

Everyday Entrepreneurs: Documenting African Entrepreneurial Journeys

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COMPULSORY DECLARATION

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this creative media production and associated reflective essay from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

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Introduction

As a researcher, my journey to creating the *Everyday Entrepreneurs project began by looking into the ways in which young entrepreneurs found support through online platforms (see Appendix A). By way of an initial small-scale qualitative interview-based study, I explored how young African entrepreneurs use, engage with, and perceive online platforms as a resource. Through a series of one-on-one interviews with four African entrepreneurs, the study found that aside from gaining practical entrepreneurial advice and guidance, participants also had a desire to simply learn about the journeys and stories of other entrepreneurs, something that they found on various blogs and websites. But the participants were especially concerned with the lack of relatable content available to them and felt that it was necessary for African entrepreneurs to share their stories in order to help others succeed.

When conducting the abovementioned study, my aim was to better understand the experiences and needs of budding entrepreneurs on the continent and proceed to expand this into a creative media production and develop a platform aimed at inspiring and informing young African entrepreneurs. However, on completing this background study, I realised that the research had been quite limited in that the participants consisted of somewhat privileged participants. None of the interviewees were “necessity entrepreneurs”, i.e. those who enter into entrepreneurship as a result of failing to find other employment opportunities, instead, all of them had some form of tertiary education and belonged to the medium-high LSM group. For these reasons, the study couldn’t be seen to represent the experiences of all young African entrepreneurs. Motivated by this realisation, I began looking into stories of African entrepreneurship, specifically online, and discovered that while there were a number of platforms highlighting African entrepreneurial stories, examples of which include [She Leads Africa](#), [How We Made It In Africa](#), and [I Am Youngpreneur](#), these sites, like my initial study, focused mainly on opportunity entrepreneurs and excluded less affluent necessity entrepreneurs, and those from lower-income groups and the informal sector, despite the fact that these entrepreneurs overwhelmingly outnumber their more affluent counterparts. Based on this, I then turned my attention to creating “Everyday Entrepreneurs”, a platform that could start to fill the above-mentioned gap by highlighting narratives of some of the informal sector and necessity entrepreneurs around us, in an attempt to contribute to, and broaden the conversation on entrepreneurship. This paper documents my research, experience and learnings during the creation of the project.

*The Media Creative Production can be found online on the website everydayentrepreneurs.co.za. Access to the website is restricted due to the fact that one of the final participants gave consent for her story to be used only for the purposes of this project, and not for publication. The password to access the site is Android1907.

Background

Employment & Entrepreneurship in South Africa

For the past nine years, South Africa's unemployment rate, which currently stands at 27%, has been steadily rising (Yu, 2017: NPN) (Statistics South Africa, 2018: NPN), earning one of the largest economies on the continent (World Bank, 2018: NPN) a spot amongst the twenty countries with the highest unemployment rates globally (Nqandeka & Xabadiya, 2018: NPN). The International Labour Organisation ranks South Africa as the ninth worst country for unemployment, and it is the lowest-ranked country with what many consider a mature and developed economy (Nqandeka & Xabadiya, 2018: NPN).

Among the unemployed, there appear to be two main groups in South Africa, the first being young people, most of whom have completed their matric, but who are unable to find jobs despite actively searching (Yu, 2017: NPN). This group is worst affected by unemployment – 38% of those between the ages of 15 and 34 are unemployed (Kubheka, 2018: NPN), and well over half of this group is classified as chronically unemployed, meaning that they have never worked (van der Merwe, Ngalo, & Redelmeier, 2018: NPN) (Yu, 2017: NPN). The second group consists of older people with prior work experience, who are seeking employment through their social networks but have been struggling to find work for more than three years (Yu, 2017: NPN). In terms of race, unemployment disproportionately affects the Black and Coloured populations of the country (Chutel, 2017: NPN) (BusinessTech, 2015: NPN) – the unemployment rate sits at 31.4% for Black South Africans, 22.9% for the Coloured population, and only 6.6% for White South Africans (Chutel, 2017: NPN). When gender is considered, the unemployment rate is much higher for women, and Black women in particular are the most vulnerable (Mhlanga, 2018: NPN).

The reasons for South Africa's high unemployment rates are varied and complex (de Villiers, 2018: NPN). For one, Apartheid's legacy of inadequate education and training, as well as the systematic exclusion of Black people from high-skilled jobs still affects many South Africans (GCIS, Unkown: NPN). Despite the end of Apartheid, many schools that were formerly designated for Black pupils are still disadvantaged in terms of management, knowledge infrastructure and the quality of teachers and instructors (Bhorat, 2009, NPN), leading to inadequate skills development for Black youth (SAPA, 2014, NPN). In addition to a lack of adequate education and skills, the unemployment rate is also affected by spatial inequalities, another remnant of the Apartheid years. Many job seekers live far from business centres, and often contend with high costs when job seeking (Banerjee, Galiani, Levinsohn, McLaren, & Woolard, 2008, p.717); from transport costs to accessing the internet and even printing CVs and letters, this comes up to an average monthly amount of R550 (Willis, 2018, NPN).

Another key contributor to unemployment in South Africa is the issue of labour demand-supply mismatch (Bhorat, 2009: NPN) – more and more young people enter the job market each year, while the number of employment opportunities that become available lags far behind (GCIS, Unkown: NPN). However, when this is examined more closely, it becomes apparent that the real issue is not the number of jobs being made available, but rather the type. The majority of the unemployed are low-skilled or semi-skilled (de Villiers, 2018: NPN), while employers increasingly require higher-skilled individuals to fill roles. In 2017, the Labour Department

reported that it was only able to place 2% of the five million people on its public employment services division database and cited the fact that most of the job seekers on their database were low-skilled as a contributing factor (Whittles, 2017: NPN).

Only 21% of South Africa's employed have received tertiary education, and, in the past, the large numbers of low- and semi-skilled job seekers were employed by sectors such as mining, manufacturing and construction (TimesLive, 2018: NPN). However, the 2008/2009 global recession led to a number of these sectors drastically reducing their workforce and leaving many people unemployed (GCIS, Unknown: NPN). For example, where the above-mentioned sectors collectively employed 41% of the unskilled workforce in 2001, they now only employ 23% (TimesLive, 2018: NPN). And while tertiary education dramatically improves one's chances of becoming employed – 90% of South African graduates are employed – there are still over 300 000 graduates who are unable find jobs because their qualifications, and in some cases experience, do not match the needs of potential employers (BusinessTech, 2014: NPN) (Gibixego, 2018, NPN). While many employers are seeking managers and professional graduates such as accountants, lawyers, doctors and engineers, many graduates leave institutions with “soft degrees” in the arts, humanities and social sciences (BusinessTech, 2014: NPN) (Barron, 2018, p.8).

South Africa's Entrepreneurial and SMME Landscape

Entrepreneurship – the application of initiative, innovation, creativity, risk-taking, and other enterprising skills towards self-employment, or employment within small start-up businesses (Chigunta, 2002, p.1) – is widely considered an important contributor to national economies. By building new businesses, entrepreneurs empower themselves (Beeka & Rimmington, 2011, p.145), create employment opportunities for others (Fatoki, 2010, p.87), and encourage economic and social transformation in their regions (Langevang, Namatovu, & Dawa, 2012, p.439).

Within the African context, entrepreneurship is viewed as a considerably sustainable job generation tool with the potential to lead the continent's development (Obonyo, 2016, NPN) and help solve the continent's youth unemployment problem (Chinguta, Schnurr, Torres, & Creation, 2005, p.16). The youth unemployment rate in Africa – largely attributed to a lack of formal job opportunities – currently stands at 11.1%, and with Africa's youth population of 200 million projected to double by 2055 (Bryant, 2016, NPN), there is a recognised need to support young entrepreneurs and create more opportunities for them (Bryant, 2016, NPN). In South Africa, as in many other countries, entrepreneurship has long been seen as a sustainable job creation tool (Obonyo, 2016, NPN) and a way of making more young people economically active (Owualah, 1999, p.50). In addition to economic benefits, entrepreneurship also has positive social effects, creating opportunities for upward social mobility, more especially in the case of under-privileged groups – this is particularly important for developing countries such as South Africa (Preisendorfer, Bitz, & Bezuidenhout, 2012, p.2). The South African government recognises the role that small businesses, i.e. small, medium and micro enterprises, or SMMEs, have to play in driving down unemployment rates as well as contributing to the GDP (SEDA, 2016, p.5). Efforts are being made to create enabling environments for these businesses through policies, strategies and programmes, an objective that was highlighted in President

Cyril Ramaphosa's maiden State of the Nation Address in February 2018 (Schourie, 2018, NPN) (SEDA, 2016, p.5).

The term "small businesses" refers to a range of enterprises, from medium-sized businesses employing in excess of 100 people, to informal micro-enterprises, many of which are run by some of the poorest members of the population (SEDA, 2016, p.5). In South Africa, informal businesses make up a significant segment of entrepreneurial activity (Preisendorfer, Bitz, & Bezuidenhout, 2012, p.3) and are considered "survivalist" due to the fact that they are small-scale, often volatile, and mainly created as a means to secure an income for an individual or family. Examples of such enterprises include street trading, backyard manufacturing and services, and home-based evening jobs (SEDA, 2016, p.5). It is estimated that informal businesses contribute around 6% to the country's GDP annually (Fourie, 2018, NPN), but their survivalist nature coupled with the fact that most of these entrepreneurs have little to no business skills (Mashau & Houghton, 2015, p.599) means there is little potential for growth or employment of others (SEDA, 2016, p.5). Research indicates that 69% of SMMEs that are able to employ staff operate in the formal sector, while 80% of "own account workers", i.e. those who are self-employed and working either on their own or with one or more partners, are in the informal sector (SEDA, 2016, p.15) (OECD, 2001, NPN). In most of the country's provinces, informal SMMEs significantly outnumber formal ones, except in the Western Cape and Northern Cape where the numbers are equal, while the majority of formal SMMEs (46%) can be found in the province of Gauteng (SEDA, 2016, p.17). There are an estimated 2.2 million SMMEs in South Africa, of which close to half are in domestic trade (wholesale and retail) and accommodation, and the majority of informal enterprises also operate in trade and accommodation (SEDA, 2016, p.19).

In terms of race and demographics, 71% of all SMME owners in the country are Black, but the bulk of these entrepreneurs are in the informal sector – 89% of informal businesses are Black-owned while 51% of all formal SMMEs are White-owned (Preisendorfer, Bitz, & Bezuidenhout, 2012, p.5) (SEDA, 2016, p.22). It is reported that 60% of SMME owners have been educated to secondary level and 19% have a tertiary education, while only 4% have not received any schooling (SEDA, 2016, p.24).

Migrant Populations in South Africa and Entrepreneurship

One cannot look at South Africa's entrepreneurial landscape without considering the migrant population and their participation in this area. Since 1990, when the process to dismantle Apartheid began, there has been an increased movement of foreign migrants and refugees from the rest of Africa and abroad into the country (Visser & Kalitanyi, 2010, p.377), as South Africa, due to its relatively stable government, infrastructure, and economy, emerged as a suitable location for those attempting to improve the socio-economic opportunities (StatisticsSA, 2015, p.123). According to the United Nations Population Division, South Africa's foreign-born population is around 4 million (Maluleke, 2018, NPN), with 75% originating from the African continent, and citizens of SADC countries making up 68% of all international migrants in the country (Chiuma & Meny-Gibert, 2016, NPN). A 2016 survey indicated that the top ten countries "sending" migrants to South Africa are Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Lesotho, Malawi, Swaziland, Namibia, the UK, Democratic Republic of Congo, Nigeria and India (Chiuma & Meny-Gibert, 2016, NPN). Reasons for leaving their countries of origin range from political instability to business prospects and better economic opportunities (Visser & Kalitanyi, 2010,

p.383). Of the nine provinces, Gauteng has the largest population of foreign-born migrants (6%), followed by the Western Cape (3.1%) and the North West province (2.7%) (Chiama & Meny-Gibert, 2016, NPN). It is important to note, when considering these numbers, that undocumented migrants are less likely to take part in official surveys, making it difficult to obtain accurately statistics on international migration in South Africa (StatisticsSA, 2015, p.127).

On arriving in South Africa, many immigrants struggle to find formal employment and when they do, it is not uncommon for them to experience exploitation (Visser & Kalitanyi, 2010, p.381). This pushes them into the SMME sector, where they start their own businesses and in some cases employ local staff – reportedly more than South African entrepreneurs (Ngota, Rajkaran, Balkaran, & Mang'unyi, 2017, p.147) – making entrepreneurship a significant tool for the economic and social integration of immigrants (Visser & Kalitanyi, 2010, p.379) (Tengeh & Nkem, 2017, p.5). Most immigrant entrepreneurs in the country start retail or service businesses such as curios, motor-car repairs, salons and restaurants, and those that do enter into production are predominantly found in the clothing sector where they work as tailors (Visser & Kalitanyi, 2010, p.379).

[From Online Experiences to Everyday Entrepreneurs](#)

While my study on how young African entrepreneurs make use of online platforms resulted in some interesting insights, it was quite limited in that the sample consisted of somewhat privileged participants. None of the interviewees were “necessity entrepreneurs”; they all had some form of tertiary education and belonged to the medium-high LSM group. They had access to various resources such as capital, networks of similar-minded individuals, established business people who could serve as mentors, etc. These interviewees were also all opportunity entrepreneurs, i.e. individuals who are employed but find themselves becoming entrepreneurs as a result of business opportunities that they’ve identified, often in a niche market (SEDA, 2016, p.10).

The aim of this study was to gain insight into the motivations and experiences of young entrepreneurs, specifically on online platforms, and use these learnings to inform a creative project; a website that would serve to inspire and inform other young entrepreneurs. Developing such a platform would also require an understanding of what content already exists in this space, and so what followed was a look at popular platforms in order to identify any patterns or gaps that may exist. What follows is an overview of these platforms.

- [How We Made It In Africa](#) – Created in 2010 by South African entrepreneur Jaco Maritz, *How We Made It In Africa* is an online magazine designed for African business people and potential investors from abroad. (How We Made It In Africa, 2018, NPN). The site’s content highlights business trends and opportunities, and also profiles leading business people and entrepreneurs from across the continent, all in an effort to educate, inform and inspire readers (Amawhe, 2017, NPN) (Anzisha Prize, 2013, NPN). Articles on *How We Made It In Africa* are divided into seven categories, four of which focus on entrepreneur and business profiles. These are:
 - [Entrepreneur Watch](#)
 - [Startup Snapshot](#)

- [The Journey So Far](#)
- [Meet the Boss](#)

Past articles in the above-mentioned categories have featured the likes of [Katlego Maphaj](#), co-founder and CEO of South Africa fintech YOCO, [Nadayar Enegesi](#), Nigerian co-founder of tech company Andela, and [Bethlehem Tilahun Alemu](#), the founder of soleRebels, an Ethiopian shoe company. The articles range in focus from stories of how entrepreneurs started their businesses, profiles of small, innovative startups, and more light-hearted pieces in which the interviews share their thoughts, interests, and advice.

To date, *How We Made It In Africa* has profiled hundreds of entrepreneurs (How We Made It In Africa, 2019, NPN), and in 2018 the platform announced that it would be publishing a book focusing in the stories of 25 top African entrepreneurs, some of them previously featured on the site and others who are being interviewed for the first time (How We Made It In Africa, 2019, NPN) (Ventureburn, 2018, NPN).

- [Lionesses of Africa Startup Stories](#) – *Lionesses of Africa* is an online community aimed at promoting and celebrating entrepreneurship among women on the continent (Moss, 2016, NPN). The community is one aspect of the Lionesses of Africa Public Benefit Corporation, a social enterprise with the same mission, launched by American social entrepreneur Melanie Hawken in 2014 (Lionesses of Africa, 2018, NPN). Through the online platform, women have access to mentorship and resources, and are also able to learn about other women entrepreneurs at various stages of their journeys via the *Startup Stories* section (Moss, 2016, NPN). *Startup Stories* features women from across Africa and the diaspora who have chosen to start their own businesses, from well-known jewellery designers to the owners of newly established ventures. Visitors to the site are encouraged to submit their own stories for sharing on the platform.
- [She Leads Africa](#) – The brainchild of two young Nigerian management consultants, Yasmin Belo-Osagie and Afua Osei, *She Leads Africa* is a community dedicated to helping millennial women get ahead in their professional and business ventures (Kolia, 2018, NPN) (Omiyi, 2015). The While the *She Leads Africa* site is not primarily aimed at highlighting entrepreneurs, it is designed to deliver career and business content, some of which includes articles featuring women who have already seen success in their businesses and who can be considered role models (She Leads Africa, 2016, NPN) (Kolia, 2018, NPN).
- [I Am Youngpreneur](#) – *I Am A Youngpreneur* is part of Youngpreneur Media, a company established in 2013 by South Africans Indira Tsengiwe and Bashanganyi Magwape (Omar, 2018, NPN), both of whom advocate for the cultivation of entrepreneurial mindsets on the continent (Fin24, 2014, NPN). The *I Am A Youngpreneur* platform is a collection of articles profiling successful young entrepreneurs from South Africa and the rest of the continent in their own words – pieces are written by the subjects and in the first person (Fin24, 2014, NPN) (Omar, 2018, NPN). Through the platform, the founders of *I Am A Youngpreneur* hope to educate and inspire other budding entrepreneurs (Omar, 2018, NPN).

- [CNN African Start-Up](#) – CNN’s African Start-Up site produces mainly video content featuring entrepreneurs from all over Africa and highlighting their often unique ideas, how they’ve been able to build their businesses, various successes and challenges, as well as their future plans and prospects (CNN African Start-Up, 2016, NPN). While many of the businesses featured fall into the category of opportunity entrepreneurs with professional backgrounds, the site has also covered a few entrepreneurs who have less advantageous backgrounds but have managed to create successful businesses, such as a [Ghanaian coffin designer](#) and a [Ugandan man teaching street children how to make shoes out of discarded materials](#).

When looking at the above platforms, it emerged that, with the exception of CNN African Start-Up, the content primarily focused on opportunity entrepreneurs and excluded so-called necessity entrepreneurs, who are driven to start their own businesses because they have no employment prospects, despite the fact that these kinds of business owners significantly outnumber their more privileged counterparts (SEDA, 2016, p.10). Based on this information, I then turned my attention to creating “Everyday Entrepreneurs”, a platform that could start to fill the above-mentioned gap by highlighting narratives of some of the informal sector and necessity entrepreneurs around us, in an attempt to contribute to, and broaden the conversation on entrepreneurship.

Methodology for Creative Media Production

Interviewees for the Everyday Entrepreneurs project were selected through a ‘purposive sampling’ process (Allen M., 2017, p. 1533). Initially, I intended to achieve this by reaching out to potential participants in person and through social media and word of mouth, with the possibility of snowball sampling. At various points during the course of the project, I approached my personal network and asked for introductions to interesting entrepreneurs that they may know, and used my social media accounts (Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram) to introduce my project and ask for referrals. Email requests were also sent out to a number of contacts. In total, these word-of-mouth efforts yielded six referrals, of which four went on to participate in the project.

There are a number of local organisations that focus on entrepreneurial skills training, and a few of these were also contacted in hopes that they would be able to lead me to former students who have gone on to start their own businesses. The first, Sorbet Group, established the Sorbet Empowers Women programme (SEW) to provide skills development training to women from historically disadvantaged backgrounds, in order to help them find employment in the beauty industry (Sorbet Group, 2018, NPN). However, while SEW initially included a micro-franchising programme to enable graduates to start their own small beauty businesses within their communities, this model proved unsuccessful and graduates were instead employed in existing Sorbet branches (G. Cross, personal communication, October 08, 2018). For this reason, the Sorbet Group was unable to refer me to suitable potential interviewees. The Amy Foundation is the second organisation that was approached, and their focus is youth skills development programmes for local communities (Amy Foundation, 2018, NPN). Unfortunately, at the time that the foundation was contacted, it had closed early due to an investigation on maladministration and misappropriation of public funds, instigated by worker

allegations and protests and so did not have the capacity to cater to my request (Pretorius, 2018, NPN) (H. George, personal communication, November 22, 2018).

By far the most effective method of finding participants was simply visiting various areas in Cape Town, specifically the CBD, Mowbray and Observatory, and approaching business owners that I came across – four of the final participants were recruited this way. However, this process did give rise to some safety concerns, as in most cases I as the researcher approached and conducted interviews alone. This greatly limited the spaces that I could explore in search of participants – areas such as Cape Town’s main taxi rank where many micro-entrepreneurs and hawkers operate, and unfamiliar areas outside the city centre and its surrounds were considered potentially risky environments and therefore avoided. Despite this, there were still a couple of uncomfortable incidents. The first being when I approached an informal carwash in my neighbourhood in the hope of speaking to the owner and gave the manager my details to pass on, which unfortunately led to unsolicited messages and calls from the manager, leading me to abandon that potential interview. The second incident occurred with one of the final participants who, after his interview had been concluded, continued chatting and gradually steered the conversation towards sexual relationships. Initially, this participant’s story was included because he had requested anonymity and had also stated that he did not wish to see the final product, and so publishing his story would not require any further interaction with him. However, later when the decision was made to photograph each of the participants, this story was excluded from the featured stories and profiles.

In total, there were eight participants, seven of whom had their stories published:

- Abass Ma-Azu, Ghanaian bag and accessories designer
- Abu Kareem, Nigerian barber and hair salon owner
- Angella Kagurabadza, Zimbabwean mobile hair braider
- Imani Magma, Congolese salon and cosmetics shop owner
- Khadim Diagne, Senegalese coffee shop owner
- Mark Sibanda (*not his real name*), Zimbabwean photographer and print and copy shop owner
- Phili Nxele, South African craft trader

Similar to my initial research on young entrepreneurs online, this media creative production also made use of qualitative interviews to gain an understanding of each participant’s entrepreneurial journey and experience. Qualitative interviewing is considered a flexible and effective way of learning about people and their experiences of individuals (Rabionet, 2011, p.563) (Al-Yateem, 2012, p.31). I conducted a series of semi-structured interviews, ranging from thirty to forty-five minutes hour long. Each interview took place in their respective businesses, with the exception of Angella Kagurabadza who asked to meet at a local restaurant, as she did not have a business premises. Participants were encouraged to speak freely, and although they were informed that the interview was being recorded using my phone, the interviews were informal and took the shape of casual conversations. This was especially the case with the first participant, Khadim Diagne, who requested the presence of our mutual friend and seemed to be a lot more relaxed when interacting with the both of us.

Although each interview, or conversation, took its own unique form, all the participants were asked similar questions in order to gather information on:

- Their personal background
- Their introduction to the line of work they are in
- How they went about acquiring the necessary skills
- What obstacles stood in their way and how they overcame them
- The challenges they regularly face in business
- Their advice to others in a similar field
- Their plans and hopes for the future

This was achieved through the use of an interview guide that was applied in each session. In addition to my explanation of the project, each participant was also provided with a copy of the project proposal detailing the nature of the research, and a consent form for their signature. None of the participants were offered monetary compensation, nor did any of them request it.

Only one participant, Mark, requested anonymity, and although he was willing to share details of his journey to becoming a business owner, he hesitated to call himself an entrepreneur. It later emerged that he considers entrepreneurs to be only those who have reached a certain level of success. When compared to the other participants, Mark had less certainty about his business; while the others were confident about their achievements to date and making clear, ambitious plans for the future, Mark stated that he was still trying to see how things would go and mentioned that he is pursuing a professional certificate in an unrelated field, suggesting that his business is simply a means to make ends meet while he works on improving his prospects. While I can only speculate, since we never discussed the reason for him wanting to remain anonymous, I suspect that Mark was not satisfied with his business and so preferred not to be identified.

Two of the participants, Mark and Phili, consented to their stories being used only for the purposes of the project, and not for publication. It is for this reason that access to the Everyday Entrepreneurs website is restricted to the researcher, supervisors, examiners and the participants.

Feature Writing, Storytelling & Multimedia

The purpose of the Everyday Entrepreneurs project is to highlight the narratives of necessity entrepreneurs, some of whom are from lower-income groups and operate in the informal sector. While there are a number of platforms doing this for more affluent entrepreneurs (as described in the overview of existing platforms), these utilise more journalistic styles of writing and interviewing, focusing primarily on the business and success of the subject. Because the entrepreneurs interviewed for this project come from what could be termed as “less privileged” backgrounds – leaving their homes and hoping for better opportunities in a new place, and navigating entrepreneurship without the business skills, capital or connections that more prominent entrepreneurs have access to, it was important for the stories to convey these varied circumstances, and to do so in a human and relatable manner.

For this reason, the entrepreneurial journeys of the participants were told through feature journalism pieces, and elements of multimedia were incorporated to help bring each participant to life, these ranged from images and videos, to audio clips of them telling their stories. The same reason prompted me to look to websites that focus on storytelling rather than simply entrepreneurship for references. Specifically, these were Humans of New York and StoryCorps, and the platforms are discussed in more detail later in this reflection.

Where journalism is concerned with the efficient delivery of hard facts, feature journalism is creative, subjective and makes use of emotions and backgrounding (Zdovc, 2009, p.321) (Steensen, 2009, p.16). In feature writing, stories are told using techniques similar to those found in realistic fiction, these include literary-style heroes, dialogue, scene description, voice, dramatic structure with plot, rhythm, allusions, alliteration, and detail (Zdovc, 2009, p.324). Some of the characteristics of feature journalism are that it is often narrative, it is usually not time-sensitive in the way the news is, it allows journalists to add subjective descriptions, reflections and assessments, and it usually portrays people and their physical and social settings, and is therefore personal and emotional, informing readers while creating an intimacy between the them and the subject (Steensen, 2009, p.16) (Steensen, 2011, p.51).

Feature writing is also often aesthetically pleasing, presented in well-thought-out layouts and with various multimedia – an element that more and more journalists are implementing to help tell better stories (Kartveit, 2017, p.1) (Steensen, 2009, p.16) (International Center for Journalists, 2018, NPN). In journalism, multimedia is a tool that can increase reader engagement (Lee, 2008, NPN), and it makes use of mediums such as video to bring subjects to life or capture strong quotes, pictures to show emotion or key moments, audio clips for quotes or ambient sound, and graphs and illustrations to convey information (Lee, 2008, NPN) (International Center for Journalists, 2018, NPN). In the past, audio and video recordings of interviews, most of which were analogue, were often regarded as secondary to the final pieces they helped produce as they were not easily accessible to the general public (High, 2010, p.102). However, thanks in large part to technology developments that have made recording audio and video material simple for anyone with a smartphone, and made editing and publishing platforms widely accessible, these mediums are thriving (High, 2010, p.105) (McHugh, 2014, p.141). Audio storytelling has been booming in recent years, from the increasing number of podcasting platforms to long-form documentaries and short digital narratives, it is now possible to tell stories that incorporate the voices of interviewees (McHugh, 2014, p.142) (High, 2010, p.105).

An example of a platform successfully utilising audio in storytelling is StoryCorps, an organisation created with the aim of “preserving and sharing humanity’s stories in order to building connections between people” (StoryCorps, 2003, NPN). StoryCorps was launched in 2003 with the opening of a booth in New York City’s Grand central station in which members of the public were invited to interview each other and share their personal stories (StoryCorps, 2003, NPN), since then over 150 000 people have participated, and more than 75 000 interviews have been collected. All the interviews are archived in the Library of Congress while a select few have been shared as 2-3-minute clips on the [StoryCorps website](#), and through weekly podcast, broadcasts on National Public Radio, short animations, and a series of best-selling books. This has become one of the largest oral history projects of its kind, capturing a range of experiences, wisdom and values as told in the voices of the various participants

(StoryCorps, 2003, NPN). While the multimedia aspect of the StoryCorps website is notable, I was drawn to the platform by the importance it places on the simple, but often heart-warming narratives of everyday people; from [Silvia's Legacy](#), the story of a young woman meeting her great-grandmother in the 1950s, to [A Love Letter to the Written Word](#), in which a woman interviews her immigrant father about his love of books.

A second platform that served as a reference for Everyday Entrepreneurs is [Humans of New York](#), which is considered amongst the most successful storytelling initiatives in digital history (Podger, 2018, NPN). Now accessible through a website, social media pages and a Facebook video series, Humans of New York began in 2010 as a photoblog for self-taught photographer Brandon Stanton to share images of ordinary New Yorkers. Slowly, it evolved into a storytelling platform, with longer and longer captions containing the subjects' personal stories and intimate thoughts (Podger, 2018, NPN) (Jenab, 2016, NPN) (Cunningham, 2015, NPN). The geographical focus of the platform has also expanded to include stories from over twenty different countries (Biale, 2016, NPN), highlighting a variety of cultures and groups such as refugees, cancer patients and inmates (Clyde, 2018, NPN). Collectively, the website and its social media accounts have gained over 25 million followers (Biale, 2016, NPN), and the content is shared countless times, often going viral, something attributed to the relatable and intimate way that the stories are told (Clyde, 2018, NPN) (Jenab, 2016, NPN) – specifically, in the subjects' own words (Lingaas Turk, 2016, p.23). In an evaluation of the top twenty stories on Humans of New York, it was found that the top seventeen pieces featured stories told in the individual's own words, and this is thought to loosen the boundaries of writer, reader and subject, bringing audiences closer to the subjects being interviewed (Lingaas Turk, 2016, p.23).

The final product was a collection of seven, in-depth feature articles about entrepreneurs from different backgrounds, and operating different kinds of businesses. While the written stories are the main focus of the Everyday Entrepreneurs site, where possible, audio clips from the interview sessions were incorporated as a way of giving voices to the participants and allowing them to tell parts of their stories and experiences in their own words. This proved to be an effective way of capturing some of the character of the participants, as they easily became comfortable with the interview, not paying attention to the audio recording device after the first few minutes and falling into engaged conversation. Of interviewing his subjects, Humans of New York's Brandon Stanton says, "the feeling of being validated, the feeling of being heard unlocks something in people that allows them to share," cited in Clyde (2018, NPN), and this became the pattern with the entrepreneurs that I interacted with during the course of this project. Those who agreed to participate were eager to share their stories and needed little if any prompting, often going into detail about their individual journeys and experiences. This feeling of ease was perhaps also the result of utilising a non-intrusive device, i.e. a mobile phone audio recorder, to record the interviews.

[Incorporating Audio and Visual Material](#)

With two of the participants, I experimented with video clips created by simply setting up a mobile phone camera and tripod and recording the participant, with their consent, as the interview was conducted. This resulted in some variety in content format and allowed the interviewees to be seen as well as heard. However, I was limited by my lack of experience and training with regards to video recording and editing, and also had to take into consideration that this way of interviewing could make some participants uncomfortable. Abu, the barber

and salon owner, happened to have studied acting back in his home country Nigeria, and so was quite comfortable and engaging on camera. On the other hand, Imani, a salon and cosmetics shop owner from the DRC, became more reserved once the interview mode switched from audio to video recording, and at a point confessed that she did not want to look directly at the camera. While Abu's video recording resulted in a number of clips and segments for potential editing and publishing, Imani's video had fewer such options, as I had to identify points at which she seemed most at ease. Surprisingly, the reverse happened when she was photographed; although she was reserved before the initial shot, once she was shown the image she lit up and became more enthusiastic about the session.

Similarly, when I attempted to photograph some of the participants, I encountered the same challenges in terms of not having the necessary skills as well as dealing with potentially uncomfortable photo subjects. Following my interview with Phili, a young woman who sells African crafts, artefacts and souvenirs at the African Women Craft Market in Long Street, I asked for permission to take a few photographs of her in her stall. Although she agreed to being photographed, she was visibly self-conscious during the process and did not look at the camera.

While images can serve as critical visual tools, helping people connect to individuals, places and contexts, it is important that photographers depict subjects in an accurate and respectful way (Thibault, 2014). Guidelines to achieving such images include ensuring that subjects appear at ease, engaged and empowered, and that their body language is positive, i.e. open and not anxious or uncomfortable (Gardener, 2015). Considering the unsuccessful results of my attempt at photographing Phili, I decided to seek help with this aspect from a peer who studied photography. By reaching out to this connection, not only was I able to access the right equipment, I was also able to pick up a few pointers for taking good portrait shots. Appointments for the photo sessions were made with the participants, and during these sessions I photographed all but one of the participants, asking for tips and advice where necessary, such as how to achieve the right kind of lighting, and the effects of certain camera functions and controls.

All but one of the participants were photographed in their respective businesses, giving visitors to the Everyday Entrepreneurs site glimpses of the worlds in which they work. This was easy in some cases, and slightly more complicated in others. For example, Khadim and Imani, who are both the sole tenants in their respective business premises, were very free during their photo sessions and were able to move around as they pleased and experiment with posing in different areas.

On the other hand, Marie, who described the women with whom she shares a space as family, has a much smaller area to work in, making it difficult to take her picture without getting in the way of other people. During her session, we were either blocking the salon doorway, or trying to avoid one of her colleagues. At one point, the salon owner walked in and asked what was going on, stating that she hadn't been told about a photoshoot. There was some tension, but this dissolved when Marie apologised and explained the situation. However, myself and the colleague assisting me made a point to speed things up to avoid causing any further disruptions, and because Marie was the first participant that we photographed, this lesson

informed our approach with the other participants, keeping the sessions as short as possible (20-30 minutes), and avoiding getting in the way of other tenants or potential customers.

While attempts were made to incorporate images of everyone, two of the participants, Abass and Phili, had travelled to Pretoria and Durban respectively. I navigated this unforeseen situation by photographing their work spaces and products instead. Angella, the mobile hair braider, did not wish to be photographed and chose to rather have her braiding work featured. While the intention was to give a face to each of the participants, having some profiles with visuals showcasing products was useful in that it added some variety to the content on the website.

All the participants received high-resolution copies of the photographs and have the freedom to use these as they please. Since the photography element was a collaborative effort, both myself and the above-mentioned colleague, Nadine van Driel, are credited for the final images.

Conclusion

“Everyday Entrepreneurs” are exactly that, everyday – we encounter many of them as we go about our daily lives, sometimes making use of their services and other times not really paying too much attention to them. Perhaps this is why they are left out of the narrative on African entrepreneurship and relegated to statistics on the prevalence and impact of small and medium businesses. Another reason for their absence could be that, when compared to the individuals behind start-ups that raise millions in funding, companies that transform how we live, and products that offer us something new, exciting and trendy, those pursuing far simpler businesses appear less fascinating to many people.

In a short interview given to his young nephew, StoryCorps founder David Isay says the following: *“You can find the most amazing stories from regular people, all you have to do is ask them about their lives and listen.”* During the few months that I spent learning about entrepreneurship in Africa, in South Africa, and on the streets of Cape Town, his statement proved to be true. While not everyone who was approached agreed to participate, those who were willing shared their stories openly and allowed me a glimpse into the challenges they have had to overcome, the successes of which they are proud, and their hopes for things to come. Each story, like each person, was unique. Their businesses may not be making millions or doing something new, but these entrepreneurs have navigated numerous personal obstacles, contend with financial challenges and exist in spaces where they are one of many, challenged to stand out in one way or another, so that they can make a living.

With just seven final participants, all of them based in Cape Town, South Africa, and the majority of them immigrants, this creative production only scratched the surface. The different economic environments and social circumstances in South Africa and beyond suggest that there are thousands more interesting and insightful stories of everyday entrepreneurs. They simply have to be found, listened to, and shared.

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Appendix A

Initial Study - How young African entrepreneurs use, engage with, and perceive online platforms as a resource

Within the African context, entrepreneurship is viewed as a considerably sustainable job generation tool with the potential to lead the continent's development (Obonyo, 2016, NPN). Entrepreneurship has been known to help make more young people economically active around the world (Owualah, 1999, p.50), and so is particularly valuable as a solution to the continent's youth unemployment problem (Chigunta et al., 2005, p.16). Africa's youth unemployment rate – largely attributed to a lack of formal job opportunities – currently stands at 11.1%, and with the youth population of 200 million projected to double by 2045, there is a recognised need to support young entrepreneurs and create more opportunities for them (Bryant, 2016, NPN).

In order for African entrepreneurs to thrive, efforts must be made to address the obstacles they face, such as the lack of funding, gaining essential skills, and support from their respective governments (Obonyo, 2016, NPN) (Fatoki, 2010, p.87). Of these challenges, acquiring relevant knowledge and skills such as the basics of business development, marketing, communications, networking, and gaining access to mentors (West, 2012, p.7) has previously been identified as a need that can be met online (Evans & Volery, 2001, p.334).

Africa is home to the fastest growing internet penetration rate in the world, with the number of smartphone connections set to reach 720 million by the year 2020 due to the lowering costs of data and mobile devices (Rice-Oxley & Flood, 2016, NPN). This connectivity and access to mobile technology has proven valuable to the continent's entrepreneurs (Ukpere et al., 2014, p.66); allowing them to access information, embrace digital marketing, and even manage payments and finances (West, 2012, p.1).

Research Problem & Objectives

Despite the rapidly increasing connectivity, and the potential of the internet to support new businesses and their owners, recent research indicates that only 52% of young African entrepreneurs turn to online resources for assistance, behind networking events and mentors (62%), and training programmes (54%) (Survey, 2016, p.12). Based on these statistics, this research explored how young Africans engage with and experience online resources when venturing into the field of entrepreneurship.

Under the broader heading of *“How Young African Entrepreneurs Use, Engage with, and Perceive Online Platforms as a Resource”*, the research attempts to better understand the experiences and needs of budding entrepreneurs on the continent by focusing on the following questions:

- What kind of information and resources do young entrepreneurs seek out?
- Which online platforms do they find themselves turning to?
- Do they feel that the information and support available to them online is adequate?
- How would they like to see online resources cater for them?

Existing research in the field by Chinguta et al. (2005), Langevang et al. (2012), Fatoki (2012) and Beeka and Rimmington (2011) covers the motivations and challenges of young entrepreneurs in Africa, while Ukpere and peers (2014) have looked at how online and digital tools are relevant to, and can improve the prospects of African entrepreneurs (Ukpere et al., 2014, p.58). The proposed study contributes to the body of literature by documenting the challenges and opportunities of online platforms as a resource for young Africans entering the entrepreneurial space.

Literature Review

Entrepreneurship – the application of initiative, innovation, creativity, risk-taking, and other enterprising skills towards self-employment, or employment within small start-up businesses (Chigunta, 2002, p.1) – is widely considered an important contributor to national economies. Research has found that by building new businesses, entrepreneurs empower themselves (Beeka & Rimmington, 2011, p.145), and in developing regions such as Africa, they create wealth, employment opportunities and improved living standards for others (Fatoki, 2010, p.87) (Ukpere, et al., 2014, p.479), and contribute to economic and social transformation (Langevang, et al., 2012, p.439).

Studies in the area have identified entrepreneurial activity as a solution to youth unemployment in Africa (Chigunta et al., 2005, p.16) (Kew, 2015, p.5). With 200 million people between the ages of 15-24, Africa is home to the youngest population in the world, and employment opportunities in the formal sector for this growing demographic are limited (Kew, 2015, p.5). Research indicates that Africa's youth make up 60% of the unemployed population and only 37% of the labour force (Beeka & Rimmington, 2011, p.146), and that many young people are indeed turning to self-employment and entrepreneurship to remedy the situation. When compared to their peers around the world, African youth have a higher tendency to be self-employed (Beeka & Rimmington, 2011, p.147), and they are optimistic about the business opportunities in their respective countries (Kew, 2015, p.7).

Despite mostly positive attitudes, entrepreneurship presents significant difficulties. Research shows that a common challenge faced by current and aspirant entrepreneurs is access to information and resources (Evans & Volery, 2001, p.333). And although development policies in various African countries have highlighted the need to increase entrepreneurship through the implementation of support structures (Langevang, et al., 2012, p.439), a recent survey indicated that only 43% of young entrepreneurs described the support currently available to them as "fair", followed by 24% who described it as "poor", and 17% describing the support as "very poor" (Survey, 2016, p.3).

Studies have revealed that entrepreneurs specifically require assistance with customer relationship management, credit, capital access, marketing, market data, financial resources, investment, training, and mentorship (West, 2012, p.7), and African entrepreneurs in particular are faced with limited resources in such areas (Beeka & Rimmington, 2011, p.147). A 2015 study found that young entrepreneurs on the continent find themselves hindered by a lack of adequate skills, support and market opportunities, and that they are often restricted to low growth retail businesses that employ old technology (Kew, 2015, p.10).

The internet and new technologies have become valuable tools for entrepreneurs and businesses, making it easier to exchange information and access networks (Evans & Volery, 2001, p.334). In Africa, mobile devices are becoming increasingly cheaper (Karrer-Rueedi & Trueb, 2011, p.13) and the continent has the fastest growing internet penetration in the world (Rice-Oxley & Flood, 2016, NPN); research in the field has shown that both these developments have changed the entrepreneurial landscape (Ukpere, et al., 2014, p.58).

Studies have shown that while many African entrepreneurs are embracing mobile devices and the internet, using these to market their goods and businesses, communicate, access relevant information, and simplify payment processes (Ukpere, et al., 2014, p.557), the use of such technologies amongst young African entrepreneurs is generally low – a phenomenon that can be attributed to internet costs (Kew, 2015, p.10). However, internet connections are still considerably cheaper than other forms of communication such as voice or SMS, and research indicates that users on the continent can, and often do, mitigate costs by opting for monthly, weekly, daily, or platform specific data bundles (Chair, 2017, p.2).

Adequate information is important for entrepreneurs wanting to gain a competitive advantage and eventually succeed (Lybaert, 1998, p.335). Although the cost of internet connectivity is a barrier, research indicates that access to mobile technology has in many cases demonstrated its value for those involved in entrepreneurial activity (Karrer-Rueedi & Trueb, 2011, p.18) (Ukpere, et al., 2014, p.66). This suggests that online channels would be effective in reaching and educating young Africans faced with the challenges of entrepreneurship.

Methodology

This research was undertaken by means of a qualitative interview-based reception study. Qualitative research tends to be exploratory (Reagan, 2006, p.74), focusing on developing a rich understanding of an audience's experience and interpretation of media products (Schroder et al, 2003, p.148). It was therefore appropriate for investigating the reception of online support platforms amongst young African entrepreneurs.

To obtain the required insights, a series of one-on-one naturalistic interviews were conducted. One-on-one interviews are advantageous in that they enable the researcher to probe topics that may arise during the discussion (Priest, 2009, p.107), while also allowing for the clarification of responses and follow up questions (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p.145). For participants, naturalistic interviews help create a comfortable environment which encourages them to speak freely and elaborate on their thoughts and experiences, generating richer data for the researcher (Deacon, Pickering, Golding, & Murdock, 2002, p.288).

The study consisted of four participants, from Nigeria, Tanzania, Zimbabwe and Botswana, and aged between 27 and 31 years old. Their entrepreneurial ventures were in fashion manufacturing and textiles, lifestyle and events, and art upcycling. The longest running business was established 5 years ago, while the newest business had only been running for 2 months.

These participants were selected through a 'purposive sampling' (Allen M., 2017, p. 1533) process that involved reaching out to African entrepreneurs between the ages of 15 and 35, who are in various stages of their business ventures. Participants were recruited through

emails to the researcher's network, as well as snowball sampling once the first few interviewees had been contacted. Interview dates and times were then arranged with participants, and they were each provided with a consent form detailing the outline and purpose of the research. There were initially 6 individual interviews scheduled, but unfortunately the last two participants dropped out of the study due to time commitments.

The interviews were 30-45mins long and were conducted in person and over Skype and WhatsApp calls. To ensure consistency in the approach and line of questioning employed an interview guide was created and used in each session. This guide was determined by the research question and featured important topics and questions to be addressed (Deacon et al, 2002, p.65) (Priest, 2009, p.108). Through the open-ended questions in the guide, each interview session aimed to facilitate a discussion around the online platforms that the research participants regularly engage with for advice and support when starting and running their businesses. Specifically, they were asked questions around where and how they access these platforms, what kind of information they found most valuable, and the perceived benefits and challenges of said platforms. Participants were also asked their opinions on how online resources for young entrepreneurs on the continent can best cater to their needs. Each interview was audio recorded and later transcribed, after which the transcripts were analysed to identify prominent or common themes and issues that emerged.

Findings and Discussion

Becoming Entrepreneurs - All four participants of this study had some form of tertiary education, and two of them worked in full-time jobs. When asked their reasons for venturing into entrepreneurship they described either a desire to make a creative interest profitable or identifying a problem that they felt they could solve and turn into a business.

I don't know if I thought of myself as an entrepreneur when I was doing it. I just wanted to do this because I experienced this problem, so I thought it would be a perfect way to help other people in my situation." – Participant 3

"I've always wanted to practise my art, I've always loved art, and at the same time I've always wanted to sort of do it professionally as well or sell it professionally." – Participant 4

Motivations for Going Online - Motivations for using online platforms were quite similar amongst the participants. They explained going online to do research and find information on various aspects of their businesses, market themselves on social media, keep up with news relevant to their industries, and learn about the stories and journeys of other entrepreneurs.

"The many different platforms that have popped up have really made it very convenient to just gather certain information that you need for inspiration and motivation, and so on." – Participant 2

"I start from just listening to what other people have done, hearing how their journey has been, and in that I'll take from what they say and then try and implement as well." – Participant 3

The participants whose businesses have artistic leanings – fashion and art upcycling – explained that they went online to seek out creative inspiration.

"I definitely get a lot of inspiration from online platforms, and that really helps push my business." – Participant 2

"Pinterest for inspiration, not for marketing or anything like that." – Participant 4

Preferred Devices - When asked about what kind of devices they preferred or found themselves using often, two of the participants listed mobile phones as their first choice and their most-used device but gave different reasons for this. Participant 2 preferred this device due to the convenience of always having it at hand and constantly being online, while participant 3 explained that her main resources for entrepreneurial information are podcasts and that a mobile phone allowed her to listen to these easily.

"I'll definitely say that it's my mobile, because it's in my hand and it has data on it, so I can just go online. My computer I have to open it up, set it up, my phone is in my hand." – Participant 2

"My main resource has been podcasts, that's what I listen to most for the entrepreneurial stuff, so mobile is much easier to do that with." – Participant 3

The remaining participants mostly used desktop computers to access online platforms. Both these participants worked full time jobs and so spent a large amount of time at a desktop during the day and switched to using their phones when outside of work. One participant explained that this also give him the advantage of using a fast internet connection and saving on data costs.

"I get to work, and I sit down with my computer and my laptop and I just access from there." – Participant 1

"At work it's desktop, and the reason for that is it's faster, the screen is bigger, you know, all those conveniences. One reason why I use the desktop so much, is also because I don't pay for the internet at work." – Participant 4

Online Platforms Frequented - When it came to specific platforms used, the participants explained that they accessed different platforms for different reasons. For the artistic entrepreneurs, Pinterest was considered a valuable source of instructional information and inspiration, particularly because of how the platform curated information according to the user's interests.

"Pinterest, because they always have lots of different things, and they always know what you're looking for – the second they know this is what you like, this is what you search for, they curate it for you. So that's one platform that I feel is very useful." – Participant 2

"Whenever I wanted to try something, or I needed to learn how to do something, I would use Pinterest, you know, because they've got all the images and they take you to websites and they actually give you instructions." – Participant 4

The participants described Facebook as a useful platform for marketing their businesses and allowing them to connect with people outside of their immediate network through features such as Facebook groups and pages.

"I've actually gotten a few orders and recognition and things, thanks to online platforms. It's not just people I know, it's a couple of people I know, but most of the people I've engaged with have been complete

strangers seeing my stuff on Facebook or Instagram, that's how we've been able to connect.” – Participant 2

“There's a Facebook group called _____, so basically people who are selling cars, people who are subletting rooms, people who are, you know, hiring out entertainers for events, all that, they sort of go through that. So, I'd say there's that, if anything [for marketing].” – Participant 4

Twitter and SurveyMonkey were mentioned as useful tools for conducting research, and most of the participants mentioned visiting blogs and websites for inspiration and updates, as well as to keep up with businesses similar to their own. YouTube videos and podcasts also provided information and entrepreneurial motivation.

The Value of Online Platforms - Participants spoke positively about what being online allows them to do, and specifically mentioned social media marketing that enables them to reach people outside their networks and circles and accessing a wealth of information at little to no cost while also being able to consume it in their own time.

“The online platforms have made it a lot easier, because you can use social media to really market yourself – which is very important.” – Participant 2

“There's quite a lot of free, should I say free stuff on the internet, so much free advice, and you can do it at your own time.” – Participant 4

The ability to seek and receive assistance with aspects of their business was also highlighted as a very valuable function of online platforms. One participant described how she received help with a business plan and found a financial adviser through a closed Facebook group of young entrepreneurs who showcase their work at the same market. However, obtaining this kind of assistance was seen as dependent on posing the question to like-minded or well-connected individuals.

“You can actually put [a question] out there and receive the right information...but you just need to make sure that you're putting it on the right platform...it's not just a Facebook status.”
– Participant 1

Missing Mentorship - While the participants noted that online platforms are useful for research, inspiration and marketing, a common complaint amongst three of the interviewees was that they lacked support in the form of mentorship, and so found themselves seeking this kind of support offline. These participants sought out people in the same industries and businesses, as well as business people in other fields who were willing to offer their advice. They found these mentors in their networks, and in some cases in their own families, and used these resources to supplement the information they get online.

“One of the big things I think is missing for young entrepreneurs, is mentorship...You need those people that like, they think like you, they understand you, so that type of stuff, that is what we're missing on online platforms.” – Participant 1

“I believe in terms of support I usually...it's usually a one-on-one relationship, I don't actively look for it. It's just that I don't feel like I can usually get the selection I need online.” – Participant 2

“I go to real sources, people who I know personally who are running their own businesses and hear what they’ve done.” – Participant 3

“Another way is just through friends and family, you know when I’m doing something with my people, I tell them, ‘my guys, so there’s this little issue here that I’m dealing with, would you go through this?’ And if they can’t figure it out, it becomes an automatic brainstorming session, then we decide that okay maybe this is what we can do.” – Participant 4

It was also noted by two participants that they would not only like to access experienced mentors online but would also want to connect with other young entrepreneurs to share ideas, resources, and even explore the possibility of working together.

“It’s not just about who’s older and who has experience in business or whatever, it’s just ‘I’m going through this, you’re going through this, how can we help each other?’ That’s useful.”
– Participant 2

Finding Relatable Content - Participants also found that relatable content was missing on these online platforms. They expressed a desire to see more entrepreneurial content either about or created by other African entrepreneurs, as there was the perception that not all information would be applicable to their locations, and that it is necessary for those who have set out on similar entrepreneurial paths to share their stories and advice in order to help others succeed.

“Sometimes a lot of the stuff that is posted isn’t from Tanzania, it’s not from Africa, it’s from Russia or Germany, or Austria, you know, or the US or the UK, so there’s quite a lot there that doesn’t apply to me.” – Participant 4

“I think more people like us who are entrepreneurs in Africa need to put resources out there for people. An African person should have, for example, their own podcast, or their own website, detailing their own experiences and their own resources that they can offer people to benefit their journey to their entrepreneurial dreams.” – Participant 3

One participant mentioned that she felt that other entrepreneurs offering their advice and assistance was not likely in her country since, in her opinion, there doesn’t seem to be a willingness to help others get ahead.

“The person who’s been there the longest time is in the position to help the most, but then they are afraid that if they help and give people their ideas, their advice, they would be giving up their trade secrets or they would be giving up their place in being number one. So, it’s about defending their territory in a way.” – Participant 3

“Motherland Moguls” - Platform *She Leads Africa* was mentioned as a good resource and a positive step forward for young women in entrepreneurship by the women who participated in this pilot study, even those who had not yet actively engaged with the platform. The website was started in 2014 by two young entrepreneurs from Ghana and Nigeria, and it focuses solely on African women, featuring success stories, advice, as well as practical information ranging from establishing a business strategy and plan, to creating a personal image and brand.

“I am a ‘Motherland Mogul’, She Leads Africa is literally my go to for everything. on that platform, I’ve learned everything from writing the perfect cover letter, fixing up my CV, to how to grab investor’s attention through business plans.” – Participant 1

"I haven't actively gotten involved, but I have heard of it, I have registered on it, and I think it is a positive step for entrepreneurs, especially female entrepreneurs." – Participant 2

"I haven't actually gone onto *She Leads Africa*. But I do believe that it's a very good resource, because a lot of people that I've spoken to offline talk about it and mention it." – Participant 3

Conclusion

This study was aimed at investigating how young African entrepreneurs use, engage with, and perceive online platforms as a resource. Through a series of one-on-one interviews with four African entrepreneurs, it was found that while online platforms were very helpful in terms of research, creative inspiration, social media marketing and networking, they were lacking content that was created specifically for African entrepreneurs and access to mentors who could personally assist budding entrepreneurs. While most of the participants were able to find forms of mentorship in their personal network, this solution would not be so easily possible for entrepreneurs without such connections. For the women who participated the platform *She Leads Africa* was hailed as an encouraging step forward for young women who wish to enter the business and entrepreneurial space, creating content that addresses their needs as both women and budding entrepreneurs and business people.

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