Duduzile Dlamini

Department of Communication Science, University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, South Africa
Email: DlaminiDF@ufs. ac.za
ORCID: https://orcid. org/0000-0001-7380-3101

SEE ME AND HEAR ME: BLACK SOUTH AFRICAN WOMEN USING YOUTUBE AS A SITE OF BELONGING AND VISIBILITY

ABSTRACT

Digital technologies have created opportunities and threats in African feminism and digital scholarship, requiring feminists across the continent to rethink and reimagine their position in the digital sphere. Pre-colonialism African women were respected members of society. However, during slavery, colonialism and apartheid women where marginalised, victimised, and dispossessed socially, politically, and economically, making it difficult for them to be seen or heard. It is for this reason that post-colonial African thought is at the epicentre of foregrounding and reclaiming African intelligentsia. Digital technologies privilege Eurocentric knowledge; inevitably this poses a threat to the African gender transformation movement. African women face challenges such as the digital gender divide, cyber bullying, online violence, harassment, and gender bias datasets. To mitigate this gap, African women are curating transnational, transregional and transdisciplinary content to respond to and prevent all forms of online violence and gender inequality. This study argues that digital technologies can be used as a form of resistance to patriarchal, sexist, racist, classist and misogynistic ideologies about African women by creating feminist-driven podcasts, blogs, YouTube channels, websites and social media sites that work towards realising feminist futures free from violence and socio-political and economic injustices online and offline.

Keywords: digital communication, online communication, feminism, African feminism

INTRODUCTION

Historically, African women have been silenced and were unseen due to slavery, colonialism and apartheid. Women's invisibility manifested in systematic erasure, especially on television. Traditionally, mass media operated from a top-down approach – the media had direct and primary control of news, information, and entertainment. Television owners,

advertisers, directors, writers, producers and executives globally, continentally and nationally were and continue to be predominantly white and male, and inevitably their deeply entrenched perceptions about society reflect on television screens. Media ownership determines how content is selected, produced and framed. Hence, the strong call for a diverse workforce in the media, especially in executive positions, to promote inclusive content and good organisational practice.

In South Africa, progressive policies, acts and the Constitution (1996) have enabled women to access leadership roles in previously contested spaces such as the media. Women's presence as executive storytellers have positively changed the stereotypical portrayal of women on television by employing the female gaze. However, numerically and ideologically, traditional media and online platforms are still owned and controlled by men. As a result, women's voices are not loud as their male counterparts. Moreover, the digital space has shifted the top-down traditional media approach by enabling former audience members to be prosumers. The evidence is seen in the growing number of bloggers, vloggers, YouTubers and podcasters who offer alternative media content that would otherwise not appear in the mainstream media, revealing audiences' appetite and desire to consume unconforming media representation.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This article is based on the author's observations on the declining number of locally produced talk shows on mainstream South African television, while at the same time seeing the proliferation of South African talk shows on YouTube. This article argues that the decline of television consumption and the saturation of black female talk shows on YouTube is an illustration of/or response to neglected content on television. Therefore, the aim of the study is to explore the proliferation of YouTube talk show channels developed by and for black South African women, particularly looking at how the audience responds to the way YouTube creators see, hear, and represent other black women on digital talk shows.

The following research objectives were set:

- ♦ to assess the objectives of black female led YouTube talk show channels;
- ♦ to ascertain audiences' response to feminist digital content; and
- ♦ to explore the relevance of the YouTube channels in current South African digital feminist discourse.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Implications of Imperialism and apartheid in the media

One of the reasons why Africans are at the epicentre of the decolonial project is because they have been unseen and unheard for centuries. Colonialism is a system that marginalised Africans socially, psychologically, politically, and economically, especially women. In the colonial era African women lost their standing in society

143

and were relegated to perpetual minor status, unable to make political and economic decisions (Tamale, 2000). Pre-colonial African women were respected members of society who contributed to communal growth and economic development (Mama, 1984; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2005). Apartheid dispossessed Africans, especially black women, from their minds, land, resources, culture, spirituality, and dignity (Mbembe, 2001; Ajayi, 2002; Mboti, 2019). The dawn of democracy, however, provoked great debate and excitement around how women would use the camera to examine their social, political, and cultural location. Studies show that women have gradually changed the media landscape; however, they are still underrepresented in leadership structures (Berger, 1999; Wasserman, 2020; Rodny-Gumede & Chasi, 2021).

The male and female gaze on television

Representation is the portrayal of meaningful aspects of reality for an audience. According to Hall (1989), representation is the production of meaning in a two-way process: media practitioners encode the message, and the audience decodes the message. Media representation has the power to change the status quo or reinforce orthodox practices. According to film feminist Laura Mulvey (1975), the cinematic representation of men and women illustrates social and political power disparities. This refers to the gaze, where those in positions of power scout and exploit the marginalised. The male gaze in particular refers to content created for the aesthetic or sexual pleasure of male audiences created by male media practitioners. It entails the presence of a man behind the camera, while the female body is objectified on screen for male spectators to consume (Mulvey, 2000; Masina, 2010). Media scholar Oliver (2017) argues that the male gaze is dangerous and problematic because it reinforces traditional stereotypical perceptions of women and denies them personal agency. Traditional cinematic representation of women and especially black women limits their experiences and capabilities by confining their roles to home nurturers, survivors of social ills, poor, weak, dispossessed, and sexual objects. The male gaze extends beyond television screens to video games, music videos, and films, and this is considered by Yancy (2008) and Mazibuko (2022) as the reproduction of the colonial gaze.

African feminist scholar Gqola (2001) writes that the task of representing black women in postcolonialism is necessary but difficult because it demands innovative and ground-breaking representation. The world is evolving, and so are women, and the media is expected to reflect these societal changes. According to Muholi (2012) post-colonial feminist work such as the female gaze attempts to imagine and reimagine different futures, and different ways of thinking, seeing and being. The female gaze is a response to the male gaze. The female gaze troubles the patriarchal, sexist, racist, classist and discriminatory representation of women in various genres on television.

A brief history of South African talk shows

Like local and international talk shows, South African television talk shows originated from radio current affairs shows. South African television talk shows can be traced back to *The Felicia Mabuza-Suttle Show* in 1992, the first prime-time television talk

show aired on SABC 1 with a live audience and experts discussing sociopolitical and economic issues. Host Felicia Mabuza-Suttle interviewed the likes of Nelson Mandela, Kenneth Kaunda and Julius Nyerere and facilitated social cohesion discussions at a critical time in post-apartheid South Africa. Mabuza-Suttle paved the way for the next generation of television hosts after the show ended in 2005 (Simpson, 2009). In 2002, *Take 5* became the most popular youth-based talk show on SABC 1. The show tackled the challenges that young South Africans experienced while offering pragmatic solutions (Milton, 2009). In the early 2000s, television talk show discourse was mostly geared towards healing, with an interest in confession and testimony. Popular confession-oriented programmes included *Relate*, *Nyan Nyan*, *Khumbul'ekhaya* and *Forgive and Forget*. In each episode participants would publicly confess a secret on camera, as well as to the person they were seeking reconciliation with (Ndlovu, 2013). While most of these shows are no longer on air, *Khumbul'ekhaya* remains one of the SABC's flagship programmes.

In 2003, Carol Bouwer Productions produced *Motswako*, the longest-running talk show on SABC 2. The production was female-centric, dealing with sociopolitical and cultural issues South African women faced, including HIV/Aids, gender inequalities and politics, combined with topics in fashion, art, and women empowerment. The show was presented in Sesotho. Despite its success, the show ended in 2022 after 21 seasons (D'abdon & Molebatsi, 2011; Shelembe, 2014; Nkosi, 2014). Thereafter, SABC 3 revived the South African talk show scene by introducing *3 Talk*, produced by Urban Brew and hosted by Noleen Maholwane-Sangqu. The show was a prime-time daily lifestyle show that covered topics from entertainment, sports, music and books to health, crime, abuse and politics, targeting diverse South African audiences in terms of race, age, gender, class and sexual orientation (Carelse & Evans, 2017). Audience participation included calling in live on studio and commenting via SMS. The show ended in 2015 due to low ratings (Chipp & Maphalala, 2019).

In 2013, actress and musician Khanyi Mbau hosted her own talk show on free-to-air channel e.tv. *Katch it with Khanyi* was produced by Endemol and was a pre-recorded show that covered South African celebrity interviews. This celebrity-centred format served as a precursor for current and possible future South African talk shows. The first season's location was Nambitha's Restaurant in the famous Vilakazi Street in Mbau's hometown, Soweto. The second and final season was shot at Orlando Stadium. The show's success resulted in a South African Film and Television Award (SAFTA) nomination for best talk show, but ended after three seasons (Engelbrecht, 2014).

Youth panel chat shows began to emerge in 2015. Shows like *Ekse* and *Ekse Zwakala* on e.tv discussed diverse issues faced by young South Africans, including lived experiences about politics, crime, alcoholism and navigating social relationships, with a segment on the streets speaking to people about the topic discussed in the studio. The Ochre Moving Pictures production aired for three seasons (Mbutuma, 2015).

The proliferation of late-night shows on South African television emerged with *The Phat Joe Live Show*, an entertainment talk show that featured various segments, such as comedy, music, movie reviews and political satire. The show was aired on e.tv from 1999 to 2001, before moving to SABC 1 from 2001 to 2005 (Pokwana, 2001). *Late*

Night with Kgomotso followed on SABC 2 in 2008 and was presented by Kgomotso Matsunyane, a film maker, broadcaster, and businesswoman. The show was filmed with a live audience, celebrity guests, and a live band. The tone of the show was cheeky, thought-provoking and fun (Nyathi, 2011). *Late Nite News* (LNN), hosted by prominent South African comedian Loyiso Gola, started in 2010. The parody and satire talk show featured black comedians commenting on current affairs. The show used humour to expose power inequalities and the lack of political progress post-apartheid South Africa. LNN became a success across Africa and was nominated for an International Emmy Award for best comedy series in 2013 and in 2014. In 2015 the show was cancelled after 11 seasons following a creative disagreement between the channel (eNCA) and Diprente Productions (Mkhwanazi, 2014). Other noteworthy talk shows include *Your Late Mate with Nimrod Nkosi* and *Tonight with Tim Modise*, both on Soweto TV.

Real Talk, presented by Anele Mdoda, first aired on SABC 3 in July 2016. The show focused on a wide array of topics and won a SAFTA for best talk show in 2017. Its success was short-lived after an internal SABC investigation found that the Department of Social Development had paid R500 000 to appear on the show (Tjiya, 2018; Ferreira, 2018). Viewership ratings declined as the show lost credibility after breaching the SABC's editorial policies. In 2019, Mdoda resigned and was replaced with veteran broadcaster Azania Mosaka. The show has since been cancelled (IOL, 2019).

In 2021 satellite broadcaster DStv's Pan African lifestyle channel Honey TV was launched. The channel aired a talk show The Buzz, hosted by five diverse women from across the African continent. The hosts represented South Africa, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Zimbabwe and Nigeria. In each episode a viewer writes a letter about a dilemma they are facing. The round-table panel offered diverse insights, advice and lived experiences on the topic and at the end of the show the presenters voted on what they thought the viewer should do about their predicament. Honey TV closed in 2023 (Ferreira, 2023). The public broadcaster currently airs only one talk show. *Daily Thetha* is a mid-day youth current affairs show on SABC 1.

Digital Black feminism

Digital Black feminism's praxis entails studying, archiving, publishing, and continuously engaging in African feminist thought. The Digital Black feminism paradigm focuses on the way black women use digital tools to tell stories, the methods they use to tell the stories, and the impact that these stories have on the intended audience (Dlakavu, 2016; Sobande, 2021; Mazibuko, 2022). Against the historical backdrop of exclusion from the media sector, black women use the digital space, and particularly YouTube, as a form of resistance, but also as a pursuit to realise personal agency and visibility (Pereira, 2017; Steele, 2021). The use of "Black feminism" is to distinguish the geopolitical, socio-economic and political thought of African philosophical nuances and ancestries (Oyeronke, (1997). Black feminism examines the racism and classism that exist in the lives of black women because of slavery, colonialism, apartheid, neoliberalism, and global oppressions (De la Rey, 1997; Mama, 2019; Tamale, 2006;). Steele (2021) provides an explanation of how race and gender intersects in the information and communications technology sector. She (2021) writes that the

digital space has provided women and especially black women with the platform and opportunity to set the agenda, to self-define, to trouble and complicate the status quo, and at the same create an enabling space for discourse for a common cause to occur.

Digital African Feminist scholarship has grown over the years, enabling women across the globe to connect (Sobande, 2020). Women use the digital space to self-actualise and build online communities that produce meaningful e-sisterhood (Dobson, 2015). This is evident through black women Youtubers subscribing, collaborating and monetarily supporting other black female Youtubers. Women participate in the digital space to resist the hegemonic social representation of black women, especially in mainstream talk shows (Bukula, 202). As mentioned earlier, the talk show format is the most-watched genre on television. Media owners capitalised on this and started to produce shows by targeting content from those with lesser power or privilege through exploitation, excessive vulgarity, violence and sensational representation for high ratings, while neglecting other forms of representation and realities (Manga, 2009).

As with television, the digital sphere is highly gendered. According to YouTube classifications, men dominate in gaming, music, sports, comedy and education, while women's reasons for joining YouTube is to build communities and to share content on faith, entertainment, finance, beauty, wellness, fitness and health.

Audience participation

Television talk show scholarship is incomplete without discussing audience participation. Most studies neglect the role audiences play in the success or failure of a media product. Audience research usually focuses on the audience's profile, their perceptions about the show, and the influence that media products has in formulating audiences' identity, especially in feminist studies. Most research focuses on women's perceptions about soap operas, melodramas and telenovelas (Shattuc, 1997) with a more recent shift to audiences' participation in daytime television talk shows (Wood, 2009). Media studies mostly focus on female audiences (Tortajada *et al*., 2017) because women were traditionally located as media consumers rather than media producers.

The findings of early studies (McQuail, 1987) still hold some truth, namely, that talk show audience members are active media users along the lines of the uses and gratification theory. Talk shows encourage live audience participation through calls, texts, and now connecting through social media platforms, enabling public discourse to take place (Shattuc, 2014). A talk show without an engaged audience is more likely to fail. The success of any talk show is determined by high viewership, which contributes to the channel's advertising revenue. Studies (Manga, 2003; Ndlovu, 2013; Ponono, 2014) found that low viewership of television talk shows is mainly because of declining editorial trust in traditional media; external interference (Wood, 2009; Tortajada *et al*., 2021); or because the content is boring, irrelevant and stagnant. In the digital space an active audience is also important. The platform requires subscribers, likes and a robust comment section between the audience and the creator for the YouTube channel to thrive. Studies (Frobenius, 2014; Sobande, 2017) found that women participate in digital communities created by women who look, sound, and think like them. Research (Arthurs *et al*., 2018) further shows that audiences remain loyal to digital spaces that are authentic and unique.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Method

This is a qualitative study constructed within the interpretivism realm. The study aims to seek an in-depth understanding of the social experiences and activities of a group in a particular setting (Mayring, 2014), namely digital communities, and how they share, construct or deconstruct the socio-economic and political meaning of the society they live in. The study employs virtual ethnography to collect and interpret data (Baym, 2015; Hine, 2000).

Sampling

The study's sample consists of five black South African women's talk shows on YouTube, namely *Wellness and Wisdom*, *The Conversation Capital*, *Moments with Mantsoe Pout*, *Convos and Cocktails*, and *Let's talk with Khosi*. The YouTube channels were selected because of shared common characteristics, namely, that they are all produced by black women for a black female audience, addressing current feminist issues in the digital space post-apartheid South Africa.

Data collection

Automediality is a process that requires a researcher to be immersed in and participate in a digital space, culture and community (Baym, 2015). This kind of participation is known as "lurking". Lurkers are highly engaged internet users who rarely engage in the comment section of the media production, but they deliberately view, like, subscribe, and watch advertisements as a contribution to the channel's success. Scholars justify lurking as a form of research participation that yields data collection. This "field" in the digital sphere challenges traditional methods of collecting data, becoming more flexible, fluid, and invisible (Hine, 2000). For this study, I immersed myself in the digital culture and practice of each talk show channel and diligently live-streamed and downloaded already available YouTube videos in a chronological order from the time the channel began to the latest uploaded episode. I collected data by observing and analysing in great details the content of the show, guest appearances, the production process, and audience participation by looking at the number of views, comments, likes or dislikes of each video in all five channels from January 2023 until March 2024.

Data analysis

Data analysis was done through content and visual analysis (Mayring, 2010). This allowed me to analyse black women's digital presence and contribution by evaluating the content of their YouTube channels and determining audiences' textual participation in the comments section. Studies (Myers *et al*., 2013) have found that videos are important tools of analysis in media studies. In this regard, I selected visual analysis as a suitable method as it presents messages that offer multiple interpretations mainly because audiences are non-passive but consume visual content in multiple forms (Van Leeuwen & Jewitt, 2001). This dual analytical approach is a useful contribution as it offers new, rich, robust and nuanced ways of studying audiovisual media and communication. The data was analysed according to the following categories: the

title of the programme, content, production details, guest selection, the format of the show, audience participation, and the impact of the show on current South African feminist discourse.

Ethical considerations

Online research is a relatively new method and it is highly contested. Research with human participants requires informed consent (Khan, 2014). However, YouTube videos are in the public domain as a "public video-sharing platform" that encourages users to "broadcast themselves" (Bruckman, 2002). The study was planned and executed while keeping in mind the ethics of care, minimising harm, and respecting human rights (Friend & Singer, 2015).

FINDINGS

Brief context of the five YouTube channels is provide before the themes are discussed.

'Wisdom and Wellness'

The YouTube channel was founded by Mpumi Ledwaba in 2016. Ledwaba is an entrepreneur, podcaster, and multimillionaire YouTube channel host. *Wisdom and Wellness* focuses on inspiring, equipping and encouraging its audience with a holistic approach to living. The channel embodies faith and feminist futuristic values, and an overarching theme includes the representation of African women. Topics of discussion include motherhood, fatherhood, mental health, gender inequality, beauty, faith, family, business, wellness, friendship, marriage, health, leisure, finance, and relationships. Guests include entrepreneurs, black couples, social media influencers, musicians, chefs, beauty queens, aviation practitioners, and media personalities. Many of the guests are black women. The studio is a home production set that is professionally curated with a camera, furniture, sound equipment and décor. The channel has 300 000 subscribers and over 30 million views. *Wisdom and Wellness* is available at: https://youtube.com/@MpoomyLedwaba?si=I_Bwhf_JAPmeDkz9

'The Conversation Capital'

The Conversation Capital first aired on YouTube in 2022 and was founded by host Ursula Mariane, content producer Bonga Botha and technical director Given Masilela. Mariani, the face of the show, is also a lecturer, voice artist and radio presenter. The channel advocates for talking, sharing knowledge, building content, and curating a safe digital space. *The Conversation Capital* largely focuses on current socio-political issues in South Africa. Some of the topics covered are black female businesses, cohabitation, surrogacy, teenage pregnancy, fertility, unemployment, depression, black generational wealth, African spirituality, masculinity, diversity, sex, and health. The guest profile consists of legal experts, financial advisors, entrepreneurs, therapists, academics, artists, traditional healers, medical professionals, and fitness instructors. The guests on the show are mostly black women. The channel has more than 28 000 subscribers and one million views. *The Conversation Capital* is available at: https://youtube.com/@theconversationcapital?si=81IAvBWkv0eEygGj

'Moments with Mantsoe Pout'

Mantsoe Pout is a radio presenter, content director and television writer. She founded her talk show on YouTube in 2022. The show is a celebrity interview programme, documenting and capturing moments of South African celebrity's upbringing, life experiences and career trajectories. Celebrities include comedians, actors, musicians, film directors and radio presenters. Black women are the main guests. The show is shot in a home studio with a camera, sound equipment and furniture. The channel has over 9 000 subscribers and 240 000 views. *Moments with Mantsoe Pout* is available at: https://youtube.com/@momentswithmantsoe?si=LMKv5Ty-F73sxse0

'Convos and Cocktails'

Convos and Cocktails is hosted by Lesego Tlabi, an author, comedian, actress and digital content creator. The channel was launched in 2023, and focuses on meaningful feminist conversations for South African women in a post-feminism era. Topics include freedom, sex, sexuality, body surgery, relationships, blended families, loss, and success. Guests are media practitioners, sexologists, parents, celebrities, authors, and medical doctors. Black women dominate the guest list. The show is recorded in a professional studio. The channel has over 1 000 subscribers and more than 48 000 views. *Convos and Cocktails* is available at: https://youtube.com/@ConvosandCocktails?si=uMhkdypQoQqrAtG_

'Let's Talk with Khosi'

Makhosazana Zwane Ziqubu is a seasoned journalist, a former magazine editor, and an executive media practitioner. In 2023, she founded *Let's Talk with Khosi*. The show focuses on meaningful and impactful interviews with South African celebrities and influential figures. Guests include television producers, authors, models, reality television stars, academics, medical doctors, and businesswomen. All the guests are black women. The show is recorded in a professional studio. The channel has over 3 000 subscribers and over 196 000 views. *Let's Talk with Khosi* is available at: https://youtube.com/@LetsTalkWithKhosi?si=s197OorQMrsUQfMt

DISCUSSION

This study is concerned with the reasons why and the way in which black South African women are curating talk shows for other black women on YouTube. Through auto-ethnography I found that YouTube has become a replacement for television for many young women. Historically, traditional media presented black women as sexual objects, who are dispossessed and marginalised. This skewed representation has led to the danger of a "single story" (Adiche, 2006, 2009).

Building feminist digital spaces

According to *The Conversation Capital*, mainstream talk shows lack meaningful and impactful conversations. Pout says she started her YouTube channel because feminist work is hardly documented in the digital space. *Wisdom and Wellness,* on

the other hand, was established to offer an alternative healthy representation of black women and the community they live in. *Let's Talk with Khosi* offers South Africans alternative content with interviews with influential black women who occupy positions in traditionally male-dominated industries. Tlabi (*Convos and Cocktails*) founded her YouTube channel because she had been trying to break into mainstream media and was constantly rejected because she did not meet the beauty standards of television. This led her to create an informative, robust, and innovative feminist-inclined YouTube channel. All five channels were created with the intention of building safe digital feminist spaces as a response to mainstream media's portrayal of black women.

It is clear that the channels are intentionally curating feminist digital spaces that are encouraging, empowering and impactful. Historically, women, and especially black women, have been *Othered.* It is for this reason that they are building e-sisterhoods where they can belong and where they are seen and heard. The candid post-feminism conversations range from education, wealth, freedom, intersectionality, sex, sexuality, female pleasure, masturbation, abortion, family planning, weight loss surgery, love, career, entrepreneurship, motherhood, marriage, divorce, wellness, and spirituality. These topics are important to the current South African feminist discourse because they represent black women's current realities as they obtain qualifications, lead organisations, have families, maintain their identities, and evolve in all spheres of their lives. The five YouTube channels are developed and produced with a female gaze, and as a result the content is feminist and future-driven, focusing on changing the status quo and preserving feminist digital communities with care, empathy, and integrity while advocating for social justice online and offline.

Audience participation

The digital space is thriving with diverse content that accommodates all genders. Just like television talk shows, the success of YouTube channels is based on audience participation. The five YouTube channels have received positive feedback, with many YouTube users expressing nostalgia and appreciation for the content:

> *This show reminds me of 3 Talk with Noleen Maholwana Sangqu* ('The Conversation Capital')

> *Mpoomy is definitely our very own Oprah Winfrey* ('Wisdom and Wellness')

> *Apart from Felicia TV show I have never come across such mature content in SA* ('Let's Talk with Khosi')

> *This is the content that I have been longing for in mainstream TV* ('Convos and Cocktails')

> *These interviews remind me of the late night with Kgomotso* ('Moments with Mantsoe')

These comments illustrate the South African talk show trajectory from television to the digital space and how the legacies of television talk shows have migrated to the internet. Television channels use trailers to attract viewers, while YouTubers use social

media to pull in viewership. This strategy works for most digital content creators as each channel in this study use this method. Unlike television, audience feedback on YouTube is instantly visible in the comments section. Comments can be positive or negative, depending on the audience members' perceptions of the content. YouTube content creators have the option of responding, ignoring, deleting or blocking comments. Audiences determine the success of YouTube channels through subscription, likes, comments, hours spent on the channel, and the number of advertisements viewed. It is therefore important for YouTubers to curate authentic, credible and quality content for a loyal and engaging audience. This study illustrates that the success of YouTube channels is tied to audience participatory culture. Without an audience the content is insignificant and loses social, political and economic impact.

Turning passion into profit

Unlike television executives, many YouTube channels are established without profit in mind. According to *Wisdom and Wellness* founder Mpumi Ledwaba, she began her channel to offer a healthy representation of the black community. Financial success was not a priority when she began her digital content creation journey, but she embraced the YouTube financial model. *Wisdom and Wellness* has reached digital success status, with a high number of subscribers and views, leading the host to work with big local and international brands. *Wisdom and Wellness* reached a million subscribers in 2021. Similarly, *The Conversation Capital* did not have monetisation as part of their strategic plan. The rationale for creating the channel was to contribute to meaningful social discourse. The channel has grown significantly since 2022 and has over one million views.

Moments with Mantsoe, *Convos and Cocktails* as well as *Let's Talk with Khosi* are also passion projects and commodifying their craft was not the primary focus. However, positive audience engagement and participation have led to monetary success. YouTube enables content creators to monetise their content through ad-generated income by joining the YouTube partner programme. To be eligible to monetise a YouTube channel, a minimum of 1 000 subscribers is required. The advertising revenue is based on the number of times the channel has been viewed and the amount of time spent consuming content on the channel. Other ways of making money on YouTube is through "super chat" and "super thanks". These are donations from the audience showing appreciation to content creators. These financial models highlight the importance of an interconnected e-community, emphasising that the success of a YouTube channel is built on quality content and a loyal digital community.

RECOMMENDATIONS

More intersectional studies in digital scholarship are required, including looking at the nuances and the role that race, gender, age, class, religion, culture, and sexual orientation play in the way digital communities are constructed. The body of knowledge can also be expanded through studies focused on practical intervention strategies towards internet access to mitigate the digital divide.

CONCLUSION

This article argues that black women were and are still excluded in managerial positions in mainstream media institutions, silencing, ignoring, distorting or othering their voices. It is for this reason that black women are occupying the digital arena to push back against this unjust system by creating safe feminist spaces for other black women to counter invisibility and voicelessness. The female gaze is an act of self-empowerment that illustrates women's autonomy in storytelling and self-actualisation. The five YouTube channels cover different but progressive representation of black women in South African 30 years after democracy. The channels are important virtual communities for black women to denounce and debunk traditionally racist, sensationalist and sexist representation. They offer digital spaces where black women's identities are restored to survive and flourish in society that is often hostile towards them. The study found that YouTube presents unique opportunities for black women, enabling them to be writers, producers and directors who contribute to the digital political economy. The findings point to innovative ways of storytelling in the 21st century by employing the female gaze in the digital space to expand feminist and digital scholarship.

REFERENCES

Adichie, C.N. 2006. *Half of a yellow sun*. New York: Knopf/Anchor.

Adichie, C.N. 2009. The danger of a single story. TEDGlobal, July 2009. URL: http://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story?quote=558 [Accessed on 10 June 2023].

Ajayi, J.A. 2002. *Unfinished business: Confronting the legacies of slavery and colonialism in Africa*. Amsterdam: Sephis.

Andrejevic, M. 2009. Exploiting YouTube: Contradictions of user-generated labor. In: Snickars, P. & Vonderau, P. (eds). The YouTube reader. Stockholm: The National Library of Sweden.

Arthurs, J., Drakopoulou, S. & Gandini, A. 2018. Researching YouTube. *Convergence*, 24(1): 3-15. https://doi.org/10.1177/1354856517737222

Baym, N.K. 2015. *Personal connections in the digital age*. Second edition. Oxford, UK: Polity.

Berger, G. 1999. Towards an analysis of the South African media and transformation, 1994-99. *Transformation*, (38): 82-116.

Bukula, T. 2019. *Black South African women prosumers and social media:# BlackGirlMagic as a case study*. Unpublished Master's dissertation. University of Johannesburg, Johannesburg, South Africa. URL: https://hdl.handle.net/10210/453574

Carelse, A. & Evans, M. 2017. 'The woman you want to be': The changing face of 'Fairlady' magazine, 1985-2005. *African Journalism Studies*, 38(2): 115-140. https://doi.org/10.1080/23743670.2017.1332656

Chipp, K. & Maphalala, J. 2019. When elephants fight: South African washing powder wars. *Emerald Emerging Markets Case Studies*, 9(1). https://doi.org/10.1108/EEMCS-02-2018-0031

D'abdon, R. & Molebatsi, N., 2011. 'Behind the scenes': An exploration of the process of creation, self-production and performance in the all-female spoken word poetry show 'Body of Words'. *Scrutiny2*, 16(2): 56-61. https://doi.org/10.1080/18125441.2011.631828

De la Rey, C. 1997. South African feminism, race and racism. *Agenda*, 13(32): 6-10. https://doi.org/10.2307/4066146

Dlakavu, S. 2016. Black feminist revolt and digital activism working to end rape culture in South Africa. *BUWA! A Journal on African Women's Experiences*, 7(7): 101-107.

Dobson, A.S. 2015. *Postfeminist digital cultures: Femininity, social media, and self-representation*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Engelbrecht, L. 2014. We get candid in a quickie with Khanyi Mbau. *News24*. URL: https://www.news24.com/life/we-get-candid-in-a-quickie-with-khanyi-mbau-20140918 [Accessed on 3 May 2023].

Fadlilah, S. 2015. *A study of conversational structure in television talk show* The Talk. Unpublished doctoral thesis. University of Surabaya, Surabaya, Indonesia.

Ferreira, T. 2023. Honey TV: MultiChoice's attempt at a 'BBC Lifestyle for Africa' axed after just 2 years. TV With Thinus. URL: https://teeveetee.blogspot.com/2023/10/honey-tv-multichoices-attempt-at-bbc.html [Accessed on 4 February 2024].

Friend, C. & Singer, J. 2015. *Online journalism ethics: traditions and transitions*. London: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315702025

Gqola, P.D. 2001. 'Ufanele Uqavile': Blackwomen, Feminisms and Postcoloniality in Africa. *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity*, (50): 11-22. URL: *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/4066402

Hall, S. 1999. Encoding, decoding. In: During, S. (ed.). *The cultural studies reader*. Second edition. New York: Routledge.

Hine, C. 2000. Virtual ethnography. In: Hughes, J. (ed.). *SAGE Internet Research Methods*. London: Sage. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446268513

Knight Steele, C. 2021. When the Black lives that matter are not our own: Digital Black feminism and a dialectic of self and community. *Feminist Media Studies*, 21(5): 860-863. https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2021.1949370

Livingstone, S. & Lunt, P. 1994. The mass media, democracy and the public sphere. In: Livingstone, S. & Lunt, P. (eds). *Talk on television: Audience participation and public debate*. London: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203131916

Mama, A. 1984. Black women, the economic crisis and the British state. *Feminist Review*, 17(1): 21-35. https://doi.org/10.1057/fr.1984.19

Mama, A. 2019. African feminist thought. In: *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of African History.* Oxford: Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277734.013.504

Manga, J. 2003. *Talking trash: The cultural politics of daytime TV talk shows*. New York, NY: NYU Press.

Masina, N.L. 2010. *Black like me: representations of black women in advertisements placed in contemporary South African magazines.* Unpublished doctoral thesis. University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa.

Mayring, P. 2014. *Qualitative content analysis: theoretical foundation, basic procedures and software solution*. GESIS – Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences. Klagenfurt. URL: http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-395173

Mazibuko, M. 2022. *Rebellious black femininities: Embodiments of freedom, desire and agency in South African popular culture from 1980 to present*. Unpublished doctoral thesis. University of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa.

Mbembe, A. 2001. *On the Postcolony*. Volume 41. Studies on the history of society and culture. Oakland, CA: University of California Press.

Mboti, N. 2019. Towards Apartheid Studies. *Glimpse*, 20: 15-70. https://doi.org/10.5840/glimpse2019202

McQuail, D. 1987. *Mass communication theory: An introduction*. London: Sage.

Milton, V.C. 2009. Edutainment television programmes: Tackling HIV/AIDS on the South African Broadcasting Corporation. In: Lagerwerf, L., Boer. H. & Wasserman, H. (eds). *Health communication in Southern Africa: Engaging with social and cultural diversity*. Pretoria: Unisa Press.

Mkhwanazi, K. 2014. LNN, Trevor Noah to boost SA comedy globally. *Mail & Guardian*. URL: https://mg.co.za/article/2014-10-14-lnn-with-loyisa-gola-and-trevor-noahs-boost-to-sa-comedy [Accessed on 5 July 2023].

Muholi, Z. 2012. Faces and phases. *Transition: An International Review*, (107): 113-124. https://doi.org/10.2979/transition.107.113

Mulvey, L. 1975. Visual pleasure and narrative cinema. *Screen*, 16(3): 803-816. https://doi.org/10.1093/screen/16.3.6

Mulvey, L. 2001. Unmasking the gaze: some thoughts on new feminist film theory and history. *Lectora: revista de dones i textualitat*, (7): 5-14.

Mutula, S.M. 2005. Peculiarities of the digital divide in sub-Saharan Africa. *Program: electronic library and information systems*, 39(2): 122-138. https://doi.org/10.1108/00330330510595706

Myers, J.L., Well, A.D. & Lorch Jr, R.F. 2013. *Research design and statistical analysis*. London: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203726631

Ndlovu, T. 2013. Fixing families through television? *Cultural studies*, 27(3): 379-403. https://doi.org/10.1080/09502386.2013.769152

Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S.J. 2005. Can women's voices be recovered from the past? Grappling with the absence of women's voices in pre-colonial history of Zimbabwe. *Wagadu: A Journal of Transnational Women's & Gender Studies*, 2(1): 3.

Nkosi, L. 2014. *Black women in post-apartheid South Africa, nation-building and radio: The case of Ukhozi FM*. Unpublished Master's dissertation. University of Cape Town, Cape Town, South Africa.

Nyathi, A. 2011. My favourite show: Late Night Show with Kgomotso. Times Live. URL: https://www.timeslive.co.za/tshisa-live/tshisa-live/2011-01-25-my--favourite--show--late-night-show-with-kgomotso/ [Accessed on 4 May 2023].

Oliver, K. 2017. The male gaze is more relevant, and more dangerous, than ever. *New Review of Film and Television Studies*, 15(4): 451-455. https://doi.org/10.1080/17400309.2017.1377937

Oyěwùmí, O. 1997. *The invention of women: Making an African sense of Western gender discourses*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Pereira, C. 2017. Feminists organising – strategy, voice, power. *Feminist Africa*, (22): 16-30.

Perrine, A. 2020. Black faces in white spaces: Black women's YouTube channels in Brazil as Fortalecimento. *Journal of Lusophone Studies*, 5(1): 203-223. https://doi.org/10.21471/jls.v5i1.321

Pokwana, V. 2001. Phat Joe's whacky talk show. *News24*. URL: https://www.news24.com/news24/phat-joes-whacky-talk-show-20011117 [Accessed on 3 May 2023].

Ponono, M. 2014. *The influence of viewing context on meaning making: A reception study of the popular drama series* Intersexions *in Ginsberg township*. Unpublished doctoral thesis. Rhodes University, Makhanda, South Africa.

Rodny-Gumede, Y. & Chasi, C. 2021. Decolonising media and communication studies: An exploratory survey on global curricula transformation debates. In: Mano, W. & Milton, V. (eds) *Routledge Handbook of African Media and Communication Studies*. London: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351273206-8

Saldaña, J. 2011. *Fundamentals of qualitative research*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Shattuc, J.M. 2014. *The talking cure: TV talk shows and women*. London: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315021812

Shelembe, T.B. 2014. *Investigating the body self-relationship in young Black South African women. Unpublished doctoral thesis*. University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa.

Simpson, A. 2009. What happened to Felicia Mabuza-Suttle? *News24*. URL: https://www.news24.com/channel/what-happened-to-felicia-mabuza-suttle-20090401 [Accessed 3 April 2024].

Snow, E. 1989. Theorizing the male gaze: Some problems. *Representations*, (25): 30-41. https://doi.org/10.2307/2928465

Sobande, F., 2017. Watching me watching you: Black women in Britain on YouTube. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 20(6): 655-671. https://doi.org/10.1177/1367549417733001

Sobande, F. 2020. *The digital lives of black women in Britain*. Palgrave Studies in (Re) Presenting Gender. London: Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-46679-4_4

Steinmetz, K.F. 2012. Message received: Virtual ethnography in online message boards. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 11(1): 26-39. https://doi.org/10.1177/160940691201100103

Tamale, S. 2000. 'Point of order, Mr Speaker: African women claiming their space in parliament. *Gender & Development*, 8(3): 8-15. https://doi.org/10.1080/741923783

Tjiya, E. 2018. Anele leaves 'Real Talk' after two years. *Sowetan Live*. URL: https://www.sowetanlive.co.za/entertainment/2018-05-31-anele-leaves-real-talk-after-two-years/ [Accessed on 3 April 2024].

Tortajada, I., Willem, C., Platero Mendez, R.L. & Araüna, N. 2021. Lost in transition? Digital trans activism on YouTube. *Information, Communication & Society*, 24(8): 1091-1107. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2020.1797850

Van Leeuwen, T. & Jewitt, C. (eds). 2001. *The handbook of visual analysis*. London: Sage.

Wasserman, H. 2010. *Tabloid journalism in South Africa: True story!* Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

Wood, H. 2009. *Talking with television: Women, talk shows, and modern self-reflexivity*. Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press.