouTube has categorised niches and added that independent producers need to know which niche areas they are focusing on, be it news, entertainment, or finance etc. Selecting a niche helps audiences know what type of content you create and distribute. Moreover, understanding audience preference of their language of communication in web-series is equally as important especially for sponsorship and advertising as further highlighted by Participant 3/KH above. Since English is the global language of commerce and communication, it is mainly preferred but indigenous languages should not be marginalised as translations and subtitles are imperative for certain audiences. This speaks to strategies of engaging with one’s audiences to develop loyalty to receive benefits such as brand deals or sponsorships without placing emphasis on platform capabilities, as *audience and following is the new currency* which will be explored further in the section. This addresses the research question on business and marketing strategies in terms of how producers engage with audiences and in return receive their support and loyalty which affords them opportunities to negotiate business deals with sponsors and brands. Moreover, the audience is the selling point to the business; the more influence you have in getting audiences to engage in shows, the more investment into your business as an independent producer (Bhattacharya, 2023).

Participant 3/KH further captured the notion that there are targeted adverts for a niche. YouTube’s feature called Cost Per Click (CPC) demonstrates how eager advertisers are to fund content and gain access to YouTubers’ viewers as that pays content producers based on how many people click onto their video. Research supports Participant 3/KH’s notion by categorizing profitable niches such as Digital Marketing which pays \$12.52 per view, making it one of the lucrative categories on YouTube based on cost per 1 000 impressions (CPM) rates (Tasty Edits, 2023). Furthermore, Personal finance and investment are two money-related niches where creators can expect CPM rates of up to \$12. Additionally, educational video has some of the highest subscriber counts on YouTube, with CPMs reaching \$9.89 (Tasty edits, 2022). As evidenced by the request to Broadcast Yourself, YouTube is set up such that no user’s video uploads are given priority over others. However, Snickars and Vonderau (2009, p. 383) maintain that: “various techniques adopted by the site enhance advertising privilege, some videos over others”. Online audiences tend to be fragmented; thus, advertisers have been forced to rethink traditional ways of reaching their target groups. Because media companies and their

advertisers want to draw attention to their content, YouTube categorises its videos, among other designations into promoted videos and spotlight videos. Major media companies still use YouTube as a platform for content distribution - possibly a space can be opened for smaller, independent companies to reach audiences in ways that traditional media tend to obstruct (Snickars and Vonderau, 2009). However, a challenge for independent producers who do not meet the requirements of one thousand subscribers and 4 000 watch time will not be able to benefit from CPC, this will be further discussed in section 5.7.1.

The YouTube ads may appear as a text ad within the video, a video ad before it, or both. Only when the YouTuber decides to include his/her own advertisements do the video commercialise and the videos start to play after the ten-minute mark. The amount of money that CPC gives content creators depends on whether their advertisement is viewed for at least 30 seconds or for half of the advertisement depending on their niche (Katsimene and Elds, 2020). Also, another process of raising money for independent producers, by having many individuals contribute modest amounts of money each, is usually done online through the crowd funding website *Patreon*, which is a page that gives creatives power to make meaningful interactions and steady revenue. Distributors on YouTube can use this platform to provide *Patreon* subscribers with merchandise, bonus content, and creator access. The platform also enables a distinctive form of community engagement and support for social media entrepreneurs and *Patreon* contributors (Katsimene and Elds, 2020).

The process of niche marketing fundamentally benefits growth possibilities, value creation, profits, and the success of niche marketing principles (Toften and Hammervoll, 2013). Participants 3/KH and 2/BK above emphasised the relationship with advertisers and brands and developing a niche to secure capital. This resonates with the theme of *democratisation* engendered by media-technological convergence which includes access to audience online platforms for producers. Kotler and Armstrong (2012) believe the idea of specialisation leads us to the distinctive competences a firm need to possess when pursuing niche markets. Their key strengths are in their ability to match technology with specific customer requirements (Dalgic, 1998). A YouTube channel needs to know its niche market to determine its target audience and the kind of brand collaborations you can aim for as it plays a huge part regarding how much money you can earn on YouTube. Companies are aware of the influence YouTube has on customer behaviour specifically as it enhances audience purchase intent (Katsimene and Elds, 2020), hence, sponsoring UGC creators is an effective strategy for promoting

companies' goods or services which expands the financial capacity and reputation of independent producers.

Therefore, YouTube needs its creators. In the PEM, audiences are a commodity for advertisers; the data in the analysis proves this as expressed by Participant 2/BK above (p. 131). The power relations at play involve the audiences with regards to distribution as their views determine how much revenue producers get for their distributed content. Many corporations choose to sponsor YouTube videos, which is the act of offering to pay for an individual, group or initiative. This form of paid advertising is very similar to editorial content (Wojdyski and Evans, 2016). Online social networking sites have frequently been seen as revolutionary new media tools because on the one hand they enable the development of a brand name and targeted advertising marketing while on the other they increase citizen participation in the dissemination of information and content creation at no cost (Losifidis and Wheeler, 2016). Consequently, the attraction of brands wanting to advertise on the platform to reach audiences is relevant.

Although Participant 4/ZI was the only one who shared his disadvantaged monetisation experience on YouTube stating:

Participant 4/ZI explained: *“From my experience in SA and being a youtuber, it’s hard to get money. It is super possible to become an entrepreneur by being a youtuber but there’s a whole process because YouTube belongs to google and it requires you to have an ad sense account and getting this account active you need to get this code mailed to you and that process is not even email, its actual mail that they have to deliver to your house; getting that code is a nightmare. And without that code you don’t get your money.”*

Participant 4/ZI continued: *“It’s not an easy process and the fact that you know you need to have one-thousand subscribers and to about ten-thousand people in your videos, But I’m thinking such stuff really messes us up because if you are new to YouTube and your first video booms, and what happens if you don’t have one thousand subscribers?”*

It is still noteworthy to research further experiences any independent producer could experience on YouTube. Smith (2009) and Morozov (2012) contend that when using social networks and video-sharing platforms, users leave data trails behind them. Although consumer discontent

over the commercialisation of UGC, the worth of their data and the value of their online identity are all to be considered. Privacy issues have been raised, for instance, Facebook's near-monopoly over online identities and its business model for monetizing consumer data. Additionally, each time a person conducts an online search, digital traces are left behind that are gathered by Google which generates income through AdSense. This is essential to their financial management and crucial to the techniques by which social media extracts surplus earnings. Losifidis and Wheeler (2016) assert that because audiences are the commodity themselves (as social media users) they do not pay for the service and one of the reasons online social platforms exist is because they commercially exploit new members. One common characteristic among social media sites is that they are widely accessible across the corporate sector as well as socio-economic classes for free.

Although there are related studies, there is not enough information on how social media entrepreneurs monetise digital platforms and the various ways they accomplish it. Literature does not cover the advantages of social networking for single individuals and therefore the findings in the study vary with the case studies individually to support the literature (Alarcón-del-Amo, Rialp-Criado and Rialp-Criado, 2018 & Olanrewaju *et al.*, 2020). Due to the recent emergence of social media businesses, the methods of monetising content have not been thoroughly researched (Katsimante and Elds, 2020). Dwyer (2010) questions if media convergence is the primary cause of YouTube's success. Consequently, do you wonder how much money YouTube makes? The *Guardian* (06 April 2009) asked this question, and the response was *probably not* (Johnson, 2009). The fact that Google is a publicly traded business, which spent \$1.65 billion in 2006, raised some questions (Dwyer, 2010). Its inability to sell adverts on 97% of its pages which mostly contain UGC was a cause for alarm in 2009. Hence, the business model found alternative strategies such as wide sponsorships and astute product placement (Dwyer, 2010). However, Google has now entrenched itself as the dominant industry in the growing field of video advertising. The advertising sector has been compelled to adapt to these new practices by deliberately linking a fragmenting audience of consumers to goods and services through specific media providers (Dwyer, 2010). Furthermore, as earlier mentioned Participant 3/KH supported this idea by articulating the importance of having a following and online presence. He said:

“I feel as though right now a following is the new currency, having a following is very important to have a following as it becomes easier to get things because even brands are looking for influence. I feel it’s about having an online presence because normally

these platforms don't know that sometimes there are advantages and disadvantages. I feel the way we are doing it we are building a community online. What we are doing now is because the more content you create the more viewership and the more money you make. There is different content; there is content called evergreen content, which means if you create that content today' it will stay relevant. There's content for news but the following week people are no longer interested. So, it's important to create content that will sustain you for a very long time as we are now moving to a space where people are starting to understand online content. So, it's always about posting something relevant to your target audience."

Participant 3/KH stated that it is very important to have a following (large subscriber number) as it becomes easier to monetise because brands are looking for influence. He further highlighted that there is evergreen content, successively, an evergreen video usually remains current and lively for longer periods of time, giving the content a timeless characteristic (Chris, 2022). The sustainability of a channel depends on the ability to attract many audiences to view content. As such a single viral video will not sustain itself for long periods. Even though a channel can receive a lot of attention by producing a single viral video, those views can rapidly become monetisable. Evergreen videos have a more consistent build-up through a diversity of content that keeps viewers interested. In comparison, viral videos have a shorter time span than evergreen videos that have a dedicated following among its specialised audience. This is because it contains information that will be frequently and persistently be searched on online platforms growing the views with time (Ciampa *et al.*, 2016)

5.6.3 The Audience as a Commodity: Addressing PEM

When analysing the data and excerpt above the findings showed that in terms of social media economics, the new method of virtual production is through the audience being a commodity as Participant 3/KH reflected; *audience following is the new economic currency*. The corporate ethics in Facebook, Twitter' and Google's actions in relation to these digital traces have come under increasing scrutiny which brings into account the sub-theme of audience a commodity. According to Facebook's policy of *we do not share your information when we distribute ads*, this may be true for information that may be used to identify a specific individual but the website which generated \$10 billion in advertising income in 2013, collects a significant quantity of data that is useful to advertisers (Losifidis and Wheeler, 2016). According to and

Golding and Murdock (1997), the political economy of communication is essentially focused on researching how capitalist businesses create communication and media as commodities. It is about understanding how power relations work within and around the media. The audience has the power on online media in conjunction with producers who make content for them. A risk of what is an inevitable convergence will be the loss of audiences especially as Participant 3/KH highlighted *how an audience and following is important to have as it becomes easier to get things because even brands are looking for influence*. History demonstrates that once a new media technology becomes prevalent, audiences frequently do not go back to the old delivery method. Therefore, we should consider the transition from television to the internet, from free-to-air TV to on-demand streaming. Overall, the balance of power in a new period will be decided (De Souza, 2020).

Financial analysts in 2009 were still claiming that even though YouTube has a huge audience, it still has an uncertain business model. One of the fundamental problems that commercial media companies face is how to translate cultural goods into revenue and eventual profit. A foundational element of market supply and demand is difficult to establish because cultural commodities are intangible and reusable without much limitation, thus, copyright is one of the reusable commodities. Furthermore, demand for any given cultural good is difficult to predict, thereby complicating how media companies approach media and distribution. Companies employ several strategies to ensure that commodity value is established through access limitation, constant resupply of media-such as 24-hour news and the sale of audiences to advertisers as Participants 3/KH stated as *evergreen content and news content*. It is this strategy that most concerns media companies who hope to tap into online audiences. (Snickars and Vonderau, 2009).

5.7. CONVERGENCE INFLUENCE ON ONLINE DISTRIBUTION CONVENTIONS

The final theme examined *how media, technological convergence and genre of the shows are perceived in terms of quality of content and the conventions pursued when distributing on YouTube*. Utilising free online distribution platforms that send online videos over the internet or other Internet Protocol-based transmission methods reveals that consumers are increasingly viewing television programmes online (Udoakpan and Tengeh, 2020). Consumer television viewing habits have changed as a result of increased accessibility, availability, and increasingly affordable broadband data. As a result, consumers are embracing online streaming services

because they want to watch content at their convenience. Available streaming service providers changed how TV material is consumed by disrupting the television broadcasting industry but has provided viewers with more options (Udoakpan and Tengeh, 2020). Consequently, independent producers and distributors need to adapt to an online market by understanding an online audience and the conventions of video quality to capture audiences.

5.7.1 Video Quality: production-design, thumbnails, and titles

The participants indicated in the findings that screen size and conventions were not priorities whilst using the YouTube platform, instead enhancing video quality, and understanding the audience were essential. The sub-theme that emerged from the researchers' observation was *video quality through production design, thumbnails, and titles*. The following excerpts bear testimony to highlighting this sub-theme:

Participant 1/LG: *"I don't think it's about the screen size but more about the platform. YouTube is fast. I know when I watch something and I google how to reset my phone and I see the videos I want to watch the one-minute version, not the 15-minute version like I have no time. The shortest video tells me what I need to do so that's what I watch."*

Participant 1/LG continued: *"The screen size, video length and key search words for video titles are essential. You need to hook your audience really quickly."* Good sound and lighting are important because the more effort you put in; the more people appreciate it.

Participant 2/BK: *"As a small creator you never really think about it or it's not as detailed or calculated as in proper big productions. With 'The b Word' (title of the participants show) I have made a very big effort to have a distinct look and feel in terms of the set. This is for people to recognise it, that this is 'The b Word' because in the style . . . I also wanted the set to kind of reflect that as well. And it's important for my viewers to see themselves seated right here as well."*

Participant 3/KH: *"The first thing that you discover on YouTube was your thumbnail through searching or it prompts you when you get there. There's a lot of videos but the first thing a user will click on is your thumbnail, that's why there's what they call 'clickbait' which are allowed on YouTube, but they are not allowed to mislead a user."*

If a viewer views a thumbnail and clicks, then it drops, and another user comes and clicks on your thumbnail, and it also drops; that tells the algorithm that this video they clicked but quickly dropped means there's something wrong about the video. But by the time a viewer clicks the thumbnail and if a person watches it for longer, - then a second person watches it for longer - and comments - that means there's engagement. To avoid misleading the audience it is important to plan the thumbnail and topic of your video according to its content."

Participant 3/KH aptly continued . . . : *"YouTube quality needs to be good because if the quality is good that what lets the viewer sit more on the video. So, YouTube has titles, the one you see when you search, and the description says what the video contains and at the back there is something called a tag. The tags you put at the back become available to someone who runs that channel, so sometimes you'll find that you search something, you do it so that when the user searches and doesn't use those exact words that you put in your title, but it will discover the video in the tags, so you pull lot of tags . . ."*

The above articulations provide evidence that emphasises the platform's capability to connect independent producers directly to audiences, allowing them to broaden their search, providing viewers to receive additional content recommendations while capacitating independent producers to reach the target audience. YouTube audience expectations, YouTube advertisers, brands, video quality, role of hashtags and thumbnails are all aspects highlighted by participants. The articulation from the participants below further describes analytics and programs offered by YouTube for audience engagement:

Participant 1/LG stated: *"'Audience retention' with analytics you can see if people only watch the first minute or you can see that people watch a lot from 3 to 5 minutes. Then you can see that what people are interested in more and can cut and re-upload a shorter video. Also, 'meta data' in which you write the description and file name when you upload it like 'how to shoot weddings' needs to be in your file name and description, in the title, even in the meta tags so that it's easy to find."*

Participant 2/BK added: *"YouTube has 'Creator Studio' app and they have introduced many programmes to help support creators whether it's understanding the platform, understanding the algorithm or what can help further to push your content. 'Create a studio' is an app itself that gives you analytics, tells you things about your audience*

and your performance, and it gives you data points you can visit and choose to use or not to use in order to grow and gain favour. They recently introduced YouTube Black Voices where they actually invested in black creatives specifically on the YouTube platform all over the world. So, a handful, like 5 creatives that have received funding, master classes, mentorships from the YouTube platform.”

The evidence above addressed the research question based on determining how media, technological convergence and the genre of the shows perceive relationships between medium, technology, quality of content, and if they affect quality. Lastly, as many distributors start off with limited resources and crew, producers do begin slowly and work according to their conventions.

5.8 CONCLUSION

The respondents imparted their personal views and first-hand knowledge and the findings revealed that the respondents' comments were occasionally of similar views. Although each responder had distinct motivations for utilising YouTube, their experiences and comprehension of the platform were very similar. Respondents cited networking in the media sector as an essential element. They also noted risks, concerns and issues that may arise while using free internet distribution, one of which being copyright infringement. Understanding the niche and audience to monetise; thumbnails, SEO and title are tools to advertise material and lastly communicating why the world should move digitally. The data collected was for the purpose of gaining knowledge from the first-hand experiences of participants.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides the study conclusions that are indicative of the study's scope. This chapter expands on the research recommendations for the purposes of further research similar to this study. The suggestions are based on an overview of qualitative results obtained in Chapter 5 as well as the study's research aims and objectives. This chapter also demonstrates the significance of this research and how it will benefit the field of communications.

6.2 CONCLUSION

By examining media convergence in relation to YouTube's free video distribution, the study has added to the body of knowledge on online distribution alternatives. Other aspects pertained to the commodification of the YouTube digital platform through a political economy overview. This was accomplished by conducting a qualitative study on independent producers in SA who are currently using the distribution platform for revenue. Thus, supporting the assertion by Jenkins (2006) that public TV and social media have sought new ways to intertwine. There have been technological advancements on a global scale, notably, the introduction and expansion of OTT and video distribution services on social media. This study was able to conclude that SA is a new country when it comes to monetising on YouTube. Therefore, more knowledge and focus on niche, quality of video content and audience viewership understanding will garner more advertisers and sponsorships for SA independent producers to be able to afford a crew, equipment, catering and marketing to understanding YouTube's ever-changing algorithm.

Case studies seemed to further suggest YouTube's is more accessible and encourages creative freedom, moreover, innovations within technological developments facilitate in reaching audiences anywhere and at any time with any device. This study has highlighted the important role of online audience, producer, and advertiser relationships. The landscape of traditional television broadcasting was discussed to elaborate on explorations, such as, new online business models, video streaming, accessibility, and new media audience engagement in the mainstream and in the digital industry prompted by YouTube. There is a potential for the findings presented by the case studies to contribute to shaping a successful online distribution. It is further envisaged that this study will stimulate further research and inform government efforts to realise that capitalistic intentions of corporate media industries are restricting

creatives' efforts. That more may be done to promote and assist the 'media sector in SA's shift to YouTube distribution in order to reduce unemployment.

6.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

6.3.1. Entry and Employability into the Broadcasting Space

The findings in chapter five were suggestive in recognising further recommendations. The findings advocated for the need for institutions to mandate digital distribution models and educate students on the advantages and drawbacks of various distribution channels. In addition, educational institutions could begin teaching emerging film and television graduates the business side of the industry, online distribution, and introducing ways to leverage new media to curb unemployment. As royalties are a persistent source of contention, a further suggestion is to grant actors and crew royalties through an agreement that states they can receive money if the show performs well. This will enable everyone involved in the production to work towards creating a product that will endure. It has been suggested that traditional media should consider funding/commissioning smaller digital productions which would create employment opportunities. National governments' duty and response can entail the provision of additional resources to encourage new producers in SA through supporting digital transformation, it needs to create initiatives to fund digital creatives or create network exhibitions and festivals to expose available opportunities for them in more parts of SA.

6.3.2. YouTube Video Distribution

The democratisation of television content means understanding that the same audience you had on television is now online demanding content whenever they want to view it. A recommendation would be further expanded research focusing on; YouTube SEO's (online genres and niches, thumbnails, titles, meta-tags, clickbait, viral video versus evergreen content etc.), YouTube's changing algorithm, how independent producers can create an online brand and available resources. Although the findings proved that participants understand YouTube SEO's and algorithm in different perspectives, research based on this discourse remains limited because convergence moves rapidly, and technological apps are always updating and changing.

Findings also highlighted the necessity for independent producers to discover their niche, treat YouTube distribution like a business, investigate current sets of content and to be consistent. This is attainable by becoming an active YouTube user and researching competitors and other key individuals in the industry. Emerging independent producers can start alone or team-up with other graduates deprived of entry into the industry. Furthermore, they can learn skills from YouTube for skilled personnel that they do not have on the team (i.e., learn editing on YouTube *how to videos* if they do not have access to an editor). Furthermore, knowing your audience for retention purposes, understanding platform analytics and performance, are appropriate tools to utilise when distributing on social media platforms. The audience's experiences on social media as well as their overall relationship with technology need to be recorded to evaluate audience's present linguistic habits and preferences.

YouTube has tools to provide producers with an opportunity to distribute and monetise. For independent producers who haven't yet succeeded in accessing big firms to sponsor their films, advertisements through the YouTube Partnership Program are beneficial. After accumulating one thousand or more subscribers and four thousand annual viewing hours, this facility becomes available and other monetary gains (Saurina, 2020). However, independent producers need to save enough money to pre-finance the show as it may take time to see financial returns. Creatives need to learn the business of YouTube as the digital economy is big but digital distribution space is not big in SA yet, therefore, there's more money to be leveraged. It is also about the relationship with advertisers; they want to be on the YouTube platform, but producers need to give quality material. YouTube facilitates the screening of producer content to attract a niche market which then attracts sponsors and advertisers on YouTube, a very important aspect of online monetisation strategy. Therefore, content distributed needs to be treated seriously to gain financial gain from the platform to be able to pay for the production as a new producer.

An additional recommendation is to build an online audience community on YouTube which allows audiences to stay informed when a producer uploads a new video, as *following is the new currency*. The larger following a producer has, the more people watch, hence the more advertisers the YouTube channel attracts will maximise monetisation opportunities and communicate to everyone across the world to watch your video. Similarly, the creation of evergreen content keeps audiences always interested in watching as evergreen content always remains relevant which brings audiences back to watch content on your channel. To evaluate

the precise corporate ownership and control mechanisms as well as patterns of commodification and diversification, thorough research of media and communication companies is required. So that to prevent issues of ownership and control on platforms that allow independent producers to thrive. These trends are frequently considered in light of concerns like equity, access, and democratic principles (Wasko, 2012). In other words, these trends need to further research ownership, partnership, and the risks in any media environment.

Researchers have examined the advantages of social media for producers (Olanrewaju *et al.*, 2020). As marketing strategies were investigated in the study, the findings indicated that cross-media platform marketing is a beneficial way for producers to reach their consumers. Therefore, market your web-series by utilising other cross-media platforms to access insight pertaining to your audience and niche areas on all social platforms. Moreover, create video material that engages your audience by including a personalised YouTube banner with social media icons directing viewers to your accounts on other platforms (Kay *et al.*, 2020). Also, marketing strategies utilised on the YouTube platform are thumbnails and video titles to get YouTube to recommend your videos to other audiences within the platform. Therefore, independent producers need to be aware of the YouTube recommendation system which analyses a channel's content and attempts to deliver your videos to people with similar interests. This study focused on YouTube's role in brand-building and to what extent YouTube marketing influences consumer behaviour - perhaps further research can focus more on YouTube producers' marketing themselves as a brand (Viertola, 2018 & Prasad, 2018).

Ultimately, independent producers need to invest in YouTube advertising, gather audience data and monitor the success of their YouTube channel through indicators like view-time retention, popular videos, and interaction, as well as keeping an eye on their competitors (*Unbox social*, 2020). Video quality also needs to be outstanding enough that YouTube can recommend your video when people search, and it makes you stand out from the competition as it will attract more advertisers and potential sponsors.

6.3.3. Copyright, Intellectual property and Online Regulations set by Government.

Copyright regulations regarding music state that using a commercial song on YouTube is not allowed, and YouTube will not allow you to upload the video. This recognises that music copyright should be a part of literature based on video online distribution as they both are similar as entertainers. Music artists and independent producers who create video content should find means to work together such that both monetize from their creations on YouTube, however, there is a gap in research that ties the two together. This is a business opportunity for creatives to choose music that is copyright free to avoid copyright strikes.

The internet provides a platform for exhibition, transforming home movies from a private to a public context, therefore, public regulation and intervention is significant. Moreover, data prices should be lowered by internet providers so that young people can access digital professional platforms and minimise the digital divide by allowing convergence to occur in SA. Regulations should be subject to the YouTube platform itself in ensuring the protection of users. Therefore, SA government should try and engage YouTube stakeholders to create a safe platform to distribute. Furthermore, government should implement regulations issued by the platforms themselves so that all countries are in common compliance. Creatives should further familiarise themselves with the POPI Act, Film and Publications Act and the copyright on YouTube. Lastly, future research needs to further consider bringing together government and online distributors to garner perspectives on what or how they want to be protected online, especially with regards to copyright and IP. Arguably, the Companies and Intellectual Property Commission does not have formal ways of even copyrighting content. Therefore, that should be the priority for SA government.

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APPENDIX A: EDITING CERTIFICATE

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Exploring YouTube as a distribution alternative for independent South African producers regarding television formats

Sithabisile Kimberly Zulu

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This certificate confirms that the above-mentioned student submitted her draft master's dissertation for language-editing, which included correcting citations and the list of references. This was duly edited by me and returned to the student for revisions as per suggestions from me. I make no claim as to the accuracy of the research content. The text, as edited by me, is grammatically correct. After completion of my language editing, the student has the option to accept or reject suggestions/changes prior to re-submission to the supervisor who will check the content and instances of gaps in content and plagiarism, if any. The editor does not accept responsibility for supplementary material and revisions added after the final editing.

B.Naidoo

ID: [REDACTED]

DATE:

02/04/2023



Brian Naidoo
Associate Member

Membership number: NAI001
Membership year: March 2023 to February 2024

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THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT

APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

My name is Sithabisile Zulu, a Master's degree student in the Department of Media and Cultural Studies at the University of KwaZulu-Natal [Student number, 219095713]. The research I wish to conduct for my Masters dissertation project is titled; "Exploring YouTube as a distribution alternative for independent producers in South Africa for television formats; namely, sports show, talk-show, reality show and drama series".

The study's objective is to investigate how internet distribution systems are used in South Africa for independent producers who are now primarily distributing their content on YouTube. Through a case study model that examines five South African independent producers with YouTube channels in which they distribute television format shows online, the study will investigate the effects of YouTube's streaming service as a major content distribution channel.

The research study is supervised by the University of KwaZulu-Natal by both supervisors Professor N. Hlongwa and Ms. A. Njisane. If you have any questions, below are the contact details:

Media and Cultural Studies,
University of KwaZulu-Natal [address]
Student Email:

Thank you for agreeing to take part in the project. Before start I would like to emphasise that:

- Your participation is entirely voluntary.
- You are free to refuse to answer any question.
- You are free to withdraw at any time; and
- You are free to ask to access the transcribed data from the interview.

You have been provided with a copy of my research proposal which includes insight of the data collection tools as well as a copy of the approval letter which I have received from the Institutions Research Ethics Committee.

The information you provide in the interview will be kept strictly confidential and will be available only to the researcher. Excerpts from the interview discussions may be included in the final research report but your identity will not be reflected in the report as confidentiality to ensure protection of your anonymity your name, will be ensured as a pseudonym or case number will be assigned to each participant.

All recordings from the interview will be deleted at the end of the year 2023. Transcripts of the recordings will only be included within the final thesis, but other documents containing the transcriptions will be deleted and shredded at the end of the year. Additional data handed to the researcher such as a hard copy will be returned to the participant at the end of the year 2023. All archived material will be destroyed.

Public data such as information available on the internet, social media, articles, and interviews accessible online about you the participant, will be utilised within the study. The researcher will request data based on your YouTube analytics. Lastly, a copy of the summary of the key research findings on completion of the dissertation will be sent to you, on request.

Please sign this form to confirm that you have read the information provided and that you agree to participate in the study.

I..... (full names) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to participating in the research project. I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time should I desire.

Participant's Signature.....Date.....

If you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me at [redacted] 219095713@stu.co.za. Thank you for your time and I appreciate your anticipated participation in this research project.

Yours sincerely
Ms. S. Zulu - Researcher

APPENDIX C: ETHICAL APPROVAL

18 September 2021

Ms Sithabisile Zulu (219095713)
School Of Arts
Howard College

Dear Ms Zulu,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00003248/2021

Project title: Exploring YouTube as a distribution alternative for independent producers in South Africa for television formats namely; sports show, talk-show, reality and drama series.

Degree: Masters

Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 25 August 2021 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/ Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/ modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/ department for a period of 5 years.

This approval is valid until 18 September 2022.

To ensure uninterrupted approval of this study beyond the approval expiry date, a progress report must be submitted to the Research Office on the appropriate form 2 - 3 months before the expiry date. A close-out report to be submitted when study is finished.

All research conducted during the COVID-19 period must adhere to the national and UKZN guidelines.

HSSREC is registered with the South African National Research Ethics Council (REC-040414-040).

Yours sincerely,



Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)

/ dd

Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban, 4000, South Africa

Telephone: +27 (0)31 260 8350/4557/3587 Email: hssrec@ukzn.ac.za Website: <http://research.ukzn.ac.za/Research-Ethics>

Founding Campuses:  Edgewood  Howard College  Medical School  Pietermaritzburg  Westville

INSPIRING GREATNESS

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

University of KwaZulu Natal School of Arts Discipline: Media Studies- College: Humanities

Project Title: Exploring YouTube as a distribution alternative for independently produced television formats.

Investigator: Sithabisile Zulu

Proposed qualification: Master's in Arts: Media Studies

Interviewee Information

Name and Surname: Participant 2/BK

Gender: Female

Standardised notes pertaining to selected Case study questions:

- Face-to-face Interview
- Semi-structured interview
- Follow-up questions will be asked by the interviewer if there are points for clarity and elaboration during the interview.

Questions:

Question 1: How long, if at all, did it take you after graduating to obtain a position in television industry? Do you consider yourself as a contractual worker or a freelancer?

Question 2: What measures did you take when you were seeking employment?

Question 3: What possibilities do you see for independent or emerging content producers within the public broadcasting sector?

Question 4: What disadvantages do free-lancers and television producers face within the broadcasting sector? If at all.

Question 5: Do you as an employee of a show produced on traditional broadcasting channels have Intellectual Property rights, copyrights, or royalties for the work that you were a part of? How do you believe royalties should be distributed for shows you were a part of when shows are sold to other countries /channels?

Question 6: How did you start your YouTube channel and what influenced or attracted you to create within this application?

Question 7: What distribution opportunities can an emerging content producer receive through online streaming platforms such as YouTube?

Question 8: What kind of YouTube viewer are you? What are your preferred genres and formats to watch?

Question 9: How do you see the role and significance of YouTube content distribution in South Africa, in the near future?

Question 10: With the convergence of traditional media, technologies, and new media, growth in internet use has influenced how people produce, distribute, and consume content. How have these changes influenced your perception of content production and distribution today?

Question 11: What conventions do you take when creating? (For example, show set, duration, aesthetic choices, language choice, etc.) How do you consider user experience to engage them on a smaller online screen?

Question 12: What resources does YouTube have that allows people to participate, receive feedback to help progress within the platform?

Question 13: How do you pre-finance your show: Is it through sponsorships, investments, or a personal budget? And how many people do you have working with you to create the show?

Question 14: What tools and available resources did you use when starting and how did this affect the quality of the content you uploaded on YouTube?

Question 15: What are the key marketing strategies or branding you have employed in developing and attracting audiences to maximize viewership and monetize content on your channel?

Question 16: What is the significance of an online audience especially for the platform on which you have chosen to distribute?

Question 17: Have you received monetary compensation from YouTube for your content and its views? Would you say YouTube is a good platform in terms of monetary compensation for content creators?

Question 18: What value does a content producer bring to YouTube and what value does YouTube bring to a production company from your experience?

Question 19: Explain the relationship between, your production, online advertisers, audiences, and YouTube.

Question 20: What is your understanding of the YouTube algorithm and how do you navigate through it?

Question 21: What, in your personal opinion have been the pros and cons so far with using YouTube as a distribution platform? (In terms of policies, restrictions, owning your IP and copyrights)

Question 22: How do you believe that the open internet should protect your intellectual property work from being redistributed especially because platforms such as YouTube allow for free downloading and distribution or your copyrighted work from being replicated by a different online user?

Question 23: The Film and publications act has been passed in South Africa. It aims to protect online distribution and potentially block non-compliant online distributors. What is your take on government decisions for online distribution for users?

Question 24: What is or should be the national government's role and response in the development of regulations, to support emerging producers especially in light of new media platforms?

Question 25: How do you about broadcasting towards a progressive fourth industrial revolution and the quality of content?







APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT


PSEUDONYM: This is Sithabisile Zulu interview with Case Study 2 under the pseudonym: **Participant 2/BK**

INTERVIEW DATE: 3 November 2021

This was the second interview transcript that was conducted and contains key words pertaining to the participant's initial verbatim impressions.

Codes for the Case Study Interviews

1	Entry and Employability into the Broadcasting Space	
2	Online video distribution	
3	YouTube Distribution Tools	
4	Copyright and Intellectual Property	
5	Political Economy: Monetisation on YouTube	
6	Government Regulatory Provisions	

Key words/concepts:	Coding
<p>Interviewer: “Once you had graduated how long did it take for you to find a job within the film and television industry, if at all? Do you consider yourself a freelancer or contracted employer”?</p> <p>BK: “So, I graduated in early 2017, and I think in terms of formal employment, I was able to do an internship through a connection that I had. So, networking in the industry quickly became about who you knew. The internship was behind-the-scenes and wasn't necessarily what I wanted to do. I wanted to shadow directing but they could only get me a spot in clothing and design. It took about, like, two</p>	

months, and also it was an unpaid internship. At the end of that period, I was offered a formal employment on the next production, but I declined because I did not want to go down that path. I wanted to focus on creating, directing- I wanted to focus on my YouTube. I then became unemployed or self-employed for a year and a half and I got a job that's not related to the industry that would supplement my income to put into YouTube. Having graduated with my degree in stage and screen, I really thought I was going to get a job straight away because I had the talent and drive, and when I went to auditions, what I got was a rude awakening because, if anything, South Africa is a country that is full of talent, but opportunities are very scarce. And there's so much competition and you are competing with the hundreds and thousands of emerging talents, and you are competing with the people at the top who get preference with these roles. It was incredibly difficult to break through so much-so that I had to go through a different route, which was behind the scenes through interning. And that didn't work out in the long run, so I decided to put all my energy on my platform. I consider myself a freelancer."

Interviewer: "What measures did you take when you were seeking employment"?

BK: "I graduated from performance theatre and screen, and the measures I took was a lot of auditioning. Even before graduating and studying, I had been auditioning. Which for the most part was pretty unsuccessful, and after hearing a lot of no's for people to put me on their platform, I started my own platform to do what I wanted to do."

Interviewer: "What opportunities do you believe there are within the public broadcasting industry as an independent or an emerging content producer"?

BK: "I'm not very well versed in the perspective of public broadcasting; I have actually looked into some job opportunities within traditional media because now they are looking at more content producers. So, I think opportunities are there but quite limited, and it is quite competitive as well."

Interviewer: "Do you believe that as an employee of a show produced on traditional broadcasting channels should have Intellectual Property rights, copyrights, or royalties for the work that you were

a part of? How do you believe royalties should be distributed for shows you were a part of when shows are sold to other countries /channels”?

BK: *"Locally, it is quite disadvantaged and limited towards actors; I'll make a note to give you that article, but there was a partition by SAGA, the South Africa Guild of Actors, to actually let South African actors earn royalties from shows that have been replayed because even at a local scale, they are not getting that. I'd imagine that it's probably the same from a production scale as well; you just get paid for the work and the time limit that you are working on that production, and then afterwards-hey man."*

Interviewer: "How did you start your YouTube channel and what influenced or attracted you to create within this application”?

BK: *"Well, uhm, I've always just enjoyed watching YouTube and have been a huge consumer of YouTube growing up. Uhm, and seeing other people put themselves on camera. Like I said, I studied acting, so I always wanted to be on a platform beyond screen, and I also had great aspirations for presenting, and realising that, ok, this is a very accessible way for one to put themselves out there. It's fun, and I can expose myself to different opportunities by doing that, so that was like a motivator, and I thought it would help my acting career as well."*

Interviewer: "What distribution opportunities can an emerging content producer receive through online streaming platforms such as YouTube”?

BK: *"I think there are a lot of opportunities for emerging content producers. Like I said, it's so accessible to anyone; you don't even necessarily need to be qualified in any production to actually start on YouTube. What one would find interesting about me is that I work a lot with video producing and video editing, and it was through starting my YouTube channel that I gained those skills. Those are things I did not know how to do because I studied something completely different, but now the bulk of my work and the bulk of the opportunities that I get that sustain me and my business are through the skills I've gained by doing YouTube. There are so many opportunities on these streaming*

platforms, and they are still emerging, especially in South Africa, where it's so new. We are just getting started."

Interviewer: "What kind of YouTube viewer are you? What are your preferred genres and formats to watch and what genre would you classify your show as"?"

BK: *"I am a very hungry and well-fed YouTube viewer; YouTube is probably one of my primary sources of media consumption. I think traditional television is very much making its way out, and platforms like YouTube and your other online video services like Netflix are where the future of content is going. I have a varied taste, from vlogs to lifestyle content, social commentary, to comedy, entertainment, and film narratives and web-series. I would classify my content as more of a variety channel, but it's very much entertainment and social commentary, but also a little bit of comedy as well."*

Interviewer: "How do you see the role and significance of YouTube content distribution in South Africa, in the near future"?"

BK: *"Well, I think that it's definitely growing. What we have seen, especially in recent years, is how many opportunities there are."*

Interviewer: "What conventions do you take when creating? (For example, show set, duration, aesthetic choices, language choice, etc.) How do you consider user experience to engage them on a smaller online screen"?"

BK: *"That's such a lovely question, and it's so interesting because, as a small creator, you never really think about it, or it's not as detailed or calculated as proper big productions. In terms of me and 'The B Word', I have made a very big effort to kind of have a distinct look and feel. In terms of the set for people to recognise it, that this is 'The B Word' because of the style. Because people watch YouTube in their room, in the bathroom, it's very intimate. I want to create a space where you feel welcome, somewhere that's comfortable and not to overly produced. Also, quality that the user can enjoy. I love my bright colours and feminism. You'll see little details in the set because it's very women-*

empowering; you'll see in the books that I have, women authors, and it's all interlinked. It's very natural and organic, and some parts that are intentional so that people can recognise it, but because my content is very lively and jovial, I also wanted the set to kind of reflect that as well. And it's important for my viewers to see themselves seated right here as well. Like, that's so cute, me and my girls could come and sit and have a chat".

Interviewer: "What resources does YouTube have that allows people to participate, receive feedback to help progress within the platform"?

BK: *"YouTube has a 'Creator Studio' and they have introduced many programmes to help support creators, whether it's understanding the platform, understanding the algorithm, or what can help further push your content. 'Creator Studio' is an app that gives you analytics, tells you things about your audience and your performance. It gives you data points you can visit and choose to use or not to use in order to grow and gain favour with that programme. It tells you more about your audience but also, they have other programmes. They recently introduced YouTube Black Voices, where they are actually investing in Black creatives specifically on the YouTube platform all over the world. So, a handful, say, for instance, like five creatives that have received funding, master classes, and mentorships from the YouTube platform, and that's something more that they want to do over the years, hopefully they will be able to do more and expand and vary the kinds of creatives they will be able to support on the platform."*

Interviewer: "How do you pre-finance your show: Is it through sponsorships, investments, or a personal budget? And how many people do you have working with you to create the show"?

BK: *"So very straightforward. For the majority of the time that I've been on YouTube, which now will be 4 and a half years, it was financed by personal finances but also a lot of sourcing from a ready existing things because, again, it's just so easy to start YouTube; you don't need the best or fanciest equipment or to make a huge investment to actually start. Over the years, I've been able to work with one or two brands, which means I've been able to gain back some of the investments I've made on my channel and also create long-term partnerships. And in the next coming years, I want to work with more brands as well."*

Until very recently, it's just been me. I've been a one-woman team doing everything, but I recently hired an editor who is editing my next batch of videos; helping me just edit the full-length videos, so I have more time to focus on other aspects of the business, channel, and platforms as we exist on other platforms now."

Interviewer: "What tools and available resources did you use when starting and how did this affect the quality of the content you uploaded on YouTube"?

BK: *"So, uhm, I think I definitely started at a more privileged place as lot of creatives would when they start their channel. But just have your phone- that's all you need. Make sure you have decent lighting and an internet connection so you can upload. I was fortunate enough to already have a DSLR camera, the one that I use till this day, so my video quality was already quite good at that. I also invested in some editing equipment as well because I wanted to. Well, at the time, I thought that was the only way to do things, but now and again, people fully edit their YouTube videos on their phones. There are so many resources you can use as a creator. Also, I was fortunate to have a space solely for YouTube; usually, creators would shoot in their bedrooms. I do have a room in my house that I use and decorate but that's not something that is accessible to everyone."*

Interviewer: What are the key marketing strategies or branding you have employed in developing and attracting audiences to maximise viewership and monetise content on your channel"?

BK: *"So, what's worked for me in terms of gaining and attracting, and growing my audience is really diversifying the platforms that I use, and the platforms that I distribute my content on. So, knowing that my full videos and the hub and heart of 'The B Word' stay on YouTube. But using things like Instagram and social media platforms like Tik Tok, where I reformat and repurpose that content to exist on those other channels to go and attract and meet new audiences and bring them back to YouTube. That's been a big thing, especially Tik Tok has really helped in terms of bringing in a lot more subscribers. But I'm learning every day."*

Interviewer: “What is the significance of an online audience especially for the platform in which you have chosen to distribute”?

BK: *“Well, an online audience is everything when speaking about a platform like YouTube; you know that is your community. Your online audience is where the money is. Not necessarily the size of the audience, but how we engage and connect the audience to the creator will help leverage when talking to brands and sponsorships. But also, those are the people who want to support you, so if you want to approach brands and be completely different in content, they would be more inclined to support you because of the para-inclined relationship. So, the online audience is everything because they also empower you to create businesses or different opportunities for yourself as well.”*

Interviewer: “Have you received monetary compensation from YouTube for your content and its views? Would you say YouTube is a good platform in terms of monetary compensation for content creators”?

BK: *“Tricky, in terms of whether it’s a good platform, that’s very dependent on how well you do and the amount of views that you gain. So, it is possible to get paid from Google directly through ad spend, but again, there’s a specific percentage you’ll have to get for every thousand views. I have been paid only twice now, so I got like R1000 from them, and I was like, awesome. When it doesn’t reach that threshold, you don’t get that money. So, unless, I would say in terms of consistency and especially when starting up and you one of those people who post and go viral, it’s not really a viable way to create income, but at the same time, we are in a place where, again, you don’t need to rely on YouTube alone to create income. Like I said, there are brand deals, and as long as you have a good, engaged community and you align with the brand, you can actually make some serious money in the digital community.”*

Interviewer: “What value does a content producer bring to YouTube and what value does YouTube bring to a production company from your experience”?

BK: *“Well, the value that YouTube gives us is that it gives us a platform and gives us a space; we are basically renting space on their platform. They are exposing us to or giving us the opportunity to be*

exposed to and build our own audiences, so that's the value that we create. In terms of the value that YouTube gets from us? Well, without independent creators or production companies, or anything else, YouTube would not exist, so the creatives are YouTube's bread and butter. Also, our originality and our creativity—those are the two biggest values I think as creators we give YouTube”.

Interviewer: “Explain the relationship between, your production, online advertisers, audiences, and YouTube”.

BK: *“Pretty simple relationship: I'm the creator, I create my content, and I put it on the YouTube platform. The advertisers can approach me directly to collaborate, whether it's featuring some of their products or actually creating a video concept completely around their product. I have the audience, so the audience will come watch my video. They will now see the product I'm advertising and be more inclined to give it the time of day as a creator because of that relationship and that trust that they have with me. I'm a bit more of a reliable source, and audiences also do watch the ads that are inbuilt into YouTube to support the creators. That's another thing that benefits YouTube as well, because the more that people watch the adverts, the more they will get paid for the ads that they put in”.*

Interviewer: “What is your understanding of the YouTube algorithm and how do you navigate through it”?

BK: *“I'm going to be very real; I don't understand that algorithm. The only thing I could say about the algorithm is that YouTube will give you insights and watch time. So, if people watch it from the beginning to the end or for a long period of time, that tells YouTube or that tells the algorithm that it has that audience retention. Also, if people like and comment, and there is engagement, and if it's sharing. So, within the first 24 hours, if you get enough audience retention and engagement, it will be more likely to push it out into other similar types of people to see that content, and that's how to get into the home page.”*

Interviewer: “What, in your opinion have been the pros and cons so far with using YouTube as a distribution platform? (In terms of policies, restrictions, owning your IP and copyrights)”

BK: *“Cons in terms of copyright, and I guess it helps for artists, we have to use free copyright music on our content. And if it doesn’t get flagged, then the money that is generated through those in-build ads will go to the actual artist, which is a con for me, as a creator who wants to use that song. Cause now I have to either change my creative direction or I can keep it on, but the money is going to go to someone else, but it is a pro for other artists who have their IP being used. In terms of restrictions, it depends on what you make. I have had somethings flagged because YouTube said this might be a bit of a questionable kind of content because I do like to go into some of my topics a little bit more deep, less PG with some of them. And also, advertisers are very particular about the kind of videos that they want their ads to play on. So, YouTube will be strict on that. Again, do I have to dilute my creative direction or the things that I want to talk about? But you do have the option of not monetising those videos as well. So, it is about choosing and juggling what you will let go of.”*

Interviewer: *“How do you believe that the open internet should protect your intellectual property work from being redistributed especially because platforms such as YouTube allow for free downloading and distribution or your copyrighted work from being replicated by a different online user”?*

BK: *“It is very tricky because, as an online creator, I do want my work to be protected at all costs. There’s a lot of time, there’s a lot of money, and artistic integrity that goes into every piece that I put out there. But at the same time, I have also benefited from those free downloads”.*

Interviewer: *“The Film and publications act has been passed in South Africa. It aims to protect online distribution and potentially block non-compliant online distributors. What is your take on government decisions for online distribution for users”?*

BK: *“Good, shoutout for the government doing something. I think that it’s great that you even brought that up because even with the uploading process, they had recently after the passing of that act, which changed the way we have to go through to actually publish a video. So now you go through certain checklists: does this have certain language? is there violence? is this video for adults? is it inappropriate? then you go through the process of reviewing your own review and tick if it has none of those. Or is this video for children? And then they will have their own internal viewing process. I*

BK: *“Cons in terms of copyright, and I guess it helps for artists, we have to use free copyright music on our content. And if it doesn’t get flagged, then the money that is generated through those in-build ads will go to the actual artist, which is a con for me, as a creator who wants to use that song. Cause now I have to either change my creative direction or I can keep it on, but the money is going to go to someone else, but it is a pro for other artists who have their IP being used. In terms of restrictions, it depends on what you make. I have had somethings flagged because YouTube said this might be a bit of a questionable kind of content because I do like to go into some of my topics a little bit more deep, less PG with some of them. And also, advertisers are very particular about the kind of videos that they want their ads to play on. So, YouTube will be strict on that. Again, do I have to dilute my creative direction or the things that I want to talk about? But you do have the option of not monetising those videos as well. So, it is about choosing and juggling what you will let go of.”*

Interviewer: *“How do you believe that the open internet should protect your intellectual property work from being redistributed especially because platforms such as YouTube allow for free downloading and distribution or your copyrighted work from being replicated by a different online user”?*

BK: *“It is very tricky because, as an online creator, I do want my work to be protected at all costs. There’s a lot of time, there’s a lot of money, and artistic integrity that goes into every piece that I put out there. But at the same time, I have also benefited from those free downloads”.*

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follow the guidelines, but I am definitely for that because, at the end of the day, the internet can be a very dangerous place because it is easily accessible to children. It's important we are able to regulate and put in certain policies and placements and tighten the whip a little for people who have access out there".

Interviewer: "What is or should be the national government's role and response in the development of regulations, to support emerging producers especially in light of new media platforms"?

BK: *"I think the best thing they can do, especially at a national government, is, honestly, just put out more resources, especially when it comes to funding. We're at a place now where South Africa as a whole, job creation, and unemployment is just at an all-time high. YouTube is a place where people can actually create their own businesses and create their own platforms. It's a platform, but in order to grow and sustain it, we need monetary funding. The government, as I've seen with the Gauteng provision for funding social media and digital stuff as well and so that's good, but we need more money and more of those consistently every year, and also the barriers. There are so many barriers and so many little hurdles that you have to go through which to be fair, if you want to give someone R100,000 you have to make sure that it's going to the right place, and that they know what they're going to be doing and have a financial plan."*

Interviewer: "How do you feel about broadcasting towards a progressive fourth industrial revolution and the quality of content to come from it"?

BK: *"Online is inevitable; it is the future, and not only is it going to happen, but it's also already happening. The migration of content is moving to a digital space is already happening, and that's probably going to be the primary or the biggest source of content viewing and digesting in the future. Get into it still early so that you can reap the rewards. People who have built big brands in traditional media, be it big films they are now coming onto a space like YouTube because they see the brand value and opportunity there. It's very affirming, as a creator, to see big brands coming onto YouTube, where we're all on the same playing field. I'm glad I started when I did and wish I started a little earlier. The best time to have started was five years ago, and the second best was today".*