AN ANALYSIS OF *PURPLE TRUTHS*: AN ALTERNATIVE HISTORY OF THE SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM AND MEDIA STUDIES AT RHODES UNIVERSITY. EXPLORING THE POSSIBILITIES OF DIGITAL MEDIA FOR TELLING HISTORY THROUGH MULTIPLE VOICES

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I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it at any university for a degree.

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ABSTRACT

In theory, notions of public history and participatory journalism signal the ability of users to become active collaborators in the journalistic process with a degree of agency and authority over media content. Similarities in public history and participatory journalism are manifested in audience participation where the traditional and hegemonic boundaries between readers and journalists/historians are challenged. In this thesis, I present *Purple Truths,* a digital public history website about the School of Journalism and Media Studies at Rhodes University, that highlights multivocality and plurality. It allowed for democratisation of the historical narrative by inviting audience participation to historical inquiry on a digital platform. It was constructed as a case study for the thesis to investigate participatory processes. Using a five-dimensional model developed by Netzer et al. (2014) for the construction of participation on news websites, I identified five major participation features that revealed how and where participation was happening on the website. The features were mapped and tabulated according to Carpentier's (2011) maximalist/minimalist dimensions of participation (access, interaction and 'real') to determine the degrees of participation in this study towards the aim of using the *Purple Truths* website to democratise the historical narrative. My findings suggest that despite a diversity of strategies, the study did have to rely on existing norms and practices of editorial decision-making, even in the context of digital media, and significant stages of the news-production process (selection/filtering) remained in the hands of researcher/editor. Maximalist participation, demonstrated as equalised power relations in decision-making, has a utopian dimension and is difficult to translate into practice. However, participation research requires further investigation in the digital humanities in South Africa to explore notions of democratisation of the narrative in academic and social praxis as sites of interdisciplinary democratic renewal.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of a practice-led Master of Arts in Journalism and Media Studies which includes a production-based project and this academic thesis component. The study includes the production of a digitally-produced public history website of the School of Journalism and Media Studies (SJMS) at Rhodes University as a case study for the thesis. The thesis is a discussion of this practice-led project and investigates the capacity of participatory digital technologies for telling history through multiple voices and the pursuit of democratisation of a narrative. The study investigates the advantages and limitations of a community-engaged, digital humanities project.

This study was situated within a larger Mellon research programme led by Emeritus Professor Paul Maylam who was conducting research into the institutional history of Rhodes University[1].

1.2 Background and motivation of the study

Established as an independent department in 1972[2], the SJMS was the first English-language, university-based site of journalism education in South Africa. However, despite its pre-eminent position, sustained over the decade of its existence, preliminary research points to gaps in both the volume of historical accounts of the SJMS and the scope of their historical perspective. The predominant SJMS historical narratives have involved various versions and methods of SJMS history as contextual and legitimising agents. Among these are: academic reflection regarding the development of curricula, which give insight into formal educational strategies (Du Toit, 2013; Greyling, 2007; Steenveld, 2006); a *Grocott's Mail* publication celebrating its 134th year which published brief profiles of the Heads of Department of the SJMS; autobiographical accounts incorporating SJMS as a backdrop to personal

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[1] Although part of the Mellon History Project, this project was exclusively a journalism study and the distinction was made clear from the beginning. In Maylam's research, which was be published in 2017 as *Rhodes University, 1904 – 2016: An Intellectual, Political and Cultural History,* he found a wealth of knowledge about other academic spaces in the university which wasn't possible to include in his publication. The School of Journalism and Media Studies was one of these spaces and he began searching for someone to research its history.

[2] As an independent department and no longer a sub-set of the English department (Butler, 1991).

histories (Hilton-Barber, 2016; Warman, 2015; Butler, 1991); and as part of Paul Maylam's institutional history of Rhodes University from 1904 to 2016, an intellectual, political and cultural history. These accounts give a sense of the many aspects of SJMS history but they do not trace the multiplicity of individuals' experiences from the SJMS and the diverse trajectories of the thousands of graduates who have populated the journalism and associated communication industries in South Africa, Africa and further afield (Boshoff & Garman, 2016; Du Toit, 2013; De Beer & Tomaselli, 2000). This opens up the possibility of exploring another version of SJMS history: one that traces the multiplicity of individuals who have been part of the School to present a multivoice journalism history in South Africa.

Using this as a provocation, the study explores a digital historical inquiry (a website called [Purple Truths](#)[3]) that uses a participatory alternative to the conventional approach, enabling other voices and perspectives to be heard by operating within an interdisciplinary matrix of public history, digitality and participatory journalism. In doing so, the digital media technologies employed for this purpose contest an aging fundamental notion of journalism and history: one that appoints the journalist/historian as the gatekeeper who determines what is news, how it is presented and disseminated (Singer et al., 2011). This study seeks to investigate this notion by designing a participatory alternative that can experiment with the boundaries of the journalist/historian as the gatekeeper.

Historiographical landscape

Journalists and media professionals speak of the loss of an uncaptured, polyvocal journalism history in South Africa (Vollenhoven, 2014; Jaffer, 2005). They are turning their attention to the need to reclaim and recover a historical knowledge of journalism, so that this can form a resource for strengthening the establishment of an intrinsically South African tradition of journalism. Jaffer explains, through her initiative *The Journalist,* that "We cannot blame young journalists for not knowing the historical context. They are not getting it at the universities nor are they getting it in the newsrooms. We have to create a knowledge bank that records institutional

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[3] https://apurpletruth.wixsite.com/sjmshistory

memory" (in Vollenhoven, 2014). Jaffer (2005: 181-182) provides further provocation for the exploration of multivocality in this study when she explains:

> The students who were here at that time should be tracked down and interviewed... The relevant authorities should be interviewed as well... This process may be just what the university needs to truly diversity. For as long as it does not acknowledge how very different the experiences of so many of us were, for so long will it continue to believe that it can continue to assimilate those who come to Rhodes today into the dominant culture. Rhodes is a very different place today. Yet how different is it?

This provocation is reinforced by South African historian Grundlingh (2004) who argues that since ideological liberation South African history "edges towards a more inclusive narrative of events which, despite possible different emphases, will at least pertain to all groups as fully-fledged South African citizens" (cited in Visser, 2004: 19). However, South Africa's journalism historiography is often collated in a linear manner with certain leadership figures picked out for their insights and experiences. A rich historical perspective on the sites of theoretical and practical journalism knowledge production is therefore a gap in the historiographical landscape. An examination of the richly textured and variant nature of the SJMS past can contribute to the institutional memory of Rhodes University, journalism historiography and understanding these sites as habitats of South African journalism.

In order to represent an inclusive historical narrative of the SJMS by highlighting the plurality of the School and the many individuals that have walked through its doors since its establishment, this study situates itself under the umbrella methodology of public history. The National Council of Public History (NCPH) board suggests that "public history is a movement, methodology, and approach that promotes the collaborative study and practice of history" (2016). Through principles of alternative forms, textual experiences, alternative voices, unconventional methodologies, unnatural narratives[4], reconstruction and challenging narration and the position of the author and non-linear forms of representation, public history has taken on an interdisciplinary status and inevitable practical reflexivity (Hodes, 2007; Nash, 2004; Stremlau, 2002; Becker, 1995; Berkoffer, 1995; Jenkins, 1997; Fisher, 1991). In

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[4] Richardson (in Alber et al., 2010: 115) defines unnatural narratives as "anti-mimetic texts that violate the parameters of tradition realism or move beyond the conventions of natural narrative" giving an example of the latter as "forms of spontaneous oral storytelling".

theory, these notions signal the ability of users to become active collaborators in the process with a degree of agency and authority over media and other forms of content.

Journalism in a democratic landscape

The journalistic task of providing a platform for voices requires an active audience where they [the audience] cease to be consumers and rather a more involved public. Through this action they become "users" rather than simply "audience" members (Singer et al., 2011: 36). According to Heinonen in Singer et al. (2011) these users "not only receive information, but also search out their own information, produce additional information themselves, and consult and interact with other participants in the process" (36). The result of which establishes a shift in roles that enable individuals to become active participants in journalism (Singer et al., 2011; McNair, 2000; McQuail, 2000).

Garman & Wasserman (2017: 9) explain that this orientation turns human beings into "whos" rather than "whats". This shapes a plurality of experience which is "a central condition of human experience" (Bickford, 1996: 59). Garman and Wasserman (2017: 9) further explain that in South Africa the very clumping of classes of people into *whats* ("the majority", "the poor", "women") detracts from the value of what can be illuminated when highlighting plural, unique individuals. This idea is what influences the investigation of this research as it allows the view of individuals part of the School of Journalism and Media Studies as agents rather than passive bystanders of the history; who would otherwise be speckled as inanimate names throughout the archives.

The fact that South Africa is a recently-formed democracy is important in this study because of the premise underlying this form of government: it rests on a public that is both informed about matters of civic importance and able to talk about those matters with other citizens. As Gans (2003) explains, journalists have always seen themselves as crucial to the democratic role of informing the public. That perception is a key aspect of a, generally, shared journalistic culture. This connection between discourse and democracy has been highlighted over many centuries and in many cultural contexts (Habermas, 1989; Dewey, 1927).

Despite the many and ongoing changes in the ways that people access information, leading newspapers generally retain an authoritative role (Singer et al., 2011).

Proponents of participatory models argue that in a changing society, the democratic role of journalism needs to be redefined so that it is more inclusive than what the notion of an institutional gatekeeper allows. As Gillmor (2006) and Jarvis (2006) explain, this highlights the top-down approach of journalism towards a new social imaginary that situates journalism as a conversation and collaboration with citizens which facilitates them to take an active role in news processes.

But just what might such an active role look like?

The Internet's participatory potential especially allows a shift in established modes of journalism by bringing new voices into the media (Singer et al., 2013). It is irrefutable that information technology brings us impressive means to research and represent the past (Van Den Akker, 2013). The internet operates in a number of ways within history where digital virtualisation is fast replacing the material product (Kean & Martin, 2013). History is also collected, displayed and distributed through complex networks of digital curatorial methods (Dougherty & Nawrotzki, 2013; Means, 2013; Lindsay, 2013). Digital journalism history is the area that incorporates most non-text representations of history: TV, Radio, broadcast and online archives. "Concomitantly, the internet affords the public the means to both author and convey history. Online social networks have led to new definitions of selfhood manifested through the extent of one's engagement with them" explain Kean & Martin (2013: 6).

For several years now, established media have been exploring participatory forms of content production that influence various roles of gatekeeping in production stages of content creation and dissemination (Singer et al., 2011). Gatekeeping is defined as "the process by which the vast array of potential news messages are winnowed, shaped, and prodded into those few that are actually transmitted by news media" (Shoemaker et al., 2001: 233).

This thesis investigates whether notions of participation in the production of a journalism history strengthen the establishment of an intrinsically South African tradition of journalism, which Jaffer and Vollenhoven (2014) describe, whereby the narrative is opened up for democratisation. Heinonen, co-author with Singer et al. (2011: 35), adds that we traditionally assign the role of "receiver" to the audience, even when thinking of the journalism in democratic society, due to the idea that the public is made up of people who receive information and the interpretations are

provided by journalists (McNair, 2000). "Although audience members are kept informed, they remain outside the journalistic process" of various news-production stages (Heinonen in Singer et al., 2011: 36).

However, the media, in both its mainstream presentations as well as informal, alternative and digital formats, is considered to have the potential to facilitate participation in its news-production stages. In the context of South Africa's democracy, where the media has often been given the role of facilitating democracy, it can play an important role in creating and sustaining various participatory spaces (Garman & Wasserman, 2017; Vollenhoven, 2014). These participatory spaces are arenas that invite and engage individuals in society. In the media, this requires a shift in orientation, one that reaches further than its conventional underpinnings "to a position of engagement, involvement and active listening" (Garman & Wasserman, 2017: 10).

Participatory journalism

In order to develop strategies for the design and execution of a digital public history in this study, ones which can solicit participation and foster collaboration and engagement, I lean on primary characteristics of participatory journalism and its framework of participatory culture (Jenkins et al., 2005: 7): civic engagement and self-expression, supported processes of sharing and creation, connection and access to individuals across professional fields (amateurs and mentors), an enhancement of individuals' sense of significance through their contributions and an increased sense of social connection. These characteristics, pivotal to sound participatory journalism, inform this project's re-imagining of a participatory history. In this research, I use the term participatory journalism to describe the collective collaboration in which I, and other individuals, are involved in gathering, producing and distributing information which contributes to a public history of the School of Journalism and Media Studies.

Netzer et al. (2014: 619) explain that audience participation has always been inherent in journalism. However, digital technology has morphed the news environments of contemporary society into new and "ubiquitous forms" which have challenged "traditional" boundaries of readers and journalists. It is this journalistic landscape, which has challenged traditional boundaries of readers and journalists, that is capitalised on in this study. The study manifests very much as a *product* of this

context, with a fundamental premise that guides its investigation and historical inquiry: "individual citizens and community organizers perform some of the communication functions previously controlled by media institutions" (Singer et al., 2011: 15). Furthermore, it uses capacities of digital media to do this. Scholars of journalism recognise that we are facing accelerated new conditions in participatory culture and journalism brought on by increasing use of Internet and the ever-changing digital era[5] (Brier & Wizinsky, 2016; Singer et al., 2011). Discussion forums, blogs, social networking sites, reports (including visual ones), reviews and articles supplied by readers are only a few examples of forms of the digital era that have enabled journalists to develop strategies that enable multiple sources. These platforms facilitate participatory approaches to allow more voices and perspectives to be heard and presented (Singer et al., 2011; Lasica, 2003). This provides a methodological vehicle for the design of the public history in this study by mapping various features, like those mentioned above, to employ in the creation of an accessible journalism digital public history of the SJMS where more voices and perspectives can be heard and presented.

Many terms have been used to describe this kind of participation and contributions to online newspapers, websites or journalistic content (Singer et al. (2011). These include "user-generated content", "citizen journalism" and "participatory journalism" and all refer to "the act of a citizen, or groups of citizens, playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analysing and disseminating news and information" (Hermida in Singer et al., 2011: 15; Bowman & Willis, 2003). By employing participatory journalism in the construction of a digital public history in this study, I am exploring what constitutes one of the main challenges to journalists' authority and self-definition (Lewis, 2012): the renegotiation of the relationship between producers and consumers. Through this kind of participatory culture, consumers of the history can contribute directly and, in doing so, challenge journalistic authority and professional values (Netzer et al., 2014; Deuze, 2006; Jenkins, 2006). Framing the research in this way allows the study to explore this challenge by examining how a

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[5] It is important to note that the idea that traditional forms of mass media and organisational patterns have hindered the emergence of a more active audience by limiting access and discouraging participation and dialogue has been questioned long ago. The concept of audience as passive receivers was dismissed by many media observers well before the rise of the Internet era (Wiles, 1965; McQuail, 2000; Hermida in Singer et al., 2011). It is the accelerated changing of the communication network that has made the issue "topical in novel ways" (Heinonen in Singer et al., 2011: 37).

journalistic approach of inviting audience participation can redress notions of the democratisation of narrative in this historical inquiry (Carpentier, 2011; Singer et al., 2011).

Democratisation of the narrative

As stated above, digital media technologies provide possibilities for reach, accessibility and multivocality in this study. Frisch's (1990) theory of shared authority, based on the premise of inviting individuals and publics to share their historical viewpoints, informs the multivoice processes of collaboration (participation) and co-production (authorship) of this research. Carpentier (2011: 64) further highlights the complexity of the notion of participation in democratic theories of active and passive "audience" that include the participation dimension. This role of authorship in the context of participatory research is one that is investigated throughout the study in order to evaluate the extent and attempt of forming a resource focused on the democratisation of this narrative through mapping and evaluating the implementation of participatory features.

1.3 Context of the production component of this study

Purple Truths is a public history website (production). The website, created as a case study for the thesis, goes beyond oral history collection to mobilise historical subjects as historical agents. It aims to highlight collective historical experiences of the School of Journalism and Media Studies (SJMS) at Rhodes University. It does this by bringing history, participatory design and historical subjects onto a digital platform of exchange with participatory features with the aim of mobilising people to contribute to the SJMS history and transform "historical subjects into history-makers" (Brier & Wizinsky, 2016: 2). This research uses Brier & Wizinsky's *History Moves* (2016) as a model: a public history project that brought history, design and historical subjects into conversation to shape public space. Brier & Wizinsky (2016) suggest using the *History Moves* project as an example of digital public history that can provide a model for how to build participatory digital history projects and collaborative history displays. The goal of this study is to democratise the full process – collection to curation to design to distribution – without compromising on a cogent historical narrative, the value of personal voice or intellectual merit.

1.4 Research goal

The goal of this research is to use a digitally-produced public history website as a site of exploration to investigate the capacity of participatory digital technologies for telling history through multiple voices within the context of South African journalism.

1.5 Research questions

1) How do various strategies of participatory journalism contribute to a digital public history?
2) In what ways does revising shared authority and meaning-making in historical research about the SJMS elicit a democratisation of this narrative?

1.6 Thesis outline

In this chapter I have outlined the interdisciplinary context of this research and the participatory matrix of fields (participatory journalism, digital history and public history) that are conceptually connected for the study's exploration of the extent and degrees of democratisation of the narrative in this study of the digital humanities.

Chapter 2 introduces the conceptual and theoretical background to this study by examining the methodological framework and theoretical underpinnings of public history scholarship and theoretical notions of participation and authorship that integrate participatory journalism to guide this research.

Chapter 3 provides the study's methodological orientation. I discuss the research design, creation and processes of the production's role in this study, and describe how I collected and analysed my data. I also discuss ethics.

Chapter 4 tells the story of the construction of the *Purple Truths* website. Details of its intentions, construction, materials, change over time and further detailed information is discussed and illustrated with graphic materials to give visuals of the website design and execution.

Chapter 5 focuses on the findings, analysis and discussion of the data collected by evaluating the participation features and tools of the website across five axes. I apply this to Carpentier's minimalist/maximalist models of participation in democratic theory to explore how traditional boundaries were challenged in this study and to what

extent the production facilitated a democratisation of the narrative and what this means for journalism in a democratic context.

The final chapter concludes important issues raised in the preceding chapters. It also discusses limitations and significance of the study and provides concluding reflections of the research.

CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THIS THESIS

2.1 Introduction

The theoretical framework for this thesis is rooted in public history scholarship and participatory journalism, both pursuits which embody theoretical notions of participation and shared authorship.

The thesis discusses the application of digital trends and theories of public history while informing and directing the production's exploration of public history in the context of South African digital humanities. It explores the use of these methods to facilitate the mobilisation of public history in the digital space in South Africa. The participatory journalism approach to history informs the thesis in its discussion of a journalism history in 'practice', the trends in public history and approach adopted for this study, model of transmission used, advantages and problems of online history, the project's impact on a viewing audience — this includes the role of historian/archivist/curator/exhibitor, creative ways that audiences can interact with historical artefacts, shared authority and democratisation of the historical narrative (Brier & Wizinsky, 2016; Rosenzweig, 2003).

2.2 Theoretical framework

2.2.1 Public history

The theoretical framework for this study is located in public history scholarship of constructing history from different sources and the role that participatory processes of curation and collaborative historical displays can play within historical inquiry. The theory of public history in this journalistic project challenges attempts to hold disciplinary practices to "some special canon of epistemological accountability" (Roth, 1992: 28). It insists that critical canons are applied to this project's interdisciplinary conceptualisation to judge its model of historical inquiry "by considerations derived primarily from the nature of how that model works" (Roth, 1992: 28). This project locates itself as a digital public history project because public history serves as an appropriate domain for the interdisciplinary fusion of journalism and history.

Participatory design and collaboration are vital in this research as most of the subjects of this history are still alive. In contrast to conventional history-making, seen as a solitary archival act conducted by a professional, Samuel argues that "history is not the prerogative of the historian .... It is, rather, a social form of knowledge; the work in a given instance, of a thousand different hands" (Samuel, 1994: 8). Archibald (1999: 155) has suggested public history takes the position that "public historians do not own history but are merely collaborators". History in the public arena is "the ensemble of activities and practices in which ideas of history are embedded or a dialectic of past-present relations is rehearsed" (Samuel, 1994: 8). Public history invokes history through and for the public by offering engagement and interactivity with historical activities and practices, using materials, public landscapes, monuments, museums, exhibitions, historical films, novels, family stories, songs, websites and memories in understanding history (Ashton & Kean, 2012; Samuel, 1994).

Public history provides a diverse exploration of the past by individuals who have some training in the discipline of history but are working outside of specialised academic settings. Public history is resistant to precise definition and there are extensive works on the nature and form of public history. "Process also implies practice. This includes the materials used for creating history as much as who decides what history is… if public history is not a set body of knowledge but a process by which history is constructed, then it is about 'making' history as much as 'thinking about' history" explain Kean & Martin (2013: xiii).

This research sees public history as the creation of accessible and participatory history for the public. In this way the researcher focuses on history as a body of knowledge that needs to be transmitted in accessible ways. The historian then needs to engage the public. Archibald (1999: 155-156) emphasises the importance of active involvement rather than passive consumption by highlighting the differentiating processes of public history:

> Public historians do not own history. History is owned by those whose past is described in the narrative because that story, their own version of it resides in their memories and establishes their identities. If public involvement is not integral to the process of public history the conclusions are meaningless.

Key elements that emerge from the discourse of public historians are the use of methods of the historical discipline, emphasis on the usefulness of historical knowledge in some way that goes beyond purely academic and an aim to deepen and empower public connection with the past.

With these aims in mind, this project is intrinsically guided by White's (1986: 487) claim of historical pluralism, which consists of a diversity of views, that states "A specifically historical inquiry is born less of the necessity to establish that certain events occurred than of the desire to determine what certain events might mean for a given group, society, or culture's conception of its present tasks and future prospects." Using White's (1986) notion of historical pluralism, this project seeks to recover and make visible the plurality of individuals, from both the past and the present, their voices and lived experiences in the SJMS to record a multivoice history.

Trends in public history reveal that digital virtualisation is fast replacing the material product (Brier & Wizinsky, 2016; Foster, 2014; Martin, 2013). Danniau (2013: 127) explains that the interaction and dialogue of online media, which facilitates public participation and sharing authority in analysing the past, "takes concrete and practical forms thanks to social media." The emerging digital affordances of the online arena present new opportunities for the telling of stories, access to material culture of the past and processes of collaboration and thus offers "an alternative construction of the past to that of the hegemonic" (Kean & Martin, 2013: 2). An example of the value of alternative constructions of the past can be seen in the resurgence of the 1960s *History Workshop Movement* into the *History Workshop Online*: "a forum, laboratory, and virtual coffeehouse devoted to the practice of radical history"[6]. The *History Workshop Movement* from the 1960s envisioned a "history from below" where the study of the past went beyond the academy into public gatherings called "workshops". Through their expansion onto the digital platform *History Workshop Online* they enrich a more formal academic history project with explicit encouragement of radical history in order to connect a bolder past to contemporary social, political and cultural issues. This initiative provides models of digital literacy for historians that minimises the gulf between sources and historical interpretation. This provides meaningful interaction with the public outside of the academic world because, often, the historian "within the

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[6] http://www.historyworkshop.org.uk/faqs/

academic world… refuses to see the need for historical context of a society that… manifests itself chiefly online" (Danniau, 2013: 144).

2.2.2 Participatory journalism

In exploring such a multivoiced public history model, the study draws on similar approaches to journalistic practices that have re-emerged in digital media production. Participation has played a key role in a variety of approaches within the field of communication and media studies (Carpentier, 2011: 84). Terms such as "participatory journalism", "citizen journalism" and "user-generated content" have been used interchangeably to refer to citizens playing an active and participatory role in the news production process: collecting, contributing, analysing and disseminating news and information (Hermida in Singer et al., 2011: 15; Bowman & Willis, 2003). Many scholars of journalism now recognise that we are facing new ground in participatory journalism brought on by increasing use of the Internet. Biella et. al. (2016: 1) explain that technologies available such as smartphones and social networks enable people to provide information in ways that were never possible before[7]. The inherent facilitation of participation and dialogue in this communication network means that this setting is characterised by collaborative communication among individuals where they can decide when, where and how they consume a product without setting foot in a newsroom (Deuze, 2006).

2.2.3 Access, interaction and 'real' participation

In theory, notions of public history and participatory journalism signal the ability of users to become active collaborators in the process with a degree of agency and authority over media content (Hermida in Singer et al., 2011)[8]. However, Carpentier (2011) highlights the complexity of the notion of participation in democratic theories of active and passive audience that include the interaction/participation dimension.

Carpentier (2011) foregrounds participation in democracy and in democratic theory because of its concern with the inclusion of people within decision-making processes.

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[7] "Reader participation in journalism has a long history. It dates at least to eighteenth-century England, when newspapers regularly left space at the end of the third page for reader comments, with a blank fourth page so that the paper might be folded and addressed like an ordinary letter" (Wiles 1965; Hermida in Singer et al., 2011: 13).
[8] Schoon (2013) provides a participatory model of video journalism in the context of the School of Journalism and Media Studies at Rhodes University and the Grahamstown community which this project uses as a reference point for praxis.

Carpentier (2011) highlights that democracy, because of its concern with the inclusion of people with political decision-making processes, is one of the key sites of the articulation of the concept of participation. He explores the communication field and what it offers participation, highlighting that this field has a social need for participation, as well as a difficulty in the ways that participation is organised, structured and limited. Participation has played a key role in a variety of approaches within the field of media studies and Carpentier illustrates some of the complexities of the debate on the active audience and democratic participation into the media sphere.

One of the crucial dimensions structuring different democratic models is the minimalist versus maximalist dimension, which underlies a number of key positions in the articulation of democracy. Carpentier (2011) migrates this democratic model into the media sphere to provide a distinction between partial participatory processes and full participatory processes. Minimalist forms of participation are models of partial participation where two or more parties influence the making of decisions but the final power to decide rests with one party only (Carpentier, 2011; Pateman, 1970). Carpentier (2011: 19) characterises this as "unidirectional participation". Maximalist forms of participation are seen as full participation where each individual member of a decision-making body has equal power to determine the outcome of decisions and this is then characterised as "multidirectional participation" (Carpentier, 2011: 19). These models of participation involve differentiating between "real" participation and other practices that are only nominally participatory to sharpen the key meanings attributed to participation as a political process where the actors involved in the decision-making processes are positioned towards each other through power relationships that are, to an extent, egalitarian (Carpentier, 2011: 126).

In the pursuit of the democratisation of the SJMS historical narrative, through digital public history and participatory journalism theorisations, an important aspect is authorship. This notion is what impacts and influences true democratisation of the narrative and guides this study's exploration through its assessment of access, interaction and "real" participation on the *Purple Truths* website (Carpentier, 2011: 126).

In terms of intellectual approach, the theory and methodology of public history remain in the discipline of history. However, unlike many historians in the academy, public

historians often participate in collaborative work and some argue that collaboration is a fundamental characteristic of what public historians do with varying degrees of participation. The collaborative approach inspires debates about the role of *shared authority* in public history models. In this study, Frisch's (1990) theory of shared authority, based on the premise of inviting individuals and the public to share their historical viewpoints and to address the relationship between researcher and historical subjects, influences the production processes of collaboration (participation) and co-production (authorship) in this project; acknowledging the plurality of individuals from the SJMS and their diverse lived experiences that should also be part of SJMS history. Danniau (2013: 121) explains:

> Public historians acknowledge, without succumbing to postmodern relativism, the various ways in which 'the' public is involved in the past. They believe that historians don't have the exclusive right to interpret the past.

Thus, producing a digital public history in this study provides a model for investigation, guided by Carpentier (2011), of whether its design and execution was partially participatory or fully participatory in order to explore Frisch's (1990) notion of shared authority which is specified as not giving up, or being willing to give up, authority but rather an acknowledgement of the dialogic dimension of public history. This investigation assesses, in practice, whether a public history project can be truly egalitarian in its journalistic aim to democratise the narrative. An extreme example of sharing historical authority in public history is a memorial research project called *The Children of the Lodz Ghetto* of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM)[9]. This citizen history project shows the value of what happens when historians share authority in a digital setting: the museum asks online visitors to reconstruct the lives and fates of 8,590 school children from the Lodz ghetto in Poland and in doing so "demonstrates the senselessness of measuring the success of a multi-level project simply on the basis of quantitative parameters" (Danniau, 2013: 133). Furthermore, this innovative approach embodies the ultimate goal of public history which is to spread and develop historical thinking.

In the context of the media sphere, journalists in modern Western societies see themselves as central to the proper functioning of democracy: news practitioners

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[9] United States Holocaust Museum, *Children of the Lodz Ghetto,* online.ushmm.org/lodzchildren/.

believe their job as gatekeeper is to ensure that citizens have the credible information necessary to govern themselves wisely (Singer et al., 2011; Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2007; Gans, 2003). Gatekeeping is the "overall process through which the social reality transmitted by the news media is constructed" (Shoemaker et al., 2001: 233). Within the newsroom, it involves "selecting, writing, editing, positioning, scheduling, repeating and otherwise massaging information to become news" (Shoemaker et al., 2008: 73). The journalist as a gatekeeper has become a core premise not only for practitioners but also for the people who study them (Singer et al., 2011); the concept is integral to communications research since its first application to news more than six decades ago (White, 1950). The role of journalist as gatekeeper has been undermined by digital media technologies, now affecting the production and dissemination of information, which enable users, as individuals or as groups, to create and distribute information based on their own observations or opinions (Singer et al., 2011). The role of gatekeeper in this study is challenged because the role and hierarchal positions of authorship is opened to individuals that are part of the SJMS history. Jenkins writes that a participatory media culture "contrasts with older notions of passive media spectatorship. Rather than talking about media producers and consumers occupying separate roles, we might now see them as participants who interact with each other according to a new set of rules that none of us fully understands" (2006: 3).

It is this participatory media culture that Jenkins describes, as well as Frisch's (1990) notion of shared authority in public history, that this thesis theoretically and practically investigates in the production component of this study through the creation of a digital public history website.

2.2.4 Archives, historical ephemera and living histories

This approach offers the option of a participatory historical culture in which people have a clear role in making history. British social historian Raphael Samuel noted that understanding the past comes from "civic, ritual, street nomenclature and literary or political statuary" – outside of books and archives (1994: 11). When discussing implications of the web and the internet, there is a huge advantage in modern technology that allows for direct interaction with archival material in digital form, that can be read anywhere, and is no longer spatially, physically and geographically limiting (Kean & Martin, 2013). A particular trend in the participatory historical

culture of public history is internet communities and crowd sourcing (Kean & Martin, 2013). Authors of a Canadian public history project, *The HeritageCrowd Project,* described it as:

> Historians who crowdsource the writing of historical narratives are able to empower members of a given community who may not have the same institutionalized or professional authority conceded to "experts" in the discipline. This mission is distinctly different from that of most academic historians, whose work is centred around the construction of historical narratives based on the analysis of sources, and that of the museum or public historian, which attempts to provide an impartial or objective narrative of the past for public consumption (Graham, Massie, & Feuerherm, 2013).

Literature shows much research attention focused on the open collaborative culture involving the participation of individuals/professionals and online groups and reveals potential for collaboration using digital technology platforms and crowdsourcing as a means of generating data (Mansell, 2013; Baym, 2010; Albors et al., 2008; Tapscott & Williams, 2007; Jenkins, 2006). In this production, digital crowdsourced information resources are forms of digitised material culture of the past as well as insights and commentary on the SJMS. It favours the social technology[10] of adaptive authority where the hallmark is "collaboration among large groups of individuals" (Mansell, 2013; Kean & Martin, 2013; Benkler & Nissenbaum, 2006: 394; Katz & Rice, 2002). Using this as a template, the research draws on theories and models of co-creation and crowdsourcing, two major features in an emerging field of digital curation research on collaborative systems, to facilitate a participatory engagement with people of the SJMS, allowing the history to go beyond the analysis of archival sources alone (Biella et al., 2016; Brier & Wizinsky, 2016).

No longer confined to a physical space, or as exclusive property, this method fuses formats of public history with methods of participatory journalism and provides a virtual space of multiplicity where interpretations and contributions of the past can be produced by diverse individuals in highly distributed digital mediums, bringing

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[10] Social values are embedded within hardware, software and applications, leading scholars to characterise them as *social technologies* (Katz & Rice, 2002). They influence how people act and interact especially where "the effective coordination of interaction is key to accomplishment" (Nelson & Sampat, 2001: 40).

possibilities and challenges of the digital and public histories outside the traditional format of the written essay.

An example of these principles in action is *Wikipedia. Wikipedia* is the most successful form of digital public history and, written by a number of authors, doesn't have a professional historian on call. Although it is more than a public history project, it showcases the optimal usage of the capacities of public history in the digital landscape as the largest and best-known supplier of historical information. The *Wikipedia* community is self-regulating and anyone can make or alter an entry by agreeing to its guidelines (Wolff, 2012). Rosenzweig (2006: 117) described it as "a people's museum of knowledge". Since a large group of people collectively interact, interpret, describe and provide information to the past, *Wikipedia* is a good example of public history and a case study for public historians (Danniau, 2013).

Kean & Martin (2013) state that at a London conference in 2011 on curating popular music, it was clear that nearly every speaker relied in some way and form on crowdsourcing. Examples included inviting individuals to upload answers to a set questionnaire whereby the academic or question setter then becomes mediator and gatekeeper of the accrued answers. Thematic blogs and open discussion boards, forums and discussion groups have also been used as crowdsourcing techniques. Kean & Martin (2013) argue that this is a version of cooperative crowdsourcing which creates an approach to history where those involved have ownership, agency in history-making and involvement in the methodology of it. The ephemera that is used in the methodology of this research is guided by the theory in public history that opens up possibilities of materials for history. It suggests the value of materials outside a paper-based archive as the materials collected from the archive lack insight into the experiential accounts of those there. As early as 1976 an important article on the non-traditional and diverse range of materials used by historians showed the construction of different histories through the use of different materials (Samuel, 1976). Ashton & Kean (2008) similarly suggest that the use of non-archival materials gives a greater value to the appreciation of the past in the many ways it is validated in people's lives.

The public use and application of history force researchers to reconsider the definition and collection of primary sources (Cauvin, 2016). Lyon et al. (2016) explain that

when you invite the public to participate in a conversation using common questions and shared inquiry as your approach you can engage them in a dialogue with the evidence and your own research. This exchange leads to what theorists call dialogic history and participatory historical culture which provides a living perspective outside of the archives (Thelen, 2007).

2.2.5 A position of complexity as author/researcher

This allows for redefining roles and negotiating positions. Kean & Martin (2013) state that some oral history practice may become collective exercises in nostalgia. In these circumstances, researchers and practitioners may see their role as simply presenting the stories of those interviewed rather than undertaking more demanding work analysing, discussing and reflecting critically.

The research uses Carpentier's (2011) maximalist/minimalist dimensions of participation to distinguish the difference between access, interaction and real participation in this media praxis as it explores varying degrees of content-related participation through five news-production stages: access/observation, selection/filtering, processing/editing, distribution and interpretation (Singer et al., 2011). Using Carpentier's (2011) model requires a further delineation that needs to be highlighted. It concerns the unavoidability of the positioning of myself as the researcher in this project through my involvement in the production stages of selection and editing: I explicitly solicit historical contributions from individuals about the SJMS and creative management remains my authority as the researcher in the presentation of the history. This role of authorship in the context of participatory research is one that must be investigated throughout the study in order to evaluate the extent and attempt of forming a resource focused on the democratisation of this narrative.

2.3 Conclusion

This chapter introduced the conceptual and theoretical background to this study: public history, participatory journalism, access to real participation, archives and living histories and the complexity of author/researcher. It examined the methodological framework and theoretical underpinnings of public history scholarship and the theoretical notions of participation and authorship that guide this research.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The goal of this research is to use a digitally-produced public history website as a site of exploration to investigate the capacity of participatory digital technologies for telling history through multiple voices. In order to fulfil this task a methodology was chosen that could answer the questions:

1) How do various strategies of participatory journalism contribute to a digital public history?

2) In what ways does revising shared authority and meaning-making in historical research about the SJMS enable a democratisation of this narrative?

The production component of this methodology explores public history in the digital media landscape using the School of Journalism and Media Studies (SJMS) as a site of analysis. The method for production is informed by an interest in the role that digital affordances can offer historical research to elicit aspects of history through participatory journalism processes that would otherwise remain inaccessible. In order to investigate how various strategies of participatory journalism can contribute to a digital public history, I produced a participatory-design, user-friendly history website, called *Purple Truths*, about the SJMS that could facilitate participation from an audience and be used as a site of data collection. The construction of this website was conducted in three stages: (1) archival research, (2) solicitation of historical materials and narratives from participants and (3) construction and production of the public history website *Purple Truths*. This methodology is discussed further below.

The audience in this research is characterised as individuals who have been involved in the School over the course of its history in whatever capacity and position[11]. In the context of contemporary digital news environments and digital journalism, a place had to be established as a point of engagement. The digital public history website is situated in the public arenas of Facebook and on a website platform to manage a point of engagement with SJMS history for individuals (historical-subjects/makers) who are located all over the world. Using these platforms' pre-existing social tools of

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[11] 1970 – 2017; academics, lecturers, student, visitors, part-time colleagues, support staff, political activists, administrative staff etc.

technology (posting, commenting, sharing), I managed the production as moderator and curator to embed and source ideas around the history of SJMS and, in turn, open communication of this topic to people of SJMS and connect individuals to the making of the history. This allowed the production to bring the tools of history-making to people where they are (via social media as platform for contributions and data gathering) and bring the community-made history to people where they are (via website[12] as a platform for where the history is recorded, shared and presented).

The conjunction of historical research in this journalistic context and project necessitated an approach that could fuse the theory and methods of both fields. Using online engagement techniques to crowdsource a diverse, non-traditional range of solicited materials, alongside archival material, this methodology sought to construct a different kind of history. Samuel (1994) notes that a different order of evidence leads to a different kind of inquiry. The technology of the web allowed me to highlight other methods that I could use to present, interpret and discuss the past. This included creative ways that audiences could interact with historical artefacts and shared authority in order to investigate how revising shared authority and meaning-making in historical research could elicit a democratisation of the narrative (Brier & Wizinsky, 2016; Cohen, 2004; Kean, 2004; Rosenzweig, 2003; Frisch, 1990). I decided to invite individuals of the SJMS to participate in a conversation using common questions and shared inquiry as my approach in which I could engage them in a dialogue with the evidence and my own research. This exchange leads to what theorists call dialogic history and participatory historical culture (Lyon et al., 2016; Thelen, 2007).

3.2 Production methodology

The production methodology (public history website), which is the site of data collection and point of analysis for this thesis, was executed in three stages:

i.   Archival research

Firstly, archival historical research mapped the skeletal framework using primary and secondary sources to trace the documents of the department as archived in the institutional repository of Rhodes University at Cory Library. Both online and

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[12] https://apurpletruth.wixsite.com/sjmshistory

archival research was conducted through sources of student academic records and admissions, Senate minutes, academic calendars, archives of student press, in order to trace the record in student press as well as academic documentation of the department. These documents included old departmental publications, newsletters, annual reports and some students' work. Some of these documents were digitised and used as material for nostalgic cues and prompts on the website to be engaged with by participants and facilitate participation with the audience. This preliminary archival research provided a basis for defining key questions (Zald, 1993) and yielded six themes or branching points to guide topics of inquiry and structure of this public history: "origins", "politics and radicalisation", "development of the black journalist", "theoretical position", "curriculum" and "alumni".

ii.   Solicitation of historical materials and narratives from participants

Online data collection was used as a means of data gathering to explore how digital participatory affordances shape the collecting of historical materials in an SJMS public history. Crowdsourced calls for contribution and collaboration (letters, photographs, audio, student cards, old technology, experiential insight, commentary) were posted on open online networks of alumni/SJMS social media groups that held an array of voices and positions needed to build a multi-voiced history of the SJMS. This is an ethos found in many forms of public history – public outreach in making history (Abrams, 2010).

People who had been vocal, critical of and interested in the past of the SJMS, in archival documentation and contemporary commentary, were sought through more direct means of co-creation methods, "a collaborative initiative which operates like crowdsourcing... with one crucial difference. The call for contributions is not put to an open forum... but to a smaller group of individuals with specialized skills" (Benson, 2019). The two differing methods for recruiting participants (crowdsource/direct) is influenced by this living history spanning from 1970 – 2017. Some participants had to be reached by other means because they did not have profiles to access on social media. Probably the oldest and still useful technology for online collecting simply and accurately is email. Whittle (2005) discovered that emailers can include attachments such as scanned photographs and documents which can be used alongside narratives. Email also allows for long-term interactions, follow-up, detailed exchanges and the

opportunity to connect with people who aren't on any other forms of social media. An online collecting project can get started right away with a simple web design that uses email links to encourage and accept submissions (Cohen, 2013; Whittle, 2005).

The active solicitation of digital materials, reaching out to and interacting with historical subjects online, was far more economical than traditional oral history, as it allowed me to reach more participants and acquire associated digital materials such as photographs and other historical ephemera (Cohen, 2013; Abrams, 2010). This is an important characteristic of digital collection required in this research as there were thousands of individuals that had passed through the journalism department: lecturers, media theorists, journalists, students, media practitioners, support staff, IT staff, political activists, photojournalists, broadcasters and filmmakers. The reach of this history spans multitudes and thus required a methodology that could provide equal opportunity for all participants' voices and insights to be shared and heard with an open access policy to all, no matter what position, duration or affiliation they have had with the department.

Ethical considerations

Since some of the research was conducted online (social network and website), the intention of the research had to be made clear and details about how participants' consent was to be obtained had to be included in the research design.

The social media component of this research project was located on a private Facebook group that had been specifically created and designed for the production component. It explicitly stated the aim and content of the project, how the contributed materials and narratives would be collected and aggregated into a digital public history, as well as who I was as researcher. This served as the website/page purpose and privacy statement of the online research and where intentions of the research were made clear.

Creating a private group on the social media platform and a website created an exclusive virtual space for members of the journalism school, both past and present, to engage with the journalism history. Individuals who were interested in participating inquired or joined either publicly (on the group) or privately (via email). Here, social media was a mechanism for identifying potential respondents. This internal social group communication on Facebook and *Purple Truths* had a private messaging

capability and function that allowed me to send an informed consent document directly to individuals who sought to participate, as well and through email to individuals that I sought directly; these in-built tools allowed for intuitive informed consent processes and protocol (Townsend & Wallace, 2016). Nunan and Yenicioglu (2013: 803) label this "response-based research". This form of research is most analogous to traditional offline research design, "where respondents are invited to take part in a research study, and thus there is a mechanism through which consent can be gained as part of the study" (Nunan & Yenicioglu, 2013: 803).

iii.   Construction and production of the public history website: *Purple Truths*

The diverse range of solicited, non-traditional materials and virtual historical forms – communication, letters, photographs, audio, student cards, old technology, experiential accounts, insight and commentary from SJMS individuals (content-related participation methods) – was aggregated alongside archival research into a digital historical narrative and presented on a constructed website.

The methodology in this project used examples of contemporary public history models for how to build participatory digital history projects and collaborative historical displays, specifically focused on the aim to produce cogent and collective historical experiences "within the cultural frame of mutable and highly distributed media forms" (Brier & Wizinsky, 2016: 1). This methodology used a *Shaky Truce: Starkville Civil Rights Struggles, 1960-1980*[13], a digital public history website, as a reference point. Through oral history interviews and digitised archival documents, the site highlighted the voices of its participants. However, it only presented 29 participants' perspectives in a history which is geographically bounded. In contrast, my method sought new ways of reaching the many graduates and staff from the SJMS, both past and present, and this required a digital model that, not being geographically bounded, could reach as many individuals as possible.

The *Purple Truths* project lives on a Wix platform and is not linked to any institutional servers or affiliated to the server of the School or University. To build the website, I investigated tools and resources that would suit my skillset, no HTML literacy or coding ability, looking particularly for a platform that would allow enough

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[13] http://starkvillecivilrights.msstate.edu/wordpress/ (Kalwara et al., 2016).

storage and interactive widgets and features for a non-web developer without the need to install extra themes and code builders for drag-and-drop design. In contemporary web development platforms offered for free online today, many web development companies provide platforms that allow users to create HTML5 websites with storage capacity, interactivity tools like forums, comment sections, live messengers, with a range of multimedia features that include an online open format contribution feature, as well as thousands of templates with personalised navigation and design capabilities. Using similar concepts of history and design in this project, the website platform was used as a participatory design method to present the history in a collaborative, plural and interactive way. It included storage and hyperlinks that provided access to a range of different individual perspectives, data sharing with buttons to post images (UGC), the ability to share comments privately or on open comment boxes and forums on the website, polls and social plugins. A combination of email and DropBox were used as content management systems in terms of storage and facilitating collaboration as the centres where solicited contributions were sent to and stored in to manage the flow of curation and collection. These participation tools were the framework for assessment and analysis that could assess how various strategies of participatory journalism contributed to the digital public history.

3.3 Method of analysis

Data collection consisted of daily tracking from November 2018 to December 2018. The data collected from the *Purple Truths* website is analysed using a model of participatory dimensions and analytical framework formulated by Netzer, Tenenboim-Weinblatt and Shifman (2014) for the evaluation of participation features in news websites. Netzer et al. (2014: 621) define these participatory features as "mechanisms through which editors display (graphically or verbally) the data resulting from their attempts to gauge, track and tabulate users' behaviour."

Most research, when examining the implementation of participation tools, focus on user-generated content (UGC) as a focus on audiences' active behaviour. In the Netzer et al. (2014) five-dimensional model of participation, they take into consideration the dual construction of audience participation, as both creative and quantified (Anderson, 2011; Van Dijck, 2009). They suggest that online participatory culture should also include "allegedly passive behaviour like browsing websites,

reading articles and watching video clips" (Netzer et al., 2014: 621). Therefore, they

offer a broader definition of online participation as: 1) "any form of user behaviour

that can be measured and/or displayed" and 2) the "potentiality of influencing

decisions regarding the publication or use of online content" (Netzer et al., 2014:

621). This method identifies the principal dimensions that underpin the construction

of participation features on *Purple Truths* and uses the Netzer et al. (2014) matrix-

shaped framework for the analysis of these features.

Analysing the data using this framework categorises strategies and degrees of

participatory tools in order to examine their role in the democratisation of the

narrative and classifies the forms of participation on the *Purple Truths* website. Netzer

et al. (2014) established this analytical framework for the analysis of participation

features in news websites because although audience participation has established a

ubiquitous presence in contemporary digital news environments, there is still a need

for an "integrative model that encompasses the various participatory dimensions

underpinning digital journalism" (Netzer et al., 2014: 1).

The framework consists of five axes that present a model of participatory dimensions:

1. Chronology: the stage of news production in which participation is implemented. 2.

Visibility: the transparency and prominence of participation tools. 3. Agency: the

types and levels of user and editor activity. 4. Integration: the degree of separation

between participation tools and editorial content. 5. Share-ability: intended audience

circles of readers' activities.

In order to examine how these participation tools are embedded in the *Purple Truths*

website and where participation is happening the analysis is conducted in several

steps. First, based on initial data collection, I identify five major participation features

and differentiate them as *consistent* or *occasional* participation features. Second,

using the Netzer et al. (2014) matrix-shaped model, I account for the different

dimensions of these features mentioned above by categorising them using the five-

dimensional model, mapping the features on the five axes. Thirdly, to: (1)

comparatively evaluate the effectiveness of some of the participatory strategies

employed on the *Purple Truths* website to elicit stories and participation, (2) Assess if

these strategies actually revised shared authority and meaning-making in historical

research, and (3) Explore in what ways this elicited a democratisation of this

narrative, the features are mapped and tabulated according to Carpentier's (2011) maximalist/minimalist dimensions of participation to distinguish and conduct analysis, across the five participatory dimensions, on the difference between access, interaction and real participation in this media praxis.

3.4 Conclusion

This chapter provided the methodological orientation of the thesis. It discussed the research design, creation and processes of the production's role in this study, as well as how the data was collected and analysed. The following chapter will go into further detail of the production component of this research to situate its role in the investigation of the thesis.

CHAPTER FOUR: PURPLE TRUTHS, THE A-Z

4.1 Introduction: the provocation

In 2016 Emeritus Professor Paul Maylam began concluding his vast research into the institutional history of Rhodes University. *Rhodes University, 1904-2016: An Intellectual, Political and Cultural History* gives a critical account of the history of Rhodes. In his research Maylam covered themes such as: its founding as an imperial university; academic life in the early years; politics; roles played in the anti-apartheid movement by staff and students, to name a few. But he also found a vast wealth of knowledge about various other academic spaces in the university that he felt could do with more 'air time'; the School of Journalism and Media Studies was one of these spaces, particularly for its politics, radicalisation and role that it played not only as a space of knowledge-production for the field, but also for its stance during apartheid. To contribute more research into the institutional history of Rhodes University that Emeritus Professor Paul Maylam had conducted, I was invited to do further Mellon-funded research into the School of Journalism and Media Studies.

Purple Truths is a digital public history website about the School of Journalism and Media Studies that is linked to the Mellon-funded history of Rhodes University described above. Furthermore, it was constructed for this study as an intervention into the single author, individual perspective of existing histories about the School of Journalism and Media Studies. The nature of the *Purple Truths'* intervention stems from a provocation by Zubeida Jaffer, who had been a journalism student in the department in the late 70s.

In a collection of articles from the African Sociological Review in light of a Critical Tradition Colloquium held in 2004 as part of the centenary celebrations of Rhodes University, Jaffer (2005: 181 - 182) explains:

> This does not pretend to be a scholarly and thorough record of that time... The students who were here at that time should be tracked down and interviewed... The relevant authorities should be interviewed as well... This process may be just what the university needs to truly diversity. For as long as it does not acknowledge how very different the experiences of so many of us were, for so long will it continue to believe that it can continue to assimilate those who come to Rhodes today into the dominant culture. Rhodes is a very different place today. Yet how different is it?

This was a provocation for the intervention of this project and catalysed a direction towards the acknowledgement of how very different the experiences of many individuals were in the SJMS. Immediately, rather than just following the conventional methodology of historical inquiry, I was set on tracing and recording the multiplicity and plurality within the history of the journalism department.

4.2 Conceptualisation

Driven by the abovementioned provocation my guiding questions were:
Who were these creative, brave, and "anarchic"[14] individuals of journalists, academics, students, individuals, that shaped the SJMS as it stands today? Who are the faces of such a history? How am I going to present the history of this site of knowledge production and the people who have inhabited it? What does the past of the SJMS want to say to the present and vice versa?

Following the principles of journalism my aim furthered towards an intellectual duty that went beyond the machinations of an institutional understanding of this history, but rather one that was led by a humanist approach which could piece together the fragmented individual narratives of the SJMS.

The breadth and imagination of the scope of this project endeavour, with a history that was *alive* (many individuals who had had experiences of the SJMS were still alive) and thus constantly changing, meant that I needed a very specific space where I could cogently present collective historical narratives and collaboratively display the history. I'm from a generation of journalists that has digital literacy built into my formal training and education and I have grown up in a world where contemporary communications have been thoroughly digitised. Brier & Wizinsky (2016) and Cascone (2000) explain digital technology has in some way touched everyone. The digital age with its experimenting narrative structures, visualisations and interactivity had a subconscious impact on my decision-making in this project — websites with text and image, podcasts, tools, apps, forums, newsletter, social media campaigns, video tutorials were all part of my daily media consumption and were easily available tools to exhibit the variety of participation and presentation of forms available. This

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[14] Journalism lecturer Graeme Addison (1976 - 81) described the department as "anarchic" in its beginning years (Du Toit, 2013: 304).

digital culture influenced the form, production and logic of this project. As a product of the current times, where the Internet and the ever-changing digital space has enabled journalists to develop strategies that enable multiple sources and platforms, I went to the Web. There I found that the space I needed to suit the requirements of this study and historical inquiry was a website. Fortunately, online interactivity becomes easier each year with a recent proliferation in easy to use web development platforms; much of the infrastructure and software needed to do simple to moderately complex online collecting is available and inbuilt, allowing research to take advantage of these capacities. It is these digital technologies that allowed this historical record to expand into new forms and methods.

4.3 Construction

4.3.1 Establishing necessary digital properties

I needed to construct a website that had inbuilt participatory processes that could mobilise people to contribute and interpret to the history as well as present a collaborative historical narrative. To do this, the space had to have six properties:

1. Easy and cheap: As the sole researcher and creator of this project with limited coding ability and web design experience I needed to find a platform that was easy to use and cheap. In contemporary web development platforms offered for free online today, many web development companies provide platforms that allow users to create HTML5 websites with storage capacity, interactivity tools like forums, comment sections and live messengers. These all have a range of multimedia features that include an online open format contribution feature, as well as thousands of templates with personalised navigation and design capabilities. After exploring many web design platforms that suited my limited coding skills and didn't require HTML code, I chose WIX. WIX is a free web-development programme with software that facilitates interactivity and is all-inclusive in their software, space and servers.

2. Capacity: I needed a large enough space that could store a big amount of digital information without physical limitations. Cohen (2013) explains that the acquiring of historical materials and recollections is more difficult than

setting up a static basic website because it requires the digital tools. "To adequately capture the past in this way, more technical hurdles must be surmounted to allow for historical documents and artefacts to flow inward rather than merely outward, as they do on the web pages of most museums, archives, and historical sites" (217-218). In order to sustain a two-way flow of engagement with participants and solicit their contributions through the website I needed capacity for these materials to flow inward.

3. <u>Accessibility</u>: To reach as many of the thousands of graduates and individuals of the SJMS, that aren't geographically bounded, the possibilities of online history meant that it could be available to everybody, anytime and anywhere. Furthermore, a website saved money and time in the search for sources and information (Danniau, 2013).

4. <u>Flexibility</u>: In order to accommodate both digitised archival materials, solicited historical ephemera, as well as personal narratives, I needed a platform flexible enough that could house various media forms such as text, sound, (moving) image, video, infographics, maps. This flexibility included the existence of various media forms and their complementary media components to communicate with one another and sit side by side to enrich the narrative. Another example of this flexibility, specifically employed in the construction of the website, was what Danniau (2013: 126) explains as the "activation of old media by digital reproduction (re-mediation) such as graphs, timelines, maps and diagrams." It is this diversity of transfigured digital mediums and forms that evolved the site into a plural and layered history.

5. <u>Hypertextuality</u>: Danniau (2013) highlights that the fundamental algorithmic network of the Internet is the HyperText Transfer Protocol that formulates the structure of digital text as a cross-communication interaction network where the hypertextuality of the Internet allows the user to be "liberated from a fixed linear narrative" (126). This means that "for historical representations… we can move without any difficulty between places, events and objects, from long-term to short-term, micro to macro levels and so on" (126). This was very important in the presentation of this history because the history didn't move

chronologically, linearly or even thematically. Each subject, person, theme, date, building and so on was alphabetically indexed and therefore the website had to be constructed without a start-point or periphery and only the point of departure that the user clicked on and chose.

6. <u>Interaction</u>: It was only online media that gave me the necessary possibilities for interaction and dialogue (the fundamental principle of public history) in a way that print, video and audio could not. This was because the website had the potential not only to connect me to receivers and users but also to open up the flow of communication in allowing individuals to share information, react and give feedback on the history (Danniau, 2013).

4.3.2 Building, designing and creating the website

Having determined the digital properties needed for the construction of the website required for this project, the next step was developing, designing and creating the website. Having never constructed a website before, I needed inspiration and found many other digital public history projects that I used as models for interesting and innovative concepts and execution. This stage of the website construction was very iterative and began with a blank canvas. As seen in Figure 1, the construction of the *Purple Truths* website started as a blank page with four gridlines on the *WIX platform.*
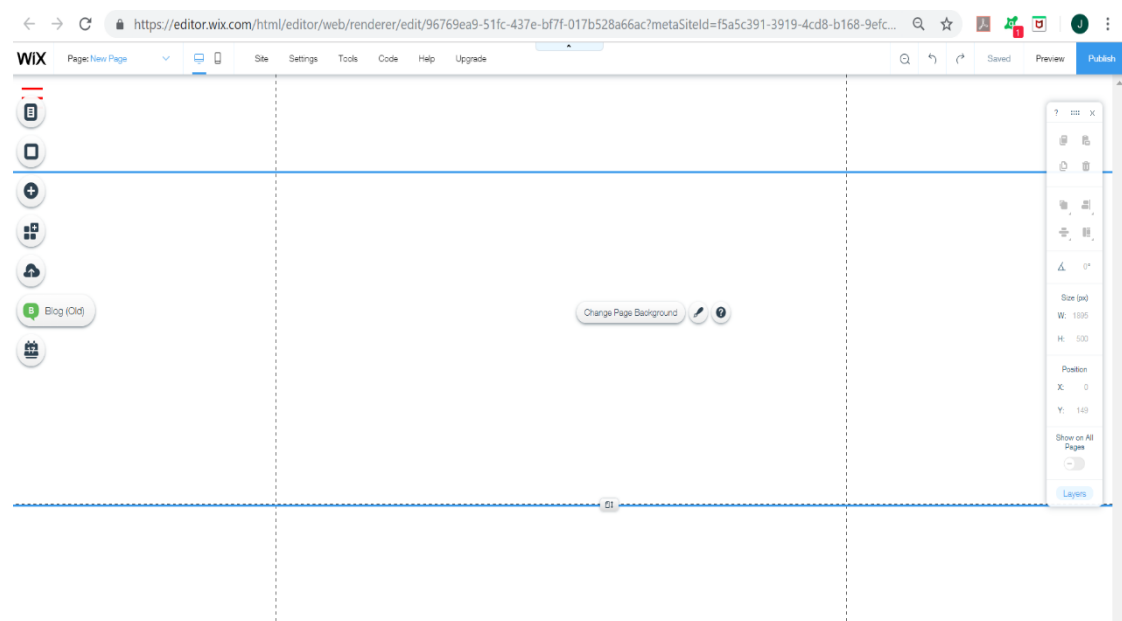

Figure 1 Blank platform on WIX for Purple Truths to begin production

In order to execute a digital public history, there were a number of elements that I had to figure out on the page: design, layout, navigation, colour scheme. These were all determined through experimentation and iteration and was easy to experiment with as the *WIX* platform had a very simple drag-and-drop inserting tool. There were two sides to this historical narrative that had to be displayed on the website: (1) the history of the SJMS, and (2) individual narratives and their contributed, crowd sourced materials. This affected how the website was going to be designed on the page and it was very challenging to find a layout that could present these two elements of the history with a simple system of navigation for the user. To guide the historical narrative that threaded the digital public history together, preliminary archival research and discussions with Emeritus Professor Paul Maylam provided a basis that yielded six themes to guide topics of inquiry and structure this public history: "origins", "politics and radicalisation", "development of the black journalist", "theoretical positions", "curriculum" and "alumni".
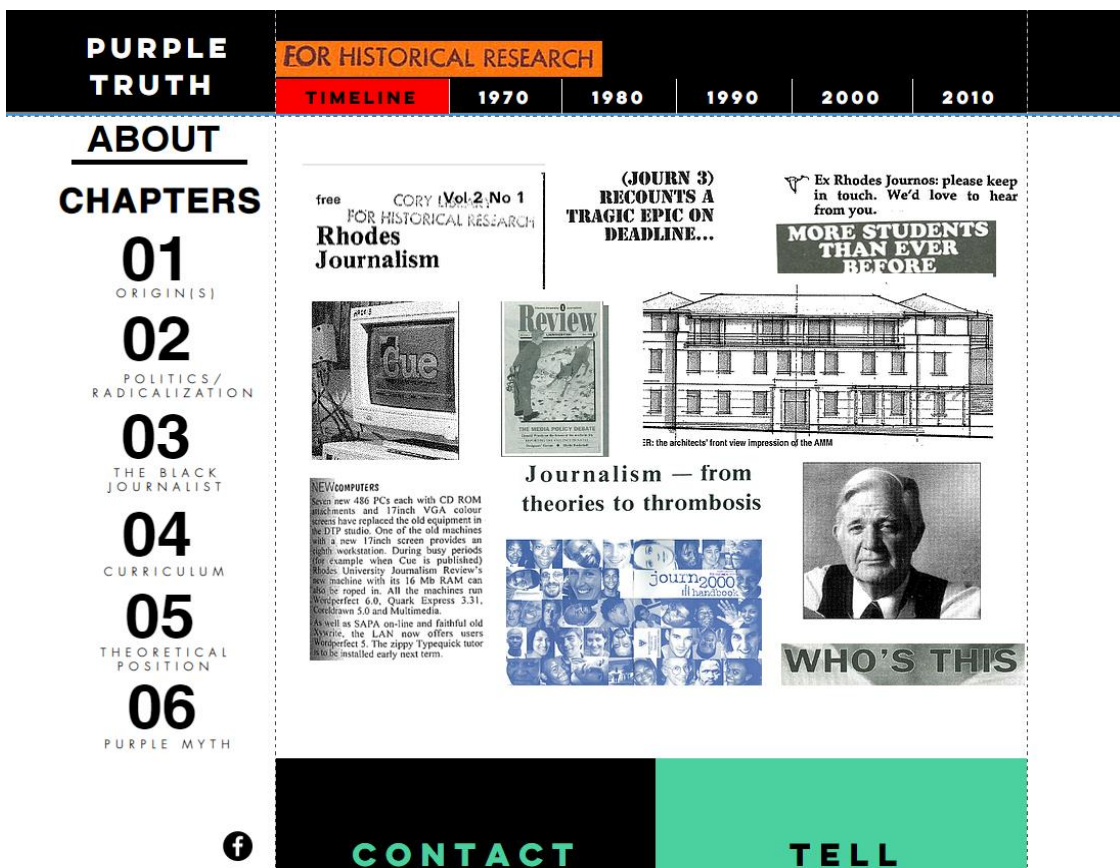

Figure 2 *Illustration of early iteration of Purple Truths web design and layout*

As evident in Figure 2, in the early stages of the construction of the website I designed the homepage to include the historical narrative (thematic history chapters) on the left

side of the page, and a timeline as a header. This proved inadequate as the idea of moving through a timeline of the history wasn't necessary for this history and didn't contribute or enrich the goal of a public history, rather, it was very convoluted and overcomplicated. It also didn't give any space in design to the individuals I wanted to include in the history and didn't indicate that this history was multivocal or pluralistic. Also indicative in this iteration is the confusion I felt in placing text and image. This was because a particular challenge was the cohesive design of the website to appeal to participation from age groups in the history that ranged from 18-70 years old, including recent graduates to former lecturers in the 80s and 90s. This was important in the formatting of the website with the aim to create a 'usable past' for the alumni of the journalism department and to be appealing to individuals across a spectrum of age and profession. This challenge led into the colour scheme. Figure 2 shows dark and clashing colours, black and turquoise, red and orange, and I realised quite quickly that this looked and felt like amateur web design.

I often returned to the drawing board and recalibrated the aim of the project and its conceptualisation: I was applying a humanist method of inquiry to this history that included oral history interviews, visual materials, archival materials, solicited and contributed personal narratives and a historical narrative. By breaking down the material and examining the multifaceted history and the multimodal spaces it was occupying, I decided to experiment with a much more straightforward and simple iteration. This led me to a much cleaner and simple design. Figure 3 showcases this final version of *Purple Truths.*

Figure 3 *The final design and layout of Purple Truths*

As evident in Figure 3, the construction of *Purple Truths* was a constant iterative process. In the end I presented the historical narrative in six chapters in the header of the website so that it could be accessed from any point of the website. This meant that the history didn't require a central point of departure but could be dived into from anywhere, at any point of exploration. Furthermore, I categorised each subject, theme and individuals' name and story alphabetically and presented it in an a-z index. Not only did this make the categorisation of the spectrum of materials easier to present and navigate, but it also gave me an opportunity for a simple way to collaboratively display a digital archive of historical information of the SJMS. This fitted the aim of what I needed as a digital public history well enough to keep it as is. I also decided to stick with a simple colour scheme as the archival and contributed visual materials gave the website the colour and life it needed to bring it alive.

4.3.3 Participatory tools

After the skeleton of the website had been constructed, the next stage of implementation for the website was the inclusion of participatory tools and features that invited participants to contribute and solicited materials for the history.

The website in this public history project relied on the collaboration between researcher and alumni, community members, students, academics, professionals and students working together to increase the exploration for showing, sharing and

interpreting the history of the School of Journalism and Media Studies. This collaboration needed tools that allowed for multiuser co-authoring, moderation and editing. The open access and engagement on the website and social media page facilitated the democratisation of the historical narrative through content collection and engagement with the curation and presentation of the history.

O'Brien and Voss (2011: 77) wrote "affordances of digital texts allow viewers to respond to and collaborate on texts that had been previously static and unavailable for interaction." Therefore, in order to encourage participants to contribute and engage with the history website, it had to be as much a communication tool as an interactive display (Coyle, 2015). The *Purple Truths* interface communicated its interactivity and participatory invitations through understandable cues. "It occurs when an object, whether physical or digital, has sensory characteristics that intuitively implies its functionality and use" (Norman, 2002). Unlike physical products, digital affordances can manifest themselves in any way imaginable. In this research, the user had to perceive that participation and opportunities to contribute to the history is possible. I tried to present these invitations for participation in creative ways, as nostalgic prompts and cues. Below are some examples of these participatory tools (Figure 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8). Some were simple and some were more complex. Figure 4 shows a complex participatory feature designed as a grid and presented with four questions which the user could choose from. They each opened onto a separate page that was linked to the question. Figure 5 is an example of a simpler, more direct participatory feature. It allowed the user to submit any file format to the project's cloud and the 'play' icon gave instructions. Figure 8 was placed at the top of most webpages on *Purple Truths* to direct users to the nearest place they could contribute.

Who are you?

The School of Journalism and Media Studies has had thousands of individuals walk through its doors. Who are you in this history?

Do you know this man?

Take the poll.
Does he look familiar or not?

Where were you?

The department is now housed in the Africa Media Matrix; but before 2006, where were you? Where were your lectures?

Light tables/ laptops?

Typewriters? Laptops? Desktops? Adobe? Share memories about the tools you used.

Figure 4 *Example of a more complex participation feature presented on the website*

Add File

▶

Figure 5 *A simple participatory tool*

Figure 6 *Survey as a participation feature*

What was your specialisation?

○ Radio ○ Television ○ Writing and Editing ○ Communication Design ○ Photojournalism

[Submit]

Figure 7 *A multichoice participation feature*

4.3.4 Materials: archival, historical ephemera and narratives

The next phase of the construction of *Purple Truths* was fleshing it out and filling it with material. It took on a hybrid expression with various digital and analogue components. This included archival materials, contributed historical ephemera and personal experiential narratives.

This was achieved by remote methods of online interaction that was not spatially bound which could facilitate collaboration from anywhere in the world. Built with accessibility for a diverse public audience in mind, the website used newspapers, publications, photographs, videos, interactive timelines, digitised archive of annual reports, course outlines and presentation of individuals' personal narrations to contextualise the archival material of the history of the journalism department, enlivening the engagement with the history. These materials, presented collectively as a digital repository (also supported particularly by digitised archives from Cory Library), recorded the history of the journalism department.

Alongside source material for the writing of the historical narrative, some archival materials were digitised and added to the website as contextual material for the historical narrative as well as for nostalgic prompts and cues for users. Figures 9 and 10 illustrate examples of clippings of archival material that was used to populate the historical narrative on *Purple Truths*.

The east elevation of the new Africa Media Matrix which will be the home of the department from the end of 2005

Figure 9 *Clipping from the archives of Grocott's Mail (2004) on the construction of the Africa Media Matrix*

Why did you choose to do a B. Journ? 1). YOUTHFUL IGNORANCE......
2) No Good FACILITIES FOR FILM STUDY IN S.A. IN 1970.......

Figure 10 *"Why did you choose to do a B. Journ?" from a 1983 survey*

Alongside these archival snippets, the participatory features described in the previous section aided the collection of the diverse, non-traditional range of materials and virtual historical forms that were solicited for the history: letters, photographs, audio, student cards, old technology, experiential accounts, insight and commentary from SJMS. Similarly to public institutions specifically choosing their collection of particular items, public historians have recently decided to use, present and collect material that would conventionally be disregarded — ephemera, collectable items that were originally expected only to have short-term usefulness (Kean & Martin, 2013). Examples of some of these contributions and historical ephemera are shown below (Figure 11, 12 and 13). Figure 12 was a conversation with an alumnus of the SJMS who shared her experience of being one of the first students through the Steve Biko Memorial Bursary programme in the early 1990s. Figure 13 was contributed from an alumnus' (1974-1977) Rhodes photograph album. The photos show journalism staff at the time, Les Switzer and Peter Temple.
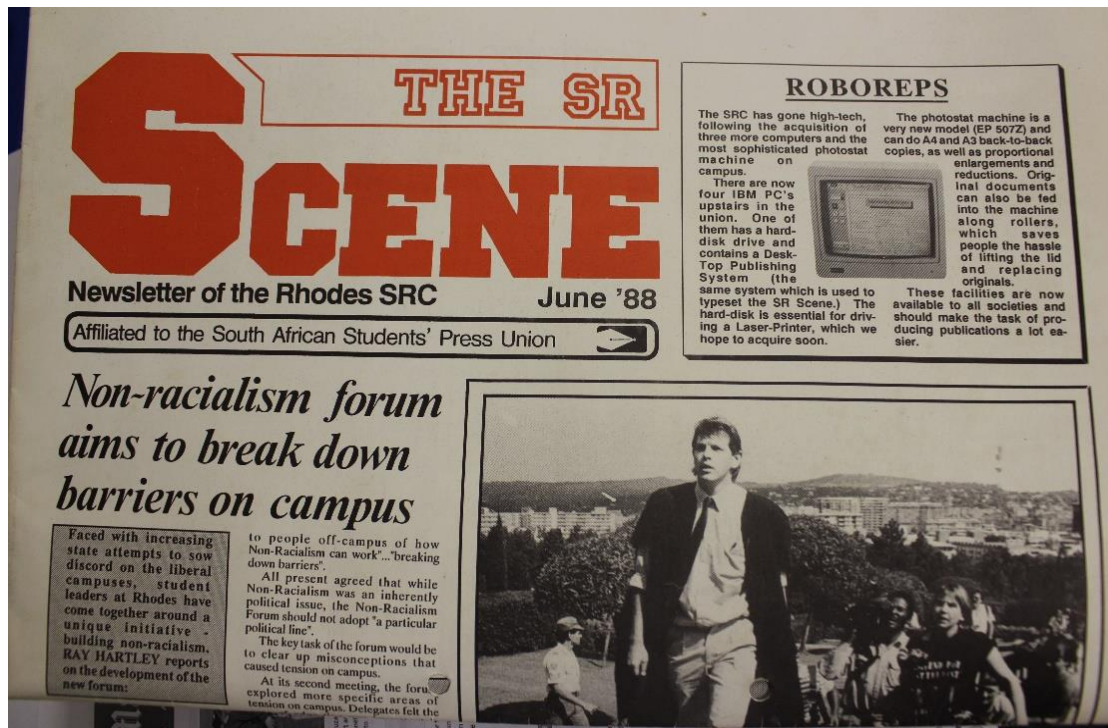
Figure 11 The first publication at Rhodes using a digital Desktop Publishing system

Figure 12 Contributed audio material in the form of an open conversation with an alumnus

JournⅢ 'Class of '76'

(Self) ② ③ ⑤ ⑥ ⑪ ⑫ ⑭ ⑮ ⑰
④ ⑧ ⑩ ⑯
① ⑨ ⑬

1. Jimmy Duncan
2. Marion Ayl
3. Richard Humphries
4. D'anne Pretorius
5. Doona Mackenzie
6. Dr Les Switzer
7. Sally Blumenthal
8. Bruce Hopwood
9. Rick Smuts
10. Linda Johnstone
11. Dave McNaught
12. Fran Le Breton
13. Sue Rautenbach
14. Larry Schaefler
15. Ingrid Rupp
16. John McCormick
17. Marilyn Cohen
19. Peter Temple

② ③ ⑤ ⑥ ⑦ ⑩ ⑪ ⑫ ⑭ ⑰
④ ⑧ ⑮ ⑱
① ⑨ ⑬ ⑯

'Heavy' Discussion →

Dr Les & John
Switzer McCormick

Sally   Linda   Fran   Ingrid
Blumenthal   Johnstone   LeBreton   Rupp

Figure 13 *A page from an individual's photo album*

The collected inputs of sound, text, images, publications and more (from both the archives and collected contributions of historical ephemera from individuals) were combined in the indexed body of *Purple Truths* and produced a multimedia archive. The curation and collection was a collaborative and iterative process throughout the life of the project. The contributions that were solicited from individuals were traces of lives and experiences of a living history. These included both textual and non-textual, virtual and physical contributions. Another example was accessing history through an old piece of technology: a light table. When the object was discussed and

used as ephemera in the history, it became a point of entry for individuals to express personal memories such as late nights working on light tables designing the next student press edition. Photographs of journalism students at protests such as 'Forward with People's Education' next to fellow colleagues highlight a perspective and experience of a journalism department, and a collection of portrait photographs of the 'Faces of a Journalism Department'[15], a page on the public history website that showcased the hundreds of photographic images of individuals who have been part of the journalism department, visually emphasised how many people have formed part of the department and its history and acted as nostalgic cues and prompts for individuals to share memories and histories.

The main form of contribution came in the shape and form of personal and experiential narratives. Most of the individuals who participated and engaged with this history did so through narrative. These story responses varied. Some were anecdotal and long; others brief and superficial. Themes and topics ranged from politics and the minutiae of curriculum to memories of missed deadlines, Guy Berger's hair and terrible lecturers. Some retellings were heavy with permeations of turbulent social and political times (from individuals of the 70s and 80s), and others filled with excitement and focus on their hopeful career opportunities from studying at the SJMS (individuals from the 2000s). The importance of these contributions of individual narratives was that they produced collective narratives of the many different experiences of the SJMS (as highlighted by the provocation mentioned in the beginning of this chapter). Every one of these narratives was added onto *Purple Truths* and categorised in the index under each individuals' name and then presented on separate pages (see Figure 14). This meant that through design, their narratives and thus their individual experiences, were given equal weight in the digital public history (see Figure 15). "Through the suite of media outlets, these histories are made legible and relevant to audiences that are distributed socially, culturally, and spatially" (Brier & Wizinsky, 2016: 3). This transformed the site into a dense, layered and multifaceted history where historical subjects were mobilised as historical agents.

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[15] https://apurpletruth.wixsite.com/sjmshistory/project06

Figure 14 An example of the index categorisation of individual narratives
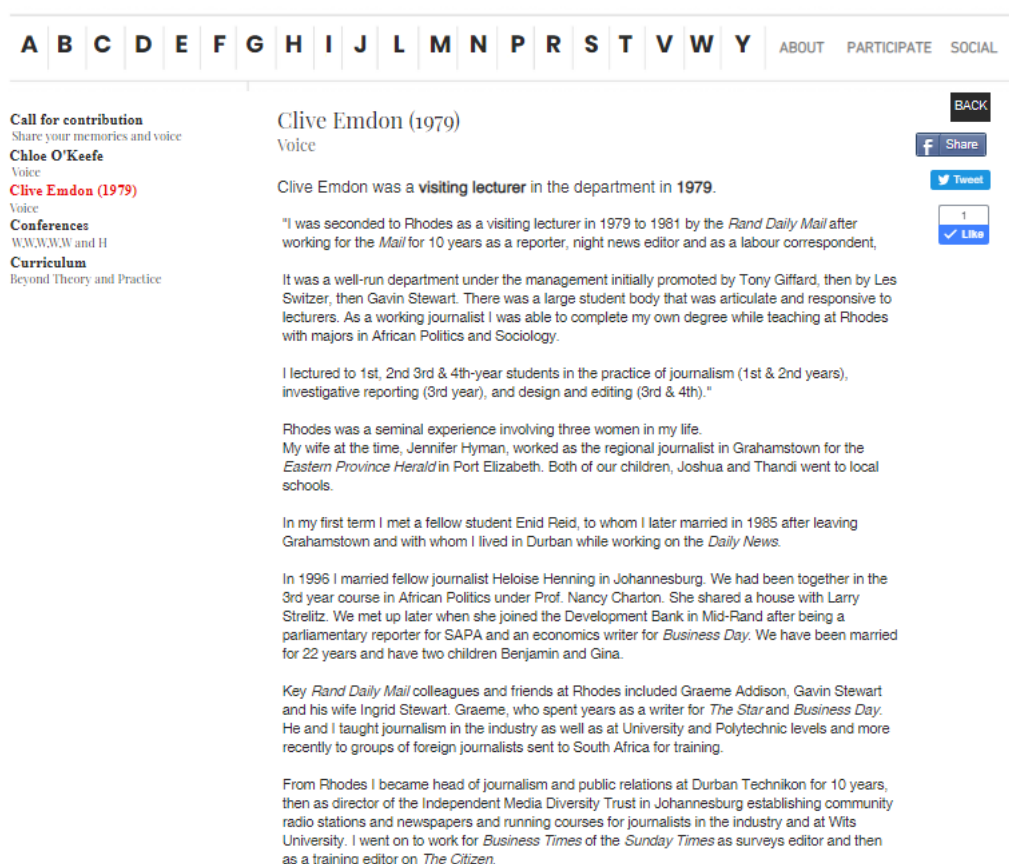
Figure 15 Illustration of how personal narratives were represented on the website

Since at least the 1960s it has been accepted to write histories of ordinary people's lives (Kean & Martin, 2013). Kean & Martin (2013) explain, however, that this kind of history was usually based on archival documents rather than what was found tucked away in personal belongings. Although this is still not regarded as the legitimate substance of academic history, public history and explorations such as this project provide experimentations and challenges in rejecting conventional and sole arbiters of legitimacy and value. Kean & Martin (2013) do note, however, that those

who use artefacts other than what is found in official archives are by no means dominant amongst historians.

4.3.5 Who participated?

Who participated? Students, alumni, students turned lecturers, lecturers turned political activists, women, men, media professionals, digital nomads, professors, freelancers, senior individuals who had already retired and younger ones who were just getting started. The diversity came in the form of age, educational background, economic standing and class, different abilities, diversities of language as well as cultural, racial and ethnic diversities. Obviously different segments of the participating group of individuals approached the history differently based on their own historically situated experiences (some approached the history academically, other politically, others sentimentally). A highlight of the group of individuals who participated was that there were a few individuals from each decade in the history spanning from 1970 to 2017 that contributed and engaged with the history. This provided thematic clues and insights into the historical narrative about the specific focuses of the department and its evolution and direction over the course of history through each decade. The variations beyond typical profiles such as age, economic levels, gender, race, ability and ethnicity were paramount, and had to be re-examined in order to put the audience and their historical and contemporary experiences centre-stage so that they could see themselves in the history that we represented. Furthermore, the professional spectrum of participants as well as the array of age-groups and differing SJMS personal experiences provided a nuanced understanding to the history and gave success to its aim of multivocality in the project. These individuals were reached through two main methods: through social media and directly through email.

Firstly, the project included a social media component. This was a Facebook group that had been specifically created and designed for this research project (see Figure 16). Here, social media was a strategy that was employed for identifying potential respondents and opening the project up to the public for people to decide whether they wanted to participate or not. It stated the aim of the project, how the contributed materials and narratives would be collected and how aggregated into a digital public history. Social media like Facebook have given millions of Internet users the

experience of participating in the web, limited not just to read and view it, but also to post and engage actively with it (see Figure 17). Individuals who were interested in participating 'liked' the page and could join the social media page for more information either publicly (on the group) or privately (via private messaging).
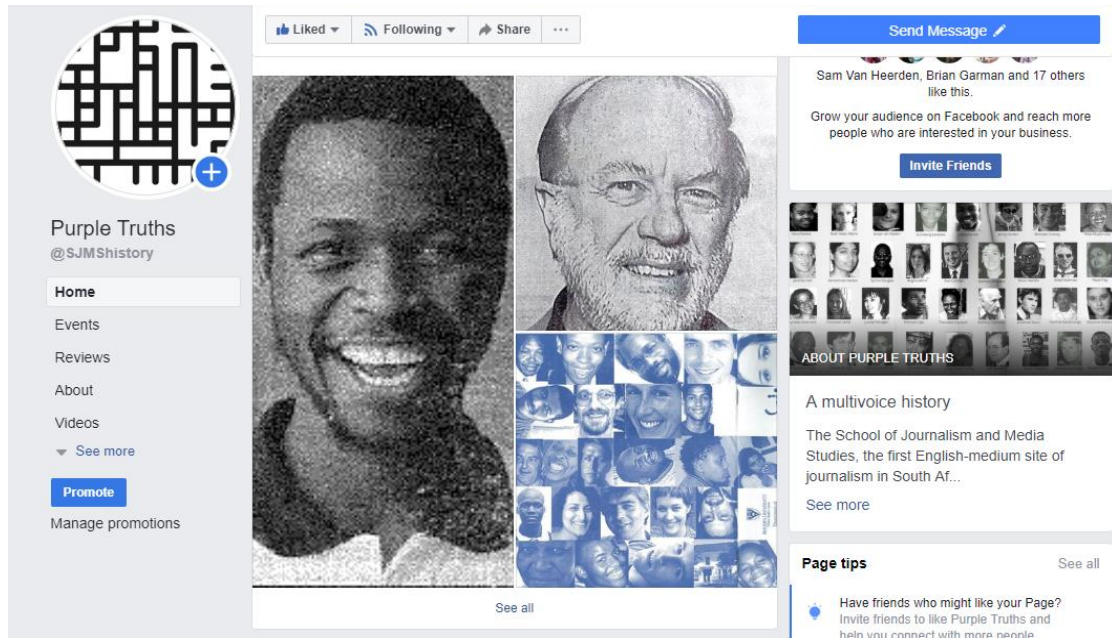

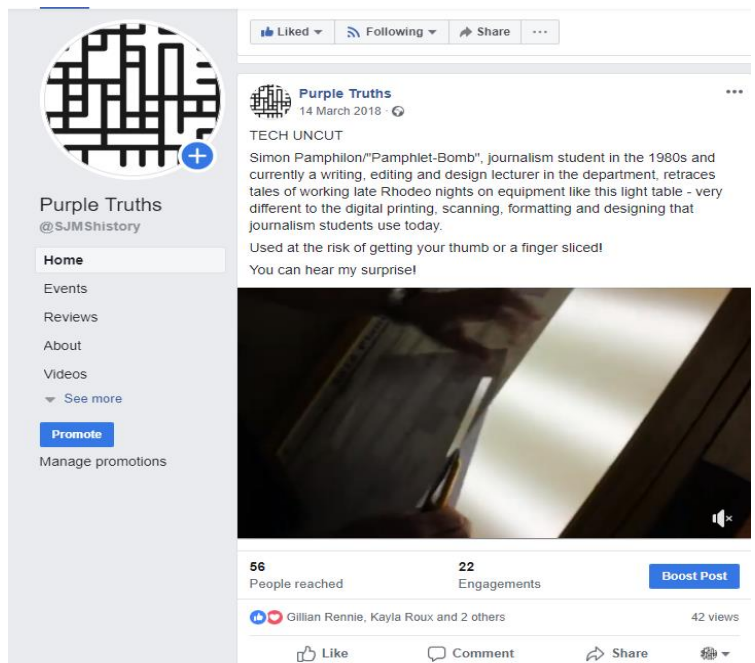*Figure 16* Screenshot of the Purple Truths Facebook page

Figure 17 Purple Truths Facebook page: reach, engagement and likes

Secondly, probably the oldest and still quite useful technology for online collecting simply and accurately is email. Whittle (2005) found usefulness in the fact that

emailers can include attachments such as scanned photographs and documents. Similarly, this was employed to reach participants directly. I was lucky enough to find a trove of Excel files that contained most of the contact details (although not completely up to date) of students and staff of the SJMS since its establishment in 1970. This ranged from postal addresses to phone numbers to email address and work addresses. I sent out hundreds and hundreds of emails using this alumni directory and the people who responded and showed a willingness to participate were the ones that engaged further in the history and were included on *Purple Truths.* An advantage of this was that email also allowed for long-term interactions, follow-ups, and detailed exchanges and the opportunity to connect with people that weren't on any other forms of social media. Also, an online collecting project can get started right away with a simple web design that uses email links to encourage and accept submissions and this is what was employed on the *Purple Truths* website (Cohen, 2013; Whittle, 2005).

4.3.6 Discussion on the intellectual and making process

> Whether the goal is to promote dialogue or creative expression, shared learning or co-creative work, the design process starts with a simple question: which tool or technique will produce the desired participatory experience?[16]

The philosophy of the production was one that embodied characteristics of collaboration and dialogic history; an engagement with audiences and a multimodal history that could act as a virtual, extra-sensory historical experience. I really wanted participants to be taken *back* to their time in SJMS history.

However, the tiers of the project were challenging: collecting data, curating a history, maintaining a collaborative dynamic, writing a historical narrative, designing and creating a website for this historical narrative, inserting and placing participants' contributions into the website and analysing data for the thesis meant that I had to occupy various roles. These included researcher, historian, curator, web designer, and social media manager. The compartmentalisation of various aspects of this project meant that on many occasions, in retrospect, the project would have benefited from more collaboration and a bigger and more diverse *team* that could take on various roles mentioned above. Public historians frequently collaborate with other non-historians across disciplines to enrich these kinds of projects. Artists, web developers

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[16] Nina Simon, *The Participatory Museum,* http://www.participatorymuseum.org/chapter1/.

and academic historians could have aided the sustainability of this project as it would have laterally enriched the design and execution of the project.

In the context of this project I learned that to have produced the desired participatory experience, with the idealistic philosophy that I had in mind for this history, I had to have more than effective communication with the audience than a single message or one directed historical investigation. This kind of audience engagement needed a goal: to create lasting ties with the community by involving them in every step of the collection and interpretation processes. This encompassing sustainability is incredibly difficult with the limited time and human resources that was available for this project.

Public historians intentionally incorporate what they learn from the successes and failures of their professional experiences into future interpretive and engagement strategies (Lyon et al., 2017). As Kolb (2015) explains, the public historian practitioner applies what has been learned from the developing patterns of experience into future situations.

I am left with a hopefulness at what still looks like a subterranean pool of historical knowledges and methodologies yet to be discovered using alternative approaches like this in the digital humanities in South Africa. As Brier & Wizinsky (2016: 3) explain, "These histories are often more complex than those that rise to the surface of typical historical analysis". It is what *rose to the surface* in this project that surprised me most throughout this research. It manifested one morning at 2.30am when, during the early stages of the *Purple Truths* project, I received a three-page word document from an individual of the SJMS suddenly overcome with nostalgia; late nights working on design projects, chain-smoking cigarettes, peers who stood in solidarity, a love for her specialisation, a purpose in career and ambition. This was an "Ah-ha" moment as I realised that this project had potential beyond its academic beginnings and that there was a way to authentically engage with audience through a real and meaningful connection to the past through their memories.

4.4 Conclusion

Before this project, there was no complete focus on the entirety of the SJMS history with the department as the sole subject. Multivocality and plurality led to a participatory design of this digital public history (rare in South African institutional contexts) that allowed for a democratisation of the historical narrative by inviting

participation to historical inquiry (not common in South African historiography). The digital format also created the possibility of the historical narrative to be presented through personal narrative/voice, historical ephemera and archival (digitised material) that shaped into a living, virtual museum and index of SJMS public history.

CHAPTER FIVE: FINDINGS, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter highlights the findings, analysis of the data and concludes with a discussion of the results.

Using Hermida and Thurman's (2008) table of formats for user participation, the findings categorises six formats of user participation that results from this study. Next, the participation tools on the website that are employed in the study, which solicited the user participation, is divided into five main types of participation features. Participatory features are defined in this study as mechanisms through which "editors display (graphically or verbally) the data resulting from their attempts to gauge, track and tabulate users' behaviour" (Netzer et al., 2014: 621). Based on this, the data of these five participatory features are tabulated to show reference to their consistency (consistently or occasionally) on the website. Secondly, to underscore the diverse dimensions of these participation tools, I use the Netzer et al. (2014) five-dimensional analytical model to analyse the various participatory dimensions of these five features by mapping them along five axes: Chronology, Visibility, Agency, Integration and Share-ability. Thirdly, in the context of media and participation, this analysis is applied to Carpentier's (2011) maximalist and minimalist dimensions of participation to determine the degrees of the five participatory features across the spectrum of access, interaction and real participation.

The discussion then explores the effectiveness of the participatory strategies employed on *Purple Truths* to answer how various strategies of participatory journalism contributes to this digital public history and to assess if these strategies actually revises shared authority in their employment towards a democratisation of this narrative.

5.1 Findings

5.1.1 Formats of User Participation

The website integrated a plethora of participation tools which solicited various formats of user participation. Using Hermida and Thurman's (2008) model of formats for user participation, the formats of user participation on the *Purple Truths* website are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 *Formats of user participation on Purple Truths*

Format	Description
Media	Photographs, video and other media (documents, student work and student cards) were submitted by participants. None were vetted by me as researcher.
Stories	Written submissions from individuals of the SJMS that included memories of their time in the department, curriculum, insights into the department's development and growth, anecdotes on deadlines/lecturers, experiential narratives. None of these were edited by me for publication on the website and rather recorded and published as they were written to preserve the authenticity of personal voice.
Comments	Thoughts and opinions across various webpages on the website. Users submitted by filling in a form on the bottom of the item.
Polls	Questions about the history posed by me (researchers), with users asked to make a binary response or a multichoice. These polls provided instant and quantifiable feedback.
Social networking	This format allowed distribution of links to stories through the social media platform *Facebook*.
Survey	This format was in-built into the website and allowed for straight-forward and accommodating user participation for users who wanted a chance for quick and easy participation and contribution.

The figures below (Figure 18, 19 and 20) illustrate some of the formats of user participation on the *Purple Truths* website.

Figure 18 *Example of user media format: video production submitted by user*

My Detour Route to the School of Journalism

Intrigue and Circumstance: A Collision Course

I'd always been fascinated by the School of Journalism. Most of my friends at undergrad level were Humanities students and I was studying towards a BCom in Management and Economics. My good friend, Camalita Naicker – a TV Journalism student – always quipped about how I was a Humanities student stuck in a Commerce faculty. She was definitely on to something.

It was she who, at the end of my undergrad year, encouraged me to apply for the Sol Plaatje Institute's Postgraduate Diploma in Media Management. Due to a project gone wrong, my plans of doing my Honours in Management had been torn to shreds and I was trying to figure out what I would do. In my life, life altering occurrences have played catalyst to my living the life I desire. This was one such case.

With Camme's encouragement, I applied and got accepted into the SPI PDMM program. Most people failed to see any correlation between my undergrad and postgrad ambitions. This was certainly an unusual route for a BCom student to take. I begged to differ.

Incorporated in the PDMM course were principles of management that I grasped at undergrad. What I appreciated most about the course is that it took me beyond a theoretical understanding of management. There was real context to it. I was fully ignited by and engrossed in learning

Figure 19 *Illustration of user media format: written submission (pdf)*

Do you know this man?

He played a big role on the Rhodes campus and in English Literature, but few know the part he played in the Department of Journalism and Media Studies. Do you?

○ Yes   ○ No

Submit

Figure 20 *Illustration of polls format on the website*

5.1.2 Prominent Participation Features

Purple Truths integrated a variety of participatory tools, which I am dividing into five main types. I include in this list only features that appear more than three times on the website. Other, less prevalent features, are discussed briefly in the discussion.

- UGC: This include any content submitted by readers in a variety of forms (some illustrated above; photographs, videos, emails), and excludes comments.

- Comments: This feature refers to the option of written remarks submitted by readers and displayed on articles. It includes the display of the number of comments.

- Social plugins: These are automatic features on the Wix platform and displays *Purple Truths'* most popular articles on social networks.

- Polls: This feature is an interactive tool and enables users to vote, either binarily or multichoice. The results are displayed as a visual graph.

- Most shared/emailed/recommended/trending: This feature automatically aggregates readers' social acts ("like" & "share") and publicly displayed it on the respective webpage.

Using the Netzer et al. (2014) model, Table 2 tabulates these five features from the *Purple Truths* website and subdivides them based on their prominence on the website. This differentiation is based on how consistently they were found on the website.

Table 2 Participation features on the Purple Truths website

Participation features	Consistently found	Appears occasionally
UGC	✓	
Comments	✓	
Social plugins		✓
Polls	✓	
Most shared/emailed/ recommended/trending:	✓	

5.2 Analysis

5.2.1 The five-dimensional framework of participatory features

Chronology

This axis represents user involvement in the various phases of news production and relates to different temporal stages (Netzer, et al., 2014). The news production stages were first described by Domingo et al. (2008) and developed further by Hermida (2011). These stages are categorised as: (a) *Access/observation*—this is the initial information-gathering stage where material is generated; (b) *Selection/filtering*—this is the stage where decisions are made regarding what should be published, also known as the "gatekeeping" stage; (c) *Processing/editing*—the stage where the story is created, writing and editing; (d) *Distribution*—the stage where the story is disseminated and opened to readers; (e) *Interpretation*—the stage where comments and discussions are opened to the audience on the published story. In order to examine gatekeeping practices, this study found that user participation was invited in a wide range of these phases.

Access/observation: There were various ways for users to participate in this stage of production, often within operational procedures based on established news practices. These primarily involved tools that allowed users to send text or audio-visual material. The main channel offered for sending through these contributions was email, via a form or link on the website which synched to a Dropbox folder, a *Purple Truths* email and my work email. These emails and Dropbox links enabled users to submit textual narratives or historical ephemera. This provided, by far, the greatest of options for users to participate to demonstrate the idea of users as co-collaborators through their contributions.

Selection/filtering: This phase was most closed to audience participation. Netzer et al. (2014: 624) explain that "Even today, the selection/filtering phase is the most closely guarded". The study did not allow readers any agency over how the digital history was narratively laid out and presented. The previously established themes of the digital historical narrative ("origins", "curriculum", "politics and radicalization", "development of the black journalist", "theoretical position" and "purple myth") guided the content of the history and user participation at this stage used these narrative branches as nostalgic prompts and cues. This limitation of agenda-setting capability inhabited a more traditional space of journalism gatekeeping and editorship, impacting on degrees of authorship.

Processing/editing: Users were invited to participate in this phase. *Purple Truths* published unedited narratives from users' solicited contributions. The crowdsourced feature of this study allowed for extensive reader contributions with a lesser degree of editorial control, enabling user participation in producing content. My content and participants' content were published side by side, labelled with specific labels and attributed accordingly to indicate source. This characterises further roles of authorship that implicates the democratisation of the narrative.

Distribution: In contemporary news websites, distribution seems to be the most popular phase of inviting user participation (Netzer et al., 2014). It was the same in this study where the stories were made available for reading and discussion. The main tool that was used for distribution in this study was social plugins (Facebook).

<u>Interpretation</u>: This stage was very open to user participation where users were encouraged to have their say on content. This included polls on various aspects of the history and its characters, as well as comment sections on most webpages.

Visibility

The *visibility* axis demonstrates the manner and degree to which participation features are displayed. Two dimensions illustrate this axis: levels of *transparency* and *prominence* of participation features.

<u>Transparency (and opaqueness)</u>: Transparent features are explicitly displayed and clearly solicit audience participations. The poll, previously known as one of the most fundamental examples of audience participation (Netzer et al., 2014; Hermes, 2006; Stromer-Galley, 2004), is often featured on *Purple Truths* and is an example of a highly transparent tool. The audience is completely aware that their votes are being collected. It is a feature with either a multichoice or binary intention that clearly mobilises users. Comments are another example of a transparent participatory feature. However, it wasn't the most popular participatory feature for users in this sample, even though they were explicitly displayed in various formats and multiple forms on the website. This is particularly interesting as it differs from many contemporary news websites where comments are found to be one of the most popular participatory features (Netzer et al., 2014; Manosevitch, 2011; Reich, 2011).

Netzer et al. (2014) explain that opaque features, located on the opposite pole of the axis, automatically track website traffic and activity without communicating to readers the data collected and its uses. Examples of this kind of monitoring includes measuring activity of users as they read articles or time spent on various web pages. This feature measures and aggregates user traffic and behaviour and publicly displays the results through various features. *Purple Truths* did not use any opaque features.

<u>High prominence and low prominence</u>: This dimension deals with the participation features in terms of their size, location on the website page and graphic display. These characteristics illustrate the importance of each participation feature to the user and impacts its noticeability "which often reflect organisational perceptions about the significance of participation" (Netzer et al., 2014: 625). Various participatory features on the website held different characteristics to portray their importance and solicit various types of user participation. Figure 21 below reveals the differences of high

and low prominence participatory features on *Purple Truths* which demonstrates examples of the graphic display and location of *high prominence versus low prominence* features on the website to illustrate the importance of participation in this project and the study's perception about the significance and value of user participation. This feature was enlarged and took up half of the webpage on the screen interface. Notice the difference of this feature in relation to the social plugins on the left side (encircled) and the "participate" button (encircled) in the masthead.
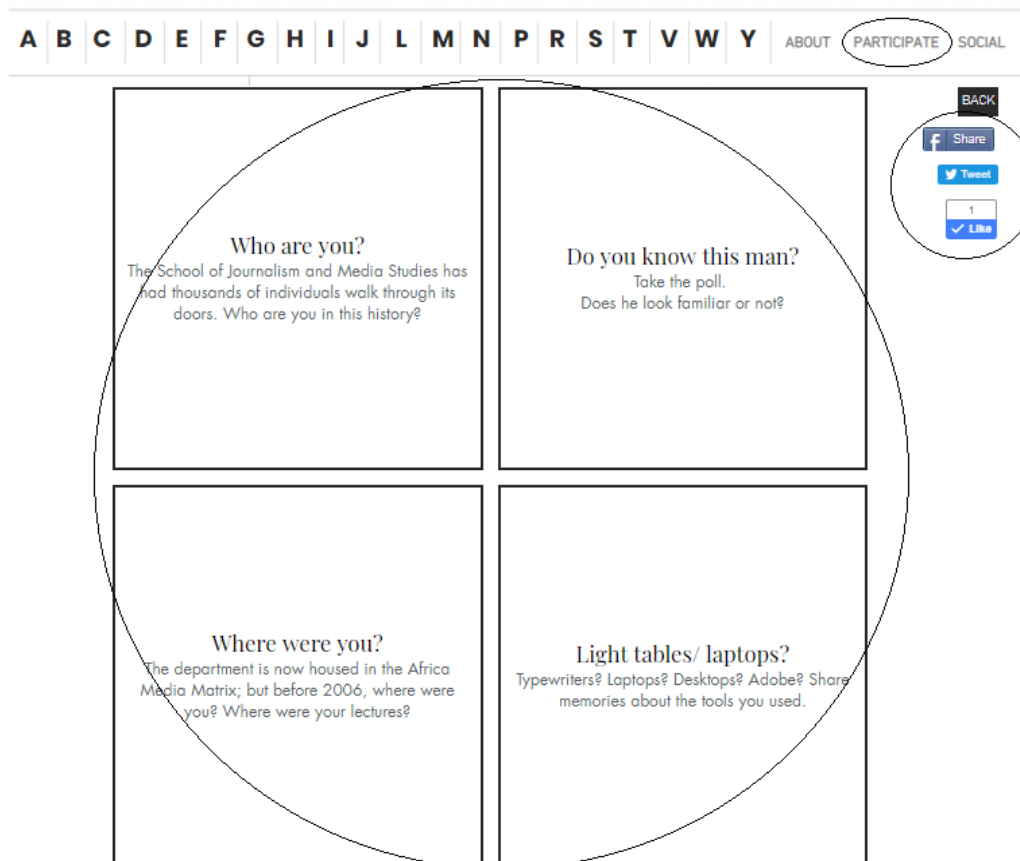

Figure 21 Participation feature with high prominence

Agency

This axis relates to the extent and source of participatory activity through the use of participatory features and focuses on two dimensions relating to the activities of users and editors:

UGC versus user-generated behaviour (UGB): This dimension refers to the differentiation between a participation feature that enables the creation of content by users (UGC) "and features that display user behaviours that do not include the creation of new content" (UGB) (Netzer et al., 2014). The UGB end of this dimension

was not employed in this study as measurements and aggregations of surfing behaviours and user statistics was not deemed necessary. Responses, contributed narratives, photographic submissions, videos — all content created by users, is what was collected in this study along this dimension. The most prevalent manifestation of UGC was personal narratives. Manifestations of UGC prominently appeared on the website in a variety of forms mentioned above. The website specifically appealed to readers: "Who are you?", "Share your own material", "Participate". These are all displayed on various webpages, but the actual UGC collected is then situated in another section, removed from the editorial sections and published on their own webpages. This is different from evidence revealed by Netzer et al. (2014) about contemporary news websites where the most prevalent manifestation of UGC are comments. This is due to *Purple Truths'* aim of trying to democratise the narrative and integrate users' participations and contributions as much as possible into the narrative. Therefore, the focus was on *content* rather than *behaviour.*

Editor's selection versus automatic aggregation: This second dimension involves the level of editor activity in relation to various participation features; automatic aggregation ranking engines are located on the "automatic" side of the axis, whereas the "editorial selection" is found on the other. The latter are user-generated texts handpicked by editors for display from various sections of the website for, usually, the homepage. Automatic aggregation was not used on *Purple Truths* and neither was "editorial picks". Due to the manageable scale of the study, all the content collected was published as is. There was no need to implement editorial decisions to what was chosen to be published on the website. In this way, participatory content was kept very separate from the editorial domain.

Integration

Continued on in a different capacity from the last axis, the *integration* axis explores the relation between audience-participation tools and the editorial news domain. The poles of this axis that Netzer et al. (2014) describe are located as "embedded" versus "segregated" participation features.

Purple Truths reveal a clear manifestation of "embedded" integration between editorial content and participation features. This is most evident where comment features are assimilated into various chapters and pages of the historical narrative,

most often embedded in the story rather than at the end (see Figure 22). Figure 22 shows a comment feature as an "embedded" participation tool evident in its location in the middle of the chapter on the website as opposed to at the bottom of a page, separate from the article, which would then have been described as closer to the "segregated" pole.

Figure 22 Embedded participation tool

An example of what Netzer et al. (2014: 626) describe as "advanced integration" is evident on the *Purple Truths* website because I assimilated professional content priorities next to "multi-tab" participation features. They call this "reverse integration". See Figure 23 where "about" and "social" categories are located alongside "participate". The historical index (a-z) of the digital historical narrative also categorises both editorial content as well as contributed, UGC content together.

Figure 23 Illustration of advanced integration in which professional content priorities were assimilated with participation features

Share-ability

Netzer et al. (2014: 627) suggest three circles of interaction which refer to the scope and type of audience targeted by readers/users. These are: *inner circle, public circle* and *social circle.*

"Inner circles" refer to individual personal activities that do not involve any social intentions. Examples of this are reading articles or writing to the editorial staff. "Public circles" are the public activities, like writing comments, which are open for the general public to see. "Social circles" are the social interactions of "liking", "sharing" and "tweeting" with the intention of distribution within social networks.

"While the inner and public circles have been part of digital journalism since its inception, features that are geared toward social circles have only recently emerged, energised by the rise of social media" (Netzer, et al., 2014: 627). This is due to social plugins and other social-sharing features that allow for open dissemination to social circles and networks where users can share their favourite content or articles. These tools are generally used in two ways: to measure the social-sharing activity around content and to measure how far content reaches via these social networks (Netzer et al., 2014).

In this study, across this axis, user activity is situated in *inner* and *public circles.* There is a clear difference between these circles of interaction in comparison to the implementation of socially orientated features and the "social circles" which are often employed and prioritised on other contemporary news websites (Netzer et al., 2014: 627). *Purple Truths* implemented simple social features of "share" and "like". No advanced social plugins were implemented on *Purple Truths* due to the limitation of the free web platform of Wix. Much of the focus of user participation on this axis was centred on the *inner circle*. Focusing on individual personal activities, which were not aimed at particular social intentions, meant that the SJMS historical narrative could be explored in-depth for participants through the *inner circle*. A lot of the *share-ability* from the user in this *inner circle* was directed to me as researcher/editor. Deeper exploration of users' personal narratives through this circle of exchange enriched the history of the SJMS by focusing on accommodating their authentic voice and adding an experiential aspect to the history. This could have otherwise compromised the depth of the historical narrative and led to a quantifying of audience.

5.2.2 Minimalist and maximalist dimensions of participation

The next stage of analysis uses Carpentier's (2011) minimalist/maximalist dimensions of participation to distinguish the difference between access, interaction and real participation in this media praxis as it explores varying degrees of content-related participation in the context of democratisation of this narrative.

Carpentier (2011: 15) foregrounds participation in democracy and democratic theory because of its concern with the inclusion of people within decision-making processes and "is one of the key sites of the articulation of the concept of participation." One of the crucial dimensions structuring different democratic models is the minimalist versus maximalist dimension, which underlies a number of key positions in the articulation of democracy. Carpentier (2011) migrates this democratic model into the media sphere to provide a distinction between partial participatory processes and full participatory processes. Minimalist forms of participation are models of partial participation where two or more parties influence the making of decisions but the final power to decide rests with one party only (Carpentier, 2011; Pateman, 1970). Carpentier (2011: 19) characterises this as "unidirectional participation". Maximalist forms of participation are seen as full participation where each individual member of a decision-making body has equal power to determine the outcome of decisions. This is characterised as "multidirectional participation" (Carpentier, 2011: 19). These models of participation involve differentiating between "real" participation and other practices that are only nominally participatory to sharpen the key meanings attributed to participation as a political process where the actors involved in the decision-making processes are positioned towards each other through power relationships that are, to an extent, egalitarian (Carpentier, 2011: 126).

The reason this debate of democratic models needs to be transferred into this stage of the investigation concerns the unavoidability of the positioning of myself as researcher in this project through my editorial involvement in the news-production stages of selection and editing. I explicitly solicited historical contributions from individuals about the SJMS and creative management remained my authority as researcher in the presentation of the history. This role of authorship in the context of participatory research is one that must be analysed to evaluate the extent and attempt of forming a resource focused on the democratisation of this narrative. The decision-

making in this study remained centralised and participation was limited in space and time, not only through virtual limitations, but also where administrative power was entirely held by me (researcher/editor). This is the first point that reflects a minimalist version of media participation, "focusing on control by media professionals" (Carpentier, 2011: 69), where I as researcher/editor/media professional, held control.

Next, Carpentier (2011) highlights the complexity of the notion of participation in democratic theories of active and passive audience. This requires the identification of two major dimensions of audience, based on Littlejohn's (1996: 310) *Theories of Human Communication,* that divides audience into active/passive. Active audience not only participate in media production but also interact with media content. In the context of this study, this affirms the users' role as *active* since the participatory component of this activity related to participation *in the media* and *through the media* — this is illustrated in the user-generated content contributions (*in the media)* and the use of the participatory features (*through the media).* However, participation in the media deals not only with participation in the production of media output (content-related participation), demonstrated in this study, but also in media organisational decision-making (structural participation), not evident in this study. This further points towards indications of this study as minimalist media participation with degrees of partial participation. In minimal forms, media professionals retain strong control over process and outcome, restricting participation to access and interaction (see Table 3).

However, another degree in the minimalist/maximalist dimension that situates the participatory understanding of this study is in the difference between unidirectional and multidirectional participation. In minimalist forms, participation remains unidirectional, "articulated as a contribution to *the* public sphere but often mainly serving the needs and interests of the mainstream media itself" (Carpentier, 2011: 69). Maximalist dimensions see participatory processes as multidirectional:

> …the broad definition of the political, combined with the inclusion of micro-participation in maximalist democratic participation, allows for the validation of participatory practices within the field in which they take place, and through their interconnection with other fields (Carpentier, 2011: 19-20).

In this instance, the participation in this study within the field of public history and participatory journalism is considered relevant in itself, because it provides users and stakeholders with opportunities to influence these environments, as both of these fields adopt realms as public institutions of political ideologies that have started their own critical discourses. "Moreover, the interconnectedness of the participatory practices is deemed important for strengthening a participatory culture within the social" (Carpentier, 2011: 19). From this perspective, the study is multidirectional (across fields), and my participation as researcher/editor in the study is considered relevant for two reasons: (1) it contributes to the wider democratisation of the narrative by validating the participatory practices within the field, and (2) through its interconnection with other fields (Giddens, 2002).

Minimalist and maximalist models for understanding participation articulates one of the key positional balances in typologies of democratic models, *representation* and *participation* (Held, 1996). *Representation* is rooted in the delegation of power and *participation* demonstrates the involvement of citizenry. "Different democratic models (of democratic theory and practice) attribute different balances between these concepts of representation and participation" (Carpentier, 2011: 17). In both of these poles, the control is not total but structured through institutional, legal and cultural logics (Dahlgren, 2009; Bourdieu, 1991). Using Carpentier's (2011) AIP (access, interaction and participation) model, the balances of *representation* and *participation* are evaluated in order to help further clarify the minimalist/maximalist meaning of participation in this study. See Table 3 where I tabulate access, interaction and participation in *Purple Truths* using Carpentier's (2011: 130) AIP model (verbatim).

Table 3 *Access, interaction and participation (AIP model) in Purple Truths*

Access (*presence*)

	Technology	*Content*	*People*	*Organizations*
Production	Presence of machines to produce and distribute content ✓	Presence of previously produced content (e.g., archives) ✓	Presence of people to co-create✓	Presence of organisation structures and facilities to produce and distribute content ✓
Reception	Presence of machines to receive relevant content ✓	Presence of (relevant) content ✓	Presence (of sites) of joint media consumption✓	Presence of organisational structures to provide feedback ✓

Interaction (socio-communicative relationships)

	Technology	*Content*	*People*	*Organizations*
Production	Using machines to produce content ✓	Producing content ✓	Co-producing content as group or community ✓	Co-producing content in an organisational context ✓
Reception	Using machines to receive content ✓	Selecting and interpreting content ✓	Consuming media together as group or community ✓	Discussing content in an organisational context (feedback) ✓

Participation (co-deciding)

	Technology	*Content*	*People*	*Organizations*
Production (and reception)	Co-deciding on/with technology	Co-deciding on/with content ✓	Co-deciding on/with people	Co-deciding on/with organisational policy

✓, Consistently found on *Purple Truths*

As evident in the check-marked demarcation of the *access, interaction and participation* applicability on *Purple Truths* in relation to this AIP model, "access" and "interaction" are the most demonstrated dimensions on the website and this falls under the pole of *representation,* where particular (historical) participatory activities are delegated to users. This gets to the root of a concept of participation which is: if users have access and interact, do they really participate? (Carpentier, 2011: 130).

Table 3 demonstrates again the distinction between content-related participation and structural participation as they point to two different spheres of decision making. Table 3 clearly illustrates no participation in structural processes of "co-deciding" in this study. Nevertheless, it was through the user activities of "access" and "interaction" that *content*-related participation could be engaged using the material solicited as content, which was chosen to be submitted by individuals' themselves with creative license and free choice of submission, that allowed a "co-deciding on/with content" (Carpentier, 2011: 130). This affirms Carpentier's (2011) characteristic of participation as invitational. Even in contemporary maximalist participatory models the imposition of participation is rare and counteractive. Their necessary embeddedness with inherent free will protects against the enforcement of participation. The lack of enforcement of participation and avoidance of editorial intervention in these submissions warrants them to be categorised under this category of content-related participation where the user activities of contribution demonstrate the involvement of "citizenry" — which Held (1996: 45) characterises as *participation* when describing the key balances between representation and participation in typologies of democratic models.

5.2.3 The people behind the participation

The human dimension of this analysis must be noted in this section because it gives meaning to the whole exercise of understanding participation in its varying degrees towards the goal of democratising the narrative and highlights the impact the project had on the people involved in it. Noteworthy throughout the research process was what participation meant to the people who were engaging in the history and interacting with it. On a hyper-individual level, the participants, through non-archival narratives and contributions, gave a living appreciation to the past and the many ways it can be validated in people's lives. *Purple Truths* turned into a collective exercise of

nostalgia that provided a resurgence of appreciation for the past. An illustration of this nostalgic expression is a note from one individual that read:

"I actually got all teary-eyed reading this email and remembering again how privileged I was to do my PGDip at this awesome place… Now you've made me want to go back!"

When I asked another individual to comment on an ambition they published as a first-year student that I found in the archives, they were overcome with emotion and, through tears, asked for "time to absorb this."

By employing participatory processes with a diverse collective of individuals, without focusing on the efficiency of the production, we see how it touches on many lives and domains both internally and externally, individually and collectively. An interesting manifestation of this came through the theme of love. Five separate individuals focused on the meetings of their significant others while at the SJMS and reminded me yet again of the humanist dimension in this institutional context. Beyond themes of politics, curriculum and theoretical positions in the historical narrative, there were also stories of love and lust, broken marriages and new ones. One individual opened up their contributed personal narrative with "Rhodes was a seminal experience involving three women in my life"[17] while another individual contributed a photo of herself and the man she met while a student in the department and then went on to marry[18].

Another participant, from the first generation of journalists who graduated from the department (1974-1977) and on the cusp of being forgotten by mainstream presentations of SJMS history, was amplified and strengthened in their sense of self and historical place in ways that surprised me. "Scary to think I started at Rhodes almost 45 years ago" he said at the end of the email.

Using images and archival material to engage with participants visibly transported them through time and space and refreshed their memories. Matthew Buckland explained:

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[17] https://apurpletruth.wixsite.com/sjmshistory/clive-emdon
[18] https://apurpletruth.wixsite.com/sjmshistory/harriet-clay-nee-knight

> I remember writing that story vividly. I remember the room, the computer and even
> where I sat. it was in the journalism computer room which was on the bottom floor of
> what is now the drama department. You walk up those orange brick stairs outside,
> into the building, turn left, walk down the passage, before the stairs that go up to what
> is now the Business School, you turn right down a second passage, and then turn left
> into the computer room. I remember where I sat, in the second row facing the
> entrance. Maria Mcloy, a fellow student and friend of mine, was sitting opposite me,
> also writing a story. I remember Darryl Accone dashing around with his long ponytail
> in a constant panic on the second floor. He was a great editor that year.

This vivid recounting also encouraged individuals to dig into their own archives. After digging around for an old student card, one alumnus said that they "keep them to remind me of Rhodes, and the good times I had there."

Whereas some people were nostalgic and sentimental, others were more practical and orientated towards the future. One individual focused on the need for SJMS alumni networks, that used to meet regularly, to bring back these alumni meetings in order to facilitate a mutual exchange of knowledge, skills, experience and finances back into the department. This has stopped happening in the last few years and this participant focused on the necessity and importance of this in sustaining the department's links with its alumni.

5.3 Discussion

The concept of participation, as argued by Carpentier (2011: 131), is the key role it carries in relation to attribution to power and equal power relations in decision-making processes and he terms this "real" participation. In the context of this study, this would indicate that there was no "real" participation due to the lack of emphasis on power dynamics between myself and users and not equalising processes of structural decision-making.

However, it's the definition of participation that allows us to think through, name and communicate participatory processes as minimalist or as maximalist (Carpentier, 2011). This definition is crucial in the understanding of participation in this study. The key differences in determining the extent of the democratisation of the narrative in this study is the definition of participation it employed. Netzer et al. (2014: 621) offer a broader definition of online participation as "(1) any form of user behaviour that can

be measured and/or displayed; and (2) that has the potential of influencing publishers', editors' and readers' decisions regarding the publication or use of online content." Carpentier (2011), on the other hand, cautions not to use too broad a definition of participation that incorporates all types of social practices. He quotes Pateman's (1970: 70-71) definition of participation, which refers to influence or (even) equal power relations in the decision-making processes. His theory is that participation cannot be equated with "mere" access to or interaction with media organisations, as Netzer et al. (2014) (and Jenkins, 2006) do. "Access and interaction do matter for participatory processes in the media - they are actually its conditions of possibility – but they are also very distinct from participation because of their less explicit emphasis on power dynamics and decision-making" (Carpentier, 2011: 69).

The definition of participation underlying this study follows the assumption that in contemporary digital news environments, audience activity does not need to be explicitly participatory to be influential and is situated within the definition given by Netzer et al. (2014) and Jenkins (2006). Processing the findings within the developed five-dimensional matrix (for a nuanced conceptualisation and analysis of audience participation) affirms *Purple Truths* as a participatory website through its various participatory strategies, manifested through the five prominent features. This study examines the selection and use of participation features on *Purple Truths*. This is particularly important in the theoretical context of public history that guided this research because public history is differentiated from traditional history through its invitation for engagement and involvement with activities and practices of the past that invite the public to actively engage with history (Ashton & Kean, 2008; Samuel, 1994).

Analysis of the five prominent participatory features supports the goal of this study to investigate the capacity of participatory digital features for telling history through multiple voices, and the focus on the *inner circle* on the s*hare-ability* axis allows this goal to be manifested as it created the space for direct engagement between researcher/editor and users in order to facilitate multivocality and, what I call, invested plurality.

Participation is seen as a political-ideological concept intrinsically linked to power but within all fields and contexts, participation situates itself in debates that question and

critique power balances that structure social interactions (Carpentier, 2011). In this study, participation is based on the social role of journalism in the democratic process where the fundamental understanding is that journalists are expected to act in the public interest (Singer et al., 2011). In the context of this study, it has. By opening up the narrative to multivocality, within the framework of the tension between journalistic and participatory cultures, it acknowledges individuals' importance outside of institutional bounds of voices of authority. It does this by including participation options that provide the opportunity for users to take on the role of producers rather than to remain consumers (Singer et al., 2011).

The complex construction of audiences by journalists is also further understood through the analysis. Findings show that the focus in this study is on the construction of audiences as "creative" rather than "quantified". This concerns the dual construction of audiences that Anderson (2011: 550) and Van Dijck (2009) describe. Anderson (2011) highlighted the use of an empowering participatory rhetoric used by journalists when discussing audiences in comparison to the accelerating reduction of the audience to mere numbers through the proliferation of various automatic, aggregating quantifying technologies in digital environments (Netzer, et al., 2014). This analysis speaks to Anderson's (2011) depiction of the gap between the rhetoric of participation and the reduction and quantification of audiences:

> The decline in aggregated visible participatory features (such as polls), the prevalence of visible individual-based features (such as comments) and the move of many aggregate-participation mechanisms to the backstage (informing editors' decisions without being publicly displayed) may suggest that while the rhetoric of participation leans toward deliberation and celebration of individuals' contributions, behind the scenes, users are turned into aggregated masses (Netzer et al., 2014: 628).

Purple Truths maintains the integrity of audience as creative rather than quantified to celebrate individuals' contributions rather than subtly turn them into masses. It does this by presenting their narratives through their own voice and situating them in the history through their own pages on the website titled by their name; occupying a space where the multiple layers of their different experiences can stand beyond the basic demographic details of the audiences and the historical themes that their experiences fit into. The individuals' personal narratives were put centre-stage and enriched with multimedia material. Furthermore, the audience as "creative" was

maintained through the freedom of choice in expressing exactly what they wanted and how they wanted to (Anderson, 2011: 550). They could submit narrative or historical ephemera (photographs, albums, student press) in any shape or form or style that they wanted to. Qualitatively, *Purple Truths* turned into a collective exercise of nostalgia that provided a resurgence of appreciation for the past. This is highlighted in the last section of the analysis. As analysis on the a*gency* axis reveals, *Purple Truths* focused on user-generated content (UGC) and didn't include any dimension of user-generated behaviour (UGB) where audience participation was invisibly measured and quantified. This choice affirms journalism in a democratic context where "whats" (quantified) are turned into "whos" (creative) as described by Garman and Wasserman (2017: 9). The viewpoint of users as "whos" initiated a perspective of understanding in the historical narrative that embodied spaces of: users as sensors and connectomes, users as eyewitnesses, users as experts, and, in turn, led to experiential insight that expanded the reach and depth of the SJMS history and journalistic process. As a researcher there were pockets of this history that I never found in the archives in the first stage of my methodology. Individuals provided thematic links between the past and the present that made the history come alive. Gillmor (2006) explains that journalists need to accept the fact that readers may well know more than they do themselves — and this was important for this research where most individuals did. In this way, "horizontal communication" was created for users rather than the conventional "top-down" communication from journalists to readers (Singer et al., 2011: 46).

Heinonen in Singer et al., (2011: 53) explains "we can say that how journalists see themselves shapes how they see users". Of the various ways that journalists see themselves, the position that I inhabited as researcher in this study was what is called a "dialogical journalist", in which an inclusive, collaborative project is undertaken between users and professionals. This role is an abstract conceptual definition from Singer et al. (2011: 47) and illustrates a particular discourse about professional roles in the ongoing debate about who is and is not a journalist. From this perspective, professional media could benefit more from seeing participatory journalism as a new form of communication where users are not just tendrils at the service of journalistic gatekeepers but also collaborators and co-workers that produce original and nuanced information, and more importantly, enrich journalists' stories. Of course, a website,

news or historical, must provide professional stories that are factual and cogent (gatekeeping), but I found in this study that content is enriched by being supplemented with user contributions that foreground social and personal aspects of a story. This facilitates "the need to make journalism more relevant in the everyday lives of media audiences" (Singer et al., 2011: 50) and speaks to the fundamental characteristics of public history. Singer et al. (2011: 50) highlight in their conversation with one community editor that "It's always been a conversation. It's just that [*journalists*] never heard the other side of it." Again, this thought is resounded in the context of South African media where Garman and Wasserman (2017: 12) highlight the "ethics of attunement" and "listening" in the quest of co-creating the democracy we want. "This does entail a powerful reorientation towards listening, attunement and paying attention" (Garman and Wasserman, 2017: 14).

In theory, notions of public history and participatory journalism signal the ability of users to become active collaborators in the journalistic process with a degree of agency and authority over media content. In reality, my findings suggest that despite a diversity of strategies, the study did have to rely on existing norms and practices of editorial decision-making, even in the context of digital media, and significant stages of the news-production process (selection/filtering) remained in the hands of researcher/editor. Although digitalisation and convergence did blur the lines between producers and audience, this reflects the articulation of democracy in the wider context of society where the notion of democracy is complex and is a site that requires constant exploration and debate (Carpentier, 2011; Held, 1996). It must be realised that quests for increases in societal power balances, in the context of government and journalism, has a utopian dimension. Maximalist participation, demonstrated as equalised power relations in decision-making, is undeniably difficult to translate into practice, but Carpentier (2012: 175) says "we should be careful not to erase it from the academic agenda of participation research." Furthermore, Carpentier (2011: 131) explains, "despite the impossibility of fully realizing these situations in social praxis, their fantasmatic realization serves as breeding ground for democratic renewal."

It can be argued that this is even more important in one-party dominated "democracies" (Rabe, 2014: 58). In developing and fragile democracies like South Africa, Rabe (2014) explains the importance of representing both shared and contested histories. The emphasis of multivocality, alongside contested histories,

impact hugely on representation in daily narratives. She highlights that journalists must understand the plurality of the past and present realities to report on the many faces of a "fragile post-colonial democracy" and, in doing so, give degrees of agency back to individuals (2014: 58).

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

6.1 Introduction

Participation plays a variety of roles in the field of communication and media studies and remains a continued site for investigation into democratic-ideological struggle. As seen in this study, participation is a structurally unstable concept. In the present-day media context, where participation is highlighted more than ever, it is important to look closely at the manifestations and intentions of participation in its challenges of maximising equal power positions of the people involved and what this means in practice.

6.2 Research positionality

Questions arise regarding the lack of assessment mechanisms in public history methodologies (Brier & Wizinsky, 2016). The biggest weakness of public history is its lack of user research, comparative or meta-research, either about digital public practices or based on digital public practices (Danniau, 2013). "This results in a lack of sources, figures, directories, quantitative and qualitative reporting that hinders comparative and meta-research into the practices of contemporary public history projects" (Danniau, 2013: 134 – 135). This research began trying to fill this gap with its aim to build on understandings of participatory digital humanities. The *Purple Truths* project offered some possibilities of qualitative participatory assessment which still preserved intellectual understanding, user integrity and authentic personal voice. The goal of assessing the data in a way that yields qualitative measures of digital public history practices that result in sources, figures and qualitative reporting is to enrich comparative and meta-research into the practices of contemporary digital humanities that embrace participatory culture.

6.3 Significance of the study

Public historians Brier and Wizinsky (2016: 13) explain "the value of assessment should probably be less geared toward the project's impact on a viewing audience and more focused on the impact the project has on those directly involved in it". The users of *Purple Truths*, through non-archival narratives and materials, gave greater value to the appreciation of the past in the many ways it was validated in people's lives. The redefinition and negotiation of positions meant that the *Purple Truths* production

became a collective exercise in nostalgia that provided a resurgence of the past. Some individuals were overcome with emotions and contacted me in tears of remembrance, others were shocked at the 45 years that had passed since they were a student in the department, some were surprised by how much they remembered and the details that remain, and others were pragmatic with suggestions of resuscitating alumni networks of the SJMS that used to exist — where alumni were physically brought together to share space, knowledge, experiences, capital and skills with the School in a mutual exchange which was discovered to be missed by many alumni.

The exploration of audience participation in online media production "should be considered in the broader context of media convergence and innovation" (Paulussen in Singer et al., 2011: 59). Driven by the acceleration of multimodal mediums and opportunities, this study found incentive for innovation in embracing digital media technologies and integration. The World Editors Forum (2008) describes the biggest change in news production since the 1980s as universally accessible content produced by everyone, everywhere. "Since professional media organisations no longer have a monopoly on easy content production and distribution, they need to learn how best to include amateur material, most commonly known as User-Generated Content (UGC) or citizen journalism, in their everyday functions" (2008: 91). This research found that by using public history to invite individuals to a shared historical inquiry through solicitation of UGC, the study was not only aesthetically enriched by historical ephemera but also humanitarianly invigorated as it embodied primary characteristics of participatory journalism. This included civic engagement and self-expression, supported processes of sharing, an enhancement of individuals' sense of significance through their contributions and an increased sense of social connection.

6.4 Limitations of study

Like any community-engaged project, the methodology is meaningless without first establishing the trust of participants. This requires a deep commitment to an equitable exchange across the lifespan of the project. The human resources required to manage this exchange, along with efforts invested into building a website, meant that one, or the other, or both, were slightly compromised. The construction of public histories is ideally more collaborative and the study would have been a different public history if

there was a web developer, a historian, a designer and a social media marketing manager involved.

This leads onto the second limitation of the study which was its mobilisation. Aspects of participatory culture could have yielded more data if the *Purple Truths* website was mobilised more fully. About 50 participants engaged with the history, across geography, but more mobilisation and time could have yielded more data.

Another limitation to this study was its sustainability. Although it is an institutional history in an online space that lives on, *Purple Truths* does require upkeep and effort to maintain and grow on the platform and its principles of multivocality — which means more human resources, to see where this curatorial idea has the potential to go.

6.5 Areas for future research

Participation and history have often been fused in South Africa with examples like the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and oral history methodologies employed at the District Six Museum. However, this study formed a basis for further research into participatory features in the academic context of the digital humanities in South Africa that explore notions of the democratisation of the narrative. Further interdisciplinary and collaborative investigations into public history and participatory journalism is vital to grow user research, comparative and meta-research. Furthermore, South African journalism historiography and media history is a critical component of establishing a contemporary South African journalism.

6.6 Conclusion

This study explored the role of historian/archivist/curator/producer/consumer, creative ways that audiences can interact with historical artefacts, shared authority and democratisation of the historical narrative to investigate how revising authority and meaning-making in historical research influences a democratised historical narrative of the SJMS. The study concludes with the resounding reality of the complexity of various strategies of participatory processes and the notion of participation. However, through the intellectual grappling of applied practical research, participation is undeniably an enriching site of possibility for the "ongoing democratic revolution" (Carpentier, 2011: 11).

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Informed consent form

School of Journalism & Media Studies

Rhodes University

Research project name: An alternative history for the future of South African journalism: Exploring the possibilities of participatory storytelling for telling history through multiple voices

Participant Information Sheet

We would like to invite you to take part in the above-named study but before you decide, please read the following information.

What is the purpose of this study?

The purpose of this study is to explore a public digital history of the School of Journalism and Media Studies using collaborative digital design methods to accommodate participation in the construction of the history. In doing so, the study aims to add to the pockets of institutional memory by recording a history of the School of Journalism and Media Studies through the voices of the many individuals that have inhabited it.

Who is doing the study?

Jesamé Geldenhuys

Who is being asked to participate?

Individuals who have declared themselves to be concerned about the making of School of Journalism and Media Studies history as well as those who have constructed parts of this history.

What will you be asked to do?

You will be asked to contribute historical materials (old letters, photographs, student press, memories, text), or your historical narratives, which will be aggregated into a digital, multivoice history website.

Your rights as a research participant

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Information gathered during the research will be used solely for the purpose of this study (investigating the use of this methodology and presenting a digital public history of the SJMS). Although this is a public

study, all efforts will be made to ensure the confidentiality of participants' personal information if so desired. All identifiable data will be stored securely on a computer with password-restricted access and only the researcher will have access to it.

If you decide not to participate there will not be any negative consequences. Please be aware that if you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time and your data will be returned to you or destroyed. You may also decide not to answer any specific question.

What will happen to the data of the study collection?

The data of the study collection (contributed materials) will be presented as a digital public history website of the School of Journalism and Media Studies. The data will also be used as an assessment mechanism for the use and execution of this methodology for the digital humanities in South Africa.

Informed Consent Sheet

** To be signed in duplicate – one copy to be returned to the researcher and one copy to be retained by the participant.

Thank you for your participation. By submitting this form you are indicating that you have read the description of the study, are over the age of 18, and that you agree to the terms as described in the short questionnaire that follows:

1. I understand that the researcher is:
   Jesamé Geldenhuys – jgeldenhuyse@gmail.com

   Yes ☐

   No ☐

2. I have read this form and received a copy of it. I understand the purpose and nature of this study and I am participating voluntarily. I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time, without any penalty or consequences. **I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction**.

   Yes ☐

   No ☐

3. **I agree to take part in this study** and I hereby grant permission for the data generated from this research to be used in the researcher's publications on this topic.

Yes ☐

No ☐

I grant permission under the following conditions:

I grant permission for the research to be recorded and saved for purpose of review by the researcher, supervisor / principal investigator, and ethics committee.

Yes ☐

No ☐

Participant's names and signature _____
Date _____

Researcher names and signature _____
Date _____

Contact

If you have any questions at any time about this study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher:

0027 82 676 0016

jgeldenhuyse@gmail.com

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.

Appendix B: JMS-ESC (Ethics Standards Committee) clearance

Journalism & Media Studies Ethical Standards Committee, Rhodes University

29 May 2018

Dear Jesame Geldenhuys

Ethics Clearance: An alternative history for the future of South African journalism: Exploring the possibilities of participatory storytelling for telling history through multiple voices.

Principal Investigator: Prof Anthea Garman & Ms Gillian Rennie (Supervisors)

This letter confirms that a research proposal with tracking number: JMS-ESC-03-05-2018-02 and title: **An alternative history for the future of South African journalism: Exploring the possibilities of participatory storytelling for telling history through multiple voices** was given ethics clearance by the Journalism & Media Studies Ethical Standards Committee, at Rhodes University.

Please ensure that the JMS ethical standards committee is notified should any substantive change(s) be made, for whatever reason, during the research process. This includes changes in investigators. Please also ensure that a brief report is submitted to the ethics committee on completion of the research. The purpose of this report is to indicate whether or not the research was conducted successfully, if any aspects could not be completed, or if any problems arose that the ethical standards committee should be aware of. If a thesis or dissertation arising from this research is submitted to the library's electronic theses and dissertations (ETD) repository, please notify the committee of the date of submission and/or any reference or cataloguing number allocated.

Yours Sincerely,

Dr V. Malila: Chairperson JMS Ethics Standards Committee.

Note:
1. This clearance is valid from the date on this letter to the time of completion of data collection.
2. The ethics committee cannot grant retrospective ethics clearance.