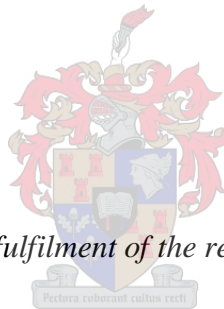


On-field: The response of South African mainstream sports journalists toward fan vlogging on YouTube during the 2019 Rugby World Cup

by

Benedict Pather



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Supervisor: Dr Gabriël Botma

Date: April 2022

Declaration

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Opsomming

Sportjoernalistiek is nie vrygestel van die gevolge van die digitale ontwigting en moet steeds aanpas by die indringende aard van nuwe media-instrumente in die hande van die publiek. Terwyl navorsing gedoen is oor die invloed van sosiale media op joernalistiek, is daar steeds 'n gebrek aan navorsing oor hoe vlogging die joernalistiek, veral sportjoernalistiek, in die algemeen beïnvloed het. 'n Kwalitatiewe navorsingsontwerp is gebruik, met behulp van 'n fenomenologiese benadering as die teoretiese raamwerk, om die reaksies van hoofstroom-Suid-Afrikaanse sportjoernaliste op aanhanger-vlogging op YouTube tydens die Rugby Wêreldbeker in 2019 te ondersoek. Vier mediateorieë is gebruik, insluitend hekwagterteorie wat deur veldteorie ondersteun word en tegnologiese determinisme-teorie ondersteun deur die teorie van die openbare sfeer. Onderhoude is gevoer met verslaggewers wat die toernooi gedek het. Dit is aangevul met 'n netnografie vir verdere insig. Hierdie navorser het veranderings in werkroetines ondersoek as gevolg van digitalisering, moontlike bedreigings vir die beroep en vlakke van saambestaan tussen joernaliste en die interaktiewe gehoor. Daar is ook gefokus op die vasstelling van moontlike voordele wat aanhanger-vlogging op die sportjoernalistieke gebied bied. Hierdie navorser het bevind dat aanhanger-vlogging op YouTube uitdagings en geleenthede bied vir professionele persone wat werk in 'n dinamiese ekosisteem wat nuwe media met sport verbind. 'n Studie van hierdie aard is belangrik omdat dit 'n gesprek genereer rondom 'n kulturele praktyk wat wêreldwyd momentum kry, veral in die globale suide.

Abstract

Sports journalism has not been exempt from the consequences of the digital disruption and continues to have to adjust to the invasive nature of new media tools in the hands of the public. While research on the influence of social media on journalism has been conducted, there remains a lack of research on how vlogging has affected journalism in general, especially sports journalism. A qualitative research design was employed, using a phenomenological approach as the theoretical framework, to examine the responses of mainstream South African sports journalists toward fan vlogging on YouTube during the 2019 Rugby World Cup. Four media theories were utilised, which includes, gatekeeping theory backed up by field theory and technological determinism theory, backed by the theory of the public sphere. Interviews were conducted with reporters who covered the mentioned tournament. This was supplemented with a netnography for further insight. This researcher explored changes to work routines due to digitisation, possible threats to the profession and levels of co-existence between journalists and the interactive audience. Focus was also placed on ascertaining possible benefits fan vlogging offers the sports journalism field. This researcher found that fan vlogging on YouTube presents challenges and opportunities for working professionals operating in a dynamic ecosystem that connects new media with sports. A study of this nature is significant as it generates discourse around a cultural practice that is gaining momentum around the world, the global south in particular.

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Definition of key terms

Active audience

Correlating with the expansion of digital media, the active audience refers to the general public's ability to "participate in interpreting as well as producing" content alongside journalists, hereby becoming interactive storytellers (Yu, 2006:305-307).

Blogging

Blogging refers to "individuals playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, sorting, analysing and disseminating news and information – a task once reserved almost exclusively to the news media" (Lasica, 2003:71).

Journalism

"Journalism is a set of transparent, independent procedures aimed at gathering, verifying and reporting truthful information of consequence to citizens in a democracy" (Craft & Davis, 2016:34).

Mainstream media

The mainstream media can consist of inter alia, print publications, digital media publications, television and radio stations. Usually, the mainstream media employs personnel that collectively work towards achieving specific corporate or social agendas. According to De Vries (2008:6) these media organisations, generally subscribe to groups "such as the South African National Editors' Forum (SANEF) and are bound by codes of conduct like that of the Broadcasting Complaints Commission of South Africa (BCCSA)."

Vlogging

Vlogging is the process of delivering a monologue around various topics, directly into a camera, then uploading the content onto a web-based platform (Burgess & Green, 2018:40).

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

With the manifestation of the blogosphere, sports fans have gained a unique opportunity to produce and publish their opinions, which presents a challenge to the occupational identity of sports journalism (McEnnis, 2017:550). Bloggers and increasingly fan vloggers able to do the work of sports journalists, create a potential power struggle around who has the most trustworthy voice in a profession previously reserved for employed reporters. Employed journalists are expected to remain accountable to news organisations, who pay them to create specified content in addition to adhering to organisational rules (Garber, 2011:41-42). Inadvertently fan vloggers have no real accountability to a sports organisation and are thus freer to comment or complain about topical issues than “their more traditional journalistic cousins” (Garber, 2011:42). The development of the World Wide Web (WWW) has led to a shift in terms of the production, distribution and consumption of content toward a phenomenal rise in the “media sport content economy”, which traditionally carried major barriers of entry and scarcity (Hutchins & Rowe, 2009:1). Lack of accountability and the mass publication of sports news has also led to numerous fake news accounts in the form of fan blogs or vlogs, with unconfirmed stories or false speculations easily accessible to the public (Novick & Steen, 2014:123).

“Historically, journalists have experienced a dominant and hegemonic position in sports culture that derives from the mass media’s monopoly control over communication channels,” writes McEnnis (2017:550). In recent years, however, mainstream media corporations and the expensive rights they own to televise popular sports content have increasingly been challenged by sports fans who use technologies such as smartphones and the Internet to create and distribute their own news. New media advancements will most likely continue to change what we know about fan behaviour as sports fans, who like journalists, aim to extend their reach of audiences while connecting with other fans (Wann & James, 2019:219-220). The emerging power struggle between sports reporters and fan vloggers, therefore acted as motivation to find out more about the inter-relationship between journalism and sports fan vlogging.

This study aims to investigate the response of South African mainstream sports journalists toward fan vlogging on YouTube during the 2019 Rugby World Cup. As a cultural phenomenon, YouTube has fast become one of the most popular social media platforms around the globe. In 2017, YouTube was ranked as the second most visited website in the world, with more than 85 per cent of visitors to the website coming from outside the United States (Burgess & Green, 2018:5). While rugby is one of the three biggest sports in South Africa (Yang, 2017:132) and is consistently covered in that country, along with other favourites like soccer and cricket. Thus, this study aims to shed light on the central issue of how fan vlogging on YouTube has encouraged changes in the work routines of professional sports reporters in South Africa.

1.2 Background

The sports news desk was previously considered as “a place dedicated to fun and frivolity” (Rowe, 2007:384). The “toy department” label is sometimes associated with the profession, for the generalised idea that sports are a trivial matter in comparison to “life or death” news topics (McEnnis, 2018:3-4). It is however argued that sports “hold a central place in modern popular culture and civic life” (Hardin, Zhong & Corrigan, 2009:325). Sports and subsequently sports journalism play an expressive role in modern-day culture, revealing the “heroic action” of athletes, which then becomes deserving of the highest esteem. This is according to Morgan (2013:31) who adds that these actions can be regarded as morally correct and praiseworthy.

Mediated sports can also encourage the discussion of important themes related to social and political struggles (Cassidy, 2017:536). For example, the concept of overcoming adversity through sports was echoed in a televised speech by South Africa’s national rugby team captain, Siya Kolisi, when he accepted the Laureus World Team of the Year award in Germany, citing how winning the 2019 Rugby World Cup was able to optimistically motivate a country struggling with various challenges such as heightened levels of division and poverty (Laureus, 2020). Many people may recall the unifying effect winning the 1995 Rugby World Cup had on South Africa. The euphoria surrounding that tournament increased due to the iconic images of former president Nelson Mandela, wearing a matching number 6 jersey and celebrating alongside then rugby captain, François Pienaar, as he lifted the Webb Ellis Cup (Fourie, 2007:291-292). Patriotic celebrations were similar after South Africa won

the 2007 and 2019 Rugby World Cups and heads of state (Thabo Mbeki and Cyril Ramaphosa respectively) were seen lifting the trophy together with the national rugby team.

Mega-events such as the Summer Olympic Games, FIFA World Cup, American Super Bowl or Wimbledon can significantly contribute to the rolling 24-hour news cycle. Held every four years, the 2019 Rugby World Cup took place from 20 September to 2 November and was widely showcased by mainstream broadcasters and on platforms like Facebook and YouTube. Organisers of the Rugby World Cup in Japan achieved significant viewership for their #RWC2019 video content by generating more than 2.1 billion online views, while further adding that “there were 13 YouTube videos that delivered more than a million views each, more than quadruple the number from 2015” (Rugby World Cup, 2019). Hosted in Asia for the first time, around 857 million people around the world watched the 2019 Rugby World Cup, which was a 26% increase from the total viewership in the previous tournament held in 2015 in England (Palmer, 2020).

1.3 Research problem

One of the defining norms of professional journalism practice is objectivity, which motivates several behaviours such as non-partisanship, originality and balance (Mindich, 1998:2). However, new challenges are increasingly being presented as journalistic practices usually associated with the profession can be performed by anyone, which has led to a shift in framing and interpretation of news (Hermida, 2013:304). The overwhelming amount of sports news available online makes it difficult for sports journalists to stay abreast of the latest news, not to mention the fact that they are competing with online fans, sports personnel, content marketers and various social media accounts (Pedersen, 2014:103). Cynicism remains around the veracity of news found on social media platforms, and whether this practice can equate to traditional reporting (Bossio, 2017:25). When news blogs and vlogs for example began gaining popularity in the early 2000s, some journalists rejected these forms of news as amateurish and insignificant, hereby creating boundaries for the professional practice, ultimately keeping bloggers and vloggers out of the mainstream industry (Bossio, 2017:28).

McEnnis (2017:550) argues that the perception sports journalists employed at mainstream media organisations have of bloggers remains an under-researched field,

especially since online fan blogging and subsets like vlogging are relatively new practices. For this study, the terms blogging and vlogging are often used interchangeably since vlogging is derived from the practice of blogging and requires similar multimedia tools. While fan vlogging on YouTube might not be the only pressure journalists face, it is worth investigating to help to better understand the impact digital technologies is having on the journalism profession. The aim of this study is hence to determine how sports journalists are reacting to disruptive technological changes and the increase in the creation of mediated sports by fans.

1.4 Focus

As academic studies have highlighted, journalists have had to continuously modify their skill sets, storytelling tools, work practices and relationships with audiences (Singer, 2018:361). Commenting, debating and multiple narratives on the Internet and social media have resulted in a huge shift from the gatekeeping authorities of the traditional mass media, such as editors, toward uncharted realms of individual expression (Cross, 2011:50). As a result of the often aggressive attitude and responses users have toward mainstream reporters and each other, “the issue of how to maximize civility in public discourse has become a prominent element of Internet ethics debates” whereby media organisations are now forced to monitor “trolls” or “haters” who vent their anger online (McNair, 2018:161).

Furthermore, the danger of the visual medium is that it can create reality, making it possible for society to believe what they see, resulting in mass social perception or the construction of reality (Bourdieu, 2011:21). Social media and the vlogging possibilities they offer have significantly advanced interaction abilities, where the audience has become an active participant co-producing a larger sports narrative alongside mainstream media (Bowman & Cranmer, 2014:213). For this study, the platform under investigation will be YouTube, because of the influence it has on popular culture. In 2018, YouTube was ranked as the number one social media site in America, “used by 73% of the adults in the country” (Kozinets, 2020:79). By 2021, YouTube was ranked behind WhatsApp as the second most used social media platform in South Africa (Van Wyk, 2021).

Aside from any forced adjustments to journalistic work routines, this investigation aims to determine whether sports journalists consider fan vloggers as rising industry competitors.

This investigation also aims to establish whether a symbiotic relationship exists between mainstream sports journalists and vloggers or whether journalists are looking to strengthen gatekeeping positions. Furthermore, this study seeks to ascertain what type of benefits vlogging offers toward the field of sports journalism.

Mainstream journalists working for South African news organisations will be interviewed to establish the nature of the relationship between journalists and fan vloggers. In addition, a netnography will be conducted to examine the incorporation of vlogging by sports journalists in their natural working environments. This study will use the Rugby World Cup of 2019 as a period of analysis because the tournament itself can be viewed as a mega-event directly involving a variety of media producers. As explained earlier, the Rugby World Cup is of significance not only because it is a mega-event viewed worldwide, but is historically used as a strategic process of nation-building by the South African government (Steenveld & Strelitz, 1998:609-610). Furthermore, the South African national rugby team, branded the Springboks, won the 2019 contest against old rivals England, whom they also beat in the 2007 Rugby World Cup final held in France (Badshah, 2019).

1.5 Preliminary study

1.5.1 Mediated sports in South Africa

Over the past few decades, a mixture of public and private news organisations in South Africa formed departments that produce mediated sports. News about sports are usually featured on the back pages of most if not all major newspapers in South Africa. In special cases, sports news are often featured on the front pages of, for example, local papers such as *Cape Times* or *Die Burger*. Numerous niche magazines exist in South Africa, which covers sports such as cycling and running. As noted in various studies, the print sector, which includes newspapers and magazines, has been forced to create online platforms that complement its print offerings. For example, the publication *SA Rugbymag* also has a website and is present across varied social media platforms (SA Rugbymag, n.d.). Similar trends are evident within major South African television services such as eNews Channel Africa (ENCA) and the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) who report about games on television and have sports-specific social media platforms. The SABC also offers a list of radio stations, such as Radio 2000 and Radio Sonder Grense (RSG), that cover sports news

and live games. Furthermore, Primedia is a privately-owned broadcaster, offering daily sports news through its additional brands such as Eyewitness News (EWN) and Kfm (Primedia, n.d.). The dominant pay-TV broadcaster is Multichoice who offers often exclusive live coverage of sports such as Formula One and especially rugby under their SuperSport brand (Multichoice, n.d.). Mainstream South African online news organisations such as Times Live and Sport24 publish daily aggregated and original sports content focusing on local and international news. As mentioned earlier, the active audience contributes significantly to mediated sports in South Africa through practices such as blogging and a closely related activity called vlogging, a concept that will be discussed further below.

1.5.2 Sports and vlogging in South Africa

Although a new phenomenon, vlogging has become popular in the South African context with numerous videos being created and distributed around topics ranging from current affairs, entertainment, sports and beyond. At the time of writing, South African vlogger Gareth Mason has accumulated over 20 000 YouTube subscribers on his channel, which he started in part to converse around his keen interest in sport and because he was unemployed (Mason, 2019). Aside from consistently vlogging about the 2019 Rugby World Cup, Mason comments on topical subjects, does live rugby reports and collaborates with other vloggers. This example is unique as Mason has dwarfism and traditionally a job as a sports anchor may be especially difficult to attain. However, because of social media and by encouraging viewers to “like and subscribe” to his channel, Mason has managed to establish a noteworthy show, titled *Walking tall with G-man*.

In another example, Mahamba (2019) notes how Springboks sponsor and telecommunication network MTN selected a sports fan to tour with the rugby team for 18 months, culminating at the 2019 Rugby World Cup, and vlog about his experiences across social media channels. This highlights the corporate interest in using vlogging as a tool to reach strategic goals. The infotainment vloggers provide may serve as a source of news not only for the public, but also for sports journalists seeking news angles. The above-mentioned forms of vlogging on platforms like YouTube, may not always have the same prestige as mainstream media professionals, but still operate with commercial intent to grow their audiences (Burgess & Green, 2018:36). Various television shows created in the months after the world cup, such as the Springbok documentary series titled *Chasing the Sun*, show how

vlogging has become an increasingly acceptable form of storytelling within mainstream media (SuperSport, 2020). Vlogging footage by fans and the Springboks' media team is evident throughout the 5-part series that mostly chronicles the journey to become the best-ranked rugby team in the world (Daily Maverick, 2020; Showmax, 2020)

However, since mobile data and broadband Internet needed to easily upload videos onto YouTube is expensive in South Africa, when compared to international standards, vlogging remains a practice reserved for a privileged group who can afford it (Caboz, 2019). Potential thus exists, not only for an increase in local fan vlogging, but also for more diversity in terms of race and gender concerning rugby reporting in South Africa. Vlogging thus offers participants the chance to “engage with mainstream media discourse, critique dominant ideological stances, offer alternative views and share information on issues they regard as receiving inadequate coverage in mainstream media outlets” (Barker & Jane, 2016:474). Despite the lack of varied voices, vloggers and other sports-related media producers, have nonetheless impacted traditional journalistic norms, shifted gatekeeping roles and placed sports journalism at a “crossroads” (Whiteside, Yu & Hardin, 2012:24).

1.5.3 Gaps in the field of research

Historically, the interaction between journalists and news audiences has not attracted a lot of attention, possibly because direct interaction between the two was relatively limited (Singer, 2018:362). This study is further informed by the research conducted by Simon McEnnis (2017), who studied the attitude of print sports journalists in the United Kingdom, to ascertain what fan blogging meant for the occupation. Similar interest is undertaken in this study, however with a focus on what fan vlogging means to mainstream sports reporters in South Africa.

What exactly constitutes news, including sports news, remains a complex issue that is often influenced by factors such as economics and politics (Schudson, 2011:192). Difficulty exists in defining what blogging actually means since boundaries between “journalists and blogger,” “insider and outsider,” and “professional and non-professional” are increasingly being blurred (Anderson & Schudson, 2020:147). Undertaking a study focused on YouTube can offer a limited overview of fan vlogging since imitations of the social media platform have become common. Popular sites such as Facebook, TikTok, Instagram and Twitch also

offer opportunities to vlog. This happens while mainstream media organisations are themselves using interactive networks, social media, blogs and different variants of mass self-communication to distribute content and engage with audiences (Castells, 2019:89). Furthermore, while writing this research, the sudden impact of Covid-19 and ensuing social distancing practices have resulted in online communication such as vlogging becoming even more significant, which could be of interest for further research.

Preliminary research suggests that while formal studies do explore sports journalism, academic research on the relationship between sports journalism and vloggers from developing regions is justified. Most research of this nature stems from the global north, in parts of Europe, North America and Australia. The term global north refers to developed and industrialised countries, while the global south refers to underdeveloped regions of the world (Main, 2001:96). Searches on academic databases such as Taylor and Francis, Sun Scholar, Google Scholar, Jstor Elsevier and the open-access journal Frontiers show that there are few academic articles written from a South African perspective that focus on the impact of fan vlogging on mainstream sports journalism. This study will thus make use of direct responses to describe the perceptions and reactions of mainstream journalists toward fan vloggers. A netnography focusing on the relevant work of South African reporters was also employed.

1.6 Problem statement

This study aims to explore the response of South African sports journalists, working within mainstream organisations, toward fan vlogging during the 2019 Rugby World Cup. The absence of local research on sports journalism and fan vlogging in the African context makes this study relevant. Sports journalism has become a fundamental part of news reports across all mediums and can be used to highlight crucial aspects of modern culture. Collecting data from mainstream journalists streamlines the interview scope to receive the most relative information about a field they would have adequate knowledge on, while a netnography allows for further data collection through directly observing journalists doing their work.

1.7 Theoretical framework

The first media theory related to this study will focus on gatekeeping. The practice of gatekeeping is when journalists curate news and deliberately add more value or worthiness to

some stories, at the expense of others (Vos, 2020:92). Traditionally, the relationship between journalists and their audience was one-sided, constituting mostly of journalists distributing information that seemed to be of civic importance to the general public (Singer, 2018:363-364). The gatekeeping role is relevant to this study because of the increasing prevalence fan vlogging has within mainstream media. According to Vos (2020:92), gatekeeping has evolved to practices such as gatewatching, whereby the public can select their preferred news and in turn choose to distribute these within several social media networks. Another form of gatekeeping has also emerged particularly due to the networked society, whereby members of the public can act as gatebouncers, a term used to suggest that social media users act as fact-checkers who separate what is generally deemed to be fake news from factual news, in for instance the comment sections (Vos, 2020:91-92). In this study, gatekeeping theory will be supplemented by field theory, as articulated by Bourdieu (2011), which may help to further expand on some of the main drivers that influence decision making processes within society.

Technological determinism will be used as the second guiding theory for this study. In technological determinism “it is believed that technology and technological innovation drive social change, culture, economics and politics” says Fourie (2007:151). The aforementioned theory is relevant to this study due to the disruptive influence social media platforms have had on mainstream media and will be enhanced by the theory of the public sphere. Blogs have been thought to rejuvenate the public sphere since it is believed that the term “blogosphere” was derived from the phrase “public sphere” (Tremayne, 2007:vii). Simply put, the public sphere, conceptualised by Habermas, refers to the “communal communicative space” within which society can deliberatively debate around crucial issues of public concern, such as politics (McNair, 2018:149-150). The virtual or imagined public sphere of “publicly accessible knowledge” is often created by journalists or in response to journalistic content, which can take the form of blogs, vlogs or other forms of commentary (McNair, 2018:150). Blogs can thus be seen not as an alternative or separate to mainstream media, but rather as a component of the large and complex media landscape (Leaning, 2011:97-98).

1.8 Research questions

The general research question with regards to this study is: How are sports journalists reacting to disruptive technological changes and the subsequent increase in the creation of mediated sports by interactive audiences? Specific research questions are as follows:

1. Have sports journalists had to make any changes to their regular work routines due to the rise of online audiences using social media?
2. Does fan vlogging offer any major threats to South Africa's sports journalism sector?
3. In order to better co-exist, how can journalism practices help to improve fan vlogging on YouTube?
4. What benefits did the practice of fan vlogging have for mainstream sports reporting during the 2019 Rugby World Cup?

1.9 Methods and approach

This study employs a qualitative research design. This researcher, a qualified journalist and blogger, relied on his own contacts to initially acquire relevant interview participants. A mixture of purposive sampling and snowball techniques to find participants was employed. As a deliberate sample group, interviews have been done with sports journalists working at various mainstream organisations. Semi-structured interviews are an appropriate method for conducting social scientific research and can be successfully conducted with individuals and a collective (Bertrand & Hughes, 2018:104). This researcher interviewed a total of 9 journalists to achieve an in-depth understanding of their work experiences in relation to the 2019 Rugby World Cup. Additionally, a netnography was conducted whereby two YouTube videos were analysed to exemplify how vlogging was used by mainstream media. Both videos were purposely sampled since they were published around the time of the tournament's final match. Given the logistical constraints of being based in Switzerland, this researcher made use of digital technologies to connect with South African reporters.

1.10 Structure of research

Chapter 1: Introduction

In this chapter, relevant background, the research problem and a preliminary study of mediated sports in South Africa are initially offered. Gaps in this field of research, the problem statement, theories employed, research questions, methods and structure of this thesis are then presented.

Chapter 2: Literature review

This chapter explores related studies that focus on the history of sports reporting, the networked society, fandom, the advancement of vlogging, and the impact these are having on mainstream sports reporting.

Chapter 3: Theoretical framework

In this chapter, four theoretical assumptions help discuss how vlogging impacts the field of journalism. Initially, gatekeeping theory as articulated by Lewin is discussed, followed by Bourdieu's field theory. McLuhan's technological determinism is then considered, after which the public sphere theory according to Habermas is applied.

Chapter 4: Research methodology

In this chapter, this study's research approaches are explained. Two qualitative approaches in the form of interviews and a netnography of two online videos are employed to answer the general and four specific research questions.

Chapter 5: Findings from semi-structured interviews and netnography

In this chapter, relative answers to the online interviews are extracted and presented. Findings of the netnographic study, which include additional interview responses, screenshots, online commentary and researcher observations are subsequently offered.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

In this chapter, summarised answers to the four research questions and the one general research question, which explores reactions of mainstream sports journalists toward the active audience, are presented. Limitations and future recommendations conclude this thesis.

1.11 Summary

This chapter provided motivation for conducting this study by offering an overview of the importance and development of mediated sports in South Africa. The research problem and preliminary study around vlogging were also offered. Gaps in the field of research, the research question and a summary of Chapters 1 through 6 were presented. A thorough literature review relative to this study is offered in the chapter below.

Chapter 2: Literature review

2.1 Introduction

This literature review initially deals with mediated sports from a broad perspective and gradually the discussion gains particular focus. The discussion starts with a background and overview of the sports journalism profession. Secondly, the discussion deals with digitisation and the influence the networked public sphere has on the journalism field. Thirdly, the discussion covers how the phenomenon of fandom is gaining momentum. Finally, this chapter focuses on blogging and the development of fan vlogging on YouTube.

2.2 Background of sports journalism

The depiction of sports dates far back in human history. For example, Egyptian tombs contain numerous paintings that display people participating in sports such as gymnastics and wrestling, which suggests that sports played a prominent role in ancient cultures (Rymer, 2019). However, paying people to report on sports news has a fairly brief history, starting about two centuries ago and is linked to the development of the printing press as well as the increase in literacy levels among the middle class (Schudson, 2011:64). First considered as leisure activities, pastimes such as bicycle and yacht racing increased in competitiveness and around the 1880s, newspapers started covering these and others, which helped grow public interest in sports (Pedersen, Laucella, Kian & Geurin, 2017:53). Laucella (2014:90) found that at the end of the nineteenth century, industrialisation and innovative communication tools such as the typewriter and radio accelerated public interest in sports and helped make it a regular part of daily news reports. The 1920s saw an emergence of the so-called “golden age of sport” as athletes, coaches and sportswriters became household names (Pedersen *et al.*, 2017:54-55). Easy-to-access mediums such as the radio became popular platforms, adding intimacy and drama to sports broadcasts, allowing listeners to hear sounds such as the bat hitting the ball and loud cheering (Laucella, 2014:91). Around the same time, sports reporting grew to be a mix of entertainment and news that featured modern-day photography in newspapers and magazines. For example, on the 16th of August 1954, *Sports Illustrated* was launched by company founder Henry Luce, who described the publication as having “an eye for action, a nose for news and an ear for truth... with heart and humor” (Wulf, 1989:15).

The advent of the television, bridging time and space, led to Canadian theorist Marshall McLuhan's 1964 concept of the "global village", a term which has increasingly been realised due to the Internet (Fourie, 2007:95). Cable television and ESPN's launch of their pioneering show SportsCenter in September 1979 had a lasting effect on the evolution of sports broadcasting (Lauella, 2014:91). During the 1990s the United Kingdom experienced growth in elite sports and subsequently sports journalism, which became aligned to the business models of pay-TV (Boyle, 2017:494). Klatell and Marcus (1988:21) pointed out that the visual medium, television in particular, is a fundamental part of the growth of sport, which is in part why advertisement logos are displayed around stadiums and on team apparel. "Sports journalism's privileged position in society has stemmed from its accreditation to the wider professional sports environment," writes McEnnis (2017:551). This endorsement led to forms of marketing and the expansion of sports coverage as well as opportunities to develop a career as a sports journalist (Boyle, 2017:494). In addition to the thriving media-sport inter-relationship, one has to recognise the "huge network of multi-billion-dollar automobile, clothing, food and beverage, and other corporate entities that sponsor sports events and broadcasters (Messner, Dunbar & Hunt, 2000:390). Foley (2010:205) argues that sport and its ties to the mainstream press not only contain characteristics of the American capitalist model, but also notes that the combination of the two contributed toward the global popularity of competitive sports. A brief background of the development of sports journalism in the South African context will be articulated below.

2.3 The development of mediated sports in South Africa

Sport does not exist independently in society and is profoundly influenced by its social context, while at the same time the practice and associations of sport influence that same society in which it operates (Marjoribanks & Farquharson, 2012:2-3). The era of 1950s magazines such as *Drum* published articles relating to soccer and especially boxing in an attempt to appeal to black sports fans (Rauwerda, 2007:393), signifying a long-standing interest in sports by South Africa's multiracial audiences. However, sanctions imposed by the apartheid government (lifted only in the early 1990s) prevented diverse participation in most major tournaments, thus limiting the country's potential for increased domestic and international sport-related exposure (Ogunnubi, 2019:520). For brevity, key details about the development of mediated sports in South Africa (such as its ties to colonial periods) before and after the 1994 democratic elections are omitted. It is important however to mention

crucial events in South African sporting history due to the media attention these gained. Marjoribanks and Farquharson (2012:3) argue that before 1990, sports reporting helped raise awareness about legalised segregation and other injustices in South Africa, which later led to the fall of apartheid. For example, a 1981 rugby tour of South Africa to New Zealand resulted in global media coverage of a series of violent clashes between police and protestors, who were demonstrating against the white supremacy ethos of the Springboks (Harding, 2011).

According to Wang (2006:92), the external perception of prestige or a country's national reputation can serve as indicators of a nation's power. Businesses and politicians are aware of the soft power influence of sport, which can be heightened by the hosting of major sports tournaments or athletes achieving victory. As a concept, "soft power" was coined by Joseph Nye to demonstrate how forms of power can influence ideology and behaviour of others or "attract and co-opt them to want what you want" (Nye, 2004:2). South Africa's soft power strategy relating to sports contributes to its aim of maintaining a positive image and hegemonic status within the African continent (Ogunnubi, 2019:523). Victories such as South Africa's national soccer team, known as Bafana Bafana, winning the 1996 African Cup of Nations (AFCON) contest were constructed by the media as turning points for the country. And as he had done the previous year at the Rugby World Cup, Nelson Mandela, again wearing a replica of the skipper's jersey, handed the winning trophy to then captain Neil Tovey in front of 80 000 attendees and millions of viewers (Hawkey, 2019). A 1996 Sky News television insert showed how former South African president F.W. de Klerk was among leaders that stood beside Mandela to commemorate the host nation's 2 – 0 win over Tunisia (TJS Sports, 2016). During the early to mid-1990s, sports was used by then-president F.W. de Klerk to encourage white South Africans to rally behind a non-racial and inclusive democracy (Nixon, 1994:152; Botma, 2010:4).

Mainstream media framed the above-mentioned wins as symbolic new beginnings for a multiracial country returning to international sport, which in part led to aspects such as sponsorship deals, sports celebrities and ultimately more mediated sports. Baker and Glavovic (1996:255) found that during the mid-1990s, it was estimated that around half of all subscription-based M-Net decoders (also known as set-top boxes initially launched in South Africa) were purchased with the sole purpose of being able to view exclusive sports coverage. In conjunction with political and economic incentives, the digital turn of the nineties reshaped the journalistic landscape with sports being profoundly influenced by this

transition, as newfound sources of information were being made available that focused more intently on sports coverage (Boyle, 2017:494). Around the same time, high-profile controversies such as former South African cricket captain Hansie Cronje being found guilty of match-fixing made headlines across the globe and symbolised the dynamic nature of sport as it entered into the 21st century. This is according to Collins (2013:126), who says the Cronje saga illustrated how sports evolved into “a potent symbol of nationalism, a major sector of the entertainment business and the focus for a re-emergent gambling industry”. News about South African athletes Oscar Pistorius and Caster Semenya has also received significant coverage and have stimulated heated public debates not only with regards to sports, but various social issues. The events mentioned in this section greatly contributed to the dynamism of mediated sports in South Africa. Digital technologies, however, made mediated sports even more omnipresent and will be discussed further below.

2.4 Networked mediated sports

The term “networked media sport” was coined by sociologists Brett Hutchins and David Rowe as a way of defining the shift in sports journalism, particularly as digital mobile devices became more used by the public, athletes and journalists (Boyle & Haynes, 2014:133-134). Around the start of the 20th century, tools needed to create sound and images became less expensive and forms of media could potentially be distributed globally (Hesmondhalgh, 2019:109). While traditional media operated mainly in a “one-directional” manner, new media became “interactive” and offered audiences more communication power (McQuail, 2010:41). Amateurs with camera phones far outnumber professional photographers or qualified photojournalists, giving the public at large the ability to document events and share media at will (Anderson & Schudson, 2020:147).

The Internet has become a major source for information related to national and global sports, with media organisations dedicating resources and social platforms to report on sports news (Coakley, 2009:409). Sport communication has become increasingly dynamic as athletes and fans become independent media-makers, even co-producers with mainstream media entities (Wenner, 2015:384). An example of the co-production practices between mainstream media and fans is when viewer Tweets are read out on television at half-time or after matches. Social media analysis is consistently included in mainstream media reports and

is seen as an alternative to the vox pop or survey style of reporting news, by highlighting “what Twitter thinks” about various issues (Burgess & Bruns, 2012:137-138).

One of the biggest concerns regarding new media and journalistic practice is the speed of the news cycle, indicating a shift from journalism as an investigative practice to journalism centred on the immediate publication of content (Siapera, 2018:140). For instance, many mainstream sports journalists are expected to offer live blogging as a sports event unfolds (Lambert, 2019:59). The Internet’s ease of accessibility, speed and interactivity has triggered an important change in the delivery of mediated sports, described as “a change for which no one can yet predict the outcome” says Real (2006:171). As a result, sports journalism has increased in complexity, partly due to the establishment of the so-called network society. Developed by Spanish sociologist Manuel Castells, the network society refers to the technological, economic and cultural transformations brought about by the Internet, that allows society to operate within a global system (Barker & Jane, 2016:459-460).

Since evolutions within the media, which includes news media, are often impacted by broader social circumstances (Heinderyckx, 2018:576), it is necessary then to also mention the economic drivers that influenced how technologies became so pervasive. These sentiments flow toward the prominence of GAFAM, an acronym for Google, Apple, Facebook, Amazon and Microsoft, which is briefly discussed below.

2.5 GAFAM and the media

Over the past decade, GAFAM have acquired an ever-increasing presence in media services, ranging from music to films to news, not to mention the role they play in emerging sectors like online sports broadcasting and eSports (Miguel de Bustos & Izquierdo-Castillo, 2019:813). The Microsoft X-Box series and associated games are examples of how mediated sports can be used to generate capital, partly because each season ushers in an updated eSports title in conjunction with mega-events (Miah, 2014:79). GAFAM companies have already purchased broadcasting rights to major tournaments, whereby conglomerates such as Facebook showcase live Major League Baseball games and YouTube screens live Major League Soccer matches (Atkinson, 2018). Connected multimedia devices have led to a “convergence” or broadly put, the implementation of cross-platform technologies and processes on the Internet (Quandt & Singer, 2009:131). The rollout of 5G networks and their

compatibility with devices such as Apple's iPhone 12 allows users to significantly expand the speed of interactivity (Duffy, 2020).

Google is the dominant player amongst the five main technology firms and even though it is not a communications company, it has significantly impacted the practice of sourcing and distributing information and has become the world's principal advertising agency (Fuchs, 2017:342). Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) techniques have become more relevant to journalism as they help companies like Google increase the visibility of trending articles and content. For instance, digital tools like Google Trends do not replace beat reporters, but have a role in suggesting which current affairs are popular (Cabrera, 2019). Facebook, on the other hand, the dominant social networking site, has managed to commodify public items such as "contacts, user profiles and user-generated content that are created by unpaid user labour" (Fuchs, 2017:342). Since its emergence in 1998, journalists welcomed Google as a tool that could be useful to routines such as searching for news (Philips, 2018:331). However, the hegemonic position of the five main (stock-exchange listed) technology companies has a far more direct impact on journalism, at times leading to the closure of long-standing publications and subsequently limiting their potential to inform the public and uphold constitutional values such as fairness and accountability (Van Niekerk, 2020).

Sport holds power in reaching dominance within networked, convergent media environments, in which television, online as well as mobile media interact, overlap and contest for market share (Hutchins and Rowe, 2012:20). The developments above suggest that not only is competition aimed at mainstream media, who may hold broadcasting rights to live sport, but also indicates how rivalry amongst sports fans themselves may become more dynamic. These contestations remain widespread not only because of GAFAM's hegemony, but also due to the accessibility of smart products offered by prominent Asian firms such as Huawei, Samsung and Sony. As mediated sports expand, humanity appears to be moving closer to a period of "digitally constituted sports experiences, where the primary medium of participation need no longer be a physical playing field or arena, but is a virtual space" (Miah, 2014:76). The proximity of fandom to sports journalism can be considered increasingly challenging in the 21st century as "fans with typewriters" have become a common characteristic of sports communication that can be witnessed on varied blogging

platforms, writes McEnnis (2017:549). Sports fans and their impact on sports journalism is thus discussed below.

2.6 Sports fans

2.6.1 Who are sports fans?

Sports fans are individuals who typically show intense interest in a sports team or athlete (Wann & James, 2019:3). Fans learn the rules of a game, keep track of a team's ranking, care for the well-being of players, spend time following related multimedia content and willingly buy merchandise (Gantz & Lewis, 2014:23).

Sports fandom offers individuals an opportunity to fulfil basic human needs such as gaining a sense of belonging to a community, gain meaning and a sense of purpose and feel unique (Wann & James, 2019:19-20). Joining a sports team, albeit as a fan, offers individuals who may typically not be capable of playing professional sports the chance to be associated with a favourite team or player. Fans who enthusiastically support sports teams may never meet admired players, but can nonetheless be brought to tears when individuals achieve greatness off and on-field (Billings & Brown, 2017:1).

2.6.2 Fans and new media

In the pre-digital age, around the 1980s and 1990s, fanzines were amateur-style print publications that were sold and circulated to communicate with and establish a community of mainly local fans (Rowe & Hutchins, 2014:9). Fandom is no longer confined to a stadium or local sports bar, instead, it is stretched throughout the online environment, which dismisses traditional geographic restrictions while intensifying the relationship fans have with players (Grundlingh & Grundlingh, 2019:12). Smartphones, combined with social media, now allow dedicated sports fans the chance to be interactive online participants before, during and after a game, whether at the stadium or at home (Benigni, Porter & Wood, 2014:225). As technology evolved, so did the experiences of sports fans, who have become accustomed to large-screen TVs where movement and slow-motion replays can be highlighted, while high-definition footage, multiple camera angles and pitch-side commentary add to the spectacle associated with sporting events (Gantz & Lewis, 2014:22).

Horton and Wohl (1956) found that repetitive exposure over time can lead to the formation of emotional bonds with real or fictitious media personalities, which forms a parasocial interaction (PSI). PSI can be considered as a one-sided relationship, established when sports fans imagine that they have close relationships with people such as sports stars, coaches, even commentators (Gantz & Lewis, 2014:28). Supporters can now closely follow stars on social media and obtain updates about their professional and personal lives. A sense of intimacy is thus created as the players are no longer characters about whom a journalist exclusively writes (Grundlingh & Grundlingh, 2019:12). Social media's have led to a "cyberspace autograph chasing" culture where fans actively seek acknowledgement from athletes and fellow fans through likes, follows or retweets, which signal a form of accomplishment and recognition (Gubar, 2015:107). However, according to Sanderson and Kassing (2014:248), hostile critique of a player or team has become increasingly common, as ever-evolving interactions occur online. Toxic forms of online discourse, such as cyberbullying, have become a widespread phenomenon as mediated sports grow in appeal and could be of interest for future research.

As mentioned earlier, the potential to become a sports fan and gain knowledge around a team or player increased in the twentieth century as broadcast mediums, especially the Internet, promised audiences more objective content. So-called objective content was unique since it was supposed to be unfiltered by official spokespersons, or sports journalists who often had to remain in the good graces of team administrators to gain access to sports news (Tarver, 2017:32). This "unfiltered" content increased in scope due to the growth in digital publishing tools such as blogging, a practice that will be discussed further below.

2.7 Blogging

2.7.1 What is blogging?

A blog is the shortened version of the word "weblog" and can be described as a website often updated with writing or digital posts arranged in reverse chronological order (Blood, 2003:61). Tremblay and Tremblay (2001:271-272) found that blogging is considered a technological extension similar to sports talk radio, which has achieved success thanks to its ability to form a community of people capable of engaging over related topics. Blog entries can focus on highly personalised issues that are archived online for extended periods or blogs

can be minute-by-minute commentaries on sports events covered by the general public and mainstream reporters (Chovanec, 2018:55).

Matheson (2004) for example investigated how blogging became part of journalism practice at British newspaper *The Guardian*. Blogs offered “a different interpersonal relation, of a different authority and of a journalism focused upon connection rather than fact” writes Matheson (2004:453). Writing became a “more ‘raw’, less ‘cooked’ source of information, allowing users to participate more in constructing knowledge about events in the world” says Matheson (2004:455). In his study about blogging, McEnnis (2016:967) found that live bloggers perceived their role as inclusive information providers that are aiming to flatten the hierarchy between journalists and the audience. In another study McEnnis (2017:562) found that blogging allows alternative and marginalised discourse a chance to become part of mainstream conversations within sports.

At present, the sheer volume of online blogs and publications referred to as blogs greatly varies (Myers, 2010:7). As technologies evolve, they not only allow new ways of creating messages, but also challenge conventional journalistic practices and norms, usually to encourage more audience engagements (Wahl-Jorgensen & Schmidt, 2020:269). New subgenres like micro-blogging and particularly vlogging are emerging constantly (Chovanec, 2018:55) and is thus considered below.

2.7.2 The evolution of vlogging

A videoblogger or vlogger can be defined as someone who produces and maintains a video blog and is also likely to self-define as a “videoblogger” writes Berry (2015:142). Vlogging is video-specific, while blogging can consist of both visual and written media. Vlogging lends itself to various forms of live performance, which rely on emotive behaviour that aims to capture the attention of audiences and thus makes it an ideal part of the present-day media and entertainment landscape (Burgess & Green, 2018:80-81). Around the late 1990s, innovative backend website coding led to a rise in video hosting platforms such as MySpace, which resulted in the formation of individual and communities of interactive videobloggers.

While the bedroom was traditionally the setting used to create content, developments in technology drastically changed this trend and users are now able to create vlogs wherever

they go. Competing technology firms continue to release vlogging-specific video cameras offering features such as high-quality 4K lenses, increased stabilisation, portability and a firmer grip (Goldman, 2020). Modern forms of action cameras such as the GoPro facilitated the development of user-generated sports media by offering features such as underwater filming, a height-adjustable selfie stick and being able to mount multiple cameras onto one's body. The term "participatory culture" is used to link user-generated content with advances in digital technologies, especially concerning social media, which offers the public a chance to participate in or be part of an interactive conversation (Burgess & Green, 2018:13-14). Participatory culture is thus defined as the process in which "fans and other consumers are invited to actively participate in the creation and circulation of new content" says Jenkins (2006:290). These developments resulted in the term "prosumer", which refers to the way in which the audience now actively participates in content production hereby blurring the lines between amateur and professional (McQuail, 2010:281).

The media now functions in what is being defined as an "attention economy", which has become one of the biggest challenges journalists are faced with, since the window of opportunity to capture the attention of audiences has been significantly reduced (Miah, 2017:234). The process of capturing the attention of audiences is crucial since one of the main reasons why newspapers in South Africa and elsewhere have continued to lose ground and even close (forcing the retrenchment of many journalists), is because advertising revenue is instead being invested into major digital companies such as Facebook and Google (Arbarder, 2020). For example, the classified section of newspapers, which previously offered a steady revenue stream for traditional South African mainstream papers, has now largely been replaced by online trading companies such as Gumtree and OLX (Arbarder, 2020). It is estimated that YouTube earned around 4.34 billion US dollars in advertising in 2020, which findings suggest is a 26.5 per cent increase from their revenue earned in 2019 (Mohsin, 2020).

While vlogging "encourages critique, debate and discussion", even basing the success of media posts on metrics such as the number of online comments it receives (Burgess & Green, 2018:81), the opposite may be true for mainstream media. A 2017 study about the closing of the comment section on South Africa's largest news website News24 found that closing that section was based on factors such as legal and reputational concerns and due to global media trends (McKenzie, 2017:4). Another South African newsgroup, Eyewitness

News, also closed its online commenting section, citing that the resources needed to moderate online comments have become “unsustainable” (EWN, 2020).

2.7.3 Motivation to become a vlogger

In South Africa, approximately 8.2 million (40.1%) of the country’s 20.4 million people aged 15 to 34 are unemployed, while 29% of the estimated total population of around 59 million people are without work (Githahu, 2020). As noted in section 1.5.2, the country’s high unemployment rate suggests that vlogging could potentially become an increasingly popular option for people trying to find ways of building an online brand and possibly generate income. Various examples exist of YouTubers becoming paid celebrities, in exceptional cases even dollar-millionaires, through vlogs that focus on topics ranging from toy reviews, online education or delivering commentary at live sports matches (Rose, 2019). Hanusch (2018:433) highlights that the under-researched field of lifestyle journalism, which can incorporate various industries related to sports such as fashion and fitness, has seen remarkable development over recent decades despite disruptions in traditional forms of journalism practice. “Online developments have multiplied employment options for aspiring lifestyle journalists in a range of ways, enabling them to make a living by finding their niche,” writes Hanusch (2018:444).

Another technology-driven incentive to vlog, especially amongst younger users, is evident in the current popularity of the video-sharing application TikTok, which allows users to capture 15-second videos or string together four video clips under a total of 60 seconds (Matsakis, 2019). TikTok is often used to record trendy movement-based activities with users uploading a wide range of clips from dance moves to parkour jumping to skateboarding tricks that can easily be incorporated with interactive media such as popular music, image filters and hashtags (Schwedel, 2018). Social media thus offers a distinct advantage over mainstream media since unfiltered messages about nearly any topic can be communicated to consumers in artistic or unconventional forms (Wallace, Wilson & Miloch, 2011:423).

2.7.4 Sports fan vlogging on YouTube

YouTube grew in a relatively short period since it was launched in June 2005 (Burgess & Green, 2018:2) and was purchased a year later by Google for over a billion dollars to become

a highly influencing part of the social media environment and subsequently popular culture (Kozinets 2020:97). One of the earliest researchers to deal with the influence of YouTube on mainstream media was Amanda Lotz (2007) whose book *The television will be revolutionized* aimed to find clarity on implications of the then start-up. A Statista report shows that in May 2019, around 500 hours of video content was being uploaded onto YouTube every minute, a significant increase when compared to five years earlier when just 72 hours of videos were uploaded at the same speed (Clement, 2019). Mohsin (2020) found that on average YouTube has around 2 billion active monthly users, due partly to the platform being free, relatively easy to use and comprising of readily available mass content. Users tend to use YouTube more on their mobile phones than desktop computers, which makes the platform a far stronger competitor in terms of reaching audiences (Mohsin, 2020).

While numerous individuals vlogged about the 2019 Rugby World Cup, for brevity, brief examples of three YouTube channels are mentioned due to the popularity of their videos, assorted style of video production and this researcher's personal judgement of rugby vlogs. Squidge Rugby (from the United Kingdom) offered a satiric yet informative collection of rugby vlogs that displayed skilful editing and compelling analysis (Squidge Rugby, 2020). Two Cents Rugby (from New Zealand) vlogged about the tournament in a relatively unbiased and consistent manner, while exhibiting broad knowledge of the sport and a wide collection of rugby apparel, from his home-based studio (Two Cents Rugby, 2021). Maction Planet (from Japan) offered alternative Rugby World Cup coverage, created in areas such as the busy streets of Tokyo, its subways and inside the stadium (Maction Planet, 2019).

In his study about blogging, McEnnis (2017:549) found that some sports journalists held certain material resources and privileged forms of accreditation, which was the opposite for bloggers who arguably have to work harder than journalists to gain authorised entry into the industry. McEnnis (2017:549) also suggests that sports journalists do not consider fan bloggers to be a threat to their "professional distinctive", but did find it problematic that some bloggers tried to mimic sports journalists' daily beat. However, as pointed out in this chapter, modern technology and how sports fans are showcasing their own work have at minimum begun to unsettle the level of distinctiveness and occupational positions sports journalism once enjoyed.

2.8 Summary

This chapter offered an overview of the influential growth of mediated sports, particularly in South Africa. How digitisation impacts sports journalism and key economic drivers of the networked society were articulated. Sports fans and why they matter were then discussed. Lastly blogging and the rise of vlogging on YouTube as an alternative to mainstream journalism was considered.

Chapter 3: Theoretical framework

3.1 Introduction

To address the issue of sports fan vlogging and how it is impacting sports journalism, this study employs four broadly related theoretical assumptions. The first theoretical assumption of this study is that gatekeeping, according to Lewin (1947), influences the construction of news. This is further enhanced by employing the second theoretical assumption of field theory, according to Bourdieu (2011), which gives a better understanding of particular drivers within journalism.

The third theoretical assumption of this study is that web 2.0 technologies have disrupted the work routines of sports journalists. Hence, technological determinism according to McLuhan (1964) is employed. Fourthly, a discussion about the public sphere theory as argued by Habermas (1992), and how this ties into the rise of the Internet will be offered.

As a theoretical point of departure, this qualitative research project assumes that a largely unfiltered social media channel like YouTube arguably reduces the gatekeeping power of traditional journalists who report on sports. This researcher supports the view that YouTube, powered by parent company Google, has become a dominant entity in the media environment, flattening some hegemonic roles held by reporters.

3.2 Gatekeeping

First coined by psychologist Kurt Lewin (1947) who studied the channelling process of groceries and how they end up on a kitchen table, the word gatekeeping has since become a metaphor to help explain the media's motivations for news selection. Gatekeeping is the procedure of "selecting, writing, editing, positioning, scheduling, repeating and otherwise massaging information to become news" (Shoemaker, Vos & Reese, 2009:73). "The gatekeeper orientation emphasized the search for objectivity and the sharp separation of reporting fact from disseminating opinion," says Janowitz (1975:618).

Contrary to the heyday of traditional media, journalism no longer holds the centralised gatekeeping power as the mediator between news sources and the public at large,

partly due to the widespread conversion of information into digital forms (Neuberger, Jo vom Hofe & Nuernbergk, 2014:346; Tandoc, 2018:235). Gatekeeping is practised not only by full-time journalists, but other professionals such as writers, correspondents, columnists and editors who have a degree of responsibility in terms of forming news stories or other information (Weaver, Beam, Brownlee, Voakes & Wilhoit, 2007:3). Gatekeepers, or controllers of information, thus come in many different forms such as people, policies and increasingly, computer algorithms (Shoemaker, Vos & Reese, 2009:74). Algorithms can be considered as “sets of formula that translate the company’s gatekeeping policies into computer instructions”, matching online preferences to that of different users (Shoemaker, Vos & Reese, 2009:74-75). This shift in media values gives a clear indication of how norms previously enjoyed by traditional media can change within a short period (Owen, 2016:32). Media companies such as YouTube now utilise personalised algorithms that remember relevant information that is compatible with characteristics such as personal background, websites used and interests (Nguyen & Scifo, 2018:385).

Scheidler and Wagstaff (2018) note that the agenda-setting function of mass media means that the media tells audiences what to think about by giving a topic of assumed importance more coverage. “If news is what the journalist says it is, the subjectivity of the gatekeeper would seem to profoundly problematise the news process, and yet the field was slow to follow up on this key insight” writes Shoemaker, Vos and Reese (2009:76). Since gatekeepers can create an image of the world for societies, researchers need to study the gatekeeping process and its influence on the version of reality that is presented to the audiences (Shoemaker, Vos & Reese, 2009:73).

Since entry points into journalism have become easier, and sports coverage evolves from a state of scarcity to plenty, gatekeeping roles have subsequently diversified. This implies that consequences of the audiences’ online behaviour may matter far more to society than in the pre-digital age, which has led to a gatekeeping extension called *gatewatching*, a concept discussed below.

3.2.1 Gatewatching

The oversupply of online information makes it important to focus not only on journalists’ selection process, but also that of the audience. This is because there is a shift away from the

traditional journalistic gatekeeping towards gatewatching, where the journalist evaluates, highlights and distributes information that has been plucked from specific social media feeds (Hermida, 2014:368). The practice of gatewatching happens when journalists curate news and make already circulating news items or stories seem more valuable (Vos, 2020:92). Hermida (2011:179) argues that members of the public also practice a gatewatching function as they become “active recipients” when distributing selected online information to friends through online channels. Tandoc (2018:235) adds that:

News audiences now actively take part in news construction and distribution, breaking journalists’ monopoly over the news. Information about newsworthy events now flows through both journalists’ and audiences’ channels. This has important implications on how we understand and value gatekeeping.

The gatekeeping process does not end once a journalist published their story, but continues as “readers read, listeners listen, and watches watch” says Vos (2020:91). Singer (2001:65) argues that traditional gatekeeping roles have, to an extent, been neglected by journalists who have become accustomed to relying more on the audience to guide and influence content creation. The number of likes and comments added to specific sports-related articles or videos are examples of metrics that allow reporters and the public to participate in forms of gatewatching.

Gatewatching is hence relevant because, over time, people retreat to small worlds of like-minded individuals that they agree with and enjoy watching, meaning that the online environment becomes divided into various “echo chambers”, which reduces the chances of being exposed to different opinions (Nguyen & Scifo, 2018:385). The circulating practice of sharing and receiving digital content via a specific circle makes gatewatching important as it can influence what one defines as interesting or newsworthy and *vis-à-vis*. Based on these findings, another subsection of gatewatching theory called gatebouncing has emerged and will be discussed below.

3.2.2 Gatebouncing

The interactive features of Internet-based mass media have given audiences far greater significance in terms of their roles in the evaluation and critique of news (Shoemaker,

Johnson, Seo & Wang, 2010:61). Metaphorically speaking, gatebouncing is when individuals or a group act like bouncers at a club, identifying and removing someone, or something, that is considered to be inappropriate (Vos, 2020:92). The term gatebouncing can thus be defined as the process whereby “journalists or others seek to mark particular pieces of information as illegitimate” and symbolically police public views or debate the credibility of what is deemed as alternative facts that have already been “let out” into the public (Vos, 2020:92-93).

Tools such as the Like or Dislike buttons and comment sections are at times used to gain a better idea of what audiences, in general, believe as being fact or fictional. News about athlete club transfers for example can at times turn out to be speculation that can quickly spread online, sometimes even ending up in mainstream news, which may then be rectified by journalists and/or online audiences. Throughout periods in history, economic and political elites have repeatedly been accused or found guilty of distributing propaganda to maintain and strengthen forms of power (Harari, 2018:275-277). For example, supporters within a growing far-right conspiracy group known as QAnon have been defiantly spreading forms of “fake news” online (Wong, 2020; Arnold, 2020). While concerns about fake news and information warfare are becoming more valid, the journalism profession appears to be struggling to effectively respond to such dilemmas, not only because newsrooms are being forced to scale down, but also because the profession itself now needs to be better defined.

Occupational norms often lead to complicated discussions, since struggles of maintaining “professional objectivity” and establishing forms of “jurisdiction” remain ongoing within journalism research (Anderson & Schudson, 2020:145). These struggles for truth-telling authority and established expertise have become even more complex in the digital age, since boundary lines between, for instance, journalist and blogger, are increasingly being blurred (Anderson & Schudson, 2020:146-147). The argument that gatekeeping culminates in messages ultimately reaching the public have normative implications, for it accords journalists – and now, also audiences – social responsibility (Tandoc, 2018:247-248). Vos (2015:9) agrees, and adds that “gatekeeping is not simply something that journalists and others do – it is often seen as a public and moral responsibility”.

Singer (2006:265) however argues that because of the divisive nature of some social media pages, including blogs, there remains a “need for someone to sort it out as well as to lend it credibility and ideally utility”. The term “amplified gatekeeping” is therefore

suggested, whereby the public, including journalists, partake in and are encouraged to perform practices such as “verification, fact-checking, editing, and critique” before uploading content (Tandoc, 2018:248). Flowing from the above view is an overview of field theory, which aims to demonstrate how different forces influence the media’s gatekeeping practices.

3.3 Field theory

Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (2011:39) considered the journalistic field as a “microcosm with its own laws, defined by its own position in the world at large and by the attractions and repulsions to which it is subject from other microcosms”. A field, Bourdieu (2011:40) argues, is a structured social environment or space in which people dominate and are dominated. Within the artistic professions, such as journalism, exists a “field of forces” in which agents compete to either conserve or transform subjective positions (Bourdieu, 1993:30). For example, when media producers use their available resources to compete for higher audience numbers. Hereby, the process of gatekeeping gets performed within a field where the aim is to attain or retain forms of capital.

Capital is central to field theory since it points toward “the specific forms of agency and prestige within a given field” (Sterne, 2003:375). There are different forms of capital, such as cultural capital, which refers to things “such as educational credentials, technical expertise, general knowledge, verbal abilities, and artistic sensibilities” writes Benson (2006:190). “Organizations who dominate the field are those successful in converting one form of capital into the other,” says Benson and Neveu (2005:4). Journalism awards, media qualifications or creating vlogs that attract large audiences, for instance, can lead to gains in cultural capital that can offer rewards such as financial capital. Journalists, therefore “become susceptible to influences from various levels when they experience or perceive some form of instability in their capital accumulation,” writes Tandoc (2014:562). Hargreaves (1986:142) agrees and adds that sports reporting tends to be self-fulfilling prophecy, whereby media professionals choose what is deemed as newsworthy, largely based on what the economic agenda demands. Tandoc (2018:244) further adds that:

Resisting pressure from an advertiser who wants an unfavourable story removed might result in a decrease in economic capital if the advertiser eventually stops buying space, but it also might result in an increase in cultural capital since upholding

editorial autonomy can boost a news organizations credibility among its audiences and peers.

Bourdieu's field theory is relevant because it situates journalism, including the realm of sports journalism, within the field of cultural production. "Popular culture is one of the sites where this struggle for and against a culture of the powerful is engaged," writes Hall (1981:239). Sports news is known for its function as a mechanism that can increase circulation numbers, bring in advertising revenue and essentially offer an element of economic capital to media organisations (English, 2016:1005). Sports journalists also function as watchdogs and create hard news, for instance when they write about athletes using banned substances or expose corrupt officials, hereby achieving cultural capital (English, 2016:1005). The sentiments above are important since it situates sports journalism alongside other forms of journalism that may be considered more serious.

The continuous power struggle to achieve capital, whether economic or cultural, thus becomes important drivers in the way the media operates, making field theory a relevant theoretical basis for this study. However, since digitisation is increasingly pertinent, the impact technology has on the media industry and society will be discussed below.

3.4 Technological determinism

Technological determinism is described by Marshall McLuhan's "the medium is the message" theory as well as that of the work of his adviser Harold Adams Innis (Littlejohn, 1992:342-345). A medium refers to media devices such as the radio, television or smartphone. McLuhan (1962:8) foresaw that "electro-magnetic discoveries" would someday be able to bring "the entire human family into a single global tribe". McLuhan (1964:16) rightly proposed that the media can drastically shape and control human actions and relationships.

In mass media studies, "medium theory" is the idea that the technology of a medium is more significant than content (Meyrowitz, 1985:16; Fourie, 2007:152; Croteau & Hoynes, 2012:299). For example, radio frequencies, which led to inventions such as the telegraph, introduced the idea of speaking rather than writing, while television required not only voice, but the use of images (Philips, 2018:322). Given its ability to surpass barriers such as poverty

and illiteracy, the radio remains one of Africa's most important and most used mediums (Mano, 2011:102-103). However, the launch of new media tools has disrupted the importance of older devices and irreversibly influenced the way societies function. In his 1985 manifesto *Amusing ourselves to death*, Neil Postman criticises television's effect on literary culture and the practice of reading books (Syvertsen, 2017:61). "Television does not ban books, it simply displaces them," says Postman (1985:141). Since then the MP3 displaced the compact disc (CD) and the MP4 did the same to the once-popular video cassette and Digital Video Disk (DVD). In an everyday context, the digital camera, a feature of almost all smartphones, has changed how society records and communicates daily life and has become instrumental in practices such as citizen journalism (De Castella, 2012) and vlogging. Within the high-stakes realm of live sports, one can observe dependence on technologies such as the Television Match Official (TMO), which acts as a virtual referee to help determine on-field decisions and match outcomes.

Post-industrialisation and the advent of new production processes, accommodating the shift in emphasis from production to consumption, made communication and information technologies fundamental tools to help industries survive and compete (Barker & Jane, 2016:173). Central to this growth in industrial competitiveness are networked computers that can effectively generate, transfer and store massive amounts of information (Barker, & Jane 2016:173). The media industry has drastically expanded due to its symbiotic relationship with information technology and correlating information systems. Information systems refer to data such as images, videos, personal details, web browser history and so forth, that are mainly stored electronically for entities such as governments or corporations (Love, 2013). Information systems also allow organisations to systematically manage, find, access, and share data to better interact with customers and compete in markets more effectively (Love, 2013).

The sphere of readily available information has resulted in users becoming more attached to devices or mediums, for practices such as speedily sourcing news, online shopping, entertainment and virtual interaction (Bhattacharjee, 2019). Compulsive users tend to keep phones within grabbing distance at all times, checking the device before bed and first thing in the morning, which arguably leads to a reduction in cognitive abilities such as critical thinking and being able to concentrate (Bhattacharjee, 2019). The sentiments above signify the complex realm of using media platforms such as Instagram and YouTube as these are

structured to increase online participation, which can result in the human brain secreting dopamine, a molecule that can make people feel emotions such as pleasure, and subsequently lead to forms of addiction (ARTE Documentary, 2020). Philips (2018:324) thus advises that “The questions we need to ask is not so much how the technology works, but who has the power to make use of it most effectively and to what end?” It is evident that power has largely shifted from mainstream toward an open stream culture, whereby the active audience can now participate in mass communication by trying to partly replicate journalism routine.

It is however argued that technological determinism can disregard broader cultural aspects and that “technology is embedded into society and that it is the people living under and rebelling against power relations, not the technology, who conduct unrest and revolutions” (Fuchs, 2017:247). Although researchers have remained sceptic in overstating the influence of “electronic media” or the various types of innovative mediums available, credit must be given to McLuhan for envisioning mass-scale participation decades before the Internet became as available as it is today, let alone the advent of social media or practices such as vlogging (Allan & Hintz, 2020:436). The dynamic function of digital devices will be further articulated in relation to this study’s next theoretical assumption in the section below.

3.5 The public sphere

Grounded in the work of theorist Jürgen Habermas, the public sphere refers to a period around the 18th and 19th centuries where the bourgeois class came together to hold “critical-rational debate” about social issues (Calhoun, 1991:3). Debates within the public sphere were considered to be the “ideal speech situation” (Habermas, 2001:97) in which citizens put aside individual interests and held discussions that offered overall benefits for societies (Butterworth, 2014:35) even though it was “in principle, though not in practice, open to all” (Barker & Jane, 2016:233). The public sphere encouraged the concept of “communicative action” over “systematic distortion” (Habermas, 2001:97), which according to Hanson (1985:32) allowed for overall decisions to be made based upon the “force of the better argument” instead of final decisions being determined by those who had the most power and forms of capital (Butterworth, 2014:35).

The public sphere is often mentioned in academic studies, especially from the early 1990s, partly due to the rise of the Internet, which promised more opportunities for

democratic forms of discourse similar to the one envisioned by Habermas (Butterworth, 2014:35). Websites, in general, encourage comments on their articles in the hope that it reinvigorates online debate in the public sphere (Daniels & Hughey, 2013:332). Yet online discussions often become brief shouting matches, where interactive audiences do not work toward unison and have little consideration for the impact their comments could have on the public sphere (Nguyen & Scifo, 2018:384). Butterworth (2014:35) however says “despite the many ways that the Internet has failed to enrich democracy, it is through the messy, wordy, and unpredictable forms of discourse that we might consider its democratic potential after all”. Devereux (2007:109), however, notes that the Internet is yet to fully realise its potential as a public sphere because variables such as class divide and levels of access prevent it from being an equally usable instrument for all. Furthermore, an empowered and effective public sphere requires that journalists aim to retain characteristics such as: trustworthiness, reliability, honesty and accessibility to a whole population (Hodkinson, 2017:183).

The considerable amount of content marketing currently visible on platforms like YouTube can ultimately influence journalists and various news agendas, a view that Habermas considers being “the hijacking of the public sphere and distortion of the public communication and debate by techniques normally associated with consumer advertising” (Hodkinson, 2017:187). Capitalist agenda, such as a profit-motive for shareholders, raises concerns for Habermas (2006:26-27) who says “The market pressure of private media is in many cases an obstacle or proper deliberative politics”. This is because not only economic, but also social and political agendas of the powerful can be achieved under the guise of public relations or persuasive communication (McNair, 2018:159). As capitalism intensified within the mainstream press, a concentration of power emerged, and the media shifted from being a facilitator to shaper: “Whereas previously the press was able to limit itself to the transmission and amplification of the rational-critical debate of private people assembled in a public, now conversely this debate gets shaped by the mass media to begin with”, says Habermas (1992:188).

While major legacy media still holds value, as explained in Chapter 2.5, a newer version of the public sphere is predominantly run by GAFAM and other high-tech groups based in Silicon Valley. These increasingly wealthy companies not only engage in the work of professional journalism, but also allow the ongoing rise of the active audience, which traditional gatekeepers and editorial processes are finding hard to contain (McNair,

2018:162). In the 21st century, comprehending the interrelationship between technology and society requires taking a look at many different aspects and an understanding of complex, multi-dimensional systems (Fuchs, 2017:247). The characteristics of complex dynamic systems presents an example of why “Knowledge is unavoidable—or, to be more precise, why knowledge has to be limited,” says Cilliers (2002:77). This framing of complex systems suggests that the layered public sphere of mediated sports, combined with that of market-driven convergent technologies, make these power struggles within society somewhat impossible to completely comprehend. This study nonetheless aims to contribute toward a better understanding of the impact that disruptive technology is having on sports journalism and the broader society.

3.6 Summary

This chapter discussed gatekeeping and the evolution thereof, followed by field theory, which aims to better understand struggles for different forms of capital. Theoretical aspects of technological determinism and the public sphere, which aim to better understand technology and the effect this has on society was then discussed. These mentioned concepts all serve as a framework for the research methodology in the next chapter.

Chapter 4: Research methodology

4.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the research methodology chosen to discover responses of South African sports journalists toward sports fan vlogging. As Grønmo (2020:11) notes, the central purpose of social science is to understand and interpret phenomena. This study is thus interpretive in nature and aims to explore how interactive sports fans are impacting the field of journalism.

The ensuing sections begin with discussions about qualitative research and the research design. Relevant descriptions of online interviews and netnography are then offered, which includes why these are suited for this study and how they contribute toward the data collection and data analysis stages. Lastly, the ethical clearance procedure is presented.

4.2 Qualitative research

Over the past few decades, qualitative research methods have become more accepted and employed in social sciences such as sociology and journalism (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:133). This researcher has thus chosen a qualitative research approach in order to discover reality “through the eyes of people who experience it” (Du Plooy, 2009:30). Flick (2014:18) says that qualitative research is a “continuous process of constructing versions of reality”.

Qualitative researchers commonly base studies on interpretivist or constructivist epistemologies (Salmons, 2015:20). Burrell and Morgan (1979:28) note that the interpretive paradigm employs a subjective approach to the analysis of the social world. Interpretive research rightly forms the basis of this study since it helps to better understand “the meanings that people ascribe to events and actions, how they make these meanings their own, and how they negotiate these meanings and interactions with other people” says Magnusson and Marecek (2015:1). Social constructionism holds the view that “what we take to be the world importantly depends on how we approach it, and how we approach it depends on the social relationships of which we are a part” says Gergen (2009:2). Burr (2003:4) concurs and says that as opposed to deriving knowledge from the natural world, we should understand that knowledge is constructed when people interact with each other. McQuail (2010:100) further describes social constructionism as a theory that views the “structures, forces and ideas” of

society as devised by humans and are hence constantly evolving and being challenged. Interpretivist and constructivist approaches deal with subjective insights that are part of a bigger social world and are thus applicable to this study.

As noted in Chapter 1, little research about sports journalism's relationship with fan vlogging from a South African perspective exists. Du Plooy (2009:88) notes that a qualitative approach is often used to help explore an area where "limited or no prior information exists". This researcher is cognisant that qualitative research methodologies are often criticised because of their subjective nature (Van Zuydam, 2019). The purpose of this study, however, is to gain a better understanding of sports journalists' subjective experiences.

This qualitative study follows a dual methods approach, in which interviews and a netnography will be employed. A multiple (or in this case dual) methods approach, according to Kumar (2019:23), draws on more than one procedure from a single paradigm, with the aim of "enhancing and enriching the accuracy, validity and reliability of the findings". Flick (2007:41) points out the concept of triangulation, which applies different perspectives, methods and/or theories to better answer research questions, can lead to quality insights.

Since factors such as one's sampling strategy or conclusions drawn can lead to inaccuracies in one's data collection process, the concept of validity needs to be emphasised. Validity can be defined as the degree to which the researcher has measured what he/she has set out to measure (Smith, 1991:106). Babbie (1989:133) adds that "validity refers to the extent to which an empirical measure adequately reflects the real meaning of the concept under consideration". It is argued that validity is more difficult to achieve when making use of qualitative research to measure concepts such as experiences, feelings or attitudes. Hence Kumar (2019:271) recommends establishing logic through justifying each question in relation to the objectives of a study, which in this case was achieved by aligning the research questions with the literature review and theoretical assumptions.

According to Bryman (2012:168), reliability refers to the level or degree to which "the results of the research are repeatable". In order to achieve reliability in interpretive qualitative research, concepts such as "accuracy, stability and predictability of a research instrument" are important, since these can increase the chances of attaining more precise findings (Kumar, 2019:273).

Bias is another important concept to consider. Bias is the deviation from a neutral frame of reference as a result of a variety of personal factors, which may occur intentionally or unintentionally (McQuail, 2010:549). Kumar (2019:360) notes the importance of being unbiased and says that “bias on the part of a researcher is unethical” and can be considered as a deliberate attempt to hide results of a study or “to highlight something disproportionately to its true existence”. In an attempt to eliminate bias, sufficient time was allocated to complete this study and the data collection and analysis thereof was properly planned. However, as McKenzie (2017:23) notes, potential researcher bias may emerge during different phases of the research processes. Burr (2003:3-4) adds that when dealing with social construction, it is important to be “ever suspicious of our assumptions about how the world appears to be”.

4.3 Research design

Traditionally, a research design is a blueprint identifying how a research study is to be completed and takes into account factors such as sample of interest, data collection for testing a hypothesis or answering research questions, and the analysis of results (Thyer, 1993:94). The research design can be considered as a plan or “strategy of investigation”, constructed in order to obtain answers to selected research questions (Kerlinger, 1986:279).

This study’s field research aims to compile data that offers insight into the responses of South African mainstream sports journalists toward fan vlogging on YouTube. Flowing from the main theme under investigation, which is to explore the impact of technological disruptions and the interactive audience within sports journalism, the following research questions (RQ 1 to 4), have been linked to Methods A and B respectively.

Method A: To be addressed through interviews

1. Have sports journalists had to make any changes to their regular work routines due to the rise of online audiences using social media?
2. Does fan vlogging offer any major threats to South Africa’s sports journalism sector?
3. In order to better co-exist, how can journalism practices help to improve fan vlogging on YouTube?

Method B: To be addressed through netnography

4. What benefits did the practice of fan vlogging have for mainstream sports reporting during the 2019 Rugby World Cup?

4.3.1 Unit of analysis

According to Priest (2010:41), the unit of analysis is in reference to the individual item being defined by the data collected. This study mainly focuses on responses and actions taken by sports journalists due to the continuing growth of the interactive audience, and online sports fans specifically. The unit of analysis is therefore South African sports journalists. For descriptive purposes, the unit of analysis will in certain cases be written as sports journalists on the one hand and sports reporters on the other.

The target population comprises of South African nationals who worked as sports journalists on behalf of a mainstream media organisation and were tasked with directly reporting about the 2019 Rugby World Cup. A target population is the actual population to which one generalises results, whereas an accessible population refers to the unit of analysis within the target population, which researchers actually have access to (Du Plooy, 2009:109). Since various constraints may prevent one from reaching all sports journalists who can be classified as the target population, one has to be realistic and seek out an accessible population. However, before determining an adequate study sample, one needs to make distinctions between the target population and the accessible population (Du Plooy, 2009:109). Distinguishing between these two population groups is crucial because “the more narrowly the accessible population is defined, the more limited the generalisability of the findings” says Du Plooy (2009:109). Flick (2014:542) points out the concept of representativeness, which relates to the generalisation of research and hence the results that get produced. Representativeness thus deems to question whether a sample population adequately represents relevant features and/or experiences (Flick, 2014:542). As in all research, including those of a qualitative nature, the researcher needs a group of people with a range of experiences similar to that of the larger population (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015:35).

As stated above, in this instance, the larger population is all mainstream South African sports journalists who reported on the 2019 Rugby World Cup. Conducting a study with every

South African reporter who covered the 2019 tournament would not be feasible for this researcher because of practical constraints. Admittedly, the application of this study's findings to a broader population may thus be limited. The chosen population will nonetheless add knowledge to an under-researched field and prepare the way for future studies.

4.3.2 Sampling

Purposive sampling means that the researcher needs to “locate individuals who can and will provide honest, robust information about themselves and/or the phenomenon of interest” says Salmons (2015:117). This researcher conducted preliminary research during and after the 2019 Rugby World Cup to identify sports journalists who compiled news reports related to the 6-week-long tournament. While a purposive sampling method was initially used, this later transitioned toward a snowball technique that relied on recommendations from participants. Snowball sampling hence assisted this researcher to gain access to the population under investigation (Uys & Puttergill, 2003:113).

As the name suggests, snowball sampling occurs similar to a tiny ball of snow growing in size as it rolls down a hill. This subsection of qualitative research occurs when the first study participant is asked to suggest other participants, and this process continues until the sample size is deemed large enough (Grønmo, 2020:170). A typical sample size for a study of this nature varies between 5 and 25 participants (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:139). For the purposes of this study, interviews were conducted with 8 South African sports journalists (See Table 4.1), while a 9th journalist was interviewed for feedback around the netnographic study. Billups (2021:26) notes that the snowball strategy is relatable to the gatekeeping function in journalism since participants can provide access to other participants or resources that may facilitate a study by offering selected access, information or opportunities. Grønmo (2020:171) however points out the subjectivity of snowball sampling, where for instance participants may suggest their close friends, which could result in the sample consisting only of a specific network of actors. Still, snowball or “network sampling” can be particularly useful since the researcher can ask participants to suggest agents who they think will be knowledgeable about the topic and may be willing participants (Grønmo, 2020:171).

Journalists represent excellent candidates for qualitative interview projects, since the nature of their jobs require them to be able to communicate experiences in meaningful and reflective

ways (Besley & Roberts, 2010:70). In this case, the journalists selected possessed direct insight about the theme being explored and had hands-on experience reporting on the tournament in question, which are characteristics that this researcher deemed necessary for the purpose of this study (Poggenpoel, 2003:150).

Details about online interview participants are listed below:

Sports Journalist	Media worked for during tournament
Mark Keohane	SA Rugby Magazine, Independent Media Print, IOL Sport & Keo.co.za
Simnikiwe Xabanisa	City Press, New Frame
Jody Hendricks	SABC - Radio Sonder Grense
Cato Louw	SuperSport, Eyewitness News
Tinus van Staden	Netwerk24
Johan le Roux	SABC - SAFM and Radio 2000
Liam Del Carme	Sunday Times and Times Live
Tholakele Mnganga	Eyewitness News

Table 4.1 – Interview participants for Method A of this study

4.4 Data gathering

While it is debatable to which degree a researcher should apply his/her own experiences when collecting and analysing data, in this instance, industry knowledge proved useful. To deal with the concept of reflexivity it is important to outline the situatedness and lens through which this researcher is looking at the interviewees and the data obtained. This researcher is a former CNBC Africa television reporter and producer who has direct industry experience related to the creation of mainstream reports (including sports news) and is familiar with practices such as interviewing, on-screen reporting and video post-production. This researcher is a sports fan himself, participates in rugby-related online community forums and regularly follows media about that sport. Furthermore, this researcher makes regular use of YouTube as both user and producer of content, manages a blog (The Sports Proverb, n.d.) and several social media pages.

4.4.1 Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews can consist of standard topics or questions while still allowing researchers the opportunity to deviate from initial themes, which allows for a deeper understanding of how study participants interpret their experiences (Du Plooy, 2009:198). Patton (2015:437) says the interview process “relies entirely on the spontaneous generation of questions in the natural flow of an interaction, often as part of ongoing participant observation fieldwork”. Semi-structured interviews balance any pre-planned questions of the firmly set out structured interview approach with “spontaneity and flexibility of the unstructured interview”, which is basically just a “conversation” between the participant and researcher (Salmons, 2015:9). The interview questions (See Addendum A and Addendum B) were derived from themes that were discussed in Chapter 2 while open-ended questions allowed participants to provide their own views.

At the time of writing, this South African researcher lives in Bern, the capital of Switzerland. Since this study is being conducted remotely, participants were contacted electronically. Initial emails were sent via social media to give potential participants a brief idea of this study and to ascertain whether they are interested in taking part. Subsequently, more information such as the research questions and list of interview questions were sent to participants. All the participants were presented with the same interview guide and ethical clearance details. As suggested by Flick (2014:235), concise and detailed instructions about what was expected from participants accompanied the questions. Two weeks were offered to participants to respond to the interview questions and an additional two weeks were offered if needed. Written or telephonic responses were requested from participants after they had the chance to first read over the questions, which gave them time to contemplate over the themes and offer in-depth answers. This researcher was cognisant that in some instances answers may not have been fully supplied, in which follow-up communication was considered. In line with the remote nature of this study, further details about the online interview procedure are outlined below.

4.4.2 Online qualitative interviews

Online interviews have become a good alternative to in-person interviews due to the efficiencies of emerging Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) (Salmons,

2015:2). Online interviews can be defined as “interviews carried out with computer-mediated communication (CMC) to collect data” from one or more persons and can occur by making use of mediums such as computers, phones or messaging services (Salmons, 2015:3). This study was conducted in a non-real-time manner, whereby e-mail platforms were utilised. Communication was also carried out through the messaging services provided by Facebook and LinkedIn due to their level of efficiency. Study participants often find online interviewing more convenient and less stressful since interviews can be conducted from their homes or places of work, which can be considered as nonthreatening and familiar (Gruber, Szmigin, Reppel & Voss, 2008:257-258).

It is important to note that the process of e-mailing questions to participants carries risks such as long waiting periods or even unanswered emails, since participants can easily get distracted by their fast-paced careers and social environments (James & Busher, 2016:248). This researcher is also aware that doing interviews via email may be less insightful than an in-person interview, as one is unable to observe factors such as non-verbal responses or ask immediate follow-up questions (Du Plooy, 2009:198).

It has been widely noted in the media that the Covid-19 pandemic caused various restrictions in numerous countries, South Africa being no exception. Over the period of conducting this research, social distancing emerged as a contributing factor for selecting the mentioned qualitative methods. Two interviewees indicated that they became Covid-19 positive and withdrew from this study after initially agreeing to take part. This researcher has also taken into account the possible difficulties of gaining access to willing participants while based in a different country. Furthermore, cognisance is made of the possibility that some sports journalists may not know much about or be interested in fan vlogging.

The second method involved observing two YouTube videos so that a general narrative about the interrelated benefits of vlogging practices within sports journalism could be formed. It is discussed further below.

4.4.3 Online observations

By employing qualitative online observations, specifically a netnographic approach, this section of the study aims to directly observe how the practice of fan vlogging benefited

mainstream sports reports during the 2019 Rugby World Cup. Vlogging practices of sports journalists were studied in their native habitat, much like an anthropologist might do an ethnography of a remote society. Fetterman (2010:14) says that:

An ethnography is primarily descriptive in nature. An ethnography compares and contrasts cultures and cultural elements...An ethnography is the descriptive tool in anthropology that can stand alone or be the foundation for larger efforts.

The term netnography was coined by marketing professor Robert Kozinets in response to increasing online social interactions and the impact these interactions have on culture (Savin-Baden & Tombs, 2017:63). Netnography is a form of qualitative research aiming to “understand the cultural experiences that encompass and are reflected within the traces, practices, networks and systems of social media” says Kozinets (2020:14).

Technological improvements over the past few decades have led to visual and subsequently virtual ethnographies gaining more attention within social sciences (Pink, 2007:1). Video-research does not always mean that a researcher is doing the filming, but can also be the analysis of various video-based artefacts such as camera surveillance, films or user-generated footage such as vlogs (Harris, 2016:27). Online ethnographies can be non-participatory with the researcher recording observations of behaviours in the community or it can be participatory with the researcher being directly involved in the community (Snelson, 2015). A non-participatory observational approach was used in this study and archival data was extracted from within YouTube’s free-to-access media sphere. YouTube was specifically chosen for this research as the platform is heavily focused on letting YouTubers, a collective term for its community of users, upload multimedia sports content.

Since YouTube is the field site, it made sense to utilise that platform’s search engine, which led to the discovery of numerous videos relating to the rugby tournament’s final match. Two online videos were sampled purposively as these were directly related to RQ 4 posed in Method B. These two videos also offered “a sense of the lived cultural worlds” that this section of the study is trying to explore (Kozinets, 2015:169). The first video involved South African sports journalist Elma Smit, a co-host on SuperSport’s In Touch rugby show (SuperSport, 2019). On behalf of World Rugby (2019), Smit co-created a series of over 40 episodes in which she reported on her experiences during the tournament from varied

locations in Japan. The second video was presented by two South African sports journalists, Ryan Vrede and Craig Lewis, both of whom are writers turned online commentators (Sarugbymag.co.za, 2019). Throughout the World Cup, Vrede and Lewis hosted an insightful show from an improvised studio in Cape Town, where they discussed sports-related issues occurring off and on-field. This researcher sent virtual requests to all three journalists featured in the above-mentioned videos, but only one response was received.

Details about netnography participant is listed below:

Ryan Vrede (Method B)	SA Rugby Magazine
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Table 4.2 – Interview participant for Method B of this study

For this section, objective descriptions focused on the benefits vlogging offered the aforementioned sports reporters. Aspects of how and why vlogging was incorporated into the mentioned videos are described in a reflective manner in Chapter 5. Reflective fieldnotes mean that netnographers record their own observations around issues such as “subtexts, pretexts, contingencies, conditions and personal emotions occurring during their time online” says Kozinets (2015:189). Netnographic data was collected in the form of reflective data or field notes that were “recorded as it happens” from observations in an attempt to contextualise content (Kozinets, 2015:188). Fieldnotes are the result of ethnographic fieldwork whereby “the ethnographer writes down, in regular, systematic ways what she [sic] observes and learns while participating in the daily rounds of the lives of others” says Emerson, Fretz and Shaw (2011:1-2). Through the process of collecting data, this researcher had an opportunity to reflect on his own experiences, which accordingly informed the final analysis of the data. This researcher watched both videos twice, with the intention of extracting data for the purpose of this study, then re-watched the content in order to make comparisons with his notes.

Hine (2000:65) however notes that virtual ethnographies carry a connotation of being “not quite” or not entirely the real thing. Flick (2014:326) adds that virtual ethnographies are always partial and not holistic as one is not in contact with participants or doing face-to-face research, but instead interacting with images chosen to be presented online. This netnography is therefore done alongside another research method in order to reach more probable results.

4.5 Data analysis

Data analysis is the process of “breaking up” data into more manageable patterns or themes so that it can be synthesised into coherent wholes (Mouton, 2001:108-109). Babbie (2010:39) says that “Qualitative data analysis is the nonnumeric examination and interpretation of observations, for the purpose of discovering underlying meanings and patterns of relationships.”

Transcription software from Otter.ai were used to transcribe 6 of the 9 interviews, which were done telephonically via WhatsApp, as these platforms were the most cost effective and efficient. The 3 remaining respondents typed answers directly on the questionnaire (Addendum A) and emailed this back to the researcher’s Yahoo account. After compiling sufficient data, which is password-protected on both his MacBook Pro and Huawei smartphone, this researcher used specific data analysis methods for the interviews and netnography processes, which are explained further in the subsections below.

4.5.1 Online interviews

After sufficient electronic responses had been compiled, this researcher looked for themes by doing a qualitative content analysis of the interview data in order to answer RQs 1 - 3. Braun and Clarke (2006:79) note that thematic analysis as a qualitative analytic method is used for “identifying, analysing and reporting patterns within data to interpret various aspects of the research topic”. Qualitative content analysis is considered to be a very flexible analytical framework that may be applied to various types of data and is thus suited for digital social research (Veltri, 2020:77). Kumar (2019:402) thus identifies three ways in which one can write about qualitative data findings:

1. Developing a narrative to describe a situation, episode, event or instance;
2. Identifying the main themes that emerge from your field notes or transcription of your in-depth interviews and writing about them, quoting extensively verbatim; and
3. In addition to (2) above, also quantifying, by indicating their frequency of occurrence, the main themes in order to provide their prevalence.

By summarising the qualitative data compiled from the interviews, the following 4 themes will be explored, which are guided by the literature review and first 3 research questions:

- General changes to sports reporting caused by smartphones and social media
- Perceived threats of fan vlogging toward the sports journalism occupation
- Potential for co-existence of fan vloggers and working sports journalists
- Benefits of incorporating fan vlogging into journalism routine (Method B)

4.5.2 Netnography

Spiggle (1994:497) says instead of analysing data, one should aim to interpret data, whereby “the investigator does not engage a set of operations. Rather, interpretation occurs as a gestalt shift and represents a synthetic, holistic, and illuminating grasp of meaning, as in deciphering a code”. *Gestalt* is a German word roughly meaning shape, which in this instance signifies how personal perspectives can influence and construct one's views. Kozinets (2015:205-208) thus suggests following a hermeneutic approach, which according to Thompson, Pollio and Locander (1994:433) is “a methodological process for interpreting qualitative data”. The process is:

An iterative one in which a part of the qualitative data is interpreted and reinterpreted in relation to the developing sense of the whole. These iterations are necessary because a holistic understanding must be developed over time (Thompson et al., 1994:433).

Writing an ethnography involves producing a narrative where “presentation, interpretation, discussion and contextualization are seamlessly interwoven” says Light (2010:181). Thus, this step of the study involves the process of “abduction” from the particular to the general, whereby a whole gets established from parts (Kozinets, 2015:205-206). Arnold and Fischer (1994:63) add that:

The meanings of a whole text is determined from the individual element of the text, while, at the same time, the individual elements is understood by referring to the whole of which it is a part... Specific elements are examined again and again, each

time with the slightly different conception of the global whole. Gradually, an ever more integrated and comprehensive account of the specific elements, as well as the text as a whole emerges.

Both videos have been downloaded to this researcher's laptop so that they could be watched on and offline, while screengrabs were also used to better illustrate how vlogging was put to practice. Emphasis was not so much on the verbal narratives of the video, but instead on factors such as the style of camera usage, possible motivations for vlogging during such a mega-event and responses from audiences. This researcher documented what was seen within the above-mentioned videos and pointed out how and why vlogging was used to communicate meaning to audiences in a particular manner.

Data was coded manually, since both videos are relatively short, 08:00 minutes and 16:58 minutes respectively. Furthermore, YouTube's built-in features were utilised as this compiles data such as how often a video is viewed, has a box for comments, offers "thumbs up" and "thumbs down" buttons to indicate viewer reactions, and provides a continuously updated count of video views. These features were useful to this study as they offered details around the popularity of each video while presenting researchers with general reactions in the form of fan comments from the broader sports community.

Since people interpret the same footage differently, giving their own meanings to its content, this form of data analysis can prove to be "complex", which can lead to a range of ethical issues (Pink, 2012:9). Therefore, ethical concerns of this study are outlined below.

4.6 Ethical considerations

Qualitative researchers are expected to be aware of the ethical issues that may surface during a particular study and then plan on how such issues may be addressed (Creswell & Poth, 2018:53-54). As an academic researcher and student at Stellenbosch University (SU), this researcher understands his responsibility towards the participants in this study. Ethical clearance has therefore been applied for and accordingly obtained through SU's ethics committee's online portal.

The ensuing closeness or intimacy between researcher and participant demands that one considers the guiding ethical principle of doing no harm by keeping data acquired secure (Hennink, Hutter & Bailey, 2020:71). Data collected and analysed will be kept secure on this researcher's laptop, smartphone and stored in print form. This researcher noted that participation was completely voluntary and journalists could opt out at any time without any form of penalty. Electronically signed consent forms were offered to interview participants, which gave the researcher appropriate permission to incorporate their answers, names and media organisations into this study.

For the second research method, Kozinets (2015:142-143) cautions that the same danger of causing potential harm that exists in face-to-face ethnographies, such as hurtful portrayals or disdainful treatment, is present in netnography. Since the online communication media is legally viewed as a public place, invasion of privacy is less of an issue; however, Kozinets (2015:148-149) advises that researchers properly cite or credit individuals who contribute to or are involved in netnographic studies, which in this instance, this recommendation has been followed. Furthermore, while participant names and the organisations they represent have been listed, their responses will not be directly attributed to their employer.

4.7 Summary

This chapter discussed the methodological research process of this study. Concepts relative to qualitative online interviews and netnography were articulated, followed by the research design and sampling procedures. Then the data gathering processes and analysis thereof were discussed and lastly, ethical considerations were highlighted.

Chapter 5: Data-analysis and findings

5.1 Introduction

The following chapter discusses the findings based on fieldwork conducted and is a result of concepts addressed in Chapter 4's research methodology, Chapter 3's theoretical framework and Chapter 2's literature review. This chapter aims to answer the main research question: How are sports journalists reacting to disruptive technological changes and the subsequent increase in the creation of mediated sports by interactive audiences?

This chapter is divided into two main sections, Method A and Method B. Method A has three subsections, pertaining to the first three individual research questions and were answered through online interviews (Addendum A). Method B has one subsection, concerning the fourth research question, and was answered through a netnography, which includes an additional interview (Addendum B).

5.1.1 Method A

Method A firstly discusses responses from sports journalists in terms of their work routines due to the rise of networked devices and interactive audiences. Motivation for this enquiry was derived from themes discussed in Chapter 2.4 and Chapter 3.4. The second subsection focuses on the major threats fan vloggers present to South Africa's sports journalism sector. Motivation for this enquiry was derived from themes discussed in Chapters 2.5, 2.6.2 and Chapter 3.2. Thirdly a discussion about how journalism practices could lead toward improved co-existence between the industry and fans is offered. This subsection was motivated by referring to themes mentioned in Chapter 2.7.3 and Chapter 3.5.

Clarification was offered for the identification of one of the media publications, which although spelt differently, are the same entity. *SA Rugbymag* (See image 5.2) is the official name of the printed publication while SA Rugby Magazine is the official spelling of that publication's website and social media channels (Keohane, 2021). The latter will be used for this study since this researcher is mainly focused on their online platforms.

5.1.2 Method B

Method B is led by a participant observation or Engaged Data Operation (Kozinets, 2020:136) stance and discusses possible benefits that came from incorporating vlogging on YouTube into mainstream sports journalism during the 2019 Rugby World Cup. The structure of the findings in this section was derived from themes discussed in Chapter 2.7.4 of the literature review and Chapter 3.3 of the theoretical framework. As mentioned in Chapter 4.4.3, two videos (video 1 and video 2) were purposively selected to observe and thus illustrate how sports journalists have incorporated forms of vlogging into their mainstream reports. The general aim was to ascertain what value vlogging offered mainstream sports journalism.

Fan vlogging has become increasingly normalised within the journalism profession and society at large, which adds to the complexity of this popular form of virtual communication. Vlogging, like its predecessor blogging, was a practice first popularised by niche users (such as sports fans), which later resulted in the general public, corporations and mainstream journalists developing forms of fan vlogging for their agendas. Subsequent enforcement of social distancing and Covid-19 related lockdowns, soon after the 2019 Rugby World Cup, further encouraged practices such as video conferencing and essentially vlogging, which illustrates how fast fan vlogging has evolved and become a more interrelated part of culture.

As noted by Kozinets (2020:97-98), the combination of video-blogging or vlogging on YouTube “is currently highly influential” and encompasses numerous industries that attract “large audiences and lucrative promotion deals from major brands.” Chapter 2.7.2 differentiated vlogging from the videos produced by mainstream media whereby, for instance, vlogging encourages frank feedback in the comment section, while mainstream media appears to be closing down online feedback options. Traditionally sports vlogs were popularised by fans using web cameras and later handheld devices (such as a smartphone or a GoPro), from a makeshift studio, then uploading often unedited content onto the Internet or YouTube. The opposite could be argued for mainstream media who conventionally relied on entities such as a professional camera crew, technical operators, post-production editing and filming shows at a television studio with the aim of that content airing on daytime television during a set out time.

The netnography aimed to illustrate how mainstream reporters increasingly incorporate vlogging into their work routines. One participant in one of the selected videos was interviewed to gain further insight into why vlogging became so important for mainstream media and ultimately ascertain what benefits were derived thereof.

5.2 Online interviews – Method A

5.2.1 General changes to sports reporting caused by smartphones and social media (RQ 1)

In line with sentiments around technological determinism theory, discussed in Chapter 3, all participants (Del Carme, 2021; Hendricks, 2021; Keohane, 2021; Le Roux, 2021; Louw, 2021; Mnganga, 2021; Van Staden, 2021; Xabanisa, 2021) noted how the multifunction capabilities of their networked devices contributed toward immediacy and convenience in how they do their work. Hendricks (2021), a sports journalist for Radio Sonder Grense with 17 years of industry experience, said that technological innovation has significantly impacted his routine. Hendricks (2021) explained that:

It's an asset. I can now be at a media briefing, I can be at a sports game, I can do interviews, I can edit it on my phone, I can have it in the studio, within two minutes after doing that interview... Before the advent of the smartphone, you had a big microphone, you had to do recordings on there, go into the studio, edit in the studio. And by the time your story gets out, it's a day after the match took place... When I started journalism in the mid-2000s, everybody wanted to work at newspapers and I wanted to work for *Sports Illustrated*... Technology has changed so much and the cell phone has contributed towards that, that it basically killed newspapers and magazines. Now we are talking about things like TikTok, Instagram Live and Facebook Live. One of our stories at a sporting event or a media conference is my Twitter feed, where you tweet developing stories and people follow that. That didn't exist when I started... I can't see myself doing my job without a cell phone.

Keohane (2021) further noted how the device has reduced media production costs, while Van Staden (2021), a multimedia journalist for Netwerk24, added that during major tournaments like the Rugby World Cup, the smartphones helped to create content such as text, images and

videos, hereby offering perspective directly from within the stadium. Louw (2021), a broadcast journalist for SuperSport and Eyewitness News, said that even though the smartphone has made a positive impact on her work routine, it has however increased the general workload. Louw (2021) explained that:

In terms of my job, I think it's made it easier and harder at the same time – because you can tweet, Instagram and Facebook from your phone it's expected of you to do that along with your normal duties like watching the game, reporting on it, and attending the press conferences etc. But at the same time, it's made all this possible. It gives the viewer and listener access as they've never had before and that's a privilege to share from my position

Aligned with the popularity of networked devices within the mediated sports ecosystem is the corresponding growth and functionality of social media platforms utilised specifically for the Rugby World Cup. Most of the respondents (Keohane, 2021; Le Roux, 2021; Louw, 2021; Mnganga, 2021; Van Staden, 2021;) experienced direct changes to their work routines during the Rugby World Cup, due to the continued influence of social media. Keohane (2021), a sports journalist for the past 33 years who was directly involved with implementing digital media strategies into the work routines of several publications such as SA Rugby Magazine, IOL Sport and Keo.co.za, said:

Social media has overtaken traditional media as the daily medium for the average supporter and casual consumer of online content, so the traditional media must learn from this casual consumer and incorporate that into the planning and content creation. I was head of Independent Media Sport in 2019 and responsible for the content planning and implementation around the 2019 RWC. My planning focused heavily on the need for video and visual content, with myself and all those involved in the daily content creation process, and this included 30-second clips, 60-second clips and YouTube longer version offering.

South Africa's pay-TV broadcaster, DSTV, who owned the rights to showcase the 2019 Rugby World Cup also made social media a priority, as this helped to target specific audiences and remain on par with general trends. Louw (2021) explained that:

SuperSport, being one of the main broadcasters for the tournament, had staff in Japan and South Africa. To accommodate the younger, less traditional viewer we hosted a show called In Touch during the tournament, where we would share and talk about social media content and have interviews with relevant players. The show was streamed live on YouTube and our social media channels. We also had a dedicated social media team, which was a newish addition to the traditional broadcast, there was a specific focus placed on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook content during the ‘normal’ broadcast on television.

It was established that there is a growing demand for on-camera reporting and visual content in general, which is in part driven by the high usage of digital technologies. Mnganga (2021), a multimedia sports journalist for Eyewitness News, said that the current demand for video and visual content meant that she had to explore other avenues to create content for audiences, who want additional stories and not just the outcome of games or the content being published by players themselves. Mnganga (2021), noted that:

We never got a chance to go to Japan for the World Cup. So in a way, we made the fans the centre of our content in terms of the on-camera stuff that we did. So we're going to the fan zones, we're getting vox pops from people reflecting on the results, them speaking about who their favourite players were... Because the players themselves have the platform to do their (journalists) jobs, we now have to find the exclusive story by telling different parts of them that maybe they don't show themselves... So we went to [Springbok player] Makazole Mapimi's hometown, we spoke to his grandmother in a very, very rural area. So yes, this guy may be at the top of the world. But this is his life, the one that he doesn't show you... Social media has created space for us to do more in-depth stories because now you get to reveal who the person is

Louw (2021) agreed and said that on-camera reporting is as important as ever since audiences can easily identify and connect with the journalist, which over time can lead to a relationship being formed and trust being established. Le Roux (2021), a sports journalist for the past 11 years who worked for Radio 2000 and SAFM during the tournament, explained that:

On camera reporting has become huge since most people access content from their social media and most people will rather watch videos rather than just audio. So it's journalists need to diversify themselves. Unless you are incredibly skilled in for example writing or being on the radio, you need to be able to do as much as possible because media organisations worldwide are cutting their budgets. Their reporters need to do online, on camera, radio and news writing.

Although most reporters said social media had a major effect on their work routines, Xabanisa (2021), who has 21 years of experience as a sports journalist, and worked for *City Press* and *New Frame* during the tournament, said that he did not feel pressured to make any changes to his work routine despite the general rise in social media usage. Xabanisa (2021) explained that:

Written content is now seen as the archaic version of news consumption. But people like what they like. Some people like to read other people like to watch things and other people like to listen. There is a market for whatever people prefer, or however people prefer to consume the news... When people talk about digital journalism you get this constant barrage, it must be 350 to 400 words long, because people don't read anymore. I don't buy it, it just means that you are officially saying your readers are stupid... The whole idea that everything is changed so much that everyone has to change with it. I feel it's a bit ludicrous and one size fits all.

These sentiments were shared by Del Carme (2021), a sportswriter with 27 years of journalism experience, who wrote for publications such as the *Sunday Times* and *Times Live*, explained that even though he recognises the rise in social media usage, he was not expected to make adjustments to his regular work routine. Del Carme (2021) said:

I was a little surprised that they didn't sort of make more requests in terms of getting video content. I got to do my job in the old-fashioned way, just focus on the things I needed to and angles I wanted to explore. So there wasn't a huge shift in my office, in the way they reacted to what market forces are dictating.

Some respondents (Del Carme, 2021; Keohane, 2021; Le Roux, 2021; Xabanisa, 2021) said that journalism practices differentiated reporters from online audiences who are capable of

producing and distributing their own sports news. Ethical journalism practices were noted as a concept lacking in terms of how some vloggers create sports content. Xabanisa (2021) added that:

The one thing that is going to take journalism forward, is actual journalism. Picking up the phone, finding out what really happened. Going back to sources, to confirm the story. Knowing what you can and cannot print. Knowing that you can only print what you can prove. The basics of journalism become much more important... So it's one of the great ironies that going forward, journalism's unique selling point, is actually journalism. Because there's so much narrative doing rounds at moment, the attempt to get to the bottom of the truth is kind of second or third on the priority list. The most important thing has become, what is my opinion on this?

Similar sentiments were shared by Del Carme (2021) who stated that even though sports fans are capable of producing mediated sports, concepts such as accountability and adhering to a press code, building long-term relationships with sources and gaining industry experience to speak with authority were some variables that favour professional reporters. Le Roux (2021) noted that the production of quality and at times exclusive content, could ensure that journalists remain trustworthy irrespective of digitisation trends. Keohane (2021) said:

There are opinions and informed opinions. Fans have always had opinions and they now have a greater voice because of social media, but these fans still want a credible source and that is the role those of us in the traditional media can still play, which is to give that fan an opinion based on interviews, inside information, integrity and with sound information. Fans vent and the mainstream media can provide the balance to this emotional outpouring. Accuracy and research remain fundamental in mainstream media and these are elements that are often lacking on social media

5.2.2 Perceived threats of fan vloggers toward the sports journalism occupation (RQ 2)

In terms of possible threats, Keohane (2021) and Louw (2021) believe fan vloggers do not pose any major concerns to South Africa's sports journalism occupation. Van Staden (2021) concurred and said that he does not perceive fan vloggers as threats to the journalism occupation, but thought at times the content created by vloggers does not offer a holistic view

since their access to inside information may be limited. Despite an assortment of online content producers, Van Staden (2021) said “mainstream news is still the go-to for most sports fans”. Corresponding with the gatekeeping theory and especially its subset gatebouncing discussed in Chapter 3.2, Le Roux (2021) said:

Anybody can do it [create online sports news], but that doesn't necessarily mean that everybody will be taken seriously. I do find that if you are busy creating content that is either not good or just completely inaccurate, the fans/public will call you out on that quickly and you will not be taken seriously. So it's not too much of a concern, but people can drive their own agenda. But again, people will be able to call you out quickly and those people don't have a very long “career” as a sports pundit or sports vlogger.

Del Carme (2021), Hendricks (2021), Mnganga (2021), Xabanisa (2021) however noted concerns within the sports journalism profession due to the fast pace at which information is being distributed online. Hendricks (2021) said the trend of trying to break news presents dangers to the industry and explained that:

The need to be first is something that has come along with this culture of the Internet, media and social media that you know, people want to be first and that can be detrimental sometimes, because what if you are first but you are wrong. And that for me is something that I'm wary of. I don't mind being second as long as I've got my facts straight that I got it from a reputable source.

Xabanisa (2021) added that he does not necessarily consider fan vloggers a threat but cautions against the trend of individuals distributing sensationalism or politically motivated narratives online without offering context or sticking to facts.

With respect to existing competition between sports fan vloggers and sports journalists, whereby fans report directly from their YouTube channels, most respondents, (Del Carme, 2021; Keohane, 2021; Le Roux, 2021; Van Staden, 2021; Xabanisa, 2021) encourage the competition and believe that, given the various social media capabilities, sports fans were at liberty to be involved in the mediated sports environment, whereby they offer diverse

opinions and can engage in dialogue with one another. Xabanisa (2021) said that “everything is competition, content is competition” and further emphasised that:

Journalism for me is governed by one thing, are you going to tell your audience something today that they didn't know before they started reading, watching or listening to you. And if you are, then good luck to you, you deserve everything that's coming to you. If you're not, sorry, you've got to go back to the drawing board and find out what it is that you're not doing.

Hendricks (2021) noted how social media platforms are geared toward promoting certain topics with a high volume of clicks or shares, which can prove to be misleading. Hendricks (2021) explained that:

It's part and parcel of the advent of social media. You're not going to start a blog, you're not going to start something on social media and only 10 people are able to see it. You obviously going to want traction and there are mechanisms in place that people use, they [can pay to] boost their posts for more people to see. They also use very sensational headlines to attract more clickbait. So I think that's another sad part of the industry.

Louw (2021) and Mnganga (2021) said that even though they welcomed competition from the interactive audience, they felt that the rise in user-generated sports content was partly driven by how the industry presently operates. Louw (2021) for instance highlighted how traditional broadcasters could aim to make sports content more accessible to South Africans by stating that:

No competition, no progress. We are in a new era in the media/broadcasting space and we all still need to figure out how to balance all the content and new platforms out there. I do however believe that the traditional broadcasters need to incorporate more of the accessible streaming platforms (especially in a country like South Africa, where there are so many different income streams etc), but at the same time because there's so much out there – surely there is a place for everyone?

While Mnganga (2021) said that technological innovation is not only allowing for more competition but is blurring the lines between who can perform tasks formally reserved for professional sports journalists. Mnganga (2021) explained that:

It's very hard to justify, for a lot of media companies, why they should be spending money for someone to go watch a football game or a rugby game, and then come back to write a match report, when they literally can get someone who's maybe an intern to just watch the game on TV... So it is a threat to journalism because all the things that were exclusively done in this industry can be accessed by just about everybody. I'm also of the firm belief that fans aren't just people who sit passively watching the game. These are people that are reading the news about who their clubs are buying, they're buying whatever shirts and apparel their teams are producing. So it all works together to build sports up. But unfortunately, journalism will be the one that suffers.

As discussed in Chapter 2, online fan commentary has become a dynamic phenomenon that adds to the challenges of being a sports journalist. Due to the toxic nature of many of the comments seen online half of the respondents (Hendricks, 2021; Louw, 2021; Le Roux, 2021; Xabanisa, 2021) highlighted that they make a priority of ignoring negative responses even though one is likely to come across them. Louw (2021) for instance said:

It will always sting a bit, especially if you've had a bad day and you know you could've done better during a broadcast. Keyboard warriors tend to just be there in their negativity all time, so I just ignore it. The irony is if you meet some of these people in real life, they will never say it, it's only because of the protection of their screens. So, I just ignore it, as a sportsperson would someone shouting at them from the sidelines.

Le Roux (2021) said that social media comments tend to "be bias" and has become a space where "it's often people getting rid of their frustrations so it's not something that I am engaged in too much". While Xabanisa (2021) shared similar sentiments, adding that media companies sometimes encourage journalists to utilise popular social media accounts so that fans can interact with them around their work. Xabanisa (2021) explained that:

When I started working at *City Press*, they asked me if I had a Twitter account and I said, No, I didn't. They said, well, could you have one because we want to cross-reference your stories so that people can know how to interact with you... I'm happy without necessarily needing to justify myself on Twitter... I have no real interest in engaging people [Online]. Some of them are rational people. And there are no issues but, by and large, it's people that come in hot... Then you having to put up with, being called names, being called useless at what you do. It's not fun. The easiest way to react is not to react.

Hendricks (2021), Keohane (2021), Van Staden (2021) all suggested forms of regulating or employing gatekeeping functions to better manage online comments. Van Staden (2021) said, "It's horrible when fans post harmful comments on social media. They should have their accounts suspended". Keohane (2021) mentioned that:

It has to be constantly monitored but until there is a legal consequence and ownership of social media identities it will remain a problem. We [Independent Online, SA Rugby Magazine] had strict social media monitors in place and we also had a strict comments policy on platforms like Facebook.

Hendricks (2021) believes that the fast pace at which comments are created and uploaded may be contributing toward the negativity seen online and noted that:

I tend to stay away from getting involved in negative online commentary because it's not constructive... I would caution especially fans to use it very carefully... Remember columns in the newspaper in the 90s and 2000s? People that wrote to those papers, were critical, but they thought about what they were saying and said it in a way that is different to most of the comments seen on social media.

Le Roux (2021) also suggested that stricter consequences need to be implemented for users online, but added that "unfortunately it's part of what we have to deal with" and said, "there is not too much that I can do to change that sort of conversations". Del Carme (2021) and Mnganga (2021) also highlighted the need for improved forms of gatekeeping but said that they viewed the diversity of online comments as a result of how social media platforms function. Del Carme (2021) explained that journalists' work is bound to be scrutinised since

it is out in the public domain and while public discourse can be toxic, he says media organisations pursue stories “that they know will get people clicking” because it drives up traffic. Mnganga (2021) said that even though the culture of racist abuse online, not only toward journalists but athletes as well is problematic, online comments can serve a purpose and explained that:

Hateful commentary is not necessarily a bad thing for some clubs. I think they'd rather have the hateful commentary knowing that people are watching the games and are aware of what the players are doing than players playing badly and no one cares. But I think for some teams and some players, they'd rather get some negativity than no attention at all.

5.2.3 Potential for co-existence of fan vloggers and working sports journalists (RQ 3)

In line with the public sphere theory, Keohane (2021), Mnganga (2021), Louw (2021) and Le Roux (2021) said that vloggers certainly offered value for sports journalists during the 2019 Rugby World Cup and felt that lessons could be learned from interactive audiences who create quality work. Keohane (2021) explained that:

I have observed fan vlogging done better and with greater insight than some of the so-called mainstream and professional outlets. There is a lot to be learned from fan vlogging in what speaks to the audience and it also personally guards against a sense of preciousness in one's content creation. Mainstream and traditional media often operate in a vacuum. Social media no longer allows for this.

Mnganga (2021) said that the amount of supporter content shared online and sent in by audiences were useful for Eyewitness News' social media channels, which in turn enhanced the company's online pages. Louw (2021) added that:

I have the utmost respect for people who consistently produce quality content because it is a whole job on its own. I think it's important that companies/broadcasters, etc, who are new to the social media space (which in South Africa I think we all are still to an extent) utilise these skills sets and acknowledge that it's a job on its own... Because the RWC was in a completely foreign country like Japan where we don't

know the culture and traditions, the people [active audiences] that were there gave us insight into all of this. Fan vloggers were extremely valuable as this led to collaborations that helped with coverage in South Africa and of the Rugby World Cup as a whole.

Del Carme (2021), Van Staden (2021) and Xabanisa (2021) all mentioned the vlogger discussed in Chapter 2.7.4, and said that Squidge Rugby was a useful platform to gain forms of infotainment, angles for stories and a different perspective. However, while respondents acknowledged that vloggers did offer value for working sports journalists, Van Staden (2021) said that sports journalists, in turn, offered value for vloggers:

I even interviewed Squidge for *Rapport* newspaper. They definitely add value, but as I said, vloggers and journalists are not mutually exclusive. Quite the contrary. Where do you think many of these vloggers get the news they use for their content? News and opinion should not be confused. Vloggers give opinion and analysis – sometimes they try their hand at news, but they'll usually have access to the news later than accredited journalists. Journalists' opinion also carries weight because readers know they work with news first.

Hendricks (2021) had similar views and said that even though he acknowledges that fan vloggers added value, especially for entertainment purposes for their followers or forms of lifestyle reporting on game day, he, however, said that there are still some areas of sports reporting or sports analysis that should only be done by experienced professionals. Hendricks (2021) added that he welcomed the idea of fans phoning into a radio station and sharing their views on air.

In terms of whether boundaries still exist between fan vloggers and mainstream media, most respondents (Del Carme, 2021; Keohane, 2021; Le Roux, 2021; Louw, 2021) believe that even though social media allows for more fans to participate in the co-creation of sports news, boundaries are still present and necessary. Le Roux (2021) said that while lines are being blurred, having certain obligations to an organisation can differentiate individuals:

There are probably sports journalists who seem more like fans and there are fans producing quality work, sometimes better than a lot of sports journalists. The

boundaries are blurred, but in a way, I think they are still there because you as a sports journalist, will have a company or publication backing you. Which is one of the key differences. If you create something inaccurate then there will be certain consequences, which fans do not have, so they can be freer in what they produce.

Louw (2021) said that even though input from the public is important, as in most other professional occupations, there are however criteria that need to be adhered to:

The boundaries are blurry with social media, but it is important that they are still there. A journalist's job is to report the facts and be unbiased. I do believe the public should have input in what gets put out there, but it's a fine line. Journalists, producers, and editors are trained in what they do, it's their job. They have certain skill sets that make them experts in what they do, just like an accountant or mechanic.

Mnganga (2021), Van Staden (2021) and Xabanisa (2021) had similar views in that they believe sports fans should have a more prominent voice within mainstream sports news. Mnganga (2021) said:

I do agree that they [fan vloggers] do need to play more prominent roles, even if they're not necessarily doing it every time. I think there should be as much time and space given to fans to vent their views because ultimately, when fans get to speak out, that creates more interest in a team and it gets more engagement.

Van Staden (2021) agreed and said that "When we see a vlogger or Tweeter or fan with special knowledge, we invite them to write for *Rapport*. Or we interview them as they are an important part of the sports media space." While Xabanisa (2021) added that fans should be more involved in mainstream sports reports but only if their involvement enhances content and if fans have relevant background knowledge. Xabanisa (2021) emphasised that:

It's an ecosystem and everyone has a place in that ecosystem. As long as boundaries don't get eroded to the point where people think they are something they are not. As a journalist, I cannot think I'm a coach because I'm not. As a journalist, I cannot think I'm a player because I'm not. So I need to respect that and to write about it respectfully, the same thing with fans.

Furthermore, to improve co-existence within the industry, between mainstream reporters and fan vloggers, most respondents (Del Carme, 2021; Hendricks, 2021; Keohane, 2021; Le Roux, 2021; Louw, 2021; Mnganga, 2021; Van Staden, 2021 and Xabanisa, 2021) recommended qualities that could improve the status of vlogging in South Africa. Qualities such as having respect, being professional, accurate, consistent and showing empathy were pointed out. Don't get personal was the advice to online sports fans from Keohane (2021) and Mnganga (2021). While Hendricks (2021) reiterated:

If they want to do something good stop chasing clicks. I know within a time of likes and retweets and stuff like that and then also do some research and put some meat on your stories and stop giving us opinion pieces about a bad player and about the referee who didn't know what he was doing. And also what I find in the few that I have watched is that they don't answer the why question in journalism. So if you are saying that the referee is bad, why are you saying the referee is bad? Or is it because he made a mistake? Is it because he blew against your team? Is it because you don't like a certain player? And once you ask the why question you'll see that a lot of the opinions online lack substance.

Le Roux (2021) also suggested mechanisms that could improve the culture of fan vlogging and said:

It is ultimately the public that decides whether someone will make it or not so if you are constantly putting out really good content, people will respond to that in a really good way. If you are constantly driving a certain agenda, you might get a following from similar minded people, but the general public may not respond too well. So quality content, not always chasing exclusives, creating good angles. It is not easy to get into sports journalism nowadays, for this very reason, there's so much content, you are competing with a lot of quality journalists for very few positions. They try to make the most of one person. So diversify, write quality pieces, do on-camera pieces, do audio links, and get your name out there.

5.3 Netnography – Method B

5.3.1 What benefits did the practice of fan vlogging offer mainstream sports reporting during the 2019 Rugby World Cup? (RQ 4)

In line with insights from field theory discussed in Chapter 3, this section aims to ascertain possible benefits or capital gained by sports journalists from incorporating fan vlogging, with a particular focus on the final 2019 Rugby World Cup match. This researcher purposively analysed the work routines of South African sports journalists, to illustrate how mainstream media content was produced similarly to that of fan vloggers.

Below are two sections, one for each of the two videos, that offer an overview of the findings, which emerged from the netnography. Within these subsections, details and a synopsis, online fan comments, mainstream reporter feedback and researcher observations are provided. As mentioned in chapter 1.5.3, this study is informed by Simon McEnnis (2017) who explored the attitude of sports journalists in the United Kingdom toward fan bloggers. McEnnis (2017:556) subsequently recognised two overarching themes when he found that fan bloggers were seen as “complementary” and “competitive”. While those findings were not identical to the findings of this chapter, some similarities were noted, which encouraged this researcher to utilise the same overarching themes in addressing RQ4.

This netnography found that the practice of fan vlogging corresponds with or complements the manner in which sports journalists presently report the news. For example, at previous Rugby World Cups, far less forms of fan vlogging were witnessed within mainstream media, however, at the most recent tournament this was not the case. Fan vlogging can hence be considered as a *zeitgeist* phenomenon within the field of sports journalism as it has become a relatively common practice that matches the age of digitisation. Fan vlogging is also considered as competitive because adopting fan vlogging has evidently allowed sports journalists to better connect with audiences and compete more directly with other working journalists and the active audience, to ultimately achieve a bigger for market share. These two overarching themes (complementary and competitive) are exemplified further below:

5.3.2 Video 1: RWC Daily

5.3.2.1 Details and synopsis

Time of writing: 23 July 2021

Title: ENG v RSA - THE FINAL! | RWC Daily | Ep44

YouTube URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TxqoQA2vr74>

Date uploaded: 3 November 2019

Views: 197,917 views

Likes: 2200

Dislikes: 157

Total comments: 295

Running time: 07:59



Image 5.1 - An example of how fan vlogging is used in mainstream sports reporting

In Video 1, snippets of the build-up, final game and medal ceremony are compressed into a lively 8-minute multimedia show. The addition of vox pops before and after the game, offer viewers a better sense of the public's reaction to what they saw and felt. The video ends with

a closing vlog, similar to a digital diary entry, during the medal ceremony where an emotional Elma Smit offers a round-up of the entire tournament.

5.3.2.2 Online fan reaction

According to Kozinets (2020:228), although blogs and vlogs can offer important information for a netnographer, “the posts, comments, and replies on these blogs or vlogs tend to be of greater interest...there is interaction, language, cultural exchange, emotion, and the potential for communal types or relations”. Therefore, a purposive sample of 7 comments was extracted to offer a general idea of how the video was received by the online community.

The comments are listed in no particular order while virtual user names have been included for authenticity. Emoticon symbols were also included, which offers a better idea of the culture of communication and expression. There are also examples of Afrikaans words, exemplifying how several languages are used within this community. Responses from opposing supporters were also included for diversity. Since Video 1 is posted after the final game, emotive responses were prevalent throughout the comment section, however, for this section, the focus is on the responses toward the work done by the journalist and not exclusively on the outcome of the match. The observed insights offered a common narrative about how vlogging added value to the way in which the event was covered.

1. NOEL LE

Elma thank you for a wonderful program and bringing the spirit of the tournament into our homes!! I have not enjoyed anything like this since London Olympics 2012!! ps. Congrats on the win!!!

2. Ikan Goren

Thank you Elma for your fabulous coverage of this Rugby World Cup. Heart, Humour and Honour, you encapsulate this magnificent sport. This Rugby World Cup felt like a Cinderella story and you were the right person in the right place to bring it to the world. The Bokke were sublime and Siya a Lion! From a Kiwi living in OZ

3. Sid Snot

I really enjoyed the world Cup daily - good light hearted videos that were well produced and fun to watch 🤔🤔 P.S - I'm still 🤔🤔 about the final result.

<p>4. PhotonHasNoMass Takayuki</p> <p>Elma Smit and staffs with her, your efforts paid off at the end. Congratulations for team South Africa. For team of this channel ,thank you for uploading very exciting videos everyday for more than a month. Farewell and see you again in France.</p>
<p>5. Kels Oha</p> <p>What a journey and experience this RWC has been!! Unforgettable. Thanks Elma and the team for these vids, they were AWESOME!!!! Congrats to the Springboks from NZ!</p>
<p>6. Johan Jacobs</p> <p>Thanks for your videos. Elma. Your camera angles where spot on. I could feel the emotion in the videos Baie dankie.</p>
<p>7. Michael Beyers</p> <p>I've thoroughly enjoyed these RWC Daily episodes. Elma and the team did an outstanding job at producing very entertaining segments. It's awesome to see how her career has progressed since her days in the Supersport studio.</p>

Table 5.1 – Responses taken from video 1's comment section on YouTube

5.3.2.3 Reporter feedback

Virtual requests were sent to Elma Smit to gain her insight into the possible benefits of fan vlogging during the world cup. No response was received.

5.3.2.4 Researcher observations

Guided by the literature review, theoretical assumptions and research methodology, the netnographic findings revealed how vlogging allowed sports journalists to integrate a relatively new form of reporting into their work, which helped them achieve various corporate and social aims. In line with the netnographic data analysis process mentioned in Chapter 4.5.2, two overarching themes namely, complementary and competitive, are identified in no particular order below:

Complementary – Netnographic findings highlighted how fan vlogging has become an accepted, at times expected, method of content production within mainstream sports journalism, which increasingly corresponds with industry norms.

1. As shown in Video 1, fan vlogging has become an additional form of sports reporting that complements how news is traditionally created. In this instance, vlogging offered reporter coverage that could be considered as told from the fans' perspective. Handheld vlogger footage (see image 5.1) is combined with conventional industry practices such as the use of multiple cameras, videography and post-production video editing. Incorporating fan vlogging brought a sense of innovation to the traditional style of sports reporting offered by mainstream broadcasters and allowed the sports reporter to be part of a popular cultural practice that is becoming increasingly common.
2. The familiarity of using multimedia tools and working on television helps the presenter incorporate handheld piece-to-camera reporting, or fan vlogging, that has become synonymous with user-generated content. Experience in sports broadcasting and knowledge of the game contribute toward the series' final video being more engaging and entertaining. Therefore, journalism experience, particularly in sports broadcasting, combined with fan vlogging benefited the final video product.
3. Vlog footage before the match, on-field and near sports celebrities such as Springbok players Cheslin Kolbe and Siya Kolisi, highlights the exclusivity (exclusive access offered to certain personnel) of Video 1 hereby differentiating the show's content from the work of fans. This type of exclusivity is often seen by mainstream broadcasting corporations who have signed television rights deals with the organisers of sports tournaments. This differentiation is important as it highlights some of the barriers that still exist between journalists and fans, despite the rise in digitisation.
4. Metrics from YouTube offer useful data such as viewer numbers, sharing ratios, likes and dislikes, which have become valuable for assessing the popularity and social success of online content, that ultimately has the potential of being monetised.

Competitive – Netnographic findings highlight how fan vlogging led to mainstream journalists adopting a relatively new form of reporting that resulted in entertaining and compelling content that can remain online indefinitely.

1. Midway through Video 1, Elma Smit is seen crying as she walks from the stands and on-field, which highlights how vlogs can capture and add real-life intimacy to sports reports. Close-up footage of Smit expressing emotions such as suspense, drama, tension and elation during the match offer significant entertainment value for an organisation such as World Rugby, which can essentially resonate with audiences.
2. Due to the competitive nature of professional broadcasting, especially within sports whereby audiences are often spoilt for choice when it comes to digital content, the practice of fan vlogging offered action-style elements to Video 1. These exciting elements often made Video 1 more competitive, or more attention-grabbing, in comparison to content created by interactive audiences.
3. The phenomenal abilities of networked devices in combination with social media sites like YouTube has made fan vlogging a practical yet effective solution to reach audiences who may not have access to satellite television. At the time of writing, Video 1 was viewed around 200 000 times and it continues to create meaning for audiences since it remains accessible online.
4. The comment section has become a popular space within sports reporting and as listed above, the varied comments offer creators of content direct and diverse insight from the general public who are themselves engaged by the phenomenon of online comments. Online comments have in recent years been closed by mainstream media due to the frank or even toxic type of discussions, however, the opposite is true for vlogs, whereby audience responses are encouraged.
5. Associated with Video 1 and Video 2 are the easy-to-use features such as rewind or fast-forward, being able to minimise or enlarge the screen or tube and offering viewers access to a systematic archive of content results in a platform like YouTube being a dynamic media 2.0 experience. Uploading content, such as vlogs, has become relatively simple with the critique of that content often coming from audiences as opposed to a press ombudsman. Free access to features such as video analytics can also help YouTubers understand video consumption and formulate their brand strategies. These considerations are important as it partly encourages more vlogs to be uploaded, which contributes toward the growth of the 24-hour sports news cycle.

5.3.3 Video 2: The Breakdown with Ryan and Craig

Ryan Vrede and Craig Lewis are senior South African sports journalists who often report on rugby related news for *SA Rugby mag* and SA Rugby Magazine. Both reporters were involved in the creation of a vlog series, made for SA Rugby Magazine's YouTube channel. Ryan Vrede was interviewed, due to his involvement in the implementation of the publication's digital strategy, and offered his insights in section 5.3.3.3 below.

5.3.3.1 Details and synopsis

Time of writing: 23 July 2021

Title: The Boks must be ambitious

YouTube URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RALdN4MVB6s>

Date uploaded: 31 October 2019

Views: 8 959

Likes: 110

Dislikes: 7

Total comments: 62

Running time: 16:58



Image 5.2 – Screenshot of how vlogging practices are incorporated in video 2

This specific episode of The Breakdown with Ryan and Craig formed part of a series of productions done specifically for web television and was uploaded onto YouTube two days before the final match. The video series was generally done in a vlogger-style approach to cater for the growing interactive audience was an additional contribution to SA Rugby Magazine's 2019 Rugby World Cup coverage. In Video 2, the reporters discussed in-depth concepts relating to the strategy implemented by the Springboks, such as player selection and coaching, to predict the outcome of the final match.

5.3.3.2 Online fan reaction

As above, 7 comments are purposively extracted to illustrate the type of feedback received by the online community. In this instance, more dialogue is focused on reporter analysis, than the video itself because most of the online comments were around the former. As pointed out in Comment 4, follow up comments were evident while direct, sometimes explicit debates between fans and toward the journalist's opinions were also noted.

<p>1. mnnh1</p> <p>Ryan's analysis, and I'm watching this after the final, was absolutely spot on. SA dominated England at the gain line and took away England's entire attacking platform and were able to dominate them. Also England were not able to sustain that level back to back into the final.</p>
<p>2. Justin Watermeyer</p> <p>Guys, if we're watching a highlights clip with Craig commentating, don't cut away to a shot of Craig sitting in a chair. Just show the close up of the highlights.</p>
<p>3. lukhanyo sodladla</p> <p>I agree with you Craig, #10 needs to do more jeeez!!! besides his kicking there is nothing else he offers and that's really bad, #15 is trash..</p>
<p>4.Ven One</p> <p>They definitely don't have the Best squad at the world cup. Only when the ice begins to melt, only after this you will see Real Quality South African Teams being produced, with Rugby, from Prop all throughout until the Fullback, the reserves and all the staff will be TOP NOTCH. Cannot wait for those times ahead.</p> <p>4.1 Ven One</p> <p>As for this video, get organized guys, get professional, don't use a laptop to present a video. SMH</p>
<p>5. Brian Wilson</p> <p>Guys many thanks for the interesting discussion. There is however one aspect of both England and Wales that concerns me and that is their ability to rip the ball from their opposition during open play. I would be interested in receiving some comments from others in this regard.</p>
<p>6. THEREAL 808RSA</p> <p>What do you mean they don't have the best squad??? Lol geez Ryan</p>
<p>7. Leon van Rooyen</p> <p>Play the English winger getting hunted down by the AB flank. Not going to happen if Mapimpi or Kolbe get the ball. Boks by 9.</p>

Table 5.2 – Responses taken from Video 2's comment section

5.3.3.3 Reporter feedback

To gain further insight around RQ4, an interview was conducted with Ryan Vrede. 3 subsequent semi-structured interview questions were posed and are briefly answered below:

1. What were some of the main motivations to create vlogs throughout the 2019 Rugby World Cup?

The commercial appeal that fan vlogging offered was a key component for incorporating this practice into SA Rugby Magazine's digital strategy. Vrede (2021) explained that "for our sales team to sell a product like that was easy for them." Automobile firm Suzuki signed a "massive deal with SA Rugby magazine" in exchange for advertising on platforms such as their YouTube channel. "Any business has to think of their commercial reality as a starting point and that was one of the main drivers. There is no SA Rugby Magazine if there is no money, it's actually as blunt as that."

In terms of the Rugby World Cup, Vrede (2021) said that they aimed to cover the tournament "in the most comprehensive way", which meant extending reporting from the magazine and website to various social media platforms. Vrede (2021) added that the practice of vlogging on YouTube was strategically used to reach a wider audience and that "people are generally more responsive to video content." Through the use of vlogging, The Breakdown with Ryan and Craig allowed for broader discussions around trending topics throughout the 6-week tournament.

2. Did the behaviour of the active audience play any role in motivating SA Rugby Magazine to create vlogs?

Vrede (2021) says that the audience was not "front in mind" in the creation of fan vlogs, however, he added that "we don't live in a bubble" and that they (SA Rugby Magazine) were fully aware of the increase in consumption and production of online rugby content. Vlog creation was thus "absolutely influenced by the culture of how people consume content."

Despite the awareness of the interactive audience, journalistic integrity and accumulated insider knowledge of the sport remains fundamental in distinguishing mainstream vlogs from

vlogs created by fans. Vrede (2021) explained that as a publication we've got to be aware of audience behaviour, acknowledge that video is currently a popular form of reporting and from these insights, we aimed to create "a product that has a unique SA Rugby DNA".

3. Are there any fan vloggers that you followed during the World Cup, who may have offered practical benefits for your journalistic work?

According to Vrede (2021):

The short answer is no. During the World Cup, we were entirely focused on what we wanted to achieve from a video content perspective. That doesn't mean that we weren't looking for inspiration to make our product better, but none of that inspiration came from rugby vloggers in particular. We cast our eyes a little bit wider and looked at sports shows generally, because I think there is a common thread that runs through them all, that makes them watchable and entertaining. In fact, there were very few rugby vloggers who were captivating, there were good ones, but it wasn't something that we looked at specifically.

Vrede (2021) added that they concentrated on shows such as ESPN's First Take and the work of Shannon Sharpe and Skip Bayless on Fox's sports network. "We looked at American and Australian sports shows and tried to use that as a platform from which we worked."

5.3.3.4 Researcher observations

As done in 5.3.5 and in line with RQ 4, some of the main observed benefits of fan vlogging in Video 2 are narrated below:

Complementary

1. In Video 2, both reporters are experienced journalists who could use their industry knowledge to offer analysis of the tournament in what is generally considered a fan vlogger format, before and after individual World Cup games. Journalism practices such as fact-checking, integrity and being able to work on multiple mediums remain

skills that are relevant since both reporters have covered major tournaments before. Fan vlogging can hence be considered a growing form of journalism work routine.

2. Creating vlogs on YouTube offers the opportunity for exciting brand awareness, which aids a media organisation's marketing strategy. Vlogging allowed SA Rugby Magazine to create added value for the publication and its sponsors, which leads to capital gains. Long after the 2019 Rugby World Cup, Video 2 remains online and can easily be viewed or shared.
3. Despite the popularity of the medium, it is relatively inexpensive to create vlogs on YouTube, which may suit a print publication. As seen in Video 2, laptop footage was used to comment on games, which is an impromptu style of reporting yet is advantageous since it can be used in match analysis and is likely a way of avoiding any copyright infringements.
4. Efforts are made to imitate or correspond with television norms since multiple cameras attached to tripods, microphones, corporate branding and post-production editing are all incorporated to help improve Video 2. Therefore, one can notice the professionalisation of fan vlogging as it strives to be more like mainstream broadcasts than an amateur show.

Competitive

1. Reporters were freer to offer relatively honest and diverse opinions, which could increase their journalistic credibility or cultural capital. Fan vlogging offers a wider scope from conventional gatekeeping practices since the journalists got to debate topics that they found relative to the final match and overall 2019 rugby season.
2. Vlogging on YouTube encourages personal brand awareness for individual journalists. In terms of audience reach, YouTube potentially extends far wider than any print publication, meaning that individual reporters can gain popularity as writers turned sports presenters. Acquiring a role as a television sports journalist reporting exclusively on rugby from a South African point of view is not easy, in this instance, however, vlogging on YouTube may increase fame and reporter credibility.

3. YouTube's video analysis features offer data for journalists to examine important factors such as subscriber numbers and geographic locations of audiences. These statistics may be useful to media organisations that are looking to use data strategically to improve audience reach.
4. Commenting and holding frank discussions is generally a feature that mainstream media discourages while offering feedback in the comment sections has become typical of fan vlogs. As shown in Table 5.2, the comment section beneath YouTube vlogs is a space where the public can directly interact with reporters and other fans and offers journalists potential for varied leads for future stories.

5.4 Summary

In this chapter, the findings of interviews conducted with a total of 9 mainstream sports journalists who reported on the 2019 Rugby World Cup were presented as well as those from a netnography of two videos.

The findings reflected relevant themes that were explored in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 to better ascertain how the rise of digital technologies and interactive audiences have impacted sports journalism in a South African context.

In the final chapter, the contribution this research makes to sports journalism will be discussed, as well as limitations and recommendations for further research

Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

This study explored the responses of South African sports journalists toward fan vloggers on YouTube during the 2019 Rugby World Cup. The section highlights findings of the four individual and one general research questions. In conclusion, relevant limitations of this study and future research recommendations are presented.

6.2 Response to RQ 1

Have sports journalists had to make any changes to their regular work routines due to the rise of online audiences using social media?

All respondents emphasised that technological innovation, the smartphone specifically, has impacted how they do their work. Directly linked to smartphones and smart devices are convergent social media websites that allow sports journalists to create cross-platform interactive media content and essentially better connect with diverse audiences. Respondents noted that concepts such as multimedia capabilities, immediacy, convenience and a reduction in production costs have encouraged their usage of digital media. Although these mentioned factors have increased their workload, it has allowed sports reporters to better target a much wider range of users. Most respondents agreed that due to digitisation, on-camera reporting has gained popularity to become one of the dominant ways in which sports is consumed and thus reported. Even though all respondents admitted that social media may have overtaken traditional media as the way in which journalists communicate with audiences, two senior respondents were not asked to necessarily change their work routines to, for instance, create more video content on YouTube and instead remained focused on writing sports news.

6.3 Response to RQ 2

Does fan vlogging offer any major threats to South Africa's sports journalism sector?

While a few respondents felt that fan vloggers do not present any major threats, most respondents highlighted related concerns. A fan vlogger's ability to create inaccurate reports

or drive biased agendas were noted as problematic. This is partly because the speed at which mediated sports is distributed online has led to a culture of wanting to break news without confirmation from trusted sources. Most respondents did not feel that vloggers presented direct threats to their professional identities, and given the current digital environment, welcomed the presence of skilled creators who offer different views on sports. Some respondents felt that the business models of mainstream broadcasters encouraged a rise in online participation since many in South Africa cannot afford pay television and thus cannot watch the Springboks play. It was also affirmed that the rise in digital culture appears to be blurring the lines between sports reporters and sports fans, which ultimately poses a threat to the work that journalists do. Most respondents noted that the online comment section was concerning since forms of abusive discourse, has become so common and difficult to fully regulate. Half of the respondents called for the strengthening of gatekeeping functions since harmful online comments, toward them and amongst audiences, brought layers of unpleasantness to the journalism profession. One respondent noted how the public has become the gatebouncer, able to regulate inaccuracies or point out inappropriate online interaction. Other respondents, although cognisant of how threatening online comments are, said that blunt discussions gave journalists an honest view of what the public thinks and ultimately, a high number of clicks are often pursued by mainstream media. Most respondents said that they strategically ignore fan commentary that may be negative and directed toward their work to protect their self-esteem and sense of wellbeing.

6.4 Response to RQ 3

In order to better co-exist, how can journalism practices help to improve fan vlogging on YouTube?

Most respondents said that co-existence between fan vloggers and working journalists indeed existed since the interactive audience added value to their jobs. Co-existence between journalist and online audience become heightened when fan vloggers are able to showcase interesting analysis, video editing and story-telling skills. “I have the utmost respect for people who consistently produce quality content because it is a whole job on its own” said Louw (2021). Over the period of conducting this research, a search on YouTube suggests that fan vlogging concerning rugby has grown in numbers, surprisingly though from a South African perspective, none of the local content creators were directly mentioned by

interviewees. Three respondents did however mention Squidge Rugby as an example of quality fan vlogging that has become of infotainment value for mainstream sports journalism. While co-creation of content appears to be growing, some journalists were adamant that boundaries must still exist between vloggers, who offer infotainment, and journalists who offer sports news. Factors such as being accountable to an organisation, industry standards, a press ombudsman, ethical standards that result in empathy and sourcing factual information, were some of the key journalism characteristics that vloggers need to adhere to, to gain increased levels of credibility from mainstream journalists. Working on answering the why question was also noted as an important area that can improve co-existence between fan vloggers and working sports reporters.

6.5 Response to RQ 4

What benefits did the practice of fan vlogging have for mainstream sports reporting during the 2019 Rugby World Cup?

Findings showed that mainstream sports reporters are increasingly incorporating fan vlogging into their work routines due to the various benefits this offers. Fan vlogging has grown to become a widely accepted, at times even expected, form of reporting whereby journalists mimic online fan behaviour, to not only better connect with audiences, but also to achieve capital gains. Since fans sometimes imitate mainstream journalists by trying to report sports news via social media, a similar situation occurs whereby journalists actively observe the work of online fans, and to an extent, incorporate this into their routines. In this case, useful features of YouTube persuaded fans and subsequently mainstream media to become YouTubers, which has now become a cross-platform and growing practice defined as vlogging. This online observation, in the form of a netnography, found that fan vlogging has become a cost-efficient, practical and exciting form of mass communication that is relatively easy to distribute and can be effective when combined with journalism practices.

Concluding response to the general research question: How are sports journalists reacting to disruptive technological changes and the subsequent increase in the creation of mediated sports by interactive audiences?

In line with technological determinism theory discussed in Chapter 3.4, the general finding is that newer technologies, particularly smartphones and social media platforms, have impacted South Africa's sports journalism field in various ways. This researcher has argued that the mainstream media has become an open stream media whereby the public can progressively replicate journalism routine by the utilisation of digital media. While a few senior reporters were not expected to make many adjustments to their daily routines, there was a unanimous view that new media offers varying storytelling opportunities, expands audience reach and offers immediacy for news production. Technological influence has also brought with it a demand for multimedia skills, an increased workload, employment uncertainty and a general expectation, aligned with varied pressures, to be present on major social media platforms.

In line with the gatekeeping theories discussed in Chapter 3.2, respondents called for more restrictions to online participation. Reporter concerns around the speed of information also appeared to be growing. While fan vloggers were not viewed as a threat to the profession, as most respondents welcomed the diversity of views around sports, there was however a reoccurring call from respondents for the adherence of journalistic standards, reduce harm and improve accountability. Furthermore, some reporters felt that regulation would more likely need to be enforced by policy changes decided upon by not just journalists, but alongside entities such as the public and major technology firms.

In line with the public sphere theory discussed in Chapter 3.5, there was a consensus that online fans are a valuable part of the sports and media ecosystem since they offer factors such as potential news angles, entertainment and a public perspective on major events. In a country where televised rugby and Internet access is still limited, frank discussions around sports-related issues and opportunities for more forms of coverage and participation has generally been welcomed by interviewees. However, although co-existence between fans and working journalists has increased in the digital age, respondents emphasised the importance of barriers separating the two entities as it was argued that fans aim to report opinions while journalists aim to adhere to factual reporting.

In line with field theory discussed in Chapter 3.3, evidence showed that fan vlogging has become a major part of popular culture, offering forms of capital for reporters. The creative process of replicating fan vlogging and creating stories in a manner that was initially popularised by audiences was found to correspond with conventional journalism techniques

and is gaining esteem within the industry. Fan vlogging on YouTube has become an attractive alternative for mainstream media, allowing interactivity with (mostly younger) audiences, thereby achieving levels of cultural capital. While the cost-effectiveness of vlogging on YouTube and the platform's ability to make extensive content easy to view, store and share, have managed to increase levels of economic capital for sports journalism.

The practice of vlogging has become a popular form of communication, in part due to society's rapid adoption of networked devices and convergent social media platforms that make opportunities to vlog easier than ever before. These developments come with various complexities since the practice of fan vlogging has become so interrelated, not only by fans and journalists, but society at large. We are only beginning to better understand the dynamics of this cultural phenomenon that is likely to become even more prevalent, as powerful technology companies continue to compete for market share.

6.6 Limitations and recommendations

The sample size of interviewees and the subjective nature of their answers could be viewed as limitations, but are motivated by the qualitative, interpretive approach of this study. This researcher is also aware that the tournament in question applies to one sport and took place over a relatively short time frame. Examples of various types of fan vlogging on YouTube extend far beyond sports to numerous other forms of entertainment and lifestyle journalism. Nonetheless, exploring the subjective experiences of sports journalists was a central aim of this study, which was done to better understand their reactions toward sports fans over a specified period. The two videos were also relevant illustrations of how fan vlogging is used by the mainstream media.

In terms of future research, the under-researched nexus between sports and new media from an African perspective offers various opportunities. Firstly though, a historical overview of the development of sports journalism in South Africa could be of interest since a study of this nature was hard to come by. The influence of sports journalism to bring about positive political and social change could prove to be important research. Exploring the relationship between online betting and sports reporting may be of significance. Studying the rise of e-Sports and the influence this form of popular culture is having on mainstream media and society could also prove worthwhile.

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Addendum A

Online interview guide

Research Questions 1 – 3

1. Have sports journalists had to make any changes to their regular work routines due to the rise in audience usage of social media?

- a) How did the rapid pace of the Internet and the popular social media platforms affect your daily work routine as a sports journalist during the past Rugby World Cup?
- b) According to World Rugby, the 2019 tournament saw a record number of visitors to their YouTube channel. How did your organisation respond to the huge demand for video content before and during such a huge event?
- c) How do you ensure that your work remains more trustworthy in the eyes of the general public, since some online sports fans can be just as opinionated as journalists?

2. Does fan vlogging offer any major threats to South Africa's sports journalism sector?

- a) What are some of your concerns with how fan vloggers can also create their own sports news, such as match previews or reviews, throughout major tournaments like a world cup?
- b) What are your thoughts around how digitally savvy sports fans can increasingly compete with mainstream broadcasters such as SuperSport and others overseas, and upload their own free rugby content during major events or tournaments?
- c) How do you feel about the harmful commentary that is often displayed between fans and even toward sports journalists on social media? And what could/should be done to improve this situation?

3. *In order to better co-exist, how can journalists help to improve fan vlogging on YouTube?*

- a) What value does fan vlogging offer to South Africa's sports journalists?
- b) Should the public be allowed to occupy a more prominent role in co-producing mainstream media, if so, why/why not?
- c) What advise could you offer unemployed sports fans who are trying to turn vlogging into a career?

Addendum B

Netnography interview guide

Research Question 4

4. What benefits did the practice of fan vlogging offer mainstream sports reporting during the 2019 Rugby World Cup?

- a) What were some of the main motivations to create vlogs throughout the 2019 Rugby World Cup?
- b) Did the behaviour of the active audience play any role in motivating SA Rugby Magazine to create vlogs?
- c) Are there any fan vloggers that you followed during the World Cup, who may have offered practical benefits for your journalistic work?