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Resistance From Within

The Experiences and Performances of Female Malawian YouTubers

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explored the experiences and performances of female Malawian YouTubers. It is grounded in the understanding of the digital realm as a liberal space in which common people can showcase their own realities without the mediation of the structures of censorship common in traditional media. At the core of the research which informed this thesis were two questions: firstly, in what ways is everyday life for a Malawian woman presented digitally on YouTube; secondly, how can power dynamics within digital content production be understood?

To answer the above questions, a qualitative research was conducted. Interviews with seven YouTubers were conducted with semi-structured questions tailored around the nature of the content that they produce as well as their experiences with YouTube content production. The interviews were complemented with a review of some of their videos to understand the nature of their productions. The collected data was analysed using a reflexive thematic analysis as well as a discourse analysis.

The findings from the data indicate that YouTube production in Malawi is a form of affective labour, that is, with little financial gains. However, the producers are encouraged to continue because they regard YouTube as a form of therapy. It is also regarded as a way of building communities. An analysis of the everyday that is presented in the vlogs shows that the female YouTubers perform transgressive activities within the identities that they have in Malawi. For instance, in showing the everyday as the wife, the YouTubers showcase that they are not just wives; rather, they are women with careers and other interests whose existence is not just within the domestic functions as traditionally women have been regarded in Malawi. The transgression equally plays within the global power structures in which they push against narratives of African countries as spaces of chaos. Similarly, in exercising agency within the technologies of YouTube, they employ various tactics that include the use of click baiting titles to attract viewers to their videos.

Key words: Female Malawian YouTubers; YouTube vlogging; Vlogs; Affective labour; Transgression; Agency; Identities; Patriarchy; Colonialism; Performance; Everyday Life.

DEDICATION

For my late mother, Gift Dula, who passed away in 2009, and my late grandmother, Rose Ntepa, who passed away in 2001. Although physically absent, I believe you continue to watch over me and guide me. I hope and pray to God that I continue making you proud by reaching for the stars.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Of course, Africa is a continent full of catastrophes: There are immense ones, such as the horrific rapes in Congo and depressing ones, such as the fact that 5,000 people apply for one job vacancy in Nigeria. But there are other stories that are not about catastrophe, and it is very important, it is just as important, to talk about them. – Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, 2009

Throughout my time as an enthusiastic consumer of YouTube content, my viewing preferences have evolved, mostly driven by my desire for specific outcomes and knowledge. I have explored a wide range of content on the platform, including music, tutorials, educational videos and docuseries. However, what truly captivated me was the discovery of an abundance of content, particularly in the form of video blogs (vlogs), created by individuals from African countries. Often, these creators presented their countries in a unique manner, contrasting the negative portrayals typically perpetuated by the Western media.

Negative representations of African countries in Western media have long been documented by scholars such as Michira (2002), Asante (2013) and Faloyin (2022). They have discussed how African experiences are often reduced to negative stereotypes, devaluing the richness and diversity of the continent. So, as an African myself, I found it immensely inspiring to witness individuals from African countries reclaiming their narratives and sharing multiple perspectives that are often invisible or misrepresented in the dominant Western discourse.

My interest further intensified when I specifically began observing the presence of black African women on YouTube. Witnessing individuals who resemble me claim space on the platform and create content documenting their daily lives and experiences in their respective countries greatly intrigued me. As such, my intention for this research was to explore the YouTube experiences and self-representation of black African women whose content is about their lives as lived in their various countries. However, I soon realised the magnitude of such a task, considering the diverse

social, political and economic contexts in which these creators operate. Consequently, I decided to narrow down the focus of the study to female YouTubers from Malawi.

Research objective and questions

By choosing to focus on female Malawian YouTubers, the objective is to amplify their voices within academic research and shed light on their unique experiences, challenges and contributions within the YouTube digital space. Indeed, Mano and Milton (2021. p. 4) have underscored the importance of generating knowledge about Africa as one approach of affirming African positions, experiences, contexts and subjectivities. Additionally, since Malawi, like many other African countries, faces various socio-economic challenges and an evident digital divide (Kainja, 2019), exploring the YouTube experiences of these content creators provide valuable insights into how they navigate the landscape despite limited resources, connectivity issues and other barriers. Through production interviews with seven female Malawian YouTubers and a review of their vlogs, the thesis also aims at providing deeper insights into how these individuals use the platform to express themselves, exercise their agency, shape their own narratives and contribute to a more nuanced and balanced understanding of the Malawian life. Therefore, the thesis asks the following two research questions:

1. In what ways is everyday life in Malawi constructed and presented in videos by female Malawian YouTubers?
2. How can we understand digital content production and power dynamics for female Malawian YouTubers?

Context of Malawi

It is important to give a contextual background of Malawi. Of specific importance, it is to underscore the practices of internet access and usage. This is relevant as it helps to understand the ways through which Malawians use YouTube. It is also relevant as it helps to situate the female Malawian YouTubers within a broader spectrum of internet access that is fraught with various challenges.

Malawi is located in sub-Saharan Africa. It had an estimated population of 20.6 million as of 2022. According to the World Bank (2022) estimates, 51.4 percent of the population is female. In terms of

age distribution, Malawi is like other parts of sub-Saharan Africa with a majorly youthful population. According to the statistics from the World Bank, 46% of the population is between the ages of 0 and 14 while 21% of the population is between 15 and 24. There is a small population from the ages of 55 going upwards as only 6% of the population is in that age range.

As a former British colony, a factor that would have an impact on accessibility of YouTube content for an outsider, Malawi has English as one of its official languages. Chichewa is the other. However, education in Malawi is provided in English, at least from the third class of the 12-year Primary and Secondary School structure. In official communications, English is the preferred mode of communication. It also earns people a particular status as it often signifies success in education (see, Fanon, 1968, who has highlighted colonial sensibilities among elite of previously colonised communities). Thus, most people that take on the role of YouTubers frequently use English which also, in turn, offers opportunities to access a wider global audience.

Often ranked as one of the poorest countries in the world, more than half of the population in Malawi live below the poverty line. Twenty-five percent of the population live in extreme poverty (International Monetary Fund, 2022). From 1964, when Malawi gained its independence, it was under a dictatorial leadership that actively limited the space for free expression. However, in 1993 Malawi adopted a new constitution which made multiparty democracy possible and enshrined a bill of rights that, among others, grants Malawians the freedoms of expression, thought and belief. Nevertheless, laws remain in place that criminalise free speech and oftentimes people are arrested for expressing themselves (Kainja, 2022). This context is also important to understand the nature and relevance of online communication in Malawi.

Internet access and usage in Malawi

The economic and development context of Malawi has an impact on internet access in the country. A 2019 survey on access and use of information and communications technology by households and individuals in Malawi found that only 2.8 percent of households in the country own a computer and only 14.6 percent of the country's population has access to internet services (National Statistical Office, 2020). This can be attributed to several factors of which the economic situation is one of such. However, in addition to that, Malawi also has high data costs (Kemp, 2021). Furtherly, people lack the

means to own a smartphone or a computer. There is also a lack of the know-how to operate technical gadgets such as smartphones (Kajoloweka, 2022).

Internet access is also spread on social and geographical lines. The National Statistics Survey conducted in 2019 established that 40.7 percent of the people living in urban areas had access to the internet compared to only 9.3 percent in rural areas (National Statistical Office, 2020). This would also be reflective of literacy situations between urban and rural areas just as it would be reflective of the developments that separate the urban and rural areas. For the people with the ability to access the internet, some challenges also present. According to an article on digital rights in Malawi by Malawian academic, Jimmy Kainja, users of the internet in the country often complained that they experienced unreliable sluggish and sporadic internet connections (Kainja, 2019).

It would however be remiss to argue that internet access in Malawi is hampering internet usage. Trends have shown that there is an upward trajectory of internet usage in Malawi (Kemp, 2021). This is particularly true of young Malawians. They are using the internet for various things that include job searches, remote work, business, entertainment and social networking. Of particular importance to this study is the increasing usage of social networking sites such as Facebook, Messenger, WhatsApp, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, TikTok and LinkedIn. Although the majority of these sites are used to stay in touch with family and friends, to establish new connections with like-minded people and to document their life stories, others use it for activities such as activism, religion, political campaigning, business and marketing and to create and distribute memes (see Mutsvairo and Ragnedda, 2017; Ngwira and Lipenga, 2018; and Matidza, Ping and Nyasulu, 2020). As is the case globally, Facebook is the commonest used social media platform in Malawi (Kemp, 2023) . It has nearly 54% of social media users. It is followed by Twitter which has 19.7% of social media users accessing it. YouTube comes fifth with 4.94 users. Indeed, the web analysis website, StatCounter, has pointed out that nearly 60,000 Malawians use YouTube (StatCounter, 2023). The image below presents social media redirections from the web in Malawi which also indicates the levels of usage of the platforms.



Figure 1: Social media usage in Malawi (Source: Simon Kemp)

The popularity of Facebook in Malawi has made it an interest to researchers on social media and internet communication in Malawi (see, for example, Mutsvairo and Harris, 2016; Matidza, Ping and Nyasulu, 2020). This has therefore led to a dearth of literature on YouTube usage. However, as Burgess and Green (2009) have pointed out, YouTube is the fastest growing social media platform. Indeed, in Malawi, Kemp (2023) established that YouTube was one of the top 20 Google search queries in Malawi. In addition, based on my personal experience shared earlier in this chapter, it is evident that YouTube has gained popularity among Malawians. While it was predominantly used by musicians to distribute and promote their music, there is a noticeable shift towards a new trend: YouTubers, mostly females, utilising the platform to document and share their everyday experiences. This observation, as already highlighted, serves as a motivation for this research, which aims to explore this emerging phenomenon in greater depth.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction to literature review

This chapter comprises eight main sections. Firstly, it provides an overview of the status of women in media production, highlighting how digital media, which was meant to break down barriers and offer ordinary people space, has also been entangled in the powers of production. The chapter then delves deeper to discuss the intersection of race, gender and media production. Black women in media production are then emphasized as active agents seeking to challenge structures that marginalize them. Subsequently, the chapter reviews previous studies on black women's experiences and performances on YouTube and identifies the conversations that this research aims to expand upon. Then, the frame used to read and study how everyday life is constructed and performed by the female Malawian YouTubers is outlined, emphasizing the ambiguity the everyday carries. The issues are then localized by connecting them to the context of Malawi and the media. It is also pointed out that YouTube vlogging in Malawi is a form of affective labour in which the benefits are not majorly financial although there are expectations of the same from the YouTubers. Finally, the chapter positions the research in relation to existing literature, emphasizing the need for more critical digital media studies.

Women and media production

The subject of women in the media has been a topic of interest for scholars and non-scholars alike (for example, see Tuchman, 2000; Byerly and Ross, 2008; and Macdonald, 2009). Questions have been asked on media portrayal of women with most indicating the negative and stereotypical portrayals of women. Indeed, scholars have highlighted the role that the media has played in normalising the misogyny that women face as well as creating an environment in which discrimination thrives (see, for example, Buiten, 2007 and Mantilla, 2013). As a challenge to this portrayal of women, other scholars have equally focused on the role that women play in media production. The argument, as advanced by Emerson (2002), is that if more women are involved in media production, then they would be able to change the ways that they are portrayed in the media. On the other hand, other scholars have been sceptical of this argument, holding that the key to changing the portrayal of women in the media is not just in focusing on women producing the

media content. The key is rather in challenging the structures of production in the media which remain patriarchal. Thus, it can be extrapolated from the arguments of Louw (2001) on power and media production that the agency of women within the media is limited as long as the avenues and structures of production remain in the hands of men. Indeed, as Sharp (2008) reminds of structures of power, they reproduce themselves through normalisation of systems and processes. In this set-up, therefore, what is published in the media is that which is chosen by men based on their interests – not the interests of women (Emerson, 2002).

Such a focus on the modes of production has often led into an interest in digital media. This is due to the affordances that such media offer. As understood by Jenkins (2006) digital media offers a platform through which people become what are called produsers, that is, producers as well as consumers of media products (similar to the thoughts of Toffler, 1980). Other than submitting to the structures of power and censorship which are a defining feature of traditional media, digital media is argued to offer a platform through which the same can be challenged. For instance, in their work on YouTube as a digital platform, scholars Jean Burgess and Joshua Green (2009) pointed at the unique affordances and dynamics of the platform indicating that it is a site for participatory culture. In this participatory culture, the *ordinary citizens* (emphasis mine) create and share content as well as obtain feedback from others. This, of course, is also true for other digital media platforms such as Facebook, TikTok, or Twitter which all rely on produser – or prosumer – culture.

Expounding on the point in the preceding paragraph on the power and affordances of digital media, other scholars such as Strangelove (2010) have also highlighted the ways through which diversity is supported in digital media. The argument that they advance is similar to that advanced by Emerson (2002) critiquing the patriarchal structures of traditional media, albeit theirs is fixated on the traditional structures of power in which they are generally male and white. For Strangelove (2010), in particular, the structure of digital media is such that it has low barriers for engagement and participation. This, as he argues, allows people who have been historically marginalised from media production – and even representation – to utilise digital media. The digital media indeed would pass for what the philosopher Jürgen Habermas called the ‘public sphere’. This public sphere term means the space "made up of private people gathered together as a public and articulating the needs of society with the state" (Habermas, 1992: 176) . Whereas the traditional

media would indeed create an impression of the public sphere, the structures of censorship limits this; the digital media, therefore, appears to take up this space offering its users an opportunity to bypass the structures of censorship.

However, just as the public sphere concept of Habermas has faced criticism from, among others, feminist scholars as it is always understood within the power structures of the people that control the narrative (see, for example, Meehan, 2013), the digital media has also faced criticism. Particularly, in this thesis, the focus is on the criticism that YouTube has faced. However, it should be indicated, this would also be relevant for other platforms. A particular criticism of digital media that this thesis draws upon is that which has been highlighted by media scholar Henry Jenkins (2009). Jenkins expressed scepticism over the supposed advantages of digital media in offering a platform to marginalised voices. As he reflected, the forms of cultural production on YouTube means that there are voices that are pushed to the margins, based on “tastes of site visitors and the commercial interest of the site owners” (Jenkins, 2009. p. 124). The scholar further highlighted that the platform’s current mechanisms of user-moderation, which pushes up content based on the support it receives from other users, might seem democratic but they are not since they hide minority perspectives (Jenkins, 2009). Thus, he argued:

“Minority content certainly circulates on YouTube, travelling through a range of social networks to reach niche publics, but there’s little or no chance that such content will reach a larger viewership because of the scale on which YouTube operates. How many visitors to the site move below the most visible content, especially if they don’t already have a stake in the topics or the communities involved”.

(ibid. p. 124)

Indeed, the digital media has not lived up to the expectations of being a public sphere in which all people would contribute equally. It has rather been trapped in the powers of production that it sought to challenge. Powers and structures that run deeper through history and shape the way in which knowledge is produced (Hall, 1996).

Colonialism in media production

It should be clear at this point that this thesis acknowledges and advances the argument that media production is a space of power. It brings back into focus what (Louw, 2001) argues is the ‘encoding’ process in the media which has been getting erased by a focus on audience studies and, equally, by a focus on other aspects of new media (Mansell, 2004). However, as Louw reminds, it is important to situate the encoding practices and processes of media texts back in the discussion of media studies and research. Thus, as he argues, there is a need to understand that media production and circulation systems are a function of power and, in themselves, produce and perpetuate power structures. In the previous section, the focus was on the power structures along the lines of gender, however, at this point, they should be situated within the context of colonialism so as to understand the intersection of race, gender and media production. In this doing, the literature is centring on the actual context of the research, Malawi, where the YouTubers under focus operate within a context that is heavy with meanings introduced and maintained by the structures of colonialism (Fanon, 1968).

The media plays a significant part in creating identities (Louw, 2001). Sharp (2008) understands identities as a result of differences, arguing however that they are mostly ascribed by the ‘powerful’ over the ‘powerless’ or, more aptly and within the arguments of this section, by the colonisers over the colonised. At the contestation of this play of power, the media becomes central in which the powerful have control over meaning and narratives (Louw, 2001). Thus, for instance, the negative ways that indigenous and people of colour are presented in the media. These representations, however, are not natural. They are embedded in the processes of production which, in turn, are shaped by the processes of colonialism. Indeed, as the scholar Joanne Sharp, highlights the processes of representation have been inspired by the histories of colonialism in which the ‘white’ core has always been highlighted as different from the ‘coloured other’ – or peripheral. These features have indeed persevered to date, with media presentations faulted, generally, on the presentation of women and, specifically black women. It is indeed the argument of Kigundu-Touré (2020) that ‘black African women, specifically, have been entirely invisible in representation spaces’ (p. 6). On the other hand, Emerson (2002), reported that it was not just in the representation spaces, it was also in the production spaces. This thesis reconciled both positions, researching with women producers to understand their experiences within presentation of narratives as well as in

media production. While the work of Emerson (2002) focused on black African women in American music videos, it is the case that the women in mainland Africa would have different experiences. This is despite sharing a race with the aforementioned. As scholars have highlighted, the presentation of Africa in the global media is one that is riddled with negativity (see, for example, Michira, 2002; Asante, 2013; Oguh, 2015). The presentation, as such scholars have highlighted, is one that is not just about labelling black people, it is one that also labels the spaces that they occupy. It is a continuation of labels that colonialism started and a perpetuation of identities that colonialism established. In this, the black are not people, rather they are ‘noble savages that occupy unexplored territories’ (Sharp, 2008, p. 72). Producing media content in this space, one then takes on the role of producing against a narrative that expects from them images and narratives of destruction, war and suffering. If it is a woman, then, it is one in which they are expected to appear as victims since the tropes of gender injustices ignore the western context – taking it as developed – and focuses on the global South as backward spaces. Indeed, as Kigundu-Touré (2020) argues, media portrayals of women are troubling yet equally troubling is the way of presenting them only as victims, not as active agents.

From victimhood to active agency: black women in media production

This thesis rejects the portrayal of black women as victims. Rather, it seeks to embrace the fullness and diversity of experiences, situating them equally as victims of racism and patriarchy (as shaped by colonialism) but also as agents of change challenging the structures that seek to marginalise them. In history, scholars of colonialism and gender such as the Nigerian Oyeronke Oyèwùmí (1997) have pointed to the agency and roles of women. At the turn of the millennium, such scholars as Emerson (2002) and more recently, Kigundu-Touré (2020), have reminded of the agency of black women in media production. Particularly, Emerson (2002) has pointed out that black women use the production as a space for “contestation, resistance and assertion of their agency” (p. 124 – 125). Her work, focusing on hip-hop videos for black women in America, should be understood as encompassing other similar videos in which black women are the producers since, according to her own admission, the presentation of women in videos has almost always been similar in which it has run along the lines of stereotypes.

In specifically focusing on African women and the new forms of technology, the work of Kigundu-Touré (2020) then becomes relevant. She highlights, almost similarly to the arguments made by Emerson previously, that black African women have utilised the power of digital media to take control of the narratives that describe them. They have become the prosumers that Toffler (1980) discussed. In this, they are not just consuming work about, and for, them; they are also producing the work that is of them and centralises their experiences. They become narrators of their own story and push against societal expectations as well as stereotypes that are carried in the media against them (Kigundu-Touré, 2020). As Wilson (2011) highlighted, “women in the global South are no longer invariably seen as passive victims; there is an increased focus on women’s ability to make decisions and choices under given circumstances, allowing them to exercise ‘free will’ within the material constraints imposed by patriarchal power” (p. 316). This thesis interrogated such claims and arguments.

Black African women in YouTube vlogs

Many scholars have theorized how online media afford space and visibility to voices and viewpoints that are frequently marginalized or denied space by the mainstream (Jenkins, 2006; Papacharissi, 2015; Mano and Milton, 2021). Particularly, Mano and Milton (2021) have argued that “digital media have offered a platform for the production, circulation, and reception of diverse texts and performances through modes of delivery that make them travel outside of the literary establishment and its canonical forms” (p. 52). For this thesis, the focus is on YouTube as a site for production and participation, with a focus on black Malawian women.

As highlighted earlier, ordinary people are sharing content on YouTube. Black women have equally made use of the platform to open up more spaces for “self-representation” by creating digital content and speaking through “amateur online videos” (Strangelove, 2010, p. 84). Worth noting, however, is that, even though the number of Black women who are creating and sharing content on YouTube is growing, there is little scholarly attention to their representation or experiences on the platform (Sobande, 2017). The literature is more sparse when the focus is on black women in Africa who are producing and sharing content about their everyday life from their respective countries. The “outsiders gaze” (Powers, 1996) that fills global media coverage of African affairs persevere to date even in digital media productions that are expected to be liberal

and platform marginalised voices (Jenkins, 2009). The observations by Wall (2009), that the everyday life representations of African countries on YouTube are “more likely to come from westerners” (p. 393) still obtain to date with Kigundu-Touré (2020) highlighting the dearth of black African experiences on YouTube from the perspective of black African communities.

It should be pointed out that this does not mean that there are no such experiences on YouTube. Research has indeed been done on the same with the Kigundu-Touré (2020) research being an example. In her work, she sought to challenge the idea that the presence of black women on YouTube and Instagram can only be analysed through a Global North lens. As she pointed out, most of the research focuses on the experiences of diasporic Black women in Western countries (see, for example, Sobande, 2017; Neil and Mbilishaka, 2019; Childs, 2022). She therefore explored the YouTube and Instagram online performances of South African women content creators who live in South Africa. Her work highlighted the political significance of black women’s representation and the important role played by their independent productions online in combating the historical and political oppression faced by women of colour. In addition to creating new representations of women and beauty, Kigundu-Touré (2020, p. 35) pointed out that the women are also “forging economic affluence and recognition for themselves”.

In the forging of such economic affluence, it is also worthwhile to point out that a significant amount of the production is on what is called affective labour or the labour of love (see, for example, Abidin, 2015; Berryman and Kavka, 2018; Raun, 2018). In this, as per definition of Raun (ibid.), media production is not just driven by monetary benefit. Thus, their definition of affective labour as “the production of material for online circulation and consumption without any necessary financial compensation – though affective and social capital can be earned through the measurable attention received” (p. 107). In focusing on the affective, Abidin (2015) has for instance discussed the context of vloggers in Singapore citing a case of a participant who wanted to share a post about a breakup thinking that she “would also genuinely be benefiting from emotional support from her followers” (p. 6). Indeed, it is the making and becoming of what are called influencers – and therefore offer positive feelings to the producers – that drives vloggers to produce even with less promises of financial gain (Raun, 2018). However, vlogging is not just about the positive feelings. Thus, to showcase that YouTube vlogging is not just about positive feelings, Berryman and Kavka (2018) discussed the use of the platform for self-therapy. They focused on YouTube vloggers who

post content showing negative emotions and gain views because in doing so “they cement authenticity, offer (self-)therapy and strengthen ties of intimacy between YouTubers and their followers” (p. 87).

The foregoing is pointed out to indicate that as much as the work of Kigundu-Touré (2020) is important, it is equally limited. Not only does it play within the frames of production for economic gains, it also plays on the trope of beauty and hair as other research on YouTube and black African women have done (see, for example, Childs, 2022). This equally limits it to understanding the YouTube experiences of other Black African women who produce and distribute content in other African countries outside of South Africa. On the latter point, it should be emphasised that the similarity of gender and indeed geographical position does not render all experiences similar. This would indeed be conflating the experiences of all women as the same, a claim that Kigundu-Touré (2020) herself rejects. There are, eventually, similarities but there are also remarkable differences which would be shaped by the socio-economic contexts and access to production facilities, as it would be the case between Malawi and South Africa. Indeed, as Faloyin (2022) reminds, each African country has its own unique and complex cultures, histories, experiences and systems that shape people’s identities, how they live life and the opportunities that are available to them.

In expanding on the former point on the focus of such research, it should be expanded to highlight that such studies – despite their relevance and necessity – limit the experiences of black African women. It indeed plays into the narratives of women as the ‘other’ gender which patriarchy seeks to impose on a rich and diverse experience (Oyěwùmí, 1997). This study, therefore, expanded on the research that such black African feminist scholars as Kigundu-Touré (2020) have initiated. In expanding on this corpus of knowledge, the focus is not just on hair and beauty, rather it is on the representations of everyday life. The everyday life, in this context, is read as a site of contestation, challenging and even affirming – even in a subversive way, their identities and experiences (Goffman, 1959). The focus is on YouTube vlogs playing the transgressive as understood by Hermes and Hill (2021) in which it is read as “the challenging of written and unwritten social rules” (p. 4).

Performance of everyday life on YouTube vlogs

Individuals are constantly performing and presenting themselves in different ways and situations in order to shape the way others perceive them (Goffman, 1959). According to the sociologist, individuals engage in “impression management” in order to control how others perceive them (ibid. p. 146). These strategies are aimed at disclosing or emphasizing the right characteristics that would be acceptable within a particular society. As Goffman argued, individuals perform different roles in social situations and employ various techniques to ensure that they present themselves in the best possible light. Thus, the argument:

“When one’s activity occurs in the presence of other persons, some aspects of the activity are expressively accentuated and other aspects, which might discredit the fostered impression, are suppressed. It is clear that accentuated facts make their appearance in what we have called a front region; it should just be clear that there may be another region – a back region or backstage – where the suppressed facts make an appearance.” (ibid. p. 69).

Whereas Goffman employed as a framework the metaphor of theatrical performance, various scholars have been inspired by his landmark work and have examined the self-presentation theory in regard to how it relates to people’s social life, particularly on social networking platforms or media sharing networks (see, for example, the works of Thumim, 2012; Huang, 2014; Saha *et al.*, 2021). The theory has also been used to explore audience engagement with drama and reality television shows, specifically as it relates to performances of different people, such as contestants, judges, producers, and family and friends, in the production of reality talent shows (Hill, 2019).

However, it is the use of the theory in the work of Papacharissi (2015) which is of interest. In exploring the theory, the communications researcher highlighted that although individuals do not often self-identify as performers in everyday acts of self-representation, “the social roles associated with gender, race, and class as well as those involved in professional, family, and social circles are performed as repeated behaviours” (p. 96). Individuals, therefore, often behave in certain ways because of their identity and the social expectations that come with it; they may not even realise they are doing it. Thus, the argument by Papacharissi that in today’s society, the way people act and present themselves to the world can reveal a lot about how they are trying to gain power and make their own way in society (Papacharissi, 2015).

Thus, building on the argument by Papacharissi, the everyday within the YouTube vlogs should be understood as a space of power. Indeed, the everyday is the regular, routine, banal, boring, normal and abnormal events and experiences that happen in people's lives (Karner, 2007, citing Morgan, 2004). However, as Karner offered a further thought, writing on ethnicity and everyday life, he emphasized that scholars should be keen to understand how everyday functions, how it is perceived by social actors, how it evolves over time and how it intersects with structures of *power* and *inequality*. It is the structures of power and inequality that a reading of the everyday should entail and it was eventually utilised in this study.

A building block of the argument of understanding the everyday as a site of power was laid by de Certeau (1984) who theorized that everyday life is characterised by a set of practices that are both creative and resistant to dominant power structures. Thus, the everyday life is not just about power. It is equally about challenging those power structures using practices which he referred to as "tactics", meaning the ways in which people subvert dominant systems and create meaning in their lives (de Certeau, 1984. p. 19). He pointed out that these tactics are often invisible and go unnoticed, and they involve the use of everyday practices such as "talking, reading, moving about, shopping" (ibid. p. 19). Indeed, for a YouTuber, they may show us their role as a bride, for example, yet the reading of such a text and act should disentangle the structures of meaning that it carries. In this way of thinking, the work of Margaret Thompson Drewal on the "State of Research on Performance in Africa" (Drewal, 1991) becomes important and crucial.

In her review paper, where she assessed the existing research on performance in Africa and proposed a shift in research methods to better reflect the grasp of the unique characteristics of African performance practices, Drewal pointed at performance as an open-ended exercise, describing it as a "praxis of everyday social life...the practical application of embodied skill and knowledge to the task of taking action" (Drewal, 1991. p. 1). However, she also reminded of the transgressive capabilities of performance, indicating that it offers a way for people to reflect on their present circumstances, as well as define or transform their own identities and the social structures around them. This should be read within the thinking of Emerson (2002) who looked at performances of the everyday as ways of resisting or subverting prevailing norms. To contextualise the arguments then, it can be argued that the 'impression management' which was highlighted by Goffman (1959) is not just a re-enactment of social life, it is rather an enactment

that resists stereotypes even while playing within them as is the case of the performance that Drewal (1991) discusses. Indeed, from Drewal what one reads is that a single statement or enactment of the everyday can be ambiguous, giving rise to both subversive and legitimising effects.

The everyday life that equally plays on YouTube then is within these broader functions that it cannot just be labelled as transgressive or legitimising. Silverstone points out that the everyday life is indeed a site of creativity but is also a space in which people can be exploited, excluded and repressed (Silverstone, 2013). In challenging that exclusion, then the subversive characteristics of the everyday life manifest. These are indeed empowered by the random mundanity of the everyday that they can even pass unnoticed as acts of resistance, pushback and even rebellion (Karner, 2007). An audience of a YouTuber who shows the everyday might indeed just see the everyday, however for a media researcher the role is to interrogate the everyday and analyse how power plays within or the ways in which it is challenged (Mansell, 2004). This thesis utilised the lens of a media researcher, placing power back in the processes of media production or ‘encoding’ as Louw (2001) advanced. The departure point of the thesis was in acknowledging that women are marginalised within the production processes of media content in Malawi. They operate within a structure of power bestowed upon the dynamics by coloniality and clearly upheld by the patriarchy which aligns with what is accepted as the general culture of Malawi (Semu, 2002). In the subsequent sections, I localise the issues by focusing on the particular context in Malawi, leaning on the argument by Faloyin (2022) on specificities in researching African countries.

Malawian women and the media (including media research)

It is important to highlight the context of media production for Malawian women. This is in extension to the context already laid out in Chapter One on the Malawian situation for women as well as the social media use in Malawi. At the same time, it is to lend credence to the argument of Faloyin (2022) on the differences that exist within African societies while at the same time drawing on similarities of the black experience for women across the globe. Media production in Malawi, as in most other contexts, has often side-lined women often seeing them through the male gaze (Emerson, 2002; Kigundu-Touré, 2020). Women are mostly regarded as subjects of media

portrayal through a set of parameters and consumers of media products. They are given less room to be producers of media content, let alone to shape the direction of media focus.

In a country where 98% of the people identify as religious, the role of women remains as it is written in religious texts. It is that they are expected to be subservient. The subservience, as Semu (2002) points out, is not just within the family structures. It is also in social life, and this includes in media production. While she points at the political participation of women in Malawi where their role is majorly limited to supporting male politicians, it is also important to highlight that this stretches beyond politics. Indeed, research on media and women in Malawi has hardly focused on their role in production (because the production in the mainstream places has hardly been there) and has focused on the media portrayal of the women (see, for example, Chilimampungu, 1999; Chikaipa, 2019). In this representation as well, as the cited authors have highlighted, the essence is to demean women and present them in a negative light. It is to play along the stereotypes of women as the media has done in other contexts (Emerson, 2002).

Indeed, even in the research that has been pointed out, there is less space given to the experiences of Malawian women. Thus, within the social dialogues of media research in Malawi, women are often left out or they are just the subjects for the gaze of male researchers (see, for example, Chilimampungu, 1999; Gunde, 2015; Chikaipa, 2019). The cited research, and others, do not situate the experiences of the women under focus. They are only read through the text of adverts, cartoons and social media posts that were discussed. Thus, even if critical, such research still stereotypes the place of women in the Malawian society, and in the media which they criticise, where the women can be seen and heard, hardly platformed (Semu, 2002).

This victimisation, however, is what this thesis has rejected. Thus, it employed Sandra Harding's standpoint theory to explore the agency of the women as YouTubers. The theory argues for the need to centre the experiences of those on the margins of power as their position on the periphery gives them a unique perspective from which it is important to understand society and culture (Harding, 2008). This margin position, as feminist scholar Joan Borsa reminds, is a place with the possibilities of exploring and representation (Borsa, 1990). Indeed, in reading this margin, the role of digital media – YouTube for this thesis – becomes important. Malawian women are seen as thriving in online platforms where they also are producers of their own reality, some of which

takes the form of transgressive actions from the content they produce as well as the modes of production (Hermes and Hill, 2021).

Malawian women online

Malawian women exist on the internet, although academic research and general interest on the same would create a wrong impression. From keeping lively what is called the Malawi Twitter space, influencing on TikTok, to making YouTube vlogs of the everyday, their imprint is significant, a product of what Thornton *et al.*, (2014) refers to as development ideals that have produced educated women who have careers. Gunde (2015) focuses on the online communication around a female President in Malawi, however the existence of Malawian women on the web transcends that, placing them at the centre of production. In YouTube vlogs, they however have to assume the responsibility of not just showcasing their reality but having to also push against unfair narratives that have been driven by the global media (Mano and Milton, 2021).

YouTubers producing content and identifying as Malawian are mostly assumed by outsiders (especially non-Africans) as operating and producing from this context of poverty and disease (Kigundu-Touré, 2020). Such an assumption makes them carry the extra burden of being racially marginalised and profiled. As Naso (2018) points out, African societies are imagined as disorganised. Production, therefore, within this identity of being a black person and in Africa (more for a country that is often ranked as one of the poorest), the YouTubers take on them the burden of race and poverty. They might not be overtly seeking to challenge dominant narratives of African countries in the media (Oguh, 2015), however within the understanding of the everyday life as sites of power and the acknowledgement of the dangers of a single narrative (Adichie, *The danger of a single story* / TED, 2009), their role is already one of pushing against a narrative.

However, the position of such producers should be understood from such a viewpoint as advanced by Wall (2009) who pointed out that new technology has afforded people in Africa to create open texts that exhibit fewer stereotypes and offer a complex view of their situations. The role of such producers is that they are showing people in African countries existing within the realities of their countries, producing often from a position of affective labour in which there are little financial benefits as the global production systems marginalise them (Abidin, 2015). In this production their

content carries the frustrations, hopes, dreams and fears – all showcased within the fullness of an everyday life (Naso, 2018). It is a contraposition to the one taken by global and traditional media, for instance, in which this form of production does not seek to manipulate reality (Louw, 2001). It rather filters it through the performing of the everyday where imposed identities are equally accepted while performed as subverted elements of the same.

In this case, the participation of the female Malawian YouTubers in producing and distributing videos of routine everyday life in Malawi broadens views about life in Malawi. These are narratives that would be absent in global media whose interests on Africa and blackness emanates from a point of negativity that is shaped by colonialism (Oguh, 2015; Said, 2016). Despite the fact that they come from an African country that is faced with different challenges such as power shortages, shortage of drugs in hospitals, scarcity of fuel and poverty, these YouTubers are showing an everyday life that is not just about doom and gloom. They are, as the analysis shows, even utilising some of the challenges to produce their content, building communities of care through YouTube in which they share what would be called survival tips (see, Huh *et al.*, 2014, on using vlogs in building communities of care).

The everyday life that they show, therefore, is the one that has been alluded to by de Certeau in which it is not just of managed impressions as Goffman (1959) would advance; it is rather one in which newer realities of transgression are created. The written and, indeed, the unwritten rules that are discussed by Hermes and Hill, (2021) are violated in this space and new rules are created. As such, in exploring the construction of the everyday life in the videos by female Malawian YouTubers, a deep focus into how they negotiate their daily life as well as a closer look into the narratives that they share in their videos offer a great opportunity of understanding the strategic choices or what are called tactics by de Certeau (1984) that they make in crafting their YouTube performances. It is understanding that their very act of producing vlogs is transgression against a patriarchal culture threatened by women speaking out (Amir-Ebrahimi, 2008) and a pushback against the structures of power at a global level that determines media portrayal, and access, of global South communities (Mano and Milton, 2021).

In considering the tactics, it is important to acknowledge that the female producers have to navigate the algorithmic biases of YouTube. Burgess and Green (2009) have pointed out the necessity of

YouTubers having what would be called savviness of the platform to maximise viewership, acknowledging that the structures of YouTube might be limiting to people without the knowledge of maximising it. However, it transcends beyond savviness. It is the case that the algorithms that would push videos for other and new viewers are embedded in other structures of power where stereotypes equally dominate (Berryman and Kavka, 2018; Childs, 2022). For the Malawian female YouTubers, having to pass around the algorithmic biases is particularly important as the affective labour can only be monetised when there are larger communities and YouTube is taken as a platform of value by local businesses for which they can partner with.

Situating the literature within the study

This study was conceptualised within the understanding of power as a central feature of human relationships and media productions (Mansell, 2004; Smith and Hofmann, 2016; Mano and Milton, 2021). Consequently, this study reviewed literature that discusses the concepts of power in media production as well as in the media content. In conceptualising power within this study, it was understood that digital media has been argued as a leveller in which power structures of censorship and control are altered. However, this position has been challenged by drawing on relevant literature from such scholars as Jenkins (2006) as well as Kigundu-Touré (2020). It has been pointed out that the structures of digital media around algorithms usually afford power to the same producers, usually in the global North. However, the affordances of digital media, specifically YouTube, have been highlighted mostly by focusing on black women on the platform. The literature reviewed around this has advanced that black women are utilising the platform to create space in which they can be producers of their own reality. Thus, the further focus on the performing of the everyday on YouTube where the concept of affective labour has been highlighted (Abidin, 2015; Berryman and Kavka, 2018). In localising the arguments to the study context, literature on media production and women in Malawi has also been highlighted, establishing that the socio-cultural context of Malawi has a bearing on media production and content (Chilimampungu, 1999; Semu, 2002). This has therefore laid the ground for the exploration of experiences and performances of female Malawian YouTubers.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

A case for the research design

This study was inspired by Flyvbjerg's (2001) conceptualisation of phronetic studies. As a critical media industry analysis, the study was especially interested in the power dynamics within media production processes, looking at YouTube as an alternative yet a space in which power is equally exercised. In a way, the study aimed at focusing on what other media scholars such as Louw (2001) as well as Mansell (2004) highlighted as the neglected part of digital media research, which is power. The arguments made are that the assumption that digital media is free for all people and somehow a great equaliser masks the reality of power on digital media platforms. However, as Jenkins (2009) equally pointed out, there are structures of production on digital media which in themselves maintain power and disadvantage other people. Thus, this study.

Particularly, the study investigated the ways in which female Malawian YouTubers navigate such dynamics of power in their content production and distribution. It understood how they leverage the platform to, in accordance with the argument of Burgess and Green (2009), maximise on the transformed opportunities for content creation, distribution and monetization that the platform operates. This approach however was not to pretend that the platform works the same for everyone. Gillespie (2018) already offered relevant advice against such suppositions, pointing out the concentration of power and the potential for manipulation and bias which might be present on the platform. It is indeed a point that has been elaborated in this literature review. Rather, in acknowledging the limiting structures embedded within the platform, the research also sought to understand how the female Malawian YouTubers exercise agency and challenge these structures. Thus, the focus on performing the everyday life.

Flyvbjerg points out that phronetic research is grounded in producing input to ongoing social dialogue about problems and risks faced in society with a further thought on suggesting different ways of doing things (Flyvbjerg, 2001). Therefore, this study, apart from contributing to debates about the politics of content production and distribution on YouTube, emphasises on the ways through which the YouTubers navigate around the power dynamics of the platform as well as other power dynamics that shape and constrain their participation in producing content. The research

therefore understood the everyday life that is produced as an enactment of rebellion and a challenge of established structures and practices of power (Drewal, 1991).

The female YouTubers in Malawi are understood as existing on the margins of society from which they have little contribution to the mainstream dialogue that is carried by traditional media, often under the control of patriarchal structures and systems (Chilimampungu, 1999). However, this margin is not to be doubted nor is it to be regarded as a place only of vulnerability. It is rather, as Borsa (1990) argued, an alternative reality of inclusion, social justice as well as a space from which the challenging of stereotypes is imagined and performed. On the periphery, it is where the female Malawian YouTubers redefine their situation in a patriarchal society and other than just being the interest of media producers, they become the producers and present the reality as they want it and as it plays in their world of varied characteristics and identities (Emerson, 2002).

In focusing on power, the research employed a feminist epistemology, building on the standpoint theory acknowledging that women, and especially women from subordinated racial and ethnic groups, occupy such a marginal position (Harding, 1995). This is a point that has equally been advanced by other researchers who have focused on media production by black women across the globe. For instance, Emerson (2002) who focused on black women video productions in America, as well as Kigundu-Touré (2020) whose work has already been discussed. This approach was particularly useful for this research because, apart from understanding the power dynamics within YouTube, it also offered an opportunity to the study to explore the ways through which the YouTubers navigate the power dynamics in their everyday life (Strangelove, 2010). In such navigations, then, they explore the possibilities of newer realities and representation that is inclusive (Borsa, 1990).

Research design

In situating the experiences of the YouTubers, a qualitative design was used for the study. Hammersley (2013) defines qualitative research as “a form of social inquiry that tends to...emphasize the essential role of subjectivity in the research process..., and to use verbal rather than statistical forms of analysis” (p. 12). Thus, this study was designed to focus on the subjective experiences of the YouTubers. The understanding, as Bryman (2016) posits, is that such a focus gives an in-depth understanding of human actions and the structures as well as processes that shape

the behaviour. Hammersley (2013) has been specific in highlighting that qualitative research is not only interested in understanding the human experiences, rather it situates them within scientific theories and conceptualisations, sometimes with the explicit purpose of achieving social justice. This indeed fits within the exploration of Harding's standpoint theory (Harding, 2008). In this research, therefore, a qualitative approach was not just taken with the intention of inquiring the subjective experience, rather it was also to explore the possibilities of other socially just realities. Realities that, in the Malawian context, would push against the traditional roles of women and the patriarchal media portrayals of women.

Sampling

At the inception of the study, I had intended to use purposive sampling which has been advocated for by Creswell and Plano Clark (2017) who have argued that the approach is relevant in identifying and selecting groups or individuals that have the necessary knowledge and experience with a phenomenon of interest. Purposive sampling made sense since I already had in mind the social categories of the intended participants (see O'Reilly, 2009, on considering social categories of informants when conducting purposive sampling). My plan was to approach self-identifying female Malawian YouTubers who currently reside in Malawi, are aged 18 and above, use English in their videos, are consistent in their distribution of videos on YouTube and the point of departure for their videos is everyday life in Malawi.

So, the first step which I took was to go on YouTube to look for YouTubers fitting into those attributes. Using hashtags such as #FemaleMalawiYouTuber, #MalawianYouTuber, #MalawianVlogger and #LifeinMalawi, I found more than 30 channels. Using the contact details provided on the channels, in January 2023 I started contacting these YouTubers, asking if they would be willing to participate in the study. By February 2023, only two YouTubers, Towera and Sandra, had responded to the personalized messages sent to them via WhatsApp and Instagram respectively. I suspected that the others might have received my messages on Instagram as spam; hence not getting any response from them. It is during my interview with Sandra that she mentioned that there is a WhatsApp group of Malawian YouTubers. So, at this stage I combined the initial intended purposive sampling with snowball sampling (Seale *et al.*, 2006) whereby Sandra started to assist me in identifying other YouTubers who could participate in the study. Here,

she became an intermediary/gatekeeper by facilitating easy access to other participants (for example, see Walsh and Seale, 2018, on access to study participants).

At first Sandra suggested and shared with me YouTube channels and contact details of other YouTubers whom I could approach. I noted that some of the recommended YouTubers were no longer active on YouTube. So, I only approached two, and only one, Vanessa, responded and accepted to participate in the study. For some others whom I had sent individualized messages on Instagram, but I wasn't getting any response, I also asked Sandra if they are part of the said WhatsApp group and if she could share their contact details. She talked to them about the study and the interview process and got back to me with their contact details. This was done while also ensuring that Sandra as a gatekeeper is "not putting pressure on them to participate" and that they also make their own choices regarding whether they wanted to participate or not (Byrne, 2018. p. 484). This is how I got in touch with Alinafe and Esther. It is Alinafe who further took on an intermediary role by linking me to Mira, and it is her (Mira) who linked me to Alessandra. This process of having participants in the study linking me to others who could participate taught me the importance of building trust and confidence with a research community in qualitative research. The need for researchers to patiently build trust with study participants, especially in situations where interviews are conducted across different time zones, is an aspect which Hill (2019. p. 104) has also reflected upon.

While the study was clearly targeting self-identifying female Malawian YouTubers whose videos are about everyday life in Malawi, it did not have a set age range, apart from 18 being the minimum age. However, in the end, the participants were in the age bracket of 20 to 30 and they are spread across Malawi's four major cities namely Lilongwe, Blantyre, Mzuzu and Zomba (see Appendix 2 for interviewees summaries). This, of course, means that the experiences that are recorded and highlighted in this research are particularly of urban women in Malawi whose experiences with rural women vary. Nevertheless, they are an important group to study as they have mostly been in the forefront of pushing for changes to gender relationships in Malawi. This is because they are at the centre of global and local cultures, as well as their educational levels (Chilimampungu, 1999). Indeed, as the results ended up within this sample, all the seven participants are professionals working in various roles across different sectors while four of the participants are cosmopolitan having been educated in other countries with different experiences of gender relations.

While the conditions of educated women in urban Malawi are comparatively better than those of their counterparts in rural areas (Gunde, 2015), they remain united in the contestation with the forces of patriarchy and indeed pigeonholed by the forces of colonialism that control media narratives and production (Mohammed, 2022). Importantly, the successes of the struggles of the women in urban Malawi translates into some gains for the rural women. This, again it should be clarified, is not to trivialise the differences in experiences and opportunities for the women across the social spaces.

The table below gives a snapshot of the relevant characteristics and identities of the YouTubers, as well as the areas of focus of their YouTube vlog posts (in order of the interview dates and times).

Name	Channel name	Relevant identities and focus
Towera Kumwenda	Towiae	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 27-year-old • Works as a journalist • Channel established in 2021 to share about life in Malawi • Sometimes focuses on her identity as a wife as well as a student • Uses mobile phone for making videos
Sandra Kalua	Sandra peachy mw	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 27-year-old • Works as a digital marketer • Channel established in 2013, activated in 2017 as a student in Costa Rica • Passion for video production and started vlogging as therapy • Focus has changed across the years: feelings, life as a student, life in Malawi

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Channel monetised under the YouTube Partner Program
Alinafe Malitoni	Nafe's creations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 24-year-old • Economist by training and profession • Channel established in 2015 to share her paintings • Channel focus changed in 2020 focusing on health and lifestyle • Main interest is to show the other side of Malawi • Showcases the mundane everyday life
Vanessa Rita Chimutu Kaima	Vanessa Sunshine 21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 29-year-old • Channel started in 2021 • Focuses on the everyday life in Malawi as well as shopping hauls and perfume reviews • It also focuses on travel and documenting experiences • Married and some videos have focused on wedding and marriage • Videos have also featured her husband
Mira German	Mirrorbelle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 26-year-old • Channel started in 2016 as a student in South Africa • The focus has been changing across the years: studying under

		<p>COVID-19 as a student in Kenya to the everyday life in Malawi (current focus)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • She also focuses on her motherhood journey (she has a son aged 5) • Aim is to show ordinary life in Malawi
Alessandra Thunde	Ale's Spot	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 20-year-old • Channel started in 2019 as a student in Kenya • Channel focuses on everyday life in Malawi but avoids sharing the 'personal' • Channel targets the experiences of young Malawians • Regards her age as a limiting factor • Struggles with making videos in the public
Esther Louisa Msiska	Simply Louisa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 26-year-old • Channel created in 2019, activated beginning 2023 • Multi-media personality: blogs, avid user of social media • Focuses on life as a young, single mum with a career • Channel also focuses on the everyday life in Malawi (it

		might be driven by the needs of the audience)
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Data collection

Two approaches to data collection were used for the study in order to gain a full insight into the processes of video production as well as the position of the video producers within the Malawian society and the broader YouTube space. These methods are interviews, understood as production interviews in the context of the research (Gauntlett, 2013; Morgan, 2022), as well as document review in which select YouTube videos of the interviewed producers were reviewed as documents (see, Bowen, 2009, on recorded videos as documents within qualitative research).

Document review

Document review is one of the ways through which data is collected in qualitative research. This, however, as Morgan (2022) points out, is a method that is less used within qualitative research despite its rich benefits. Such benefits that Morgan highlights include the stability of the data as well as the complementary qualities of such data to other methods; it is the latter point that was especially important for this research. In terms of understanding the documents that were reviewed, the study considered a definition put forward by Bowen (2009) in which documents suitable for reviews were identified as ‘social facts which contain text and images that have been recorded without a researcher’s intervention’ (p. 27). The images can as well be moving in which category YouTube videos would be included.

For this research, there were two stages of document review that were used as a part of data collection: before interviews and after interviews (see Morgan, 2022, on familiarisation with documents). In the first instance, I watched a minimum of 10 videos on each of the participant’s YouTube channels. This process allowed me to get familiar with their content, the stories that they tell in their videos, as well as the engagement that they have with subscribers and viewers. Bryman (2016) points out the need for qualitative researchers to build rapport with participants to generate rich data. This familiarisation was a part of building the rapport. Indeed, in the interviews, I would

refer to some of the videos and this created a sense of familiarity as well as helping me to probe more or ask questions about specific issues related to the study objectives that I noted in the videos or on their channel in general (Morgan, 2022).

The second phase of document review was done after the production interviews. One of the questions on the interviews focused on their own choice of their YouTube video which they liked or felt that it represented them and their brand well. A total of seven videos – one per each of the seven interviewed YouTubers – were therefore reviewed (see Appendix 5 for full list). Within the context of having completed an interview with them, the videos were complementary to the data collected from the interviews (Morgan, 2022) offering an insight into the content as well as production styles of the YouTubers. For instance, the video that was recommended by Sandra allowed me to understand how YouTube mutes some sections of a video when a copyrighted song is detected, even if the song is just playing in the background. This is information that I could not easily comprehend from the interviews.

Production interviews

Interviews were the other, and main, method of data collection. Gauntlett (2013) suggests interviews as an important way of collecting data within content production research arguing that they are a useful tool for gaining valuable insights into the creative process and the social and cultural contexts in which cultural products are produced. For this study, seven production interviews were conducted seeking to gain insight into the experiences of the producers as well as the political and governance processes ordering the production process (Bryman, 2016).

Before the interviews, a guide (see Appendix 3) which was used during the interview process was prepared. This was based on the study objectives. The guide, which was discussed with my supervisor, was inspired by Boyd (2015, p. 93) who shares that “an interview protocol is useful to shape the topics to be covered when seeking to understand people’s worlds”. Indeed, the guide has been pointed out as an important tool for a researcher as it helps them to stay on course and make sure that the objectives of the study are all covered in the responses (Bryman, 2016). This was particularly important for this research as it sought to create a safe space for young women in line with the feminist inspired Sandra Harding’s standpoint theory (Harding, 2008). Thus, the interview

approach was semi-structured in which as a researcher I allowed the interview to be flexible, allowing for probes to explore in detail the topic of experience (Bryman, 2016).

Due to the geographical distance between Sweden and Malawi, the interviews were conducted via zoom which afforded me the opportunity to register other non-verbal cues in the course of the interview. The interviews took place between 3rd March to 25th March 2023 and the longest running interview was for one and a half hours while the shorter running was for 55 minutes (see Appendix 2 for interview details). When arranging the online interviews setting, Salmons (2009) advice about creating a conducive space for interviewees was used. This was through consideration of the participants' access to a technology that would allow them to participate in an online interview and whether they would feel comfortable using the technology or would need additional time to get familiar with the set-up (ibid. p. 30). In the end, zoom was used as it was the participants' preferred platform over Microsoft Teams. All the participants were also familiar with using the video conferencing platform and there was no need for familiarization.

All the interviews were transcribed into text manually to allow for a proper immersion into the data (see Appendix 4 for sample of full transcript). Seale (2018) pointed out how reading and re-reading data several times before formally coding it enhances a researcher's sensitivity to meanings. For this study, the immersion was achieved through the listening and re-listening to the interviews during the transcribing process.

Data analysis

Discourse analysis

Rose's (2016) visual methodology of discourse analysis is useful when it comes to the examination of YouTube videos since it is more concerned with visual images, verbal texts, institutions and social practices together. Although the social theorist distinguishes the discourse analysis that is concerned with visual images and verbal text from the one that pays attention to issues of power, institutions and technologies surrounding their production (ibid. p. 192), the objectives of this research demanded that they should be considered together.

Rose (2016) has pointed out that discourse analysis is useful to explore how images and language construct specific views and interpretations of the social world. Therefore, the videos were

examined of their visual elements such as images, captions and symbols to identify how these were being used to convey meaning. Additionally, the language in the videos was also analysed to identify key ideas, concepts, topics and discursive practices used by the YouTubers. The aim of doing this was to find out patterns and recurring themes.

Analysing the videos was useful as it allowed me to see if they supported or contradicted the data which emanated from the interviews, specifically with regards to how the YouTubers construct and represent everyday life in Malawi. This approach also assisted me to have a deeper reflection on why the YouTubers singled out these videos during the interviews. Using Rose's (ibid: 151-153) suggestion that researchers should be aware of their own subjectivity and the potential biases that may influence their interpretation of visual materials, the discourse analysis of the videos were conducted without any preconceived assumptions other than what the YouTubers themselves told me during the interviews. See Appendix 6 for example of discourse analysis.

Reflexive thematic analysis

The data gathered from the production interviews was analysed using reflexive thematic analysis. The method has been encouraged by Braun and Clarke (2006) as necessary for analysing qualitative data with aims of identifying themes and patterns in the data while also simultaneously engaging in a reflexive process of considering the researcher's role and positionality in the research process.

I chose this analytical method because my main interest was in identifying patterns and themes that would help to address the research questions and its objectives. Additionally, as one who shares experiences, pre-existing knowledge and social position (ethnicity, race, nationality, gender, age range) with the research subjects and the area of study, this method was necessary for me to engage in ongoing reflection regarding how these factors may be influencing the interpretation of the data and analysis.

The analysis started by descriptively coding the data manually by reading the transcripts line by line, paying attention to every word and detail as expressed during the interviews (see Appendix 7). For example, codes such as *'vlogging is therapeutic'*, *'YouTube monetization in Malawi'*, *'surviving in Malawi is hard'*, *'I am learning by doing'*, *'Malawians don't like oversharing'*, *'creating content is a lot of work'*, *'YouTube algorithms are unpredictable'* and *'documenting my*

life' were appearing from across the transcripts. Next, all the descriptive codes were refined to formulate subcategories and categories. In order to establish patterns and themes, a combination of deductive and inductive coding was used (Bazeley, 2013). As suggested by Seale (2018), when a researcher has a general idea of what they are looking for, deductive codes can be used to classify the data before following it up with inductive coding to explore the data in more detail. Because preliminary concepts to be used in the data analysis were already identified at the beginning of the study, for instance *everyday life*, *digital content production*, *storytelling on YouTube*, *online performance*, *gender and identity*, and *race and identity*, inductive coding was employed to validate these concepts and explore them in more detail in relation to the study objectives (see Appendices 7 and 8 for coding process).

Ethical considerations

According to Jensen (2021. p. 285) it is always important to obtain informed consent when conducting research. As such, before the interviews, I created a consent form on Google Forms (see Appendix 1). A link to the consent form was sent to each of the participants in advance of the interviews and they all consented to participating and being recorded. On the day of the interview and prior to the actual recording, a verbal consent was also given. The interview process was an open and safe space where I encouraged the participants to be comfortable and share as much as they could.

The participants also agreed that I could use both their real names and the names of their YouTube channels in my study. Therefore, none of them has been anonymized and I will be referring to each one of them using their first names hereafter. While anonymizing research subjects is always encouraged, Jensen (2021) has highlighted de-anonymization is unproblematic in instances where a research topic and the empirical materials reproduced are uncontroversial. This is how both the participants and I felt about the topic and the findings of this study. While bearing in mind that sharing transcripts and academic writing with research participants might have different implications as pointed out by Forbat and Henderson (2005), as one way of empowering the YouTubers and engaging them as contributors to this research, I will share copies of my work with interested participants.

Researcher positionality

Even though several issues have been reflected upon in the above processes, it is important that I should establish my positionality clearly. I am a Female Malawian who was born and has lived in Malawi for over 25 years. Due to this, I have a unique perspective on the social, cultural and political context in which the participants of this study produce their YouTube content.

Additionally, although I have never produced or distributed any content on YouTube, I love consuming content on the platform a lot, particularly videos that showcase routine everyday life in African countries. I am even more fascinated when the creators of such videos are people who look like me and have a similar background to mine – young black women identifying as Africans. I look at what they do as empowering, especially on a platform which is male dominated and is constantly under criticism for racial discrimination (Albergotti, 2020).

While these factors clearly influenced the choice for this study, they did not influence the data collection, analysis and findings. This research is contextually relevant, and it addresses the priorities of the research community – female Malawian YouTubers.

Interviews reflection

A further reflection is on the interview process. Although online interviews can be cost-effective, they can also be challenging, especially in countries like Malawi where stable internet connection remains poor. This is one challenge that was experienced in this study. Unfortunately, this was also coupled with the current electricity situation in Malawi whereby power cuts are the order of the day.

Throughout the interview process, there were several instances where a participant was kicked out of the zoom meeting due to an unstable internet connection and they had to re-join. In my interview with Alinafe, which was conducted in the evening, she experienced an unexpected power cut such that we had to continue the interview while she was in total darkness.

During the interview with Alessandra, towards the end, we had to rush through it when she mentioned that her laptop battery was low as there was a power cut in her home. Nevertheless, such setbacks did not impact on the data collection and subsequently the outcome of the study as all the interviews were successfully done.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Introduction to findings and analysis

This chapter presents the study's findings and situates them within the relevant literature. The first consideration is given to the motivations for making YouTube vlogs. In understanding the motivations, it is important to consider that making vlogs in Malawi has little economic value at the moment. Thus, it is made as a form of affective labour (Abidin, 2015; Raun, 2018). Nevertheless, this affective labour is made with the YouTubers equally benefitting as it is assumed to be therapeutic as well as offering them the opportunity of building communities. Commercial interests are minor and despite that they do not drive the YouTubers, they lie within their hopes. In progressing, the analysis focuses on the everyday that is showcased by the YouTubers (Goffman, 1959). The showcase of the everyday is regarded as an act of transgression (Hermes and Hill, 2021). In performing the everyday, the YouTubers push against their own cultures as well as the structures of YouTube which would limit their ability to reach a wider audience (Drewal, 1991). This eventually leads to a focus on YouTube vlogging as an act of performing at the global stage yet within local experiences where such issues as representation as well as the colonial making of African societies in the media are discussed (Mano and Milton, 2021).

YouTube vlogging as affective labour

The making of YouTube videos in Malawi, at the moment, has little economic benefits. Instead, people are driven by the affective benefits (Abidin, 2015). These eventually are filtered through a performance of the everyday that is reflected in the vlogs. Indeed, as Strangelove (2010) argues, performing everyday life is not just driven by the need to show the everyday, it is also driven by other interests, values and benefits. In focusing on vlogging as affective labour, the experiences of the participants are highlighted in line with at least two key principles: vlogging as an emotional outlet as well as for building communities. A discussion, however, is also made on the economic benefits – or those anticipated – of vlogging.

YouTube vlogging as therapy

Despite Berkeley (2020) arguing that YouTube vlogging is driven by the need to earn an income from it, some of the participants disclosed that one of the intentions of starting vlogging was because it was regarded as a therapeutic exercise (Berryman and Kavka, 2018). Indeed, the recording of the everyday has come to be significant journaling, particularly for people with chronic illnesses, in which they share with others their experience of illness and find supporting communities (Huh *et al.*, 2014). In addition to that, as the research of Berryman and Kavka (2018) shows, there is an increased interest in YouTubers to show the other side of life than the positive experiences that have long been associated with the platform. In the context of this research, however, participants who referred to vlogging as a form of therapy were not at least known to have been diagnosed with an illness nor did they situate it within showcasing the other side of life. It was that the act of vlogging was taken as the necessary therapy. For example, Sandra, who started YouTube vlogging while studying in Costa Rica as an international student at which she was away from family, reported that it was on the recommendation of her therapist that she started vlogging on her channel.

“I had to go to therapy because I was crying every day. And then the therapist said, “What is it you want to do Sandra? Like, what do you want?” And, I was like, I just want to make videos, and he was like, then post them on YouTube. And that's how it started. ...I used to sit and just talk about how I feel, how my week was, and that would literally make me feel better.”

(Sandra)

YouTube vlogging for her was one way of journaling her experiences in a foreign land, a thing that was similarly highlighted by another participant Mira who started her YouTube channel in 2016 in South Africa. However, while in South Africa, Mira's interests were in beauty and makeup vlogging as it was common for South African YouTubers that had inspired her (see Kigundu-Touré, 2020, who researched on beauty and hair vlogging among South African black women). When she moved to study in Kenya, the focus changed to be more about journaling her experiences of online education during the COVID-19 pandemic as well as life as an international student. In a way, she was building communities of support that would provide her with therapeutic support

even if she did not get the explicit recommendation from her therapist nor did she explicitly state that she needed the same from the Malawian and international community that she would have expected to watch her videos. It is indeed the expectations of YouTubers that they will get emotional support when they share some of the everyday in their life as Abidin (2015) posited in reflecting on her experience with a vlogger in Singapore.

Community building

In critiquing an absolute focus on monetisation of vlogging, there was the introduction of the aspect of video making as an act of ‘labour of love’. This was indeed cited by the participants as another reason for their venturing into vlogging. Participants reported that they were interested in building communities. Digital media has been highlighted as one of the ways through which communities are built in modern days (Jenkins, 2006). While other research on vlogging has looked at these communities for chronic illnesses or education (see, for example, Huh *et al.*, 2014), the participants identified a different sort of community that they sought to build.

Vanessa, for instance, reflected on her own experiences of documenting her wedding processes in some of her videos indicating that she made them because she knows “the nightmare of being a bride and having to plan weddings” proceeding that she wanted “other brides to have something to learn from in their own weddings”. In a way, this would be understood as sisters watching over other sisters in a context where such spaces are increasingly getting limited due to the restructuring of society through colonialism and modernisation (Oyěwùmí, 1997).

Similarly, for Louisa, it is her role as a single young mother that shapes her approach to vlogging. Indeed, this appears in most of her videos and during the interview she shared that:

“I draw my inspiration from a South African YouTuber called The Millennial Mom, her real name is Amanda. She also creates content around her life as a young single mum. I instantly fell in love with her content when I became a single mum. Watching her videos is what inspired me to get comfortable with sharing my own journey because I know that it is not an easy one, especially in Malawi.”

From the above, Louisa did not just venture into vlogging as therapy or for the economic expectations from it. It was rather to build a community of other mothers who would be in a similar

situation as hers. A scope through her channel reveals that despite focusing on the ordinariness of life in Malawi, her relationship with her child – through the eyes of a single mum – features predominantly. Such titles as *Playtime with Evan*, *A day in the life of a single working mum* as well as *If you are a single mum, make use of the victim support unit* are telling of the community she seeks to build. The last title, particularly, presents her as an influencer of sorts (Kigundu-Touré, 2020) for single women who are facing problems, signposting them to possible solutions in a way that a sister would to another sister.

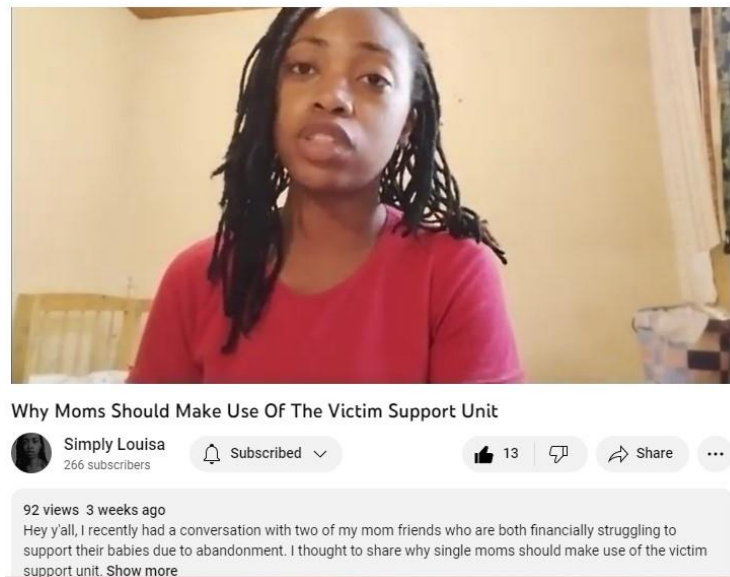


Figure 2: A screenshot of one of the videos mentioned above (May 2023)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gHwGqKjGuNM&t=498s&ab_channel=SimplyLouisa

Sandra acknowledged that vlogging is about building communities stressing that authenticity is one of the ways through which that is achieved. She disclosed that her choice of authenticity as a tool has allowed her to build deeper connections with her subscribers as well as to create a sense of community among the subscribers themselves. She shared this about one of her videos:

“I don't fake it. Everything you see on my channel is my actual life. If you see me on a motorbike going to town because I don't have money for a taxi, it's real. There was a time when I was going through a hard time, and I didn't have money. I told people that I don't have money for food. I did a video about what I eat in a

week when it's hard. *People related* [emphasis mine] ...to the point where others donated money for me to buy food for my family.”

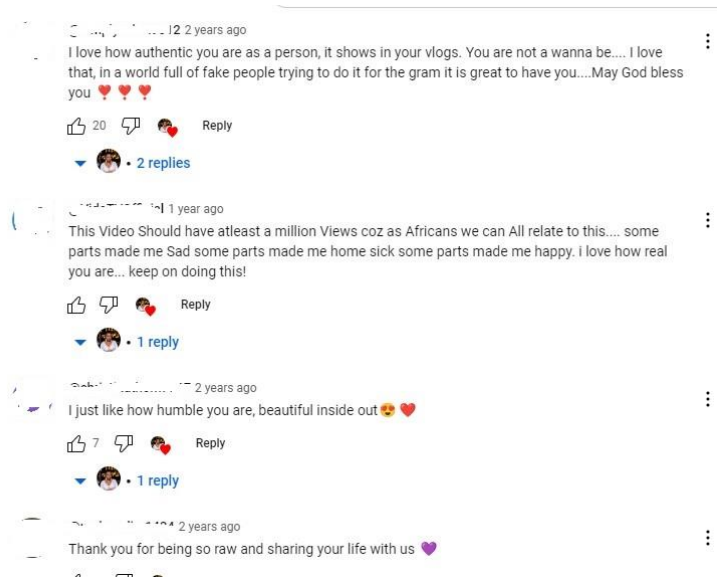


Figure 3: A screenshot of some of the comments on Sandra's video (May 2023)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2oxk_fcyfbU&ab_channel=sandrapeachymw

Emphasis has been added on the relatability to indicate that one of the values and benefits of YouTube vlogging is to build a community through which the YouTuber can relate with others. Indeed, in presenting the everyday life, Sobande (2017) has pointed out the abilities of relatability on YouTube particularly for black women arguing that “that images of Black women on YouTube still seem more authentic than those in mainstream mass-media” (p. 662). Indeed, unlike what would generally be perceived as celebrities whose lives are admired and adored yet people feel that they cannot attain their status, YouTube vloggers appear as one with the people and the audience see themselves reflected in them. Similarly, as Abidin (2015) established, vloggers themselves do not refer to the communities built as of fans since “it might come across as demeaning” (p. 3). Thus, the vloggers and audience both operate from a position of relatability. The relatability in this context, however, should be understood beyond its function as a tool of creating engaging content to the functions of building community.

Economic benefits of YouTube vlogging

The geographical position of Malawi and its subsequent economic levels that have an impact on access to the internet would certainly place the economic viability of YouTube vlogging in jeopardy. However, participants indicated that they vlog because of the economic benefits, and prospects, of it. It is however the prospects that feature heavily as only a few of the participants are able to earn income from their videos. This is also significantly shaped by their personal experiences and situations in regard to the establishing of the channels. Sandra, for instance, is one who earns from the YouTube Partners Program. However, this is only possible because she created her account when she was in Costa Rica where Google payment services are possible.

Closely linked to earning, however, is personal branding which also positions the YouTubers in a way of establishing brand partnerships from which they are paid. Apart from Sandra indicating that she also earns from brand collaborations, Mira indicated that she has ever earned from brand collaborations. She reported that:

“Sometimes small brands, companies and business owners in Malawi come to me so that I can sell their products on my channel. For instance, recently a company which makes hair products reached out to me so that I should market their products. They gave me their products and using my YouTube channel as a selling point, I produced a video showing how the products work.”

The other participants indicated that their expectations on financial earnings are at best hopes since, as Towera said, “the position of Malawi makes it hard to make earnings on YouTube”. When such participants were asked about brand partnerships, they indicated a willingness to pursue that avenue with Vanessa reporting:

“If I can’t make money through AdSense [a Google product that allows YouTube channel owners to make money by displaying ads during their videos] then at least I can collaborate with Malawian brands. After all, most of the people who watch my videos are Malawians.”

Nevertheless, this is a challenging position as industries in Malawi are scaling down on advertising due to difficult economic conditions. At the same time, vlogging on YouTube faces competition from other fast rising platforms such as TikTok or more traditional platforms such as the radio

which have a wider reach in Malawi. However, the other opportunities that YouTube vlogging would provide still makes the process worthy for the YouTubers with Louisa reporting that she finds fulfilment from “sharing my experiences about being a young, single and career mum”. It is indeed in performing what Boxman-Shabtai (2019) calls ‘labour of love’ that the YouTubers find the inspiration.

This, it should be clarified, is not to say that opportunities of making an income from vlogging are not welcome. It is rather to indicate that an absolute focus on monetisation of content is, to quote, Kigundu-Touré (2020), to ignore the “the closer relationship or, even, a closer bond, between creators and viewers” (p. 22). Indeed, the making of YouTube videos in Malawi is driven by affective benefits in which the YouTubers are members of a community sharing between them and their audience experiences as is the situation for YouTubers in other countries (see, also, Abidin, 2015, for Singapore female YouTubers).

Further, the relegation of the economic focus is to fit within this research which operates from a decolonial feminist perspective that seeks to challenge the colonial patriarchal way of relating with the world (Oyěwùmí, 1997). To solely focus on financial gains even when content is produced from a place of love would be a disservice. It is indeed the argument of Berryman and Kavka (2018) that a focus on the economic aspects of YouTube largely ignores the other richer experiences on the platform. Equally, one of the participants in the research, Alessandra, commented on YouTube vlogging as a form of affective labour pointing out that her motivations for vlogging were largely from a position of affective benefits. She remarked:

“I just love sharing my life experiences as a young Malawian or just as a person in general. Initially, I wanted to pursue a career in graphic designing, but I couldn’t because it is not viable in Malawi. So, I was like, maybe let me just channel my creativity into making YouTube videos. Honestly, I always have fun when making my videos and I am always happy when I share them on YouTube and my subscribers join in the fun through watching.”



Figure 4: An example of Alessandra's videos shared on her 20th birthday (May 2023)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ArvBvPGpowk&t=345s&ab_channel=Ale%27sSpot

Transgression through vlogging

The second part of the analysis focuses on the everyday that the participants showcase in their videos. The everyday here is as per definition of it by Goffman in which he established it as a carefully managed space which is filled with what he called “impression management” (1959: p. 146). That is, a space in which the self is curated and now just presented as raw. Indeed, within this thinking, Alinafe, Alessandra as well as Vanessa disclosed that they choose what to present to the public through the vlogging. Vanessa, for instance, said:

“It can be scary to share things that are too personal on YouTube. For example, let’s say my wedding and the events around it. But for me, those events are big milestones, and I wouldn’t want them to be undocumented. Of course, it’s not like I shared everything that happened, but I definitely shared enough for me to one day look at and be proud...”

However, the everyday also should be understood more broadly, particularly on the tensions within it. It should be understood that in the curation of narrative and the management of impression

(Goffman, 1959), there are also tensions within the everyday turning it into a place of power where people – and indeed narratives – are exploited, excluded and repressed (de Certeau, 1984; Karner, 2007). In this context, it is a space in which narratives are challenged and alternative narratives are created. Relying on the argument advanced by Hermes and Hill (2021) in which they understood the media space as used by producers to “counter good taste, ...temporarily deny the legitimacy of political institutions and leaders by ridiculing them and take pleasure in rewriting social rules” (p. 5) the vlogging is understood as an act of transgression in which there is a rewriting of the social rules. When discussing the transgressive aspects of the vlogs, there is a specific analysis on the ways that the YouTubers portray the Malawian woman in the videos as well as playing the role of wife. There is also a discussion on those who are perceived as transgressors of the social order yet build communities of support. All these are interlinked to the concepts discussed in the earlier section on affective labour as well as community building.

Being the Malawian woman, on video

Scholars have described – through the lens of media productions – the Malawian woman as existing at the end of targeted misogyny and negative stereotypes (Chilimampungu, 1999; Gunde, 2015). It is of little wonder, therefore, that much of the media produced, which has been rightly critiqued by the scholars, has been done by males. The radio adverts that Chilimampungu (1999) discusses were at the hands of males, mostly produced when Malawi was still in transition from a conservative dictatorship. Similarly, the online content that Gunde (2015) discusses was at the end of being produced, and mainly shared, by males. This research established that when Malawian women are producing the content, the representation is one that challenges the established patterns in media that is controlled by males. This would indeed be similar to other studies on vlogging and video production by black women in other parts of Africa (Kigundu-Touré, 2020), even in America and Britain (Emerson, 2002; Sobande, Fearfull and Brownlie, 2020).

I however seek to develop this performance of the Malawian woman in everyday life by highlighting the limits that the women face in their production. Thus, even if they seek to subvert the power of patriarchy which seeks to impose on them ways through which they can be regarded through such things as adverts (Chilimampungu, 1999), it imposes even in comments of the everyday that is shared. Sandra, at the moment, shares her life as a Malawian. Her vlogs are about

the random things that she does daily such as her routine experiences of groceries shopping, cooking, house cleaning, visiting her parents and indeed attending weddings, musical shows and other events. In an interview, she narrated experiences of people commenting on the things that she shares where such people specifically seek to limit her and label her actions of sharing the everyday life. She said when responding to the nature of engagement she gets for sharing the everyday life:

“...I have got people who say to me that, by posting videos of myself buying things [for my house], then I am showing off. Others actually say that I will get bewitched because I am showing off that I am doing well...”

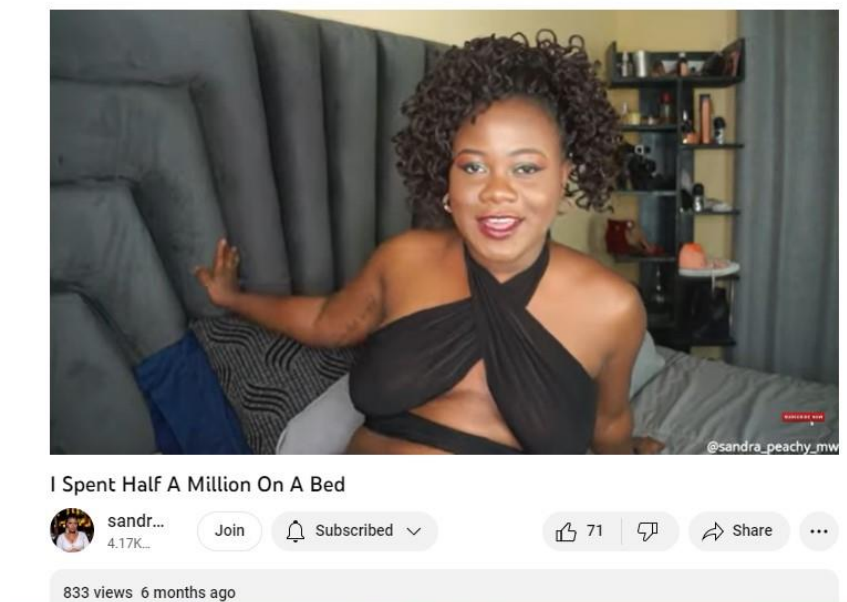


Figure 5: Sandra's video about her newly purchased bed (May 2023)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V893VZDXSpM&t=529s&ab_channel=sandrapeachymw

Tradition in this context, passing off as comments around witchcraft, should be understood within the praxis of patriarchy that is embedded in Malawi. Indeed, anthropological research on witchcraft in Africa has shown that it is used as a form of social control (Evans-Pritchard, 1937). While the arguments that are made broadly on it are not particularly on reinforcing patriarchy, it is important to highlight that patriarchy in some African contexts such as Malawi or South Africa have been highlighted as part of culture and tradition with feminism, as Kigundu-Touré (2020) argues, being

regarded as modernity and indeed a form of colonialism. Thus, the criticism that she faces is tailored to the ways through which the Malawian culture would rather see women, as subjects who are under the control of their parents (when young) and partners, in the case of being married (see, for example, Semu, 2002).

However, the production of these videos on their own is a radical act of pushing back against stereotypes. Indeed, it is the argument of Smith and Hofmann (2016) that the everyday life and a performance of the same is the presentation of contestation, it is the enactment of power processes. Even Sandra herself acknowledged and in extensive reflecting on that experience highlighted in the preceding paragraph, she remarked that the comments do not deter her, saying:

“...those people (who make comments) don’t understand lifestyle content creation. So, it’s fine. Those who are willing to listen, I teach and talk to them about it and tell them about what I do, that it’s a serious thing. Like, “if you are on YouTube, you will see that I am not crazy, or I am not showing off.”

In the eyes of such people who criticise her, indeed, a woman is better off being private. If her story is mediated, by the processes of media production, managed by men then it is acceptable. The vulnerabilities, anxieties and indeed the strength of women is a thing that they would rather not see, particularly coming off from the owner of the narrative. When a woman is expressive, as Amir-Ebrahimi (2008) observed, then they are taken as transgressive. However, the very act of blogging is one that even if it is curated as Goffman (1965) registers, it is curated to show the multidimensional nature of being a woman in a country such as Malawi. It is indeed a part of transgression utilising the digital media (Hermes and Hill, 2021).

Performing the wife

The role of women in Malawi, as Semu (2002) observes, is that they should be subservient. This is where they are mostly treated as an appendage to their husbands – or partners (see Adichie, 2017 on the way that marriage is thrust upon women in Nigeria, of which similar situations obtain in Malawi). For the YouTubers who post about their partners and marriages, however, they equally transgress against this situation, rather presenting their significant others as a part of them – not central to their existence. In some of her videos, for instance, Sandra appears with her partner in

which he just makes what would be regarded as a cameo appearance. He is not the significant part of the vlogging experience, nor the centre of it.

Even when Towera reflected on her video in which she was travelling to visit her husband whom at that time they were living in different cities, she made sure to highlight that experience as functioning within her identity of being a wife. However, contrary to what the Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2009) would have highlighted as the role of identities in media production, this vlogging is not to accentuate the identities. It is rather to alter them in a way. Thus, the wife is indeed central to her identity, however the roles of that wife in a traditional set-up which she challenges are altered in the production, release and experience of the video. Thus, apart from saying that the video was about:

“...my life. I had to leave everything just to go and see one person. The journey wasn't easier... but I was like, you know what, I have missed my husband. I hadn't seen him in four months.... It was really a long journey and the fact that he didn't know that I was visiting him was even more scary. I started off at 4pm and I arrived the next day. Along the way I had to continuously text my parents, furnishing them with all the details of my trip just in case anything happens.”

She added that: "the whole vlog was just about being vulnerable and taking a risk as a woman". She centralised her identity of womanhood within that aspect of being a wife. It was the exploration of emotions, expected indeed of women in African societies but not expected publicly of a wife, that she explored. In a way, the YouTubers seek to redefine what womanhood within the marriage institution entails, particularly in Africa. It is also a push against the expectations on YouTube where, as Berryman and Kavka (2018) point out, the videos are not expected to showcase negative emotion “especially in the form of anxiety, distress and the performance of emotional vulnerability” (p. 87).



Figure 6: A screenshot of Towera's video referenced in the section above (May 2023)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FxIFMIID-iw&ab_channel=Towiae

Similarly, for Vanessa, in her videos that presented her wedding process, they were mostly centred on her as a woman. At least four videos on her channel were curated from the wedding and marriage processes, and they mostly focused on her personal experiences rather than a couple's experience. Here, it is important to understand these vlogs as performance of the everyday by women, usually also for women (Abidin, 2015). In the context of Malawi, women are people who are constantly excluded in media spaces or portrayed with negative stereotypes (Gunde, 2015).

Trailblazing: Being a single mum

In discussing the benefit of community building which motivates people to venture into vlogging, Louisa was used to drive the narrative. Her story of being a single mother, however, does not just collapse into community building. It also features in the identities that would be used to present the everyday life in Malawi. She conceded even that without that particular identity of being a single mum, she would not have ventured into vlogging. Her experiences, and practices, of performing the everyday are also shaped by her experiences of being a mother – often straddling between the traditional and the modern. For instance, on the question of curating a particular image

for the everyday life, she reported that the image had to be in line with her motherhood identity saying:

“I feel like if I didn’t have a baby, I probably wouldn’t have been more cautious about what I share like the way I am now. It is actually a Malawian thing. A lot of Malawians are really conservative and private, especially when they become parents. They really don’t share much about themselves because of the fear that if something bad happens, it will not only affect them but their child as well. So even me, I don’t want to share much because you never know what might happen.”

In the above, Louisa presents an image of being a traditional woman whose online image is dictated by the beliefs of the Malawian society. However, her position of being a single mum contradicts the expected standards of a Malawian woman. This would also extend to the production of vlogs which has been decided in the preceding section. Most importantly, it should be highlighted that by creating a platform on which she can perform the everyday, Louisa engages into a transgressive act of rebellion against the conservative society that would rather have her hide in shame (Hermes and Hill, 2021). This, she refuses, and her refusal of the traditional dictates runs into her videos.

In one particular video, for instance, she gets deeply emotional as she narrates how she wanted her baby to be a girl instead of a boy. Sitting in her bed, while her child was making inaudible sounds in the background, she shares how having a boy child in Malawi is treated as a prestigious thing mainly for the reason that he will carry over his father’s name whereas a girl will simply end up getting married. She did not want her child to be loved by his father only because he is a boy. This should indeed be read within the self-representation theory which understands independent and digital media production as acts of resistance (see, for example, Goffman, 1959; Drewal, 1991; and Papacharissi, 2015). In this context, Louisa pushes against the expectations of the society, rewriting the rules that govern society (Hermes and Hill, 2021) around gender and parenting.

It is similar acts that Mira as well performs in her vlogs. As a 26-year-old who became a mum to her son when she was aged 21 while still in college, Mira’s channel has evolved in focus from her life as a student in South Africa, then Kenya and now it is in Malawi. At this point in Malawi, focus moves between her life as a Malawian woman and her life as a young mother. She said in

an interview that this was deliberate reporting that she wanted to show “the various faces of Malawian young women”.

As argued, the personal experiences of the YouTubers shape the content and the everyday life that they perform. Thus, the videos that Mira shares, as she acknowledged, are not just meant at providing support and lessons to other young mothers in Malawi, rather they are also to counter the stereotypes that would be there about Malawi. Indeed, her channel is full of videos that show her in various situations: as a mum, a student and just a woman going about her day. Her experiences in other African countries might have shaped such experiences. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that her South African experience was an influencing factor and Kigundu-Touré (2020) highlights that vlogging among South African black women arose as a conscious effort at pushing back against a narrative mostly imposed by Westerners within and outside South Africa. Mira said of her videos that:

“Sometimes it is just me trying to show a different perception of what people out there have of Malawi. I know that every time when most people hear about Malawi, the first impression that they have about the country is of poverty, bad roads and diseases because that’s the narrative that the Western media push. So, the fact that I live here, and I have access to YouTube, it just gives me the motivation to show my subscribers who are not Malawian a different side of Malawi that they don’t easily have access to. Of course, there are numerous problems here, but by sharing about my life, I am able to show that there are also young women in Malawi who are thriving and living a similar lifestyle to that of their peers in other parts of the world.”

From this, it is important to understand that there is an interplay of identities in the production of vlogs and YouTubers. Thus, the reading of vlogs and their producers should be considering the intersection of such identities. At the same time, it is to highlight the role of black women YouTubers producing under the weight of a white gaze that marginalises them for, firstly, being black and, secondly, being women (Emerson, 2002).

Existing on the local, performing for the global

A tension has been teased out in the preceding sections in discussing the issue of identity as fluid and equally transgressive. This should be analysed in detail in this section since it focuses on the everyday that the women exist in and which they perform. This is the tension between the local and the global, or the tension between tradition and modernity. The participants in the study are what would all pass for the modern Malawian woman. This, as Thornton and others (2014) describe, is the woman with an education, a job, independent and in control of her fertility. Indeed, across the years the image of this woman has been perfecting, despite challenges, and is the one that is embodied in the vlogs.

However, as the participants reflected, there are also expectations that are made of them as per cultural standards. Thus, in performing wife or single mother – contradictory positions that still strengthen the diversity of womanhood which the vlogs present – they are all balancing the expectations of the society while at the same time having to militate against the same and redefine themselves. This would be understood within the arguments made by Drewal (1991) and Strangelove (2010) in understanding digital media production as functioning within the performance of gender roles while at the same time militating against them. In an interview with Louisa, for example, she highlighted how her the Malawian culture emphasises on privacy and less sharing. This was also reported by Alinafe and Alessandra.

This conformity to culture, however, should not be read as an enforcement of the cultural practices through the use of digital media. This would indeed reduce the transgressive power of digital media, and YouTube specifically, and acknowledging the scepticism by Jenkins (2010). As a Malawian woman for whom YouTube has offered a platform, Towera indeed acknowledged that YouTube is empowering arguing that “there are a few people who use YouTube in Malawi, especially for vlogging, and the fact that I do makes me happy because I realise that I have an influence over how life in Malawi is presented on the platform”. This empowerment, nevertheless, is played within the dictates of culture while challenging it at the same time.

This is the reason for arguing that this position is laced with tension. On one hand, the YouTubers belong to their society while on the other hand, they critique that society and act in a transgress to it. Indeed, the work of Thornton and others (2014) has situated these experiences of the modern as

outside of the Malawian culture. A similar refrain is quite common in Malawi towards empowered women, that they are copying the culture of others. The ‘other’ that is referred to in this context, I would proposition that it is the ‘global’ that is neither ‘Western’ as the traditional would have us believe (see, Kigundu-Touré, 2020) nor ‘purely local’. Rather, it is an amalgamation of the local and the ‘abroad’ in which Western, local and even Eastern values are incorporated in daily life. In accepting their position as the global, for instance, Alinafe indicated that her videos are to ignore Western media presentations of life in Malawi saying:

“I am obviously aware that there are many things that are not as rosy in Malawi. But we see that a lot and little if not nothing of the good things that also exist in this country. And even though sometimes in my videos I am always complaining about the electricity blackouts, but I do appreciate where I am and what I have.”

Performing the Malawian

The performance of the everyday has already been discussed, particularly in line with the identities of the YouTubers. However, another important finding emerged from the research. This is also particularly important in line with reflecting on the everyday as it is advanced by Karner (2007). Before the interviews, when familiarizing myself with the participants’ content, I noted that in many of the videos that I watched, each of them was talking about how the prolonged power blackouts were impacting their content production processes. This is a challenge of course that is beyond the socio-cultural limitations in their context and the limitations of technology (these will be discussed separately in the next section). This unexpected finding is highlighted here to indicate the broader context of YouTube vlogging in Malawi. It is also highlighted to bring back the research to the everyday, showing that the female YouTubers do not only perform identities of gender and their subcategories. They also perform the Malawian identity and take advantage of its various disadvantages to produce content.

As Childs (2022) observes, producing the everyday in digital media entails taking advantage of whatever situation that one is presented with. In this regard, the YouTubers are not shying away from showing Malawi as is at the global stage. In one of the videos, Vanessa, focuses on the power blackouts which at the time would run for over ten hours. In the video, she says:

“... So today is Saturday. I am just in Zomba.... I am doing a couple of things. I wanted to do some work, and at the same time I wanted to vlog because it’s been a minute since I actually did a proper vlog. Vlogging has been hard guys, and you know why it has been hard, ESCOM [Electricity Supply Corporation of Malawi]. Like right now my phone is at 10 percent and luckily enough I have this power bank that is even connected to my phone. So, we will see how this goes. [Next day] Hi guys, good morning. I am currently at Kefi Hotel. We don’t have electricity. I am always on the hunt for electricity nowadays... I am just working on my laptop. I mean, I am just bored, because I feel like I have to always be on the hunt for electricity. It's crazy. But yeah.”

The performance of the everyday as a Malawian should also be understood beyond the limits of showing – mostly to an outside world – the way of life in Malawi as Alinafe had also said of her productions. It is also related to one of the values and benefits of vlogging: building community. Thus, in the same video of Vanessa whose part I have referred to, there is a direct reference to what one would call ‘surviving life in Malawi’. This would indeed be applicable to those in Malawi, who belong to her community, or would wish to share in her community. She discusses the situation and explores the possibilities of navigating that situation making herself authentic (Berryman and Kavka, 2018).

It is important to highlight as well that the situation of power failures is constantly highlighted as one of the challenges that Malawi faces since it stands in direct with the processes of vlogging. Alinafe, for instance, reflected on the impact of the power failures reporting that:

“Previously, once I finished editing, I used to schedule my videos to be up on YouTube on Fridays. But with the electricity situation, nowadays once I finish editing and there is electricity, I upload it right away regardless of whether it’s Friday or not. ...The blackouts affect me a lot. Recently I wanted to film an after-work video, but I couldn’t because there was no electricity for four consecutive days whenever I was arriving home from work. I just gave up.”

However, the participants are finding tactics to navigate around the constant and prolonged blackouts. For some, for example Sandra, the tactics include taking advantage of the days when there is electricity to create enough footage for the whole week and just scheduling the videos on

YouTube depending on when she wants them to go up. This way, she is also able to remain consistent in the way she shares content on YouTube. The next section discusses such tactics in detail.

Tactics of doing YouTube

It is clear by now that female Malawian YouTubers face unique power dynamics and challenges in digital content production due to socio-cultural factors. However, another important barrier is the infrastructure of the platform. In this section, the focus will be on the tactics that the YouTubers use to navigate around content production as well as to increase the visibility and reach of their content on the platform. This is also to highlight their role as active participants who use their agency to challenge/navigate not only structures of power within their locality, but as they operate at a global level. The discussion in this section will be structured along those lines starting with discussing the tactics around overcoming the socio-cultural restrictions some of which are physical; secondly, discussing the tactics as they navigate the structures of power inherent in the technologies of YouTube.

Beating YouTube algorithms

The production of YouTube videos is often a struggle for attention (Burgess and Green, 2018). This, of course, is mostly assumed from the financial benefits of producing vlogs (Raun, 2018). However, as Abidin (2015) argues, producing from an affective labour position entails similar commitments. Thus, despite that only one of the participants has access to the YouTube Partner Program, the participants in this research similarly indicated that the essence of vlogging is to build a community. It is not, as the participants of Abidin (ibid.) research narrated, to build a legion of fans. This community, apart from being a necessary appreciation for the ‘labour of love’ they undertake, it is also essential in the prospects of monetisation. Even without the YouTube Partner programme, for such YouTubers as Vanessa with intentions of partnering with brands for promotion, building a fan base is the ideal goal of vlogging. However, the structure of the platform limits their engagement, thus they have to devise means of optimising their vlogs.

The participants reported that their use of YouTube has also led them to rely on the web of social media platforms to promote their content. Indeed, this has also been reported in literature with

Papacharissi (2015. p. 7) pointing out that social media platforms are interconnected. The participants shared that they use their social media platforms such as TikTok, Twitter, Instagram, Facebook and WhatsApp to share teasers or links to their YouTube videos as well as to attract new subscribers to their channels. Sandra, for instance, in an interview reported:

“Sometimes when I am really serious about it, I do a campaign on my social media accounts, letting people know that I have a YouTube channel and telling them to subscribe. Because it doesn’t make sense that I have 11,000 followers on Instagram and not even 5,000 subscribers on YouTube.”

In addition to this tactic, some of the participants indicated that they create content around trending issues. However, my separate online ethnography, coming after following the participants – as well as other influencers – across their social media channels, I realised that in the Malawian digital space there appears to be a division with those who comment on current affairs mostly limiting to vlogging on Facebook where the demands for video making is less. Nevertheless, it was reported by Mira that she makes some videos on trending issues, not necessarily current affairs, to build a large community which she can optimise in future. She said:

“For instance, I created a video about hair makeover in which I was showing my subscribers how I do my hair at home. So, at that time, Inecto was promoting one of its new products and I used it in my hair makeover. The video received so many views and there are actually people who subscribed to my channel because of it.”



Figure 7: A screenshot of Mira's video which she referred to in the quote above (May 2023)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jjUc1N_kVKQ&t=5s&ab_channel=Mirrorbelle

Vanessa added another tactic, reporting that her approach is not really about creating content around trending topics. She reported that the content she creates is what is called “evergreen content” which she described as content that will always remain relevant despite the change in seasons or change in focus of trending issues in society. Examples of such content for her include the perfume reviews and the try-on hauls that she usually creates. This, she also acknowledged is because such has a wider reach that can not only be limited to Malawi where fewer people would access YouTube. This has indeed been highlighted as true of YouTube content that transcends nationality and focuses on the broader issues such as, in the case of Kigundu-Touré (2020) research, beauty and hair. On this, Vanessa remarked:

“I did notice that when I do videos about perfume reviews, I get more views than I normally do on my other videos, for instance the vlogs where I take people through my day or weekend. I think this is probably because the videos pop up when someone is looking for a particular perfume’s reviews on YouTube.”



Figure 8: Vanessa's perfume video with over 1,700 views (May 2023)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WPnDxFx1RX4&t=37s&ab_channel=VanessaSunshine21

This tactic is also similar to how the participants use search engine optimization techniques to improve their video titles, descriptions, tags and keywords in order to rank higher in search results and gain visibility. In a way, they maximise the biases of the algorithms, focusing on the stereotypes around hair and beauty (Kigundu-Touré, 2020), and maximise on the same. However, the agency of the female producers is taken a step higher with Sandra disclosing that she sometimes has to use click-baits to gain viewership (Abidin, 2015). These would either be in the form of video titles or thumbnails. She recollected on her use of click-baits:

“Like one of my recent videos that was doing quite well and had people clicking on it fast because the cover said, “Do not come back” and the title was “5 things I wish I knew before moving back to Malawi, Africa”. It evoked so many emotions in people and some were really angry, so to speak. And I was like, if you really watched the video, you would know that I 100% support coming back to Malawi or Africa, and these are just things I wish I knew. And the way I titled it, I knew that it would make people click on it.”

Indeed, a better description of vlogging was made by Louisa who remarked that producing videos for YouTube “is really about having to continuously learn, from not only yourself but also others by seeing how they are using the titles, tags, artworks or keywords. And then just pray that it works out for you when you implement the same in your content”. It is a similar reflection to that made by Burgess and Green (2009) on the complexity of video making on YouTube in an age of marketisation of the platform highlighting that “successful YouTubers have tended to be canny and unknowledgeable about YouTube’s attention economy...and this knowledge is often performed playfully or humorously” (p. 74).

The YouTuber as the negotiator

The camera, in Malawi, is an intrusion. Communities are mostly sensitive to cameras owing to the traditional beliefs around privacy and witchcraft that, for instance, Louisa talked about. This, therefore, makes recording of videos difficult. The burden is doubled for women for whom expectations are that they are subservient in the home and leave the gadgets to the men (Kigundu-Touré, 2020). Indeed, Alessandra reflected on her experiences as a YouTuber, reporting in an interview that:

“...you get a lot of side eyes and negative judgement. Sometimes, I try to ignore it, but other times it is difficult...”

Sandra related of an incident that she had at a local hotel where she was stopped from filming and had to be escorted out – effectively criminalising a routine activity that people often do in modern days of sharing their daily lives (Strangelove, 2010). Her attempts to explain to them that she was just creating footage for her vlog and to refer them to her YouTube channel did not help. She said in reflection:

“After this incident, I did a video where I talked about the experience.... I didn't realize my followers are people who are reactive. They went on [the hotel's] social media page and they were like, hey, you did this to Sandra.... Now I am allowed to go there and create footage for my vlogs if I like, but I chose not to go there again....”

This is however not just for public places or unfamiliar people. Participants equally reported that even with some friends, they would have problems getting them involved. This, as Sandra, said

limits the presentation of the everyday life in the videos. This would indeed be an extension to the theory of Goffman (1959) on the everyday life, highlighting that the curation is not just to fit within a particular presentation of the self, rather it is also to fit particular standards. Such standards that the participants disclosed were also within the ethical and legal limits of YouTube vlogging.

In discussing on the ethics of vlogging, it should be stated that this is an area for which this thesis did not explicitly explore. It is an area that, if a recommendation would be made at this stage on further research, can be better explored (this will be discussed more in detail in the final chapter). However, it was interesting that this emerged in this research with the participants highlighting that they have learnt to negotiate with the public in making their videos. In an interview, Alinafe reported that:

“When in public, I normally don’t like being noticed that I am taking videos. So, if I am in a store or supermarket, I usually have my wallet and my phone, and I just act like I am holding my wallet in a certain way while I am actually filming. I just make sure not to show people’s faces. Sometimes when I go to the gym and I want to create content for my vlog, I just put my phone in a quiet corner where people won’t notice. Although I have a professional camera, I avoid using it in public spaces because it becomes too obvious that I am filming, and people usually give me side eyes.”



Living Alone Update | A day in my life in Malawi, Africa



Nafe's Creations
505 subscribers

Subscribed

32



Share



416 views 8 months ago

Welcome Back

Thank you for watching a day in my life in Malawi, Africa and a living alone update, many more videos coming

Figure 9: Alinafe's video in a thrift store blurring out faces

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B-g0X11gBX8&t=121s&ab_channel=Nafe%27sCreations

The point above is brought to highlight the complexity of video making in a highly patriarchal society as well as to elucidate that the empowering aspects of digital media transcend beyond the digital media, filtering through to the processes of digital media production. The experiences of negotiating with the public, and even their partners, for video production in a way can be understood as acts of *reclaiming* the public space for the women (I use *reclaiming* on inspiration from the work of Oy w m , 1997, who understood colonialism as leading to the marginalisation of women in Africa). Indeed, the position that is occupied by women at the moment in Malawi within the media is one in which they are regarded as subordinate. Their reality is filtered through the productions of media houses in the hands of men or researched through the lens of male researchers (Chilimampungu, 1999; Chikaipa, 2019).

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

This research had set out to explore the construction and presentation of everyday life in Malawi through videos created by female Malawian YouTubers as well as the content production and power dynamics for these creators. This was grounded in the understanding of YouTube as a platform which offers people a chance through which they can produce their own content, on their terms (Burgess and Green, 2009, 2018); this affordance of YouTube was regarded not withstanding its limits of operating within a technological structure favouring communities in the Global North. Women in Malawi were understood as historically marginalised out of media spaces in which their roles are stereotypical (Chilimampungu, 1999; Gunde, 2015). Thus, the interest was in understanding the ways through which they leverage YouTube to reclaim spaces in the media and representation of their own realities.

In order to get that understanding, two methods were primarily used for data collection. These are document review and production interviews. Interviews were conducted with seven female YouTubers living in Malawi and the discourse of seven videos (one video for each of the YouTubers) were thoroughly analysed, this is on top of the numerous videos that were reviewed during the familiarization process. Goffman's (1959) performance of everyday life theory, as employed by Papacharissi (2015), was used to understand how the YouTubers identities and the social expectations that come with them (the identities) influence their construction and representation of daily life in Malawi. The notion of everyday which was used in the research encompasses both normal and abnormal events and experiences in people's lives (Karner, 2007), while also being viewed as a space for creativity and resistance (de Certeau, 1984). Thus, YouTube was recognised as a form of media in which transgressive actions take place (Hermes and Hill, 2021). In the sections below, the research questions posed at the beginning of this thesis will be addressed, ending in suggestions for future research as well as a justification for the thesis' contribution to knowledge.

The first research question asks: In what ways is everyday life in Malawi constructed and presented in videos by female Malawian YouTubers? From the findings, it is clear that the daily life in Malawi that is portrayed and represented through the lens of the female Malawian YouTubers is one that is largely influenced by their different identities as well as the socio-cultural context of the country. In this context, the YouTubers embrace their identities and act within them. However,

reading them as simple portrayals of identities would be misleading. The YouTubers use the presentation of the everyday as spaces for contest as well as transgression (Hermes and Hill, 2021). For example, YouTubers who are married or have partners do not just show the everyday as revolving around their partners as is expected of tradition, rather they show themselves existing as career women and indeed full individuals in their own right. The partners might be referred to in the videos, and sometimes appear, but they do not take the central position. This would be unlike in other representations within the traditional, and even digital, media where the women are presented in stereotypical positions and often as an extension of the male figures in their lives (Chilimampunga, 1999; Gunde, 2015).

The second research question asks: How can we understand digital content production and power dynamics for female Malawian YouTubers? In answering the question, media production processes were understood to be about power (Mano and Milton, 2021). This is similar for YouTube. In Malawi, female YouTubers at least face two levels of power that they struggle against. The first, which is related to the point on identities indicated above, is on having to negotiate with the power structures in the immediate socio-cultural context (Semu, 2002). Thus, the YouTubers face challenges in accessing physical spaces for production. At the same time, there are instances in which people within the communities that they build are overly critical of the content that they share with them. This would indeed be read within the limits that patriarchy seeks to impose on women where they are not expected to be heard.

The second level of power that the YouTubers have to militate against is embedded in the platform of YouTube. The structure of YouTube monetisation programme places such countries as Malawi outside of the list of beneficiaries. The production is mostly made as affective labour (Abidin, 2015). However, there are tactics that the YouTubers are developing to bypass these limitations. This includes using key words that would be quickly picked by the YouTube algorithms as well as using clickbait titles. The essence of this approach is for them to build bigger communities from which they can look at alternative means of marketisation (Burgess and Green, 2018).

Critical reflection

This thesis is limited in scope in a number of ways. Firstly, out of more than 50 female Malawian YouTubers who produce and distribute content on the platform, only seven were interviewed and

had their videos analysed. While I cannot say for sure if having more than seven participants would bring out different results, I would recommend it for a bigger study because their backgrounds, motivations, experiences and identities would be different, and this might have an influence on how they perform everyday life or how they navigate different content production and power dynamics.

Additionally, there is an important issue that emerged from the interviews but was not explored deeply in this thesis. This is in regard to how the YouTubers always have to ensure that their videos are meeting particular standards to avoid being flagged for, among others, committing copyright infringement. As such, I would recommend exploring the issue of ethical and legal limits of YouTube content creation for black female YouTubers further. For instance, future research can look into the legal frameworks and regulations that govern YouTube content creation, with a specific focus on how they affect black female YouTubers. Another research that can be conducted on the topic relates to the strategies employed by black female YouTubers to negotiate and navigate the ethical and legal boundaries of content creation on YouTube while maintaining their creative autonomy.

Furthermore, the findings of this study cannot be used to generalise the YouTube experiences of other black women who create content around their daily life in other African countries outside of Malawi. This is because they operate under different contexts, realities and social conditions (Faloyin, 2022). However, the findings of this study can be transferred to open avenues for researching such other contexts. Nevertheless, there is a need for more studies in other African countries for a better understanding of the experiences of female African YouTubers who produce content about their everyday life in different African countries.

However, this thesis and its findings are valid and have the potential to make a significant contribution to knowledge in several ways. Firstly, the thesis addresses a research gap by exploring a topic and subjects (female Malawian YouTubers) that have not been extensively studied before. The absence of previous academic research in this area highlights the novelty and originality of this thesis. Secondly, the thesis adds to the broader body of knowledge by focusing specifically on female Malawian YouTubers. By examining the experiences and performances of this specific group, the thesis has shed light on a unique context and has provided insights into the challenges, opportunities and successes they encounter within the YouTube landscape. This adds depth and

nuance to the existing literature on YouTube content creators. Furthermore, while there have been some academic studies on the experiences of black African women who produce YouTube content (for example, the research by Kigundu-Touré, 2020 highlighted earlier), this thesis further expands on this knowledge base by specifically investigating female Malawian YouTubers. This localized perspective allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the experiences and dynamics within the African YouTube community.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Consent Form

Below is a collage of the consent form which was created using Google Forms. Clear text under the photo.



Consent Form

Name of interviewer: Mercy Malikwa

Research title: Anchoring narratives
- Female Malawian YouTubers Presentation of Everyday Life in Malawi

I am a master's student in Media and Communication Studies at Lund University in Sweden. For my thesis, I am researching the presentation of everyday life in Malawi by Female Malawian YouTubers. This research seeks to explore how you use YouTube to show to the world how life in Malawi is lived.

Particularly, I am interested in understanding the processes that you take to produce your videos; the factors that influence what kind of stories to share; the techniques that you use when

Full Name *

Your answer

Age *

Your answer

Occupation *

Your answer

Name of YouTube Channel *

Your answer

Particularly, I am interested in understanding the processes that you take to produce your videos; the factors that influence what kind of stories to share; the techniques that you use when telling your stories, and how you navigate your identities (nationality, race, gender, relationship status, profession) in the production and distribution of the videos on YouTube. During the interview, I will also ask you to show me a video which you produced which best describes your identity. The interview will approximately last between 40-60 minutes. The data will only be used for my thesis work.

I would like to record the whole interview so that I can transcribe it for my analysis, but I will only record it with your consent. Please feel free to say as much as you want during the interview. You can also choose not to answer some questions or stop the interview at any time. If you agree to take part in the study, please fill out the form.

me7614ma-s@student.lu.se (not shared) Switch account

* Required

Full Name *

Your answer

Approximate number of videos on channel *

Your answer

I agree that the original recording and interview transcript generated thereafter will be retained in the researcher's google drive until the result of the thesis is confirmed. *

Yes

No

Signature (Initials can suffice) *

Your answer

Date *

Date

Consent Form

Name of interviewer: Mercy Malikwa

Research title: Anchoring narratives – Female Malawian YouTubers Presentation of Everyday Life in Malawi

I am a master's student in Media and Communication Studies at Lund University in Sweden. For my thesis, I am researching the presentation of everyday life in Malawi by Female Malawian YouTubers. This research seeks to explore how you use YouTube to show to the world how life in Malawi is lived.

Particularly, I am interested in understanding the processes that you take to produce your videos; the factors that influence what kind of stories to share; the techniques that you use when telling your stories, and how you navigate your identities (nationality, race, gender, relationship status, profession) in the production and distribution of the videos on YouTube. During the interview, I will also ask you to show me a video which you produced which best describes your identity. The interview will last between 40-60 minutes. The data will only be used for my thesis work.

I would like to record the whole interview so that I can transcribe it for my analysis, but I will only record it with your consent. Please feel free to say as much as you want during the interview. You can also choose not to answer some questions or stop the interview at any time. If you agree to take part in the study, please fill out the form.

Full Name:

Age:

Occupation:

Name of YouTube Channel:

Approximate number of videos on channel:

I agree that the original recording and interview transcript generated thereafter will be retained in the researcher's google drive until the result of the thesis is confirmed:

Signature (Initials can suffice):

Date:

Appendix 2: Informants' summaries

1	<p>Name: Towera Kumwenda</p> <p>Age: 27</p> <p>Occupation: Reporter</p> <p>Date of interview: 03.03.2023</p> <p>Length of interview: 56 minutes</p> <p>Name of YouTube channel: Towiae/Towiae Talks</p> <p>Number of videos on channel on the day of the interview: 64</p> <p>Number of channel subscribers on the day of the interview: 180</p> <p>Equipment used when creating videos: Smartphone, ring light, tripod, laptop</p> <p>City of residency: Mzuzu</p>
2	<p>Name: Sandra Kalua</p> <p>Age: 27</p> <p>Occupation: Digital Marketer</p> <p>Date of interview: 05.03.2023</p> <p>Length: 1 hour 10 minutes</p> <p>Name of YouTube channel: Sandra Peachy MW</p> <p>Number of videos on the day of the interview: 436</p> <p>Number of channel subscribers on the day of the interview: 4,072</p> <p>Equipment used when creating videos: Smartphone, vlogging camera, tripod, laptop, ring light</p> <p>City of residency: Blantyre</p>
3	<p>Alinafe Malitoni</p> <p>Age: 24</p> <p>Occupation: Economist</p> <p>Date of interview: 07.03.2023</p> <p>Length of interview: 1 hour 12 minutes</p> <p>Name of YouTube channel: Nafe's Creations</p> <p>Number of videos on the day of the interview: 85 (some are private)</p> <p>Number of channel subscribes on the day of the interview: 502</p> <p>Equipment used when creating videos: Smartphone, professional camera, tripod, microphone, laptop</p> <p>City of residency: Lilongwe</p>
4	<p>Name: Vanessa Rita Chimutu Kalima</p> <p>Age: 29</p> <p>Occupation: Program Coordinator</p> <p>Date of interview: 08.03.2023</p> <p>Length: 1 hour 15 minutes</p>

	<p>Name of YouTube channel: Vanessa Sunshine21</p> <p>Number of videos on the day of the interview: 43</p> <p>Number of channel subscribers on the day of the interview: 712</p> <p>Equipment used when creating videos: Smartphone, vlogging gimble, tripod, laptop when editing, ring light</p> <p>City of residency: Zomba + Lilongwe</p>
5	<p>Name: Mira German</p> <p>Age: 26</p> <p>Occupation: Communications Officer</p> <p>Date of interview: 12.03.2023</p> <p>Length of interview: 1 hour 30 minutes</p> <p>Name of YouTube channel: Mirrorbelle</p> <p>Number of videos on the day of the interview: 111</p> <p>Number of channel subscribers on the day of the interview: 498</p> <p>Equipment used when creating videos: Smartphone, professional camera, tripod, ring light, laptop when editing, earbuds, headphones</p> <p>City of residency: Lilongwe</p>
6	<p>Name: Alessandra Thunde</p> <p>Age: 20</p> <p>Occupation: Call Centre Agent</p> <p>Date of interview: 16.03.2023</p> <p>Length of interview: 1 hour 12 minutes</p> <p>Name of YouTube channel: Ale's Spot</p> <p>Number of videos on the day of the interview: 40</p> <p>Number of channel subscribers on the day of the interview: 311</p> <p>Equipment used when creating videos: Smartphone, tripod, ring light, laptop when editing, microphone</p> <p>City of residency: Lilongwe</p>
7	<p>Name: Esther Louisa Msiska</p> <p>Age: 26</p> <p>Occupation: Content Creator</p> <p>Date of interview: 24.03.2023</p> <p>Length of interview: 1 hour 23 minutes</p> <p>Name of YouTube channel: Simply Louisa</p> <p>Number of videos on the day of the interview: 50</p> <p>Number of channel subscribers on the day of the interview: 254</p> <p>Equipment used when creating videos: Smartphone and laptop sometimes when editing</p> <p>City of residency: Blantyre</p>

Appendix 3: Interview Guide

Themes and concepts: Background information and context; content production and distribution; everyday life and digital storytelling; identity (gender, nationality and race)

1. Background info + context

- When did you create a YouTube channel?
- What motivated you to create the channel?
- When did you start uploading vlogs on your channel?
- How many subscribers does your channel have?
- What do you do to attract more subscribers?
- Why does having subscribers to your channel matter?
- Tell me about the demographics of your subscribers or the people who watch your videos on YouTube?
 - Nationality/age/gender

2. Production and distribution of content

- How often do you create and upload videos on YouTube
- Who is your target audience?
- Tell me about the tools that you use when creating your videos your videos?
 - Smartphone/laptop computer/professional camera/tripod/lighting
- Do you shoot and edit your videos on your own or do you have people (or a person) whom you work with?
- What processes take place between shooting a video and finally uploading on YouTube?
 - Editing/deciding on time and date to upload/scheduling an upload
- What expectations do you normally have when you upload a new video on YouTube?
 - Getting more likes/followers, creating engagement in the comments section
- This far, how many minutes is the longest video you have ever shared on YouTube?
- How about the shortest video?
- What difference does the length of the video have on the reception?
 - Number of views, likes, comments

- Before becoming a YouTuber, what skills or training did you have on creating content for YouTube?
- After you started vlogging, are there any skills or training that you have acquired to improve or update your initial knowledge in content creation for YouTube?
- YouTube provides a chance for vloggers to make money from the platform, is this something that you are already doing or have the aspiration of doing?
- If already making money from YouTube, what impact does that have on your content and the frequency of your content distribution?

3. Everyday life and digital storytelling

- Tell me what influences the choice of time, place, topics, and narratives for your videos?
 - Personal issues/societal issues/campaigns and brands collaboration
- What aspects of your everyday life do you normally share in your videos?
 - Grocery shopping/celebrating a birthday/doing household chores/attending classes/visiting friends/cooking
- How do you decide which life events, routines experiences or activities to talk about or show in your videos?
 - Based on viewers comments/personal discretion
- What storytelling techniques do you use to make your videos interesting or attract more subscribers to your channel?
 - Creating suspense/using captions/taking the viewers on a journey/pausing questions to viewers
- What difference is there (in terms of views and comments) on the videos that you share on YouTube?
 - For example, are there videos of particular activities, stories, routines that are watched or liked more than others?
- What factors do you consider when creating your videos in public spaces?
 - Issues of other people's privacy
- How do you choose the audio or sounds that you use in your videos?
 - Issues of copyright

4. Identity (gender, race, nationality and others)

- Tell me about how you navigate around being a female YouTuber
 - For example, does your gender have any impact on your interest/professional as a YouTuber?
- How do your identities influence content and narratives in your vlogs?
- What role do your identities play in how you construct and present how everyday life in Malawi is lived?
- Tell me how you navigate around your identities on a global platform?
- What do you think of content production and distribution on YouTube as a female Malawian?
- Tell me about one of your videos which best describes who you are

5. Extra questions depending on some research topic-related responses

6. Is there anything that you would like to add (Closing reflections)?

Appendix 4: Full transcript sample

Interviewee: Sandra Kalua

YouTube Channel: Sandra Peachy MW

Date of interview: 05.03.2023

Length of interview: 1 hour 10 minutes

Medium: Zoom

Mercy: So firstly, I would like to know when you created your channel?

Sandra: The channel itself was started in 2013. But that's because at that time, if you just had a Google account, you automatically had a YouTube account. I don't know if you knew that. But hosting on it started in 2017.

Mercy: What motivated you to create the channel?

Sandra: I did that because I was in a bad mental state. Before that, I used to work on TV, I was a TV personality at Matindi TV. And then I went to school to do agriculture. So I think that switch was a little bit extreme. So when I was not happy, I had to go to therapy, because I was crying every day. And then the therapist said, "What is it you want to do Sandra? Like, what do you want?" I was like, I just want to make videos, and he was like, then post them on YouTube. And that's how it started.

Mercy: So after that therapy session in 2017 you started uploading videos right away?

Sandra: Exactly.

Mercy: How many subscribers does the channel have now? Like as of today?

Sandra: I need to check. We are currently at 4,072.

Mercy: How do you attract new subscribers?

Sandra: Sometimes when I am really serious about it, I do a campaign on my social media accounts, letting people know that I have a YouTube channel and telling them to subscribe. Because it doesn't make sense that I have 11,000 followers on Instagram and not even 5,000

subscribers on YouTube. So whenever I have free time, I do a campaign. But mostly, new subscribers come from just the videos themselves. If it's a really interesting video, you'll find that people just automatically subscribe to me. So, it's just organic, word of mouth, and campaigns.

Mercy: You have talked about Instagram. Is that the only social media platform that you market yourself on?

Sandra: No, I do. TikTok too. Facebook, not really, this is because my Facebook is connected to my Instagram. Things I post on Instagram automatically go on Facebook. So I'm not actively creating content for Facebook, but it's connected.

Mercy: Why does having a lot of subscribers matter to you as a YouTuber?

Sandra: For me personally, it's because I'm monetized. So that means the more subscribers I have, the more eyes that are on my channel and the more money that I make.

Mercy: Are you able to see the demographics of the people who watch your videos?

Sandra: Yes, I am able to.

Mercy: Okay, so maybe which are the top five nationalities of your viewers?

Sandra: I'd have to check. Let me check that for you.

Mercy: Check their gender and age range as well.

Sandra: Most of my viewers are between 18 and 44. Highest being between 25 and 34. So, 54% of the people that watch my channel are between the ages of 25 and 34.

Mercy: Okay.

Sandra: And then most of them are female. So 77% of them are female and 22% of them are male. Top five countries are Malawi, the United States, South Africa, UK and India.

Mercy: That's interesting. So, how often do you create and upload videos on your channel?

Sandra: I create once a day, like one day of the week, which is Saturdays. I try to make at least a minimum of four videos. And then throughout that week, I upload every two days. So, for example, I will upload today, two days will pass and then on the third day I will upload a new video.

Mercy: What tools do you normally use when creating videos?

Sandra: I have my phone. I have a vlogging camera.

Mercy: There is a special vlogging camera?

Sandra: Yes, there is a special vlogging camera.

Mercy: How different is it from the other cameras?

Sandra: I mean, compared to my phone, the quality is 100%. It's so much better. And it's the one I use for my sit down videos. Of course, there are better models out there. But it's also okay. However, I don't use it in public because Malawians are not used to this, you get a lot of eyes and a lot of questions when you're holding a camera in your face in public. So I use my phone when I am shooting in public.

Mercy: Do you shoot and edit all your videos on your own, or have you got someone or people whom you work with?

Sandra: I shoot my non-sponsored videos on my own. So if no brand is attached to it, I'll do it on my own, because nobody needs to approve anything. But if I have a paid partnership, like a brand wants to do a video with me, I do include the cost of the cameraman in my costing, so then I have someone to film and edit that one.

Mercy: What processes usually take place between shooting a video and finally uploading it on YouTube?

Sandra: So firstly, I need to.... I watch a lot of YouTube. I am a YouTuber who actually watches a lot of YouTube. I get a lot of inspiration from different YouTubers because it's not easy to have a video idea every two days. So you need to, like take in a lot of things. So I watch a lot of videos for inspiration, I watch people within my niche, which are lifestyle vloggers. I especially watch those that are in Africa, because I feel like they are more relatable. And my content is about finding your ground or establishing yourself as a young individual in Africa. So I try to watch other Africans that we can all create content around the same lines. If it's a sit-down video, I like talking about finance a lot because I feel like a lot of us don't really know what to do with money, how to handle money and stuff like that. So I just give my two cents. I am not saying I am a financial expert, but I give what I know and what I can advise people. So most of my sit-down videos are

like that. And I take those inspirations from other financial YouTubers and get the ideas from them. Yeah, so that's what I do. After I have those ideas. I usually list them down and write them down. Because obviously you can't just have things in your head, and then I write down my thoughts on the topic. And then I sit down and film.

If it's a vlog, usually just going around with me and seeing what I do, I like to see how different YouTubers have different angles around that kind of content. Then I take note of what I can incorporate, what I can do and what I cannot do. There are things that I have extremely failed at, like for example a morning routine video. I have tried to do that millions of times, but it doesn't work. So sometimes it just doesn't work out. But sometimes it works out really well. For example cooking videos, people love those. When I do house update videos, people really like those and they are usually like: hey, I want to move back to Africa and I see you doing that, I want to do that too. So that's it, get inspired, write it down, prepare and film. And then on Sundays, I sit down and edit. Most of my Sundays are for editing. After I am done editing, I schedule everything and the videos automatically go out every two days.

Mercy: What expectations do you normally have when you send out the videos?

Sandra: Actually, I don't have too many expectations. Because when you get so consumed with the numbers, you get stressed. A lot of YouTubers, like Malawian YouTubers, we have a group called Malawian YouTubers, we talk, and people join YouTube for money. And unfortunately, Malawi is not a monetized nation. So views from Malawi don't make any money. So it's stressful. You can't get monetized. And if you are monetized, but a majority of your viewers are from Malawi, you can't make money. So they give up quickly, and I keep telling them that you are starting this for the wrong reasons, you need to do this because you like it. You need to do it with a mind that even if you were to get zero Kwacha, you can still do it. That's how I started. I had my channel for three years before I even made one penny from it. I have just recently started making money. It's been three years since I have been making money from it, and the channel is like six years old. And in the first three years when I was making videos, I didn't even know I could make money from my channel until I got an email saying, Hey, you're eligible for the YouTube Partner Program. I was like, what's that? You see what I mean. So I try to expect nothing from it because I genuinely do it because I like to do it. So even if a video has two views, that's okay. Two people watched. It's not zero. So that's fine.

Q. This far, how many minutes is the longest video that you have made?

Sandra: I think I have a video that's over one hour long. And that's the longest.

Q. How about the shortest video?

Sandra: The shortest is like less than five minutes. But more than three. I can't really give you the specific time.

Mercy: If you look at the reception of the longest video and the shortest video, are there any differences in their reception or the duration of the video doesn't matter?

Sandra: It matters a lot. I have analytics to my channel, and you have what we call viewer retention. Viewer retention is how long someone will watch your video without opting out. So there are specific levels, there are YouTubers that have such a dedicated viewership that even if they post a two-hour vlog, there are YouTubers that I can personally watch a two hour vlog of theirs and enjoy it. But there are other levels of YouTubers, maybe you are a beginner, your video quality is not that great, your audio quality is not that great. So, even five minutes seems too long for people to watch your video. I am at a level that, when my videos are between eight to 15 minutes, I have a high retention of maybe over 60%. But I am sure that if I made really long videos, I would not have the same high retention that I have. Because even that one hour video that I told you about, the retention is quite low. It's like 20%. So after maybe 10 minutes, which is around the average time that I do my normal videos, people click out. Like, okay, we are done with her. So I am hoping one day to reach a level where people can watch a whole two hour vlog. But I do understand that I am not at that level. So I avoid it because retention affects the way the algorithm suggests your videos. So if people click on your video, and immediately after two minutes they are clicking out, YouTube assumes that nobody liked the video, so it stops showing it out. So it's better to keep it within the timeframe that people are watching longer so that YouTube can suggest it more. My short videos, I mean, they do okay, they have a high retention rate, but then people always request longer videos, but I know for sure that they don't want too long videos. And another factor that determines why I choose between eight and 15 minutes is because, if you are monetized and your video is less than eight minutes, you only get an ad before and after the video, but you don't get an ad in between the video. So if I make it eight minutes, I can put in ads in between the video, which

is very important to me because, believe it or not, YouTube doesn't play ads in all the slots that you made. So you can put 10 slots for ads and YouTube only puts two ads.

Mercy: Oh okay. How does that work?

Sandra: They choose. I don't know what their choice is based on, but I understand maybe it's your audience and the people they are targeting with their ads. So if they see your audience is not really within the group of the people that they are targeting, even if you have to put 20 ad slots within a video, they will not put 20 ads. So usually you get the first one. The first ad usually pops up when you click on a video. And then you get one in between the video and that's the one your viewers see if your video is longer than eight minutes, which now I slot in. So I don't know the specifics of how they select, but I think it's along those lines. So I try my best to have the video between eight and 15 minutes, because I know a majority of my viewers are Malawians, I read that to you, Malawian viewers are not monetized. So it's best for me to give myself more chances by having a video that can at least take in more ads.

Mercy: So, when you are uploading a video, you just choose like, an ad should pop up here, here and there. Because I was really surprised when I watched some of your videos, when an ad popped up, I was able to follow through after the ad. And I was also curious because I also once watched another one video which had an ad that was four minutes long and your video was around 10 minutes. Do you also choose the length of the ads?

Sandra: We don't select the type of ads that are going to be played in the video, because the ads are placed according to where the viewer is. So if you are in the US, you get ads that are specific to your location. And if you are in South Africa, you also get ads that are specific to your location. We don't select the ads; we just select when the ad can be played.

Mercy: Before becoming a YouTuber, did you have any YouTube content creation skills that you had?

Sandra: Actually, when I started I didn't have any skills. So, when this therapist, may God bless his soul, I love that man, suggested that I upload my videos on YouTube, I told him that I didn't know how to edit. I did know how to be in front of the camera because I worked on TV, but I never did the behind the scenes stuff. So he had a great solution. He was like, if you are serious about it, I'll get you an internship. I was volunteering my time at the school's audio visuals office. So in

exchange for me working for them, I got to learn how to edit. They taught me how to edit, how to take pictures, how to handle cameras, things like that. But basically, they lent me cameras and I would film myself. That's how I got to start. But then I felt like I could do better. So I did online courses on how to edit and I purchased an editing software and found my way around that. So I edit videos, like I have video editing skills. And I do that at my workplace, because now I am the head of operations for a digital marketing agency. I produce content for companies. I handle their social media. So I have to make reels. I have to make videos and take pictures. Because of YouTube, I was able to grow that skill and now I do it professionally.

Mercy: It's really nice that, even professionally, you are doing something that you love.... Now tell me, how exactly do you get money from YouTube? You talked about just getting an email one day when you least expected it...

Sandra: I told you Malawi is not a monetized country, right? Luckily for me, when I got monetized I was in Costa Rica. So it was easy. Costa Rica is a monetized nation. So you need to have a bank account from the country that you are registered under. So since my channel was registered under Costa Rica, I had to prove that I was indeed there by providing a bank account and a physical address from Costa Rica. So, using my example, here is how it works: for them to register you for the monetization scheme, they have to physically send you a letter with a pin to prove that you're actually there. So you have to receive the letter, and then that pin, put it into your YouTube account. So that happened easily for me. When I returned to Malawi, I just maintained my bank account. So since then, they deposit the money in that account. It's not every month. Of course a long time ago, it was every month because all the views were monetized. But after the update now it's not every month, because you have to make a minimum of \$100 for them to deposit. So now in a month I make like \$30, \$25. So if I only have \$25, I don't get a deposit, but it tops up. So like I had \$25 in January, then February, I make another \$25. And my total will be \$50. But still, they can't deposit because it's less than \$100. So you see, then another month you made \$30. So you have like \$80, and they still keep it until it gets to a minimum of \$100 before it is deposited in your account. But if it was like the older days when all the views were monetized, it would have been very easy. I hit the targets easily. Because I do have a decent number of views on my channel. So then you would find that in a month you have made \$200, sometimes maybe \$300. In a good month, you have made \$500. It's just like a cute little extra income, which is why people can't do

this full time. Because if you have thousands of views, and with my little views that I had, making \$500. Now imagine if I had 50,000 viewers, and then hitting like 200,000 views in a month, it could be a salary. That's like \$2,000 in a month, in Malawi that's like 2 million Malawi Kwacha. You can literally live on that, decently. Unfortunately, it's not like that.

Mercy: What does this mean for Malawian YouTubers who created their channels while in Malawi?

Sandra: They cannot be monetized, they can't. But there is a way to go about it. If they have family in the U.S, or South Africa or Kenya, they could change the location of that channel and say that they are there. And then that person has to receive the pin for them. That person has to open a bank account for them, which they can use for YouTube. If they trust someone who can do all of that, then they can do it. But it's not the case for most YouTubers. And then apart from that, they need viewers to not be in Malawi. So let's say you are successful, Mercy helped you get a bank account abroad, you got your pin, and you have your channel. But if all your viewers are from Malawi, you will not make one cent. That's why I keep telling these people that if you are starting this, start it because you want to do it and you like to do it. Don't do it for money because you will be depressed and you are going to leave it and you are going to say YouTube has no value and then you are going to let it go.

Mercy: It's tough hey. Okay.... Tell me what influences the choices of topics, narratives, stories that you share in your videos?

Sandra: My original influence of the videos was as an emotional outlet. I used to just sit and just talk about how I feel, how my week was, and that would literally make me feel better. Then I realized that because I am talking about my surroundings, people were interested in knowing where I was and what I was doing. And at that time, I was in Costa Rica, and I was a college student. So I did college lifestyle videos. And people were kind of shocked that I was doing a bachelor's programme in agriculture. So it was that little factor that got people interested in me. And then when I graduated, because I still talk about my life and how it is, it was now about navigating the transition from being a college student to establishing yourself as a professional and as a young person in Malawi, because doing that in Malawi is crazy. It's really hard to establish yourself as a young female anywhere, but I feel like in Malawi it's crazier and it's harder. Because even just things like moving out, when I was telling my parents like, oh, hey, I haven't been living with you

guys for four years while I was in school. It's kind of weird to be in your house. So I want to move out and do my own thing. They were like, you are a young girl, you're not going to get married if you go and stay on your own. You know you have to leave your parents' house because your husband, a man or something like that has come to take you or something like that. So it is that, and also navigating the currency because the Malawian currency is crazy. Talking about salaries, because salaries here are crazy. So it's just me talking about that. So I think people outside Malawi or people like you, Malawians who live abroad, most of them watch me because they want to know what's happening in Malawi, how much do I spend in a week, how much is housing, how much would it take for a young female Malawian to build something for themselves. So that's what inspires me. A lot of people also suggest videos for me. Like, hey, I want to move to Malawi, but I need to know this, So I would do a video about that. And others are like, hey, I want to move to Malawi, do you think I could survive on \$2,000, and then I'll make a video to let them know that with \$2,000 you can do 1,2,3,4,5. Also, I hope one day I can afford to turn my channel into a travel channel because I enjoy traveling. It's just that right now I can't travel. So I feel like once I get myself together, this channel is going to migrate towards that because at some point, I'm going to finish growing myself and I am going to finish building a home. And then what next. So yeah, that's what inspires me, what's currently happening in my life.

Mercy: Aha, I have actually seen some of your videos where you show just how messed up ESCOM [Electricity Supply Corporation of Malawi] is. How do you navigate the loadshedding and constant blackouts with content creation?

Sandra: Like I said, living in Malawi is an extreme sport. But you just take your life towards it. There were times where I was unable to produce content. For example, like for Vlogmas 2022 [Christmas themed video every day in December leading up to the 25th], I wasn't able to do that because of ESCOM. Because that was an everyday upload in December and every day I came home, there were no lights. So that was very difficult. But I think channel wise, this thing of filming on a Saturday and editing on a Sunday has really helped because I take advantage of the times that there is electricity to make enough videos for the whole week and schedule them for uploading on YouTube. So even when there's a blackout, the videos are already ready and up on YouTube. So it's about learning about your environment and trying to find your ways around it.

Mercy: What storytelling techniques do you use to make your videos interesting or to attract more subscribers?

Sandra: Sometimes I use what we call clickbait. Like one of my recent videos that was doing quite well and people were clicking on it fast because the cover said, “Do not come back” and the title was “5 things I wish I knew before moving back to Malawi, Africa”. It evoked so many emotions in people and some were really angry, so to speak. And I was like, if you really watched the video, you would know that I 100% support coming back to Malawi or Africa and these are just things I wish I knew. And the way I titled it, I knew that it would make people click on it. So that's one way to do it.

Another way to do it, I think I am funny. I try to be as funny as possible, and then create little snippets of the funniest parts in the video like major chords and stuff like that. Another thing I try to be is relatable. I don't fake it. Everything you see on my channel is my actual life. If you see me on a motorbike going to town because I don't have money for a taxi, it's real. There was a time where I was going through a hard time, and I didn't have money. And I told people that I don't have money for food. So I did a video about what I eat in a week when it's hard, and people related to a point where others donated money for me to buy food for my family. They were like, I have been through that time in my life where I didn't have anything, and you shared it and I could relate. When I talk about the struggles of finding a job, the struggles of managing your money, the struggles of life, I give it as it is. When I had COVID, I was here on screen saying, look guys, I have COVID and this is what is happening. So relatability and being real is one thing I feel a lot of people talk to me and say they actually appreciate. So those are the things I hold on to. Humor, relatability and clickbait.

Mercy: How do you navigate making videos in both private and public spaces? Because in one of your videos you talked about how you created a video from your old workplace and your boss was not happy and asked you to take it off from YouTube.

Sandra: I don't film with a camera, like an actual camera in public, because it makes people uncomfortable. If I am filming other people, I make sure I ask for permission. Unless it's just like a video taken just in passing showing around a place, for instance a supermarket or shopping mall, then I can't ask everyone around for permission. But if you are going to be in my frame and I know

that you will be in my frame, then I will ask like, hey, are you comfortable? I will upload this on YouTube. And then they will say yes or no.

Another thing which I learnt from the workplace video is to just find out wherever you are if you can film. So if you are at an event, you need to know if you have permission to post those videos on YouTube. If you are at work, just check if you have permission, because at my other workplace, they did not care. In fact, they loved it because they felt I was promoting their business. But for this workplace, because they have ISO standards, it is a UK company. So they have sensitive data. So they were like, oh, you can't film in the workplace because we are breaking the ISO standards and they could lose their license. So I kind of understood their position. I know that maybe I made it dramatic like they just attacked me, but it wasn't like that. It was because of protecting the company. And they had to if the company closes, I lose my job too. So I just took down the videos. So that's what I do. But here, people are just really uncomfortable with having an actual camera. When it's your phone, people assume you are just doing a WhatsApp status. It is less invasive. So that's what I do. And also, using air pods makes it look like you are on a video call.

Mercy: Apart from the work issue, have you had other bad encounters, for example someone seeing themselves in your YouTube video and expressing their unhappiness or concern?

Sandra: No, nothing like that has ever happened. But I did one time do a story time of a situation I had with the general manager of **** Hotel in Blantyre. I did a mukbang and talked about a petty thing he did to me. And he really didn't like it, he hated that. Because I didn't realize my followers are people who are reactive. They went to his social media page and they were like, hey, you did this to Sandra. Others mentioned it to him when they saw him. So it was a thing and I was shocked. That's when I realized that okay, people watch me. Because I was just ranting about what happened to me and it escalated a little bit more than it should have. So I learnt not to involve people's names in controversial stories or just to keep them to myself about it or talk about it when it's long gone.

Mercy: So did you take off the video?

Sandra: No, it's still there. But I think he got embarrassed because he banned me from the hotel. I was escorted out of the hotel when I went there after the video. I'll send you a link to that video as I was being escorted out and I was told not to be there. And people were asking him why he would do something like that. He got ashamed and now I can go there. But I chose not to go there again

because he was denying the whole episode of escorting me out when people asked him about it. And I was like, you think I made this up? I didn't make up being escorted out, people saw it happening. It was at a function and I was all dressed up, about to go in and security grabbed me.

Mercy: Now to the sound and music that you use in your videos. I noticed that you use music by Tuno [Malawian artist] a lot. And I was able to see from your videos that she is your best friend. But for the other sounds and music that you use, how do you deal with issues of copyright?

Sandra: By all means, I avoid putting artists' music on my channel. The only artist that I feature on my channel is Tuno, because she is my best friend, obviously. And I am her stage manager. So when she has live shows, I do the stage stuff and I have access to her music. When I get tired of her music, or I feel it doesn't fit, I use copyright-free music from YouTube. You can actually search for copyright-free music. Because there are channels that are dedicated to helping YouTubers because they get money from monetization, and we get videos. So those are the two options that I use. Sometimes subscribers have come to me and be like, oh, can you please use this beat? I created it for you. And if I like it, I'll use it. If I don't like it, I'll still use it. But I'll use it once. So that's how I go with music.

Mercy: Have you ever used copyrighted music and had your video flagged?

Sandra: Yes, I've had some videos flagged. Okay, so in some situations, you can't really not use the music. For example, if I went to a concert. I went to Costa Titch's [South African rapper who died days after this interview] concert and I was not going to put aesthetic music to this man dancing. So I played his music and I was ready to not make money from it. So I haven't been flagged in the sense of the video being taken down, but I have been flagged in the sense of being informed that the video can't be monetized or the money that's made by that video will go to the creator of the song. And sometimes I just let it be because I feel like at that moment, the music has to be that particular one. But there are some videos which I have felt like I really want to make money from and once it is flagged for copyright music, I make sure I edit and remove the copyrighted music. And if the video is flagged and I am too lazy to edit and remove the music, there's an option where you can just mute the music or the sound during that time. So I will just mute it. If I have extra time out, I re-edit the video with copyright free music. But it's a matter of, are you willing not to make money from that video? For people who are working towards

monetization, it should matter because when you get monetized, all your videos get monetized, even previous ones.

Mercy: Oh, okay. So how does it work?

Sandra: There are different types of videos on YouTube. One of them is called Evergreen content. Evergreen content is content that is timeless, that no matter what, people are always watching that video. So if you have evergreen content, and you just got monetized, that means your videos are constantly being watched any time of the year, any season of the year. So YouTube will then be making money from it. So they will monetize all previous videos. There is an option whereby you just click “monetize all previous videos” and it will do that. Then there are other videos which are not evergreen, for example weekly vlogs. Unless you are super dedicated to my channel that you want to watch the vlog three or four times, then it will keep on bringing me money. However, vlogs are usually just watched once and that’s it. So a good example of an evergreen video is a video that gives instructions on how to do something, for example how to make tomato pasta sauce or something like that. So, people cook every day and there are others who might be trying to cook that every day and they will constantly be referring to your video. This means anybody who is looking for tips on how to make that dish will search for tips on YouTube and they will find you. So you will always be making money from that video.

Mercy: What happens when someone watches your video more than once?

Sandra: As long as you are watching my video, it counts the views. So if you watched it 10 times, that's 10 views. If you watch the ad 10 times, I will get the money for the ad 10 times.

Mercy: So how do you navigate being a female Malawian YouTuber?

Sandra: I get teased a lot. There are other people who don’t understand it. They are always like you are always filming yourself. And then there was a time when Malawians didn’t understand why I was always posting stuff like buying things like a couch. They were like: nobody cares that you got a fridge or a couch, why are you posting it, we don’t want to hear about it. But I understand that those people don’t understand lifestyle content creation. So it’s fine. Those who are willing to listen, I will teach and talk to them about it and tell them about what I do, that it’s a serious thing. Like, if you are on YouTube, you will see that I am not crazy or I am not showing off. Because I have got people who say that by posting videos of myself buying things, then I am showing off.

Others actually say that I will get bewitched because I am showing off that I am doing well. Other people assume that all my life is on the internet, which is unrealistic because seeing 10 minutes of my day does not give you the whole picture of what my life is about. So people think I am oversharing and Malawians are not people who want all your business out there. So, for example, let's say if I was pregnant, and I did pregnancy videos, visiting the doctors and stuff like that, in our culture, that's a no. You keep your pregnancy to yourself until the baby is born. Because what if a miscarriage happens? What if, what if people bewitch you. So people take it as I am oversharing. So the best way to do it is to explain to them, that is if the person is willing because some people are not willing to listen and I don't bother myself. But if a person is willing to listen, I always explain that this is what I am doing, this is how it happens and this is why it's happening like that. And if they get it, they get it if they don't, there is nothing I can do.

Mercy: Tell me about the connection between the kind of content that you produce and the fact that you are a female Malawi.

Sandra: The male content creators that we have in Malawi usually don't produce lifestyle content. They don't do vlogs. They do tech, and I know very few of them. Some do talk shows and others do music. That's mostly the males. The females, a lot of us do beauty, lifestyle or self-care. There is this girl, her name is Maxine, she does videos about shower routines. Those are the niches that most of the ladies are producing content around. With makeup, I think that's an area where the males cannot even dare to explore. With lifestyle, I think they just don't want to share much of what is going on in their life because males are judged more. Because I feel that as a female, when I say, I got myself a couch, people are always like, wow, she got herself a couch without a man's help, yes Queen. But if it's a guy, the sentiments would be like, so why is it important that you have gotten a couch. Things like that. So maybe that's why they do tech, music and talk shows. And also some of them do podcasts and reviews.

Mercy: How do you feel about sharing your life as a young female Malawian on YouTube which is a global platform accessible by people from all around the world?

Sandra: Sometimes it's exhilarating. Sometimes, like I said, it's very therapeutic. I look back and reflect because with these videos that I share on YouTube, I have also been documenting my life for the past six years. I can see progression and growth, like a visual representation of how my life is moving, the up to the downs, everything. So for me, it encourages me because sometimes if I

am down, I just look at where I was, like my first video, or my first house tour, and then look at the space that I am in now, and I am always like, wow, there is progress. But sometimes it's also really hard. Because I talked about a surgery that I had in some of my videos. I actually had two surgeries. And it was like, in a private area, and I talked about it on YouTube. The reason I decided to talk about it was that I was freaking out that I was going to get surgery and I wanted to see if other people had the condition that I had. I searched it, and very few videos of actual women undergoing the condition came up. Most of the videos that came up were videos of the surgery itself, doctors talking about it, but not of the patients. So I was like, you know what, I don't care how embarrassing this is, I am going to talk about it. I did the first video and it's one of my evergreen videos. That was three years ago, but until today that video always has constant views and comments from women thanking me like, like oh my God, you have no idea how much this has helped me find confidence in myself knowing that there are other women who suffered from this condition. And there are always women in the comments section uplifting each other, saying to one another, this is what I also went through, and giving each other advice. So I did like a series, because I underwent the surgery twice because the first one was a failure. And there are like four videos about that condition, the surgeries and an update. And when I say those videos have helped a lot of women, I mean it. And it's not like I was giving medical advice or telling them how to get cured of the condition, I was just telling them that, look, I have this condition, it's so embarrassing, but I have it and you if you have it too, you are not alone. That really helped them, it really helped build a community and it helped me too because I was able to talk about it. I wasn't so embarrassed about the situation. Because every time people assume that if there is something wrong with your vagina, sorry for the language, it's because you have been promiscuous or it's a sexually transmitted disease but I was able to show that condition is just a malfunction of the organ. So yeah, sharing about my everyday life on YouTube really puts me in a good place. But it's also scary, sometimes it is fun and sometimes it is just a roller coaster of emotions.

Mercy: This brings me to the next question. You have shared a lot of videos on YouTube. Which one of them best portrays the different identities that you have as a person?

Sandra: I think the vlogs. I'm just going to choose a group of videos and those are the vlogs. This is because the vlogs are so real, there is usually no makeup, and they are literally about what's happening to me at that instant. Viewers see my life live as it happens, there are no filters. So the

vlogs are a true depiction of who I am. The sit-down videos are more scripted. Like I said, I will get a topic, I will write down my thoughts, I will put on make-up, sit down and look pretty and present myself in a different way. But in the vlogs, whether my hair is not made up, it doesn't matter. So, I think the vlogs are a true depiction of myself.

Mercy: Okay. How about a video which you feel proud of?

Sandra: I feel proud of that series, the medical series that I talked about earlier because it helped women. It's really helped women and I feel like that's something that my YouTube channel strives to do, just to help young people. And then the fact that it helped women was amazing for me. Yeah, it was really good. It's a good feeling to talk to women and encourage them. There are women who would say, I am going for this surgery, I am scared. And I am just like, look, you can do this, we have all done, and other women are supporting that. And then I always come back and be like, hey, I know you had this, how are you now? And they never expect that. And they are like, oh my God, thank you for checking up on me. So I am really proud of that one because helping people feels nice.

Mercy: Going back to the issue of identities. How do you balance your different identities when creating content?

Sandra: I think it's much easier when you segment it out. When I am home, I am just Sandra, and I will share videos with my mum, with my siblings, and just me being a daughter. When I am at work, I am showing you how I do things, like a day in the life of a digital marketer, and I will show you how I dress, how I talk, how I do things, meetings and stuff like that. When I am just chilling with my friends, I am Peachy, you know. We are laughing, shaking our booties, and dancing. And that's how I put it. If I am in this specific type of environment, I have to present myself according to that environment. And I have segmented my videos in playlists, there is a playlist about life in Malawi, life in the university, videos with mum, makeup videos. I have segmented them so that if you are curious about a specific subject, you can literally just go to a specific playlist and watch the videos. I tried to make it easier for the viewer to find what they are curious about on the channel.

Mercy: You talked about collaborating with brands. How has it been?

Sandra: Brand collaborations are good in the sense that, as a creator, I can monetize outside of YouTube. It's not a huge thing in Malawi. When I had brand deals in Costa Rica, I could charge

thousands of dollars for a couple of videos. In Malawi, I cannot do that. I can't charge as much as I could when I was outside. But the market is opening up now, for that. So more brands are able to understand that we can use people with platforms within this field to do 1,2,3,4,5. The disadvantage about brand deals for me is the fact that sometimes you don't have full creative control over your content in a sense that you have to say what they want. You have to put them in a good light because they are paying you. So, you can't say that I don't like that T-shirt from that brand since they are paying you. So sometimes I feel people do it and are not genuine about it, which I don't like, I really don't like that. So if I don't like a brand, and I don't want to push them like that, I say no, because already in Malawi it is not a lot of money. I am not going to be paid K20,000, which is like \$20, to lie. It's a no for me. So I would rather collaborate with brands that I know I like, even if it's just them giving me the thing (products) and I give them a video. But if I actually genuinely like it, I will do that collaboration. Hopefully, in the future it's going to reach a point where we are making more money and it's a proper thing because that's how most of the international YouTubers are making money. And that will open the market to people who want to monetize in Malawi. But like I said, right now you can't monetize through YouTube. So that's another alternative for us. So that's the situation with brand collaborations currently.

Mercy: Thank you so much. Those are all the questions that I had for you. However, if there is anything that you would like to add, I will be very happy to hear it.

Sandra: I just hope when you talk to everybody else, even if it means telling them that I said so, encourage consistency because we can't build Malawian YouTube and request for our country to get monetized if people are posting once in every three months. Because the views here in Malawi are there, especially now because there are subsidized bundles. So people have internet access now, and it is affordable. But we don't have enough Malawian content coming out from YouTube. So if we are planning as Malawian YouTubers, or if we want, because it feels like there is that desire that we want the monetization program in Malawi, but the people are not serious about producing content. They don't post. You can't even point at five consistent Malawian YouTubers right now. So hopefully, to the people you talk to, just encourage them to be consistent so that one day when we decide to appeal, we have a case.

Mercy: From your interactions with fellow YouTubers, what are the reasons behind the inconsistency?

Sandra: Nothing much is said about it. But it's really not nice. I personally love to see content creators in Malawi. And I watch any online content creators, regardless of whether I like the content or not. I do this to just give them encouragement because I feel like we are missing a lot in these spaces.

Mercy: But you are doing great. Continue doing that. And thank you very much. I am so happy that you spared your time for us to have this chat. It's really going to be very beneficial for my thesis.

Sandra: You are welcome. Good luck with it. Share a copy once it is done.

Mercy: I will definitely do. Bye

End///

Appendix 5: List of videos analysed

NB: Views, comments, likes and dislikes are as of 5th April 2023

1. Towera Kumwenda
Channel: Towiaie
Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FxIFMIID-iw>
Title: SURPRISED MY HUSBAND- Weekend vlog in an area called Mangamba in Malawi
Length: 07:31 minutes| **Posted** on 16.07.2022 | 299 **Views**| 15 **Comments**| 25 **Likes**| 0 **Dislikes**
Description: Welcome Huns, In this video I surprised my husband whom I haven't seen in over 2months. I definitely missed him. Wink wink lolll. He stays in Mangamba-Machinga and I stay in Mzuzu I Hope you enjoy the video. Remember you deserve all the best there is.
2. Sandra Kalua
Channel: Sandra Peachy MW
Video:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2oxk_fcyfbU&list=PLUhol2RrDsBuiOVTqr9IMx8w83PLtGoFp&index=19
Title: WHAT WE EAT IN A WEEK AS A LOW-INCOME FAMILY IN MALAWI life in Malawi
Length: 09:37 minutes| **Posted** on 26.04.2021| 1,688 **Views**| 113 **Comments**| 99 **Likes**| 0 **Dislikes**
Description: hey peaches i hope we are all happy and healthy. today I will show you WHAT WE EAT IN A WEEK AS A LOW-INCOME FAMILY IN MALAWI life in Malawi. i hope you like it
3. Alinafe Malitoni
Channel: Nafe's Creations
Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nfgibWi4E_0&t=268
Title: I'M MOVING OUT ALONE | packing, empty tour, moving in | moving diaries vlog ep.1
Length: 6:00 minutes| **Posted** on 4.08.2022| 331 **Views**| 34 **Comments**| 37 **Likes**| 0 **Dislikes**
Description: Welcome Back ♡ Thank you for watching my moving Vlog, many more to come. Please don't forget to like, comment and subscribe to see more videos. Hope to see you in my next video :).
4. Vanessa Rita Chimutu Kalima
Channel: Vannessa Sunshine 21
Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TcUJvgv800k&t=131s>
Title: Zomba Vlog: hunt for electricity Chilled weekend African Heritage, Pizza at Dominos and Kefihotel
Length: 11:47 minutes| **Posted** on 1.10.2022| 216 **Views**| 10 **Comments**| 27 **Likes**| 0 **Dislikes**
Description: None
5. Mira German
Channel: Mirrorbelle
Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jxNjuC690Q8&t=262s>
Title: 5 LESSONS MOTHERHOOD HAS TAUGHT ME
Length: 6.09 minutes| **Posted** on 21.12.2020| 162 **Views**| 6 **Comments**| 1 **Like**| 0 **Dislikes**
Description: Hie Beautiful People!!! In honor of my son turning 3 years old on 9 December, made this video to share 5 things I've learnt from motherhood and my journey the past 3 years. Hope you enjoy :) B-ROLL credits – (listed down owners of the videos and photos used as part of her video)

6. Alessandra Thunde

Channel: Ale's Spot

Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ArvBvPGpowk>

Title: Kissing them teens Goodbye! *WHAT I LEARNED DURING MY TEENAGE YEARS*

Length: minutes| **Posted** on 14.06.2022| **69 Views**| **8 Comments**| **11 Likes**| **0 Dislikes**

Description: Hey Spotties! Hope y'all enjoyed this video make sure you give it a like and share it with a friend 😊

DISCLAIMER I DON'T OWN THE MUSIC USED IN THIS VIDEO THEREFORE ALL CREDIT GOES TO THE OWNERS Music Used in This Video (included links to the music)

7. Esther Louisa Msiska

Channel: Simply Louisa

Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=97i5qtGBv5w&t=6s>

Title: Why I Got Gender Disappointment With My Baby | Malawian YouTuber

Length: 20.26 minutes| **Posted** on 21.01.2023| **291 Views**| **8 Comments**| **16 Likes**| **0 Dislikes**

Description: Hi babes, I hope you enjoy this video. Don't forget to SUBSCRIBE and LIKE the video. We are on the road to 200 subscribers, so let's get it.

Appendix 6: Example of discourse analysis – Louisa’s video (part of transcript below)

The video is about Louisa’s journey to becoming a mother, specifically focusing on how she was disappointed when, while in the eighth month of her pregnancy, she learnt that she would give birth to a baby boy. The video is what is called a sit-down video within the YouTube space whereby a YouTuber already has an idea, and sometimes even notes, of the topic that they want to discuss. Then, the YouTuber sits down, looks directly straight into the camera to capture the footage, and starts talking about the topic or issue in a narrative form.

For her video, Louisa is seated in her bed, with her back facing the bed’s headboard. She starts her narration by saying that the idea came from a question that she had received on whether she had gender disappointment with her baby or not. As she narrates her story, she takes her viewers through her pregnancy journey, specifically speaking about how and why she did not want to know the gender of her baby before birth and how she found out about the gender in a rather unplanned way. During the whole duration of the video, her baby can be heard screaming and making inaudible sounds in the background, and sometimes she adjusts her position to check on him.

The language that Louisa uses in the video is descriptive (e.g. “I was jovial and happy”, “I am there, naked”), painting a picture of the before and after scenario regarding when and how learnt of her baby’s gender. Sometimes she uses a different tone from her own to indicate that she is mimicking the voices of other people in her story (for example, nurses who thought she is carrying twins and a doctor who, when conducting a pregnancy scan on her, referred to her unborn baby as “him”). At some point, she gets emotional and breaks down on camera. She apologizes to her viewers, stating that she never thought sharing the story would wake up some of her buried childhood trauma, referring to how she grew up without having a deeper connection with her father, assumedly because of her gender.

Louisa’s video fits into the broader discourses of her identity as a young single mother and a Malawian woman. For instance, she gives an insight into what it is like to be a pregnant (single) woman in Malawi – being accompanied by a friend to the hospital for antenatal and routine checkups; family members wanting the baby to be a boy so that he can have the father’s love and support; and older women concluding about the gender of your baby based on the foods that you like to eat during your pregnancy as well as the conflicts happening between you and the unborn baby’s father (Malawian traditional version of “old wives’ tales for predicting gender).

The video also fits into the discourses of YouTube lifestyle content whereby she shares her personal story in such a candid way that makes her viewers feel like they are part of her story, her online community. Even more interesting is how the video discusses the social and cultural context of Malawi in such a subtle way that provides meaningful insights of the power and gender dynamics that are deeply rooted in the Malawian society. For example, when she talks about how pregnant women who go to the antenatal clinic without their partners and husbands are made to wait until the ones who are accompanied by these male figures are helped, she lays bare the patriarchal nature of the Malawian society and how the value and respect a pregnant woman is accorded is dependent on the presence of a man in her life.

Part of the video transcript: the colours are highlighting the dominant themes and ideas that are in the video, the language and visual elements used as well as the social and cultural context (identity, gender, cultural background) in which the video was created)

Title: Why I Got Gender Disappointment With My Baby | Malawian YouTuber

Production setting: Louisa is seated in her bed, with her back facing the wall, speaking directly to the camera. She speaks in a narrative voice as follows:

I was asked if I had a gender disappointment when I found out about the gender of my baby and it had me thinking because I wanted to say that I never had any gender disappointment but the truth is, it was stupid at the time, and I feel like this is something that a lot of moms actually experience and I am not scared to admit that, but there was a bit of a disappointment and I was wondering why.

So, just to give you a bit of background of how I found out the gender of my baby. I never wasn't meant to find out until the day I gave birth. That was what I wanted. I wanted it to be a surprise because I didn't want to feel a certain way towards my baby before they were born. Because at the moment I felt that everything that I feel, the baby feels that way too. and I think when the baby started getting active in my tummy, there were moments that I was sad and you could tell that it was also affecting my pregnancy because the days when I was sad, I couldn't feel him kick and when I was jovial and happy, that was when he was the most active. So I just felt like knowing the gender and being disappointed and having those feelings would affect him as well.

So what happened was, I think it was in my 8th month, it was in the third trimester and I needed to go for my routine checkup, and we had a thing with my best friend whereby she would come pick me up at home and then we go to the hospital, I would get checked and then she would drop me at work and life would go on. So the best friend that I am talking about is the one in China, Idah. So on that specific day, Idah picked me up and we went to the hospital. It was meant to be quick. Of course it's usually not as quick because what normally happens is, if you never went to the hospital with a spouse, it meant that you would have to wait for all the women who came with spouses or partners to be assisted. [baby screams in the background] And at the time, that was very normal. [She adjusts her sitting position to check on the baby] Excuse my baby. So I waited and then my turn came. [baby continues to make inaudible sounds in the background].

I went into the room and they started feeling my tummy to make sure that everything is fine. So they start feeling my tummy to see the position of the baby and what not, and I then get asked, how many kids are you having. And I am like, the last I checked, I am only meant to have one, why are you asking. And the nurse is like, are you sure. And I am like, yes, I am positive. And then, you could tell she was confused. You know. [baby continue to make inaudible sounds] And the next thing she says is give me one second, don't move, don't do anything, I will be right back. So, I am there, naked waiting for this woman to come back and attend back to me. She comes back with a colleague and she tells the colleague to feel me and the colleague starts feeling me and she is like, are you sure you are only having one baby, and I am like, yeah, why? So, she is like: [uses another voice to indicate that she is imitating another person] here is the situation, we can see the head of the child right at the bottom which means that he has changed himself and he is ready to be born, however, there is another thing that we are feeling at the top and we are not sure if it is another head. So we are assuming you might have twins. And I was confused, I was like what do you mean, I have had a scan before, I have been told its one baby, what do you mean its two. And they are like: [uses another voice to indicate that she is imitating another person] it might not be two, we are just suspecting. So, in order for you to get ready we would advise you to have another scan done so that you should see if it's actually two babies that you are carrying or if it's one. And on that specific day I got so confused because I was like, I am in my eighth month. Like, this is my final trimester. If it does happen that I am indeed carrying twins, how am I going to start getting for the second baby because I have only gotten ready for one. I was so confused. I did not know how I felt.

So I went outside and got back in the car, and my best friend was like, did everything go well. And I am just like, they are suspecting that I might have twins. You could tell she was confused as well. She is like, so what did we do? I am like, I need to go for a scan, that's number one. And I need to tell my mum. So the first thing I did, I called my mum before we started off and I was like, mum, they are saying I might be having twins. Now, my mum and I had already had the conversation because she was just telling me that I could possibly be in line to have a twin because my mum

had a twin at some point but she passed, that's why my middle name is Louisa because I was given her name. and then from my dad's side of the family, his younger brothers are twins. So my mum was just like, we both have twins in our families and you might be in line to have twins. And I was just like, well, I guess what my mum was saying came true. I called my mum and she was confused as well. And you could tell that her BP [Blood Pressure] shot up, because she was just like, you guys come pick me up, we are going to the clinic right now and we are getting scanned. And I was like, cool.

So, we left from the clinic where I did my normal checkups and we went to pick up my mum from her salon and then went straight to another clinic to get a scan done. And, once I got there, I knew the guy [medical personnel] because I had been going there for a while, for all my scanning needs, and he is like, what are you doing here? And I started explaining the situation and he is just like [uses another voice to indicate that she is imitating another person]: *the last time I checked, you were having one child. I didn't see twins there.* And I am like, but they said..., and he is like *no, it's not possible. But just to be sure you are now worked up and it doesn't get your BP high, let's get the scan done.* We got the scan done and he confirmed that it was just one baby. So that was a relief. But in that moment, he then goes: *aww, look at him.* And my mum goes: *What?* And he is like: *Look at him.* And my mum was like: *It's a boy?* [high-pitched voice]. And he is like: *I just said it's him.* And you could tell he had this "matter of fact face". My mum was like: *You are sure about this?* And he was like: *Yeah, you are having a grandson.* My mum started dancing. You could tell she was overjoyed, she was ululating and doing what not [baby makes inaudible sound]. And I got annoyed, because I was like, I didn't want to know. But at the moment, I knew that he didn't know that I didn't want to know and when I got there I didn't make a mention that I didn't want to know. So he couldn't have assumed that I didn't want to know. I think he assumed I already knew. And so it started coming back to me because months prior I had a lot of women telling me that "you are carrying a boy" because of some of the things that were happening to me.

Appendix 7: Example: establishing descriptive codes (Towera interview)

Mercy: So when exactly did you create the YouTube channel?

Towera: I created the channel in November 2021. If it's not on my birthday then it should be two days after my birthday. So that should be 21st November.

Mercy: What made you create the channel?

Towera: For the longest I have been wanting to just share my ideas, to share my life, my tips, because I feel like I have been through it and these days, every time I am talking to people they will be like, Oh, you're Dr. Phil. You get it. So I felt like I could use my platform for good and I was like let me just do it. Let me just start. So for the longest, I had been contemplating on starting. And back then the phone that I was using had a really terrible camera. So I was always like I couldn't start because of my camera. Then I got a new phone. So now everyone was like, we are waiting for you to start. You were complaining that you don't have a good camera and now you have it, why are you not starting. So I felt like my birthday was a good time to start because there was so much that was happening. There were demonstrations at that time, and I was just like, you know what, let me just start. Let me just vlog. If it doesn't work, it doesn't work. If it does, then that's good.

Mercy: Approximately, how many subscribers do you have as of today?

Towera: I have 180 subscribers.

Mercy: Does it matter to you to have more subscribers?

Towera: I feel like every time I get a subscriber, it pushes me, you know, it makes motivated that, okay, someone out there is watching me, someone out there likes what I do. So, it's a big thing. But then, I know I shouldn't let it get to me because if it does, you can easily just stop, so, I do it because I love it and I enjoy vlogging. But when it comes down to subscribers, you can die because as much as they are a big part of a YouTube channel, they don't come easily.

Mercy: Do you do anything to attract new subscribers?

Towera: I've only done that during Vlogmas last year. So what happens during Vlogmas is that you create vlogs for 25 consecutive days in December before Christmas. So I feel like that got me a lot of subscribers because I went from 120 and now I have 180 subscribers. So it's like I have 60 new subscribers and the watch time is also really great. So, after that, I realised that let me try out a theory. Currently I am trying a new theory. I don't send out my YouTube videos links the way I used to. Like previously I would put on my WhatsApp, I would put my stories on Facebook and I would post on my page. So now I was like, let me try and see if people can have their notifications turned on so that every time I post a video, they are notified. So it's been good since I stopped posting on other platforms, I feel like the results have been better than when I post. I don't know. Does that even make sense. The week before last week I posted a video, and it has around 70 something viewers. But this week I posted a video and it has over 100 views. I don't know the mathematics behind it or how to explain that.

Mercy: So that's about the videos, but how about getting new people to subscribe to your channel and watch your videos. Do you do that?

Towera: Yeah. I try because every time I post a new video I am always trying to get people to subscribe. I have been using my social media so much, like my Instagram, to invite people to subscribe. But as always, people have to relate to what you are doing. So it's not everybody that is going to subscribe. But I am trying, I am really trying. I think that's why I also started the weekly vlogs because it's about attracting people who wouldn't normally watch, but then

I am putting it in a way that it tells that, okay, **I am from Malawi**, and **Malawians also live this way and they can get to enjoy things and do these and do that**. So that has also attracted a new kind of subscribers and a new time watch. **Initially it was just Malawi but now I have U.S, Kenya and India**.

Mercy: Actually the next question was whether you are able to see the people who watch your videos as well as the subscribers to your channel.

Towera: The subscribers, not much. I don't see their demographics. I only get a notification that there is a new subscriber, but then it doesn't tell you where they are from. I don't know about other YouTubers, but I don't see such details. But when it comes to the watch time and how many countries the viewers are watching you from, it shows that. It shows you that this video, **this amount of people from Malawi watched**, **this amount of people from such a country watched**. So yeah, it does show you the demographics of the viewers.

Mercy: How often do you create and upload videos on YouTube?

Towera: Currently **I'm on one video a week**. But **I am literally trying to do two videos a week**. So **my idea is to do a surviving in Malawi series** and **then do a sit-down, like do a one-on-one talk with people every week**. So yeah, that's the plan. I have the demographics now. So, gender, it says there is nothing to show for these details. Age as well, it says the same. Aww, I have Sweden and South Africa now among my viewers.

Mercy: Oh, my goodness. It's a beautiful feeling, right?

Towera. It is. It is. It's beautiful, because it's like, **I don't only attract Malawians anymore**. **People in other countries find my videos interesting** and **relatable too**.

Mercy: That's beautiful. Okay. So tell me about the tools that you use when creating your videos?

Towera: Okay. So currently **I just use my phone** because the **camera prices are not within my reach** right now. So I'm using my phone. And **I have a ring light and a tripod**. So for editing, I use my camera and Adobe Premiere Pro.

Mercy: Is it not a lot of work?

Towera: It is. It is. It really a lot. **You can easily quit making YouTube videos**. Like you can easily just say, you know what, **no one is paying me to do these things**. Let me just stop. But I do it because **I have wanted to do it for the longest time** and I really love it. **I enjoy vlogging**, I just enjoy it. So, **it's stressful**, sometimes your phone will tell you that space has run out. You can't record. And even after deleting some items to create space, you record but you have to transfer to the computer for editing. **It's hectic** but I mean, **it's what I chose**. So, yeah, and I can't hire somebody to edit my videos because I don't have money.

Mercy: Actually, I wanted to ask whether you shoot and edit all the videos that you produce and share on YouTube on your own or if you have someone who helps you with some aspects?

Towera: Most times **I shoot and edit on my own**. There is only one video that a person helped me shoot and that was it. But it was also like, I didn't like how it came out. But apart from this isolated instance, **I shoot my own content**. I shoot and I edit. So, I just have to have the camera on me all the time.

Mercy: So, when you post a video, what expectations do you normally have?

Towera: Mostly, **it's about the comments for me** and **just the number of views**. Even if people don't subscribe to my channel, I know they've watched my video, I know that eventually they will come back and subscribe. But when I see comments like, oh, **I am from this country and I like watching your videos**, and I am always like, okay, at least **my videos are getting some attention**. And with the comments comes the ideas such as, oh, **you should shoot more of this content** we like to see more of this and that. So for me it's about that. When I get even one subscriber in a week, I am excited. But **if people comment, if people watch, it gives you hope** that, okay, even if they are not subscribing, but

they are still watching. So for me it's that thing that you can have less subscribers but more engagement. I don't know if it makes sense. Yeah. So for me, my engagement is really good. For a channel with 180 subscribers, it's really good. I feel that I am okay and that I am doing okay. I can be better but the way I am doing is not bad.

Mercy: I know that there are YouTubers who make money from YouTube. Is that something that you aspire for?

Towera: Eventually, yes. But currently I think Malawi doesn't qualify to be among the countries where YouTube is monetized. So I think Malawian YouTubers we don't qualify for that program. But eventually I would want to get paid because it is a lot of work producing content for YouTube, and you are there just watching, so the least you can do is to give me a dollar or something.

Mercy: So what influences the choice?

Towera: So, initially for me was, I was like, I am just going to share my ideas and things that I have seen. This is because I saw that that's how other YouTubers do it. They share things that people can relate to. However, I realised that my reception wasn't as great as I was expecting. So, I started looking at the comments to see what people were saying about my videos. I realised that people want to watch things that they have not seen before or things that they don't really understand. Initially, my vlogs were titled weekly vlogs, and then I started using the title "Surviving in Malawi". I have seen that the reception has been different because the videos are about what they want to see.

Appendix 8: Establishing categories and themes

After establishing the descriptive codes, Seale (2018) highlights that the next step is to regroup them into preliminary categories then themes. In the category formation stage, I used an online whiteboard to list down the codes generated from the descriptive coding process. After this, I put together similar codes to form sub-categories and categories. Finally, the final step in my coding process was developing themes. See a simple example of the process below for the theme of “transgression through vlogging”.

Themes	Categories	Sub-categories	Example from interview
Transgression through YouTube vlogging	Pushback against cultural expectations	Mediating life events, achievements, milestones/ Teaching people about YouTube lifestyle content creation	“...those people (who make comments) don’t understand lifestyle content creation. So, it’s fine. Those who are willing to listen, I teach and talk to them about it and tell them about what I do, that it’s a serious thing. Like, “if you are on YouTube, you will see that I am not crazy, or I am not showing off.”
	Performing the Malawian wife, but in an altered way	Husbands/boyfriends not central to existence/ Centralizing womanhood and not wifehood	“I think it just happens organically that I show my family in the videos but I try to maintain a balance whereby it’s mostly about my life. For example, let’s say I am creating a video whereby I am making food and maybe my brothers and sisters are there, or sometimes maybe it’s my husband who is there, sometimes they appear, but not as the focus of the video.”
	Rewriting societal rules around gender and parenting	Being a mother but also being a student/career woman/ Refusing to be dictated by societal standards of motherhood/parenthood	“There are times when people question me for showing my child in my YouTube vlogs. Sometimes I understand them but what they also need to understand is that he is a part of me. We are a package of some sort and it wouldn’t make sense to create content about my life without including him because he is a part of my life.”