



# The meaning venue owners and managers of nightclubs ascribe to their experiences of music curation

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## DECLARATION

I, **Jan-Meyer Verhoef**, student number: 24673250 hereby declare that this research titled "**The meaning venue owners and managers of nightclubs ascribe to their experiences of Music Curation**" for the degree of Master of Arts in Musicology at North West University is my original work. The sources used have been cited and acknowledged in the form of references. The work of this dissertation was done by me and it has not been accepted for any other higher degree or professional qualification at any other educational institution.

Signature: 

Mr Jan-Meyer Verhoef

Date: 7 September 2023

## **DEDICATION**

I would like to dedicate this this thesis to my mum, dad and sister who have constantly shown me in their ways that life is such a fun and creative opportunity. I hope this thesis brings you joy!

“It's not about going to a party. It's life as a party.” - Diane von Furstenberg

## **PREFACE**

As a student, there were always concerts in our conservatory on a Tuesday night. Maybe even some supplementary concerts over a weekend, but never more than three concerts. Interestingly though, attendance would always be relatively low. After these concerts, we would go out to the bars and nightclubs in town. I realised that more people were attending these nightclubs than our conservatory events, and students were engaging avidly with the music. These nightclubs were drawing students to their establishments every night of the week. I quickly became fascinated with how these establishments were structured around their musical attributes. I was very excited when my study leader also liked the idea that I could interview the owners of these nightclubs for my Master's dissertation.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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**J. Verhoef**

## ABSTRACT

Music curation is an increasingly prominent theme in contemporary literature. Curators and intermediaries make it easier for consumers to navigate a saturated marketplace while also creating brands through their unique selections of goods. Curation has become a popular field for interpretation of today's cultural market, especially in relation to music. However, the processes whereby venues such as nightclubs, for which music is indispensable, curate their unique musical assemblage remains unclear.

This case study explored the meanings venue owners and managers (VOMs) of nightclubs ascribed to their experiences of music curation for their establishments. Curation processes that musically shape six nightclubs in a South African student town, Noka, were examined. Popular and scholarly studies of music often underestimate the role that venues such as nightclubs play in creating and maintaining specific music scenes. An emic account of VOMs' curatorial decisions elucidated features of the performance context for which they are curating.

This research comprised a qualitative inquiry to address this knowledge gap. In this case study, I determined how the participants' experiences and strategies, in the context for which they curate music, shaped their musical curation processes. Open-ended interviews formed the basis for the data collection process. An emergent research design was followed, and findings were interpreted with the aid of computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software, Atlas.ti 22.

The study revealed that nightclubs are intrinsically embedded in their surrounding community's culture. VOMs have subjective approaches to musical curation that tend to rely on their instincts. Many people and technologies are involved in musical curation. Music scenes are valued by VOMs during curation and used as a tool to understand their patrons' culture. VOMs in Noka discerned between two groups of students, namely, the alternative and the commercial. This study emphasised the importance of keeping abreast of trends as a VOM. Despite a symbiotic relationship among nightclubs in Noka, there is competition for patronage among venues. Nightclubs are fundamentally businesses that must remain financially viable and the curation processes of VOMs are shaped by this principle.

**Key terms:** music curation, performance context, nightclub, nightclub owners, nightclub managers

## OPSOMMING

Hierdie gevallestudie het die betekenis wat eienaars en bestuurders van nagklubs aan die musiekkurasieprosesse vir hulle nagklubs heg, ondersoek. Kurasieprosesse wat die musikale aspekte van ses nagklubs in 'n Suid-Afrikaanse studentedorp, Noka, bepaal, is verken. Populêre en akademiese studies van musiek onderskat die rol wat nagklubs speel om spesifieke musiek te skep en te onderhou. 'n Interne vertelling van plaaslike eienaars en bestuurders (VOMs) se kurasieprosesse en keuses verhelder die konteks waarin die musiek vir nagklubs saamgestel word.

Musikale kurasie word toenemend 'n prominente tema in hedendaagse literatuur. Kurators en tussengangers maak dit makliker vir verbruikers om 'n versadigde mark te navigeer terwyl hulle ook handelsmerke skep deur hul unieke keuses van goedere. Kurasie groei as studierigting vir die interpretasie van vandag se kulturele mark, veral in terme van musiek. Daar is egter steeds 'n gebrek aan begrip van die wyses waarop plekke soos nagklubs, waar musiek onontbeerlik is, hul unieke musikale eienskappe saamstel. Hierdie navorsing het 'n kwalitatiewe ondersoek daargestel. In hierdie gevallestudie het ek bepaal hoe die deelnemers se ervarings en strategieë in die konteks waarvoor hulle musiek kureer hul musikale kurasieprosesse gevorm het. Oopeind-onderhoude het die basis vir die data-insamelingsproses gevorm. 'n Ontluitende navorsingsontwerp is gevolg, en bevindinge is geïnterpreteer deur die gebruik van rekenaargesteunde kwalitatiewe data-ontledingsagteware, Atlas.ti 22.

Die studie het getoon dat nagklubs intiem verweef is met hul omliggende gemeenskap se kultuur. VOM's het subjektiewe benaderings tot musikale kurasie wat geneig is om op hul instinkte te berus. Daar is baie rolspelers en tegnologieë betrokke by musikale kurasie. Musiektonale word gewaardeer deur VOM's tydens kurasie en word gebruik as 'n instrument om hul skare se kultuur te verstaan. VOM's in Noka het onderskei tussen twee groepe studente tussen wie hulle sou kies om hul instelling te baseer; die alternatiewe en die kommersiële. Die belangrikste is dat hierdie studie die noodsaaklikheid ontbloot het om tred te hou met tendense vir VOM's. Alhoewel daar 'n soort simbiotiese verhouding tussen nagklubs in Noka is, is daar ook mededinging. Nagklubs is fundamenteel musikale- en sake-entiteite en kurasieprosesse van VOM's word deur hierdie entiteite gevorm.

**Sleuteltermes:** musiekkurasie, uitvoeringskonteks, nagklub, nagklubeienaars, nagklubbestuurders

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# CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

This study explored the experiences of venue owners or managers of nightclubs in a South African student town, Noka, to curate music in the venues they are responsible for. The pseudonym, Noka, means peace in Setswana. I have used this name instead of the town's name to protect the identity of the establishments I researched in this project. The experiences of venue owners and managers (VOMs) are defined as the knowledge and influences determining their music curation for their venues. In this study, VOMs in charge of selecting and sorting their establishment's music are considered cultural intermediaries or musical curators. The study elucidated the experiences that influence these curatorial processes.

## 1.1.1 Background to the study

Music is vital for nightclubs (Carah *et al.*, 2021; Chua, 2019; Garcia, 2013; Nunes & Birdsall, 2021). The success of specific establishments, especially those that form part of particular aspects of the nightlife economy, depends on the type of music played (Skinner *et al.*, 2005). Given that nightclubs are highly reliant on clubbing and music is the main component of clubbing, clubs are highly dependent upon the music played. Skinner *et al.* (2005) found that females tend to attend pubs and nightclubs based on the safety of the establishment and the type of music played and that males, accordingly, tend to frequent clubs attended by women. During a copyright tribunal in Australia, the Phonographic Performance Company of Australia stated that "providing patrons with music to dance to is the primary feature of a nightclub and the predominant reason why patrons attend nightclubs" (Phonographic Performance Company Limited, 2007).

## 1.1.2 Music curation

Given the variety of available music, the role of a music curator is to guide the consumer or allocate goods based on what the curator believes the market would want (Nunes & Birdsall, 2021). The curator, therefore, finds themselves in a reciprocal relationship: guiding and influencing the market, and being influenced and guided by the market (Choi *et al.*, 2015; Desztich & McClung, 2007; Eriksson & Johansson, 2017; Hagen, 2015; Park & Kaneshiro, 2021; Prey, 2020; Siles *et al.*, 2019; Pauws *et al.*, 2006). The contemporary marketplace for cultural products and goods, such as video and music streaming, has become highly saturated (Jansson & Hracs, 2018). This is evident in the availability of 82 million tracks on Spotify to choose from (Shewale, 2023).

Jansson and Hracs (2018) note that consumers have become highly reliant on intermediaries<sup>1</sup> for guidance through this saturated marketplace and to be presented with goods better aligned to their specific needs. These intermediaries curate goods for various reasons. Jansson and Hracs (2018) aimed to create a typology for why intermediaries curate. These authors specifically limited the scope of their study to the recorded music industry because of how vast the field of curation has become in recent years. Various attributes of curation have gained particular attention in the last decade (Arewa, 2017; Barna, 2017; Canazza, 2012; Cohen, 2020; Jansson & Hracs, 2018; Lim & Benson, 2020; Lindsay, 2016; Morris & Powers, 2015; Tessler, 2020). Some of these attributes include the relationship between curation and law, online music curatorship as a profession, curation as preservation and popular music curation.

Music curation is embedded in an older mix-taping culture (Camp, 2021). Camp writes that music curation involves collecting and sorting existing music into a new medium. Following this definition and considering a nightclub as a medium for music to exist and function within, the role of curators in creating these nightclubs is evident. Scally (2021:3) conducted a study where music curation was realised and analysed within much broader contexts, such as the spaces of cities: “several musical webs that rely on the movement of people into, out of, and within Toyama City”. This reveals that the medium through which curation is practised is usually intricate. In terms of curation, VOMs conform with the following definition by Adler (2021:2): “Curators facilitate choice among symbolically differentiated products either by directly choosing products on behalf of clients or otherwise lowering choice costs”.

Jansson and Hracs (2018:3) state that “the exact nature of the positions that intermediaries hold...and the functions they perform within the marketplace remain ambiguous”. Much can be learnt from the nature of the curation process, especially concerning how the context of the musical performance informs the curation process (Cunningham *et al.*, 2011; Elliott & Tomlinson, 2006; Navickatté-Martinelli, 2009; Turner, 2003; Vall *et al.*, 2017). Jansson and Hracs (2018) write that “space” should be considered when investigating curatorial processes. I propose to extend this concept to “performance context”. Space, in the sense that Jansson and Hracs use it, does not necessarily include the component of cultural dynamics that “performance context” naturally implies.

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<sup>1</sup> Intermediation is used synonymously with curation in this thesis. Prey *et al.* (2022) regard intermediaries as being situated between the consumer while exercising choice as to what the consumer will be presented with.

### 1.1.3 Performance context

An axiom of early ethnomusicology posits that music is “a system of sound communication with a social use and a cultural context” (Qureshi, 1987). This theory explains how music has a contextual element that is indispensable for understanding its sound. Extramusical meanings give music the power to affect its context (Qureshi, 1987). By studying the musical structure and the context of performance achieved in emic terms, a musicologist may arrive at a rich understanding of a musical phenomenon (Qureshi, 1987). Through this model, musicologists aim to understand music at the point where it is performed. Musicologists bring all colourful elements, such as the setting and social functions of the performance, to the foreground of their analysis. “Context” is still relevant even when production, curation and performance are spatially removed. Qureshi’s (1987) musicological model emphasises the context’s role in musical performance. In an age where music production processes occur behind the scenes, there is a tendency to consider that music is no longer being composed to be performed. We must adapt our understanding of performance contexts to understand Qureshi’s model within a present-day setting.

Performance contexts need not refer only to situations involving a live musician performing (Bartlett, 1994; Levinson, 1987; Malloch & Wanderley, 2017; Navickatté-Martinelli, 2009; Pedro, 2014; Turino, 1990; Turner, 2003; Van der Schyff & Schiavio, 2022). The performance context consists of both the place (venue) and space (culture), influencing how the music is created or selected. In a study of nightclub spaces, Davis (2008:ii) argues that “performances altered the social space of the club from night to night and...the space changed through the physical things in the space and the rules associated with that space”. In Turner’s study, *The Resonance of the Cubicle: Laptop Performance in Post-digital Music*, he highlights that composition on a laptop device is informed by the performance context (Turner, 2003). Qureshi’s (1987) theory informs that music is not created in a void, and there is a cultural context for its performance. Often, if it is composed on a laptop at home, the music may seem as if it was created far removed from the performance context, and it might feel as though it lacks any sentiment in a personal environment. In the case of present-day music production, the performance context is highly generalised to speaker outputs. The speakers are the instrument. Similarly, the curation of music for a venue will require consideration of the specific performance context.

Symmes (2021) writes how sound art is relevant beyond itself and its aesthetics and should be consumed or understood in its full participatory relations with its landscape and identities. Hartman’s (2016) example can illustrate this point. She recalls how she attended a striptease event where the DJ erred and caused a brief silence during one of the women’s routines. The woman, standing bare-chested, who was confident until the music stopped, was now suddenly

awkward and fully exposed. Exposed not just because of the nudity but also because of the accompanying sonic nudity of the moment (Hartman, 2016).

Steingo (2015) relates a story in which the relationship between music production and performance context becomes evident. He writes that his producer friend would let a 20-second musical loop play for hours while they and some other friends drink beer and socialise around the loop. Later, someone would begin improvising lyrics or a melody, and a song would develop out of this socialisation. While some music may be created with consideration of the performance context, in this example music was brought to its performance context (space and cultural setting) and created through it.

The dance-floor element of a nightclub is an exceptionally dynamic and flexible context and, therefore, usually uses a live DJ to read the audience and adapt to the needs of the night (Gates *et al.*, 2006). Egolf (2014) notes that: “Not only does music-making and learning happen within a context, but in the instance of DJ participants, the context shapes music-making”. In the case of DJs, where music-making is not the main creative outlet but rather music curation, the focus should be on how music is curated (Gates *et al.*, 2006). From my perspective, VOMs are at the head of the curation process, as they are responsible for employing DJs. Little is known on how VOMs (who have the same responsibility) curate the totality of their venues’ musical attributes.

#### **1.1.4 Methodology for nightlife research**

Garcia (2013) writes about the difficulty of devising a methodology for nightlife research in an electronic dance music (EDM) environment. He mentions that no model has been developed for such research and that no methodology can be suited to the various contexts that such research could encapsulate (Garcia, 2013). The journal special issue, “Doing Nightlife and EDMC Fieldwork” provides a foundation to a narrative of how such research could be conducted (Garcia, 2013). This research shows that in-depth knowledge of nightlife cultures is complicated. Garcia (2013) mentions that research on nightlife cultures is already challenging and has traditionally been neglected by academia as it was not considered “serious” research. The present study contributed to the narrative developing around this methodological problem as it explored the curatorial processes of my selected members in emic terms and, therefore, was a novel enquiry in this research domain.

In a similar study to the present one, Carah *et al.* (2021) analysed how 11 live music venues in Australia navigated cultural, commercial and regulatory forces in their live music curation. The present study differed as it included all aspects of music that created the unique attributes of the venue. The study by Carah *et al.* (2021) aimed to understand how cultural policies influence the live music scene and curatorial processes of live music venues. The authors noted that popular

and scholarly debate often focuses on the musicians and fans in the formation of scenes but neglects to focus on the scene's dependence on financially viable venues (Carah *et al.*, 2021). My study differed from theirs because I interpreted my findings through a musicological lens and not cultural policy. I focused on an element that Carah *et al.* (2021) noted was lacking in this line of research: interpreting musical phenomena through the roles that venues play.

### **1.1.5 Relevance of this study**

The present study is novel because it examined music curation within a context not previously explored: an urban musical nightlife context in a South African student town. Mhlambi (2004) recognises that musicological and ethnomusicological studies have neglected urban contexts. Music curation for Noka's nightclubs has not previously been studied. The experiences that influence how music is curated for these venues in Noka, and the relationship between the context for which the VOMs curate and their curatorial processes are unclear. This relationship will be elucidated by analysing the VOMs' experiences during the curation process. This emic analysis of nightclub music curation provides a valuable foundation for future research.

Individuals responsible for music curation for nightclubs will find this study beneficial as they will be able to learn from the experiences of other VOMs who have similar responsibilities. Scholars interested in music curation at nightclubs will benefit from this research as this study explicates various aspects of this context. Furthermore, this research will benefit musicologists concerned with performance contexts of music.

## **1.2 Procedures**

This case study explored the meaning VOMs of nightclubs ascribed to their experiences of the performance context that underpins music curation for their establishments in Noka. The experiences of the performance context were defined as the experiences VOMs relied on during their music-curatorial processes for their respective nightclubs. This research specifically addressed the question: What meanings do VOMs ascribe to their experiences of the performance context that underpins music curation for their establishments in Noka?

In this qualitative study, adopting a flexible research design was important, as research in the EDM context is relatively novel (Garcia, 2013). Garcia (2013) relies on emerging research designs to account for these environments. I similarly employed this approach. The research design had to allow for subjective answers and experiences to be documented because, as Jansson and Hracis (2018) suggest, curation itself is a novel field, and the action varies depending on the context.

### **1.2.1 Research design**

To evaluate the experiences that inform the choices made by music curators for six nightclubs in Noka, I conducted an explorative case study. The most important aspect of case studies is to explore specific processes (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Therefore, this study examined the meaning of several VOMs' experiences surrounding music curation. This exploration involved the observation and analysis of multiple sites using cross-case comparisons to learn from the context involved; this type of case study can be likened to a multisite case study (Audet & d'Amboise, 2001:7).

Case studies are helpful during enquiries into a contemporary set of events where how or why questions are asked (Yin, 2018). Yin (2018:44) suggests that this method of enquiry is proper when the researcher has little or no control over the unfolding of the events. Concerning the present research question, I asked "how" the experience of the performance context underpins the curatorial processes of VOMs of nightclubs in Noka.

### **1.2.2 Research approach**

This research constituted a qualitative enquiry. This methodology is used to understand the various dynamics of a social phenomenon (Creswell & Creswell, 2017:278). This procedure was employed because the phenomenon under investigation occurs in social settings and results cannot be discussed in a quantifiable manner. The curation of the music and events was determined by various aspects, such as socio-geographical factors, which could include the region's wealth or the area's cosmopolitan nature (Jansson & Hracs, 2018). Therefore, drawing generalisations from the findings was difficult as the uniqueness of their environments influenced each case. However, the study did not aim to find a homogenous answer to music curation but instead sought to understand the relationship between music curation and the performance context.

The main focus of qualitative research is the participants' experiences and perceptions (Creswell & Creswell, 2017:278). In this case study, I determined how the participants' experiences and strategies in the context for which they curate music, shaped their music-curatorial processes. I was the primary data collection instrument in this qualitative enquiry (Creswell & Creswell, 2017:278). Therefore, this research was influenced by my interpretation of the phenomenon.

### **1.2.3 Role of the researcher**

In a qualitative enquiry, it is essential to understand the researcher's values outside of the study to contextualise the study more fully (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). To understand my positionality, Creswell and Creswell (2017:260) suggest that I write reflexively and consider two factors to be

extremely important: commenting on past experiences and commenting on how such experiences shape the interpretations of the data. For example, I might consider my status as an outsider from certain nightclubs or cultures and part of the culture of other nightclubs during my interpretation of the data. This strategy was continuously applied during this research.

#### **1.2.4 Participants**

The scope of this study was geographically limited to establishments in Noka. Six nightclubs catering for students throughout the year were considered for the study. VOMs who were curators and available for the research formed part of the compiled data set. I set up inclusion and exclusion criteria to select the participants while the recruitment strategy also influenced the overall selection of participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The inclusion criteria included VOMs who curated music for a venue with the following characteristics: it should be a nightclub and accommodate and target students as its primary source of clientele. The VOMs should have been working at their establishment for at least six months and working there currently to allow for some experience in music curation of the venue. The exclusion criteria referred to establishments that did not necessarily fulfil the role of a nightclub, for instance bars. The exclusion criteria also meant that certain nightclubs within Noka that did not cater to students were excluded. The exclusion criteria also included VOMs not interested in participating in this study.

#### **1.2.5 Data collection**

The data collected for this study came from the interviews conducted. Open-ended interviews formed the basis for the data collection strategy. These interviews were conducted after the ethics approval process for this study had been completed. This phase of the data gathering also occurred after the literature review had been done. I conducted an hour-long interview per participant: after a telephonic conversation to confirm their recruitment for the study. Additional interviews were held in the cases where member-checking required it. Audio recordings of the interviews were stored in an encrypted folder and will be disposed of (deleted from any hard drive and cloud folder) by five years from now.

The phases of the research included the literature review, establishing the methodology, data collection and the interpretation of the findings. Garcia (2013) recommends a “deep hanging out” within the nightclub context to understand the dynamics of the studied contexts. He recommends committing field notes to memory and writing them down the following morning (Garcia, 2013). This strategy does not disturb the natural flow of the studied contexts (Garcia, 2013). I employed Garcia’s strategy of a “deep hanging out” preliminary to the study to better understand the context that I would research.

Furthermore, I did not capture videos or recordings of nightclubs or their patrons, as this could violate privacy laws (*Protection of Personal Information Act 4 of 2013*). However, I used Shazam, a mobile phone-based music recognition application, to compile results on specific dates (Demarest, 2021). The app functions discretely, does not cause personal harm nor violates any privacy law. The data guided me during my preliminary research in the study by letting me become acquainted with some of the music genres played in Noka's nightclubs. In addition, the data collection strategy was informed by a literature review that guided the formulation of the open-ended questions. This literature search included books, journals, magazine and newspaper articles, internet articles and websites.

It is suggested for qualitative research that participants are purposefully selected so that a researcher can understand a particular problem (Creswell & Creswell, 2017:262). In this case, the participants were carefully chosen to elucidate the experiences of the performance context in Noka, which influenced curatorial processes for music in nightclubs. My recruitment strategy included telephone calls to these nightclubs during regular weekday mornings (script included in Addendum D). This helped because nightclubs did not function fully during those hours, and thus participants were not disturbed during crucial hours. First, a participant reserved the right to decline the interview opportunity. Second, I interviewed VOMs responsible for curating the nightclub's music. Third, the participant could elect to leave the study and terminate the interview at any time. Depending on these initial interviews, if it became vital to interview an additional party (someone that also played a significant independent role, for instance) through snowball sampling<sup>2</sup>, I arranged an interview with the participant.

### **1.2.6 Data analysis**

During the data analysis phase of the research, I used qualitative research software to sort and code the data. Hollweck and Yin (2014) recognise the role of the researcher in interpreting the data and identify the role of computers in facilitating this process. The software Atlas.ti 22 (ATLAS.ti 22, 2021), a type of computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) (Allen, 2017), was used. Since the research was emergent, I looked for patterns during this phase of the study, and the mentioned software was used to assist in this process.

This type of research does not impose theory onto the findings but instead searches for essential themes in the data. Hollweck and Yin (2014:176) write that case study data should preferably be stored in a database, which makes the information easily retrievable. The authors strongly recommend using a CAQDAS for these purposes (Hollweck & Yin, 2014). Furthermore, the most

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<sup>2</sup> Snowball sampling refers to when one participant leads you to the next participant (Garcia, 2013).

critical tool for the data analysis phase is to have access to your notes on various devices of data gathered (Hollweck & Yin, 2014:177).

### **1.2.7 Validity**

I used crystallisation as a strategy to ensure that the findings were valid. Crystallisation is important in a qualitative study with a more emergent design, such as the present one. To ensure that the findings are accurate and that the emergent goals were reached, crystallisation allows a researcher to ask whether the findings are “rich” (Ellingson, 2009). As participants’ experiences were explored, I uncovered how subjective meanings were attached to these experiences (Ellingson, 2009). Ultimately, valid findings reflected this subjectivity. In contrast, an invalid approach might generalise too often and adopt simplicity in an answer rather than complexity (Ellingson, 2009).

Further procedures to ensure the validity of the data included member checking. This is a method in which a follow-up interview might occur to compare the findings with the participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Writing reflexively about my bias throughout the study was also essential to ensure that the findings were valid (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The final strategy included peer debriefing. In this procedure, a peer in the research field continuously reviewed the processes and asked questions about the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2017:274). This had a background in musicology, knowledge of curatorial processes and fair experience of the context being studied.

### **1.2.8 Ethics**

Creswell and Creswell (2017) consider one of the most critical roles a researcher has ethically is not disclosing information that could harm participants. To do this, a level of confidentiality was provided. Pseudonyms are used for all establishments included in this study and the staff members and managers responsible for music curation. Furthermore, I skewed and masked certain narrative features for the safety of the participants. Participants were also encouraged to review my findings and alert me if any information they felt might harm them was disclosed. The study intended to understand the complexities of selective choices and to celebrate them.

Creswell and Creswell (2017) emphasise that one of the essential steps before embarking on one’s research includes completing a review board application. In the case of this research, I applied to my institution's review board, the Basic and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (BaSSREC), before continuing with the study (NWU, 2022). Once this phase was completed and I received clearance (Addendum C), I continued with the interview phase of the research.

I avoided deceiving participants throughout the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). I made the intentions, parameters and ethics protocol of the investigation clear to participants. An informed consent statement was provided as a basis for the study (Addendum A) and ensured that the participants and the researcher agreed on how the study functioned. Findings were provided before any publication occurred, and participants could contest the interpretation of the data or how it was being used.

This research will be disseminated on academic platforms as part of my Master's dissertation. It might be reworked as a journal article in the future but not shared with researchers for secondary outcomes. As the nightclub environment is a monetisable field, this research could potentially be profitable for a company, and thus, it remained essential to avoid sharing this research for secondary outcomes.

During this research, I avoided the exploitation of the participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Creswell and Creswell (2017) suggest that there should also be some reward for the participating in the study. The reward for participating in the study included contributing to knowledge generation for the practice in which the participants are all involved. The report was shared with participants, and their collaboration was appreciated in conducting a study in a novel terrain in which they are located.

Furthermore, I respected the environment of the participants in this case study. Garcia (2013) points out in his conversation about a methodology for nightlife research that people spend a lot of time and resources to enjoy a night out. I did not want to disturb this natural environment and thus only conducted interviews outside of the hours when these nightclubs functioned. Creswell and Creswell (2017) term this point "respecting the site" and it was my aim throughout the study to not disturb the normal flow of events. As I mentioned earlier, observation included non-intrusive methods that respected the individual's privacy. Interviews occurred when the nightclubs were not busy (during mornings, for instance). It is recommended for research within EDM contexts to hold interviews outside of hours when the businesses function commercially, in other words, to not conduct them during the night-time (Garcia, 2013).

### **1.3 Conclusion**

To elucidate the experiences that underpin the VOMs' music-curatorial choices in Noka is a novel research terrain. This research was guided by similar research in EDM contexts as well as curatorial studies. Locating the relevance of this research is done through a thorough literature review. Ultimately, the literature review was necessarily interdisciplinary, and not only from a musicological perspective but from various fields like economics and law, the importance of curators in shaping our ways of life was highlighted.

## CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

This case study explored the meaning VOMs of nightclubs ascribed to their experiences of the performance context that underpins the curation of music for their establishments in Noka. The elements that formed a foundation for the study are as follows: the meaning of music curation, how venues influence and maintain music scenes and the role of VOMs within these scenes, the audience or clientele and their role within these music curatorial processes, music as a constituency of music scenes and why researching specific contexts is important to our understanding of curation processes as well as elements of this context that are already available.

### 2.1 Sociology of music

Frith (2013) outlines an approach to interpret popular music which does not come from cultural studies but rather from sociology. He writes that in anthropologies music analysis becomes a kind of social symbolic structure (Frith, 2013). He argues however that instead of music functioning as a type of disruptive myth, which these anthropologies tend to do, the study of music should be as cultural process (Frith, 2013).

From this perspective the importance the role of music as marker of identity is key (Behr, 2015). Behr (2015) finds that the relationships between musicians and fans are rooted in real acts and not however some adherence to ephemeral values. This strategy of analysis highlights the importance of starting an interpretation of music as cultural process with concrete acts.

Music as a complex phenomenon needs to be interpreted through a sociological lens to account for people's experience of music (Haynes and Nowak, 2021:449). Haynes and Nowak (2021) also argue that sociology has the capacity to define some boundaries around the phenomena of music. One of the premises such sociological studies of music assume is a structural homology between music genres and the social classes of the listeners (Haynes and Nowak, 2021). Therefore, a sociology of music posits that "music should be considered within its social relationships" (Haynes and Nowak, 2021:454). Furthermore, according to them, music should become a metaphor in order to analyse the social (Haynes and Nowak, 2021).

Van der Hoeven *et al.* (2022) employ a systematic approach in their investigation of these cultural process, they argue these processes occur in spaces of consumption. They refer to these spaces as live music ecologies (Van der Hoeven et al., 2022). Music according to them, has a material reality, a network of actors, institutions and lived practices all forming part of the cultural processes. Furthermore, it is important to them that four aspects of these music ecologies be interpreted during field research; the cultural, social, spatial, and economic (Van der Hoeven et al., 2022).

Similarly, music interpreted as an action and less as an object, is important for Katopodis (2023) in a sociology of music. In this respect music can be understood through its action or performance, as socialisation, and studied through this aspect. Hence a sociology of music interprets music and its structures through its social components and functions. Liadi (2024) makes an example of how this structuralism can include various aspects, even interdisciplinary when examining and interpreting music. Liadi (2024) does this through the interpretation of multilingual lyrics used in music through Saussure's theory of structuralism in linguistics. By means of this example it is clear that there are various ways of recognizing and interpreting structure in music. Liadi (2024) explains that the use of multilingualism in the music he identified was used as a way to structure our thought of the external.

Researchers have used genres to locate socio-structural factors and spaces within popular music studies (Hitters and van de Kamp, 2010). They write that these structures typically help to identify the underlying hierarchies and the way in which social relations function (Hitters and van de Kamp, 2010). Schaap and Berkers (2020) use these demarcations of genre to interpret configurations of spaces of consumption. Through an investigation of interaction rituals at festivals, Berkers and Michael (2017), notice the importance of these spaces in creating collective effervescence with a mutual focus.

Van der Hoeven *et al.* (2019) similarly write that that genre is an entity used to actively classify demarcate music in relation to culture taste and identity. Yet again relating to Frith's conception of a sociology of music, the emphasis lies on genre as a process. Furthermore, music from this sociological perspective, should be understood against the backdrop of historically situated patterns (Van der Hoeven *et al.*, 2019).

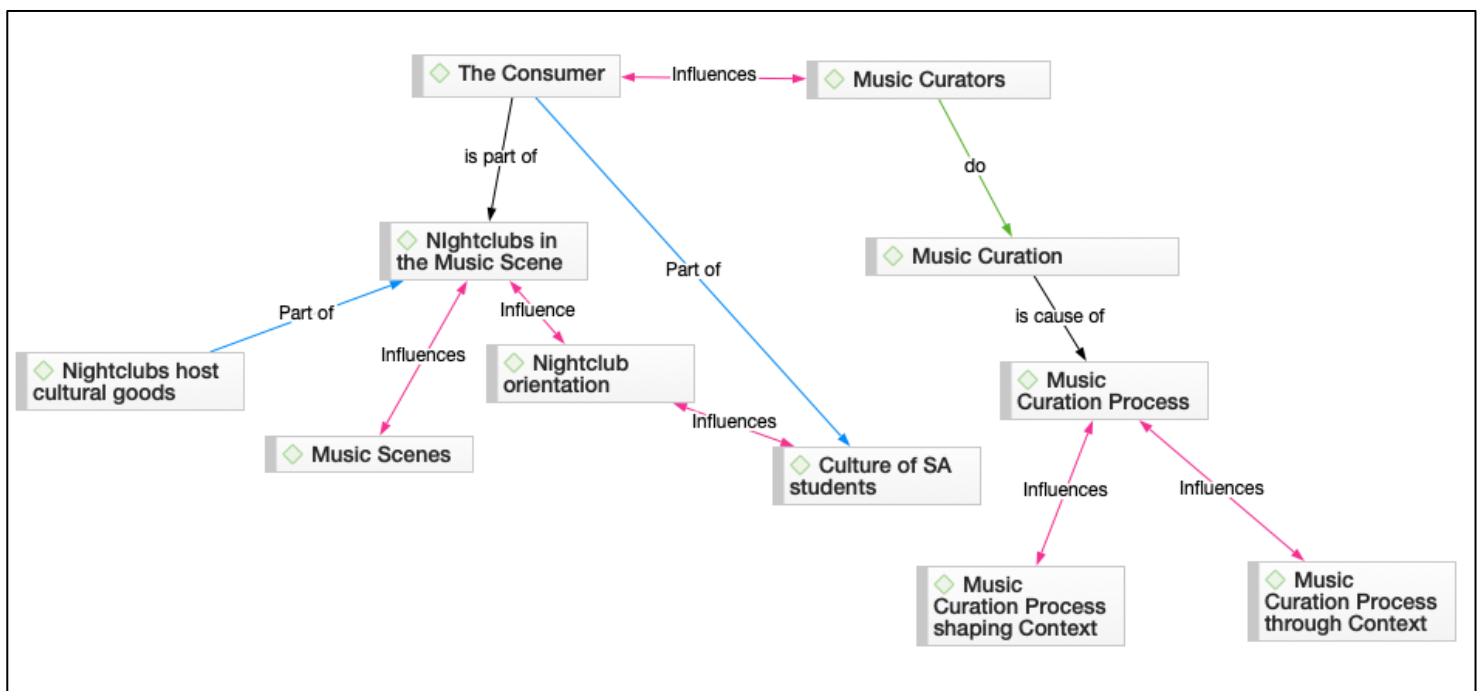
Behr *et al.* (2017) contends that music is always susceptible to the vicissitudes of an array of commercial attitudes in its dissemination. This is reflected in the phenomenon that cultural activities such as making music are recently taken seriously in economics (Brennan-Horley, 2007). The sector in which these activities take place are music-industries, where a set of companies and actors are bound by commercializing intellectual property (Brennan-Horley, 2007). Other authors like Van der Velden and Hitters (2016) study the development and redefine the genre, Dance, in the Netherlands to re-evaluate the way labels have been investing and positioning the genre.

While it might be important to align with economic principles and trends as a musician Threadgold (2018) investigates how members participating in certain music cultures in underground music scenes deliberately position themselves in relative poverty. This is to establish a sense of cultural worth and value within these scenes (Threadgold, 2018). A sociology of music thus investigates

processes which are complex, multi-layered, and uniquely situated in their contexts. Similarly, the processes of music curation by the VOMs in this study are subject to the prior characteristics.

Music and its context are intertwined in a sociology of music. This can be illustrated through studies in ethnomusicology which have noticed the relationship between endangered music and the environment (Brennan and Devine, 2020). Another example is the study of popular music studies in the sociology of music which often prioritize the economic aspects of this industry over the environmental impact of this industry (Brennan and Devine, 2020).

Prior (2021) suggests the use of the term, tastemakers, for those which participate in the processes of music curation. He writes that that musical gentrification can be understood as the way popular music moves from the outskirts to the centers of our lives through these tastemakers (Prior, 2021). He writes that they legitimize our institutions and that it is through knowledge of popular music that these practices are crystallized and where tastemakers operate (Prior, 2021).



**Figure 2-1: Roadmap of themes in the literature**

## 2.2 Music curation

The term curation is usually understood in terms of other functions, such as sorting, recommending or evaluating. What sets it apart from sorting, recommending or evaluating has always remained slightly unclear (Jansson & Hracs, 2018:17). Irving (2013:44) believes the same: “To define the subject...(it) is still difficult to bridge the perception and the reality of the practice

from those who do it". Curation in a broad sense thus implies an action in which goods are sorted according to a certain theme or idea. Persohn (2021:21) writes: "Curation, as I situate it here, extends beyond selection, places multiple artefacts in dialogue with each other, instantiates them around a complex set of themes, elicits multiple meanings from related artefacts and narratives, and promotes questions as often as answers."

To understand and locate these processes, we can explore the actions or processes that are centred around situations that link consumers to producers (Jansson & Hracs, 2018). Curation, in general, is useful in the contemporary marketplace, as the contemporary marketplace is extremely over-saturated. Jansson and Hracs (2018) note that curation helps consumers who are overwhelmed with the number of goods available to them to make sense of the marketplace. This is true in relation to the amount of music available for consumers who make use of streaming platforms. Similarly, Bhaskar (2016:13) writes that "curation answers the question of how we live in a world where problems are often about having too much".

Morris and Powers (2015) note that the most successful music streaming platforms are those for which users perceive they are in control of their musical experiences. The opposite would be a platform that does not allow a user to navigate the options and provides few resources to navigate through the vast amount of music (Morris & Powers, 2015). This leads to one of the assumptions about music curation, which is that the value of music curation lies in its resourcefulness for interpreting and managing the contemporary marketplace of cultural goods (Jansson & Hracs, 2018).

Not only do some of the current music curatorial tools assist consumers to manage and interpret the vast amount of music available to them, but while curating these platforms, they make consumers feel special and as if they are receiving a branded experience (Morris & Powers, 2015). Curation as a term in existing literature has been connected to the literature on brands and branding (Jansson & Hracs, 2018). Thus, curation creates branded experiences with inherent value and that make consumers feel at ease and catered for in the contemporary marketplace (Jansson & Hracs, 2018).

Not only does music curation help with the navigation of the musical marketplace, but it also helps establish the value of certain music (Nunes & Birdsall, 2021). Nunes and Birdsall (2021) recognise the value of music curation in that it legitimises certain goods for consumers. This aspect of music curation adds value to the practice. Jansson and Hracs (2018) note that the value of music curation in the current marketplace is increasing in many instances and that music curators are becoming almost more important than the producers of products (Jansson & Hracs, 2018).

Approximately 616.2 million people make use of online music streaming services (Götting, 2023). With a global population of 8.1 billion people (Worldometer, 2023), we can calculate that approximately 1 in 13 people use online music streaming services. The most popular services have algorithms which help with music curation. The online algorithms are only one type of music curator and there are other music curators which also facilitate curation on these platforms.

### **2.2.1 Music curators**

Another term that is prevalent in current literature, that is often used in place of curators, is intermediaries. Intermediaries, or the act of intermediation, refers to those holding and managing a position between a consumer and the marketplace (Jansson & Hracs, 2018). Likewise, curators hold a position between the consumer and the marketplace. This position is usually communicated through some platform in which cultural goods, such as music, are displayed or hosted for consumers to be able to consume.

In the past, such platforms were marked by physical spaces, such as museums, art galleries, and live music venues (Jansson, 2019). In these venues, the curator has control over the platform in which the cultural goods is hosted. The consumer chooses from the goods in the venue and choice is limited to what is being hosted. Various platforms have shifted to digital spaces and digital modes of consumption. Curators currently manipulate virtual spaces and platforms and gain their legitimacy through these spaces. Music curation has gained relevance in and for online platforms (Barna, 2017).

The value of a music curator resides in their ability to frame and qualify the dissemination of certain symbolic goods, services or experiences (Jansson & Hracs, 2018). When music curators are recognised as intermediaries in a given field, they are allotted the means to frame and qualify cultural goods (Nunes & Birdsall, 2021). It is because of the recognition of their position as intermediaries that they can fulfil this role. It is this unique position that the curator holds, the occupying of a space from which to curate, that awards them the role. For example, the management of an online music playlist awards the person in charge of the playlist the status of curator for that playlist. The relationship between being awarded such a position and maintaining it is twofold; the position is manufactured while it is maintained. The status of a curator could diminish if they are not constantly creating that value for themselves. Jansson and Hracs (2018) write that the curator curates from a position within society from where they both validate and create their legitimacy.

The ontology and lifespan of a music curator is complex (Jansson & Hracs, 2018). Jansson and Hracs (2018) recognise that there are unresolved questions as to how curators create and establish value for themselves in the marketplace. How or why they can be curators is also

ambiguous. This is because curators maintain fluid positions within the marketplace, which itself is also dynamic (Jansson & Hracs, 2018). As we will see, there are many factors that influence the success of a curator.

Music curators have also been likened to gatekeepers or tastemakers within the cultural marketplace (Smits & Nikdel, 2019). Who or what can assume the role of the curator is also far from limited. One of the ways curation can take place is through socio-technical systems, that is, a system comprising people and technologies (Smits & Nikdel, 2019). Second, various new and informal actors are challenging and changing the roles and values of the professional curator. Lastly, there are virtual contexts and physical spaces that could act as curators (Jansson & Hracs, 2018).

Given that music is such a vital element of nightclubs, those in charge of the music have a substantial impact on whether the nightclub is successful (Homan, 2010). Furthermore, as with musical branding, the nightclub's music curator selects the unique musical attributes of the nightclub and defines this brand (Weeks *et al.*, 2021). Those who oversee selecting and sorting these unique musical attributes will be considered curators, even if they haven't realised this role themselves.

The role of VOMs in nightclubs is far more complex than they might believe it to be (IHS, 2011). If the VOM employs someone to make music curatorial choices on their behalf, the VOM has had to reflect on the role of music in their business. Based on this premise, it means that VOMs are considering and comparing the relationship between music and society. While it is clear who the music curators are that will be studied, there are still certain aspects of music curation that are important to the present research. Understanding the curation process will be key to understanding what the values are that inform their decision-making.

### **2.2.2 Music curation process**

Music curation refers to a process or series of processes. These processes encompass different attributes and vary across fields (Jansson & Hracs, 2018). For instance, a music curator for a hip-hop-themed event at a nightclub will have a different budget and geographic restrictions than a music curator for an indigenous-themed event at a nightclub. Not only might their budgets differ but their outcomes will differ too. Music curatorial processes are inextricably tied to the phenomenon at play in the context in which the curation happens. Music curators need to consider the context in which they curate or else they might be unsuccessful (Fisher, 2016).

An understanding of how music curatorial processes are determined by their specific contexts is still lacking (Jansson & Hracs, 2018). The elements of context that are important to consider when

considering the curation processes, according to Jansson and Hracs (2018), include scale, location and industry. There are finer nuances to each of these categories. This is because context involves more than scale, location and industry (Navickatté-Martinelli, 2009). Jansson and Hracs (2018) include in their research that spaces are also an important element when considering what influences and shapes curatorial processes. I argue that context tends to involve a larger social element than spaces do. However, spaces lend to the notions of digital space in which cultural goods are hosted (Van Doorn, 2011). These digital spaces, with their limitations and attributes, are also important to recognise when interpreting how curation processes are shaped. Context also includes spaces such as these, while adding its technological element to the interpretation of curatorial processes. Context and curation processes are fundamental to group when considering the experiences VOMs have of curating their venues' unique musical attributes.

Such an enquiry seems to steer away from the dualism that is sometimes found in traditional Western music analysis where form and content are analysed separate from the context in which the artwork exists (Barton, 2018). A holistic approach recognises curatorial processes as inextricably tied to the context for which it was curated for. This analytical process stands to gain from an analysis of content and form while still regarding the relevance of the curated goods in their context.

Jansson & Hracs (2018) realised a need to study the processes of curation and what it could include in specific case studies to determine how curation functions in unique environments. While curation itself can be studied as an abstract action, it is much more fruitful to interpret it through its specific function in its particular environments (Persohn, 2021). This is because curation as a term is such a “fuzzy concept” and “differs between different practices” (Jansson & Hracs, 2018:3). Music curation itself also differs radically as a process, depending on the intentions of the music curation.

As music curation is interwoven within its context, one might consider what type of autonomy is inherent in the term. One might argue that this process could be a product of cause and effect playing out because of the unique attributes of the context that it serves. Alternatively, one could argue that curation could be shaping its environment. In this study, I hold that curation is a creative process that is influenced by its context, on the one hand, while, on the other hand, simultaneously influences the particular context. Music curation can be compared with taste-making and influencing (Nunes & Birdsall, 2021). This statement regards the process of curation with an element of autonomy. I, however, want to maintain something of the complexity of the processes behind curation. The processes might be in between anticipating the market for its needs, while still shaping and constructing this very market.

### 2.2.3 Music curatorial processes shaped through their context

In this study the places that will be investigated as hosts of cultural goods are nightclubs. The cultural good that I refer to here is music. Nightclubs have several elements that they curate for, but music will be considered specifically for this study. Other elements could include their décor, their food or drinks menu as well as other quirky elements such as a dress code. Which music they play has also received thought and it is the reasoning behind these choices, which elucidates some characteristics about the environment.

The embodied experience of music on the dance floors of nightclubs is a very strong experience and commodity that these establishments are selling (Solberg & Jensenius, 2017). It is recognised that not all music has the desired effects on people, such as dancing, that nightclub owners seek (Olondriz, 2020). How the VOMs go about curating the music for their context is therefore an important representation of what they believe will work in their context. This context could more fully be understood as the music scene and VOMs need to know how to operate and function within these scenes to survive (Gallan, 2012).

An important factor to consider when locating music curators is that they are curators who are subjected to the market and have achieved value in the market because they have anticipated the needs of the market. Stensvaag (2021) maintains that curators need to determine, through their knowledge of the market, whether goods are geographically relevant and socially appropriate. This knowledge and their creative ability to apply this knowledge assigns trust to the curators. They have a stamp of approval on their tastes and other people could be influenced by the curator (Stensvaag, 2021).

Stensvaag (2021) further notes that many curators working at radio stations need to know whether or not certain songs will be successful. As he does not elaborate on how the curators determine this category of success, Stensvaag does not indicate how the curation process is informed by the knowledge of the market. Indeed, the criteria that influence curation processes are often discussed in vague terms (Morris & Powers, 2015).

Financial viability is a major aspect that shapes the curation process (O'Neill, 2012). Practical elements influence how curatorial processes are shaped. For instance, many live-performance venues opt to have a DJ for the night rather than bear the expense of an entire band for a performance (Carah *et al.*, 2021). A band is more expensive, with more members usually comprising a band and more audio equipment needed than for a DJ (Brewster & Broughton, 2014). DJs can usually also perform for longer hours as, most of the time, they do not have the physical labour of singing, performing or playing musical instruments.

## **2.2.4 Music curatorial processes shaping their context**

The profession of curation has evolved profoundly over time. Traditionally, curators were only in charge of preserving and archiving art but are now involved dynamically in the selection and framing of goods (Jansson & Hracs, 2018). The role of curating has thus extended into various spheres of the marketplace. The value and influence of the curator have also shifted. In some instances, the curator can shape the needs or tastes of the music consumer. One of the reasons this happens is because curators create aestheticised experiences (Nunes & Birdsall, 2021). There is space for curators to be trendsetters and exert their influence over the music consumer. Curators create this value and are entrusted with this position of power because of a trend associated with the financialisation of art (Jansson & Hracs, 2018). When curators are specialised, consumers acknowledge the importance of the curated goods they are presented with. In many cases, the goods do not even need to be objectively as valuable as other goods and curators can lift their value tremendously (Acord, 2010).

This is emphasised by the current occurrence that the value of curation is often much higher or more important than the goods or producers themselves (Litchfield & Gilson, 2013). This influences how we should understand our current music scenes, and our markets in general. Music scenes consisting of current musical trends might not be as organic as we tend to believe, as the music scene may have been premeditated by music curators or music record labels (Fairchild, 2004). Music is curated across various platforms at various levels (Jansson & Hracs, 2018). Music curators at a local level (or for a smaller community) have been influenced by global trends, but it does not mean that they do not influence these trends (Barna, 2017). This dialectic process means that music is sifted through various levels of globalised communities such as the global marketplace. Subsequently, all of the role-players create choice for consumers that is reflective of the current context and how this context is situated globally.

Returning to one of the prerogatives of musicology, music is a socially organised sound (Qureshi, 1989). The commercial realities of the world are thus shaping this context and producing art. Many authors find this problematic because the success of the music seems to be engineered (Ingham, 2021). This means there are many considerations regarding the context for which such music will be successful. An element of the curator is thus also reflected through the curation processes. Therefore, fundamentally, two things are important to understand in an analysis of curation processes: 1) the context of curation and 2) the music curator situated within a music scene.

## **2.3 Music scenes**

The curation of music happens cooperatively with the music scene of which it forms a part (Jansson & Hracs, 2018). A general summation of the music scene is that it consists of a dynamic

cluster of musicians and fans (Subcultureslist, 2022). Carah *et al.* (2021) challenge this definition when they argue that music venues should be inherently part of how we perceive music scenes. Bennett and Peterson (2004) argue that a music scene is the entirety of the musicians and fans within a certain geographical confine, and it also consists of all resources within those geographical confines (including producers and venues).

Bennet *et al.* (2023: xxiii) similarly describe music scenes as being constituted of performers, facilities and fans in a collective operation. Duester and Bennet (2023) attest that music scenes exist around the shared interest and involvement of a group of people in certain styles and genres of music. Usually, such boundness and interaction within a scene is because of the geographical nature of the scene. Stormblad & Baker (2023:242) mention that scenes can no longer only be geographically bounded as they inevitably interact with global music culture.

Bennett (2004) also writes that music scenes are understood as clusters of musicians and audiences participating in and with various genres. According to Bennett (2004) there would usually be a local setting or district where music acts as a symbolic anchor to tie the people together. This connectedness with other people in the community has made many cultural studies interpret music scenes as subcultures and as a collective appropriation of music. However, Bennett (2004) argues that a scene perspective allows us to examine musical life in its various forms from production to consumption and across various boundaries. These boundaries make trans-local qualities of the scene important to acknowledge (Bennett, 2004).

More recent focus on scenes focuses on the trans-temporal qualities of scenes as well (Bennett & Rogers, 2016). These investigations are concerned with the functioning of scenes over time and how this occurs and functions within our cultural memory (Bennett & Rogers, 2016). According to Bennett and Rogers (2016) an aspect of cultural memory is that it takes place when individuals interact with objects, texts and images which locate meanings or ideas from the past.

Bennet *et al.* (2023:xxvi) realize that technologies and distribution forces allow for music scenes to exist and co-exist in forms of connection with other scenes. Duester and Bennet (2023) notice that scenes have material artefacts that shape the identity and the aesthetics. Oliveira (2023:23) writes that music scenes tend to be understood from the perspective of music production and not enough consideration is given to how the music is embedded in economics and cultures.

'Concrete manifestations on which music listening happens' is another way in which Bennett and Rogers (2019:6) describe tangible elements of our cultural memory which form part of a music scene. These objects and the materiality of music have become important prospects of investigation for Bennett and Rogers (2019) who recognize that our current era tends to be

imbued with a feeling of digital immateriality. It is important for researchers to heed attention to the tangible and intangible ways which music presents itself.

Stahl (2014) notices that tangible elements of the music scene could be interpreted through a material framework. He questions the role of the political economy on cultural life. After comparing the music scenes of three cities with one another he finds that music scenes are notably different in the way they unfold and add value to the members who make up these scenes and participate in them (Stahl, 2014).

Straw (2014:477) suggests that a scene might be any of the following: “collectivities marked by... proximity, spaces of assembly... of cultural phenomena, workplaces engaged in the transformation of materials, ethical worlds..., spaces of traversal and preservation through which cultural energies move and practice..., and spaces of mediation...”

While the notion of the scene is complex it becomes problematized because of the various sonic environments we engage in. Rogers (2014) is very aware of how one is sonically engaged in phenomena and argues that all the music present in our everyday lives have made us even more attuned. We are more attuned, according to him, to the processing of images with the help of some musical signification (2014:3). We are therefore embedded in our sonic environments and scenes because of technological improvements.

Participating in making music is usually caught up in a material environment and that musicologist could navigate the journey and relationships those in these environments have (Cohen, 2010). The concept of the music scene has urban roots, and certain places and spaces often capitalize on their association with the style of music developing from these scenes (Bennet *et al.*, 2023). Oliviera (2023) writes how a music scene creates a sense of belonging for its participants. The notion of a music scene is thus dynamic, and many actors aim to gain from their association or disassociation from certain scenes.

Music curation within a complex system composed of music scenes is a difficult task, yet it is growing in importance and as a relevant profession. It is an essential element to create a unique business or brand within a competing market (Jansson & Hracs, 2018). A specific selection of music can thus communicate an idea of its own. This selection also establishes unique attributes and can be used to establish a brand. Consider that sneaker companies have mainly been using trending hip-hop songs for marketing in recent years (Burgess, 2020). The clothing company Cotton On has a playlist that they research extensively to maintain a ‘modern indie’ atmosphere. This same playlist is made public and has its own unique branded value (Spotify Playlist Cotton On, 2020). The company has selected and grouped music with similar attributes for an aestheticised experience of their products. Similarly, nightclubs would be expected to play dance

music but this would be linked to the values that the community of dancers in their community hold (Garcia, 2013).

Furthermore, creating a branded experience through music can help a company establish a brand that can set it apart from its competition. It is advantageous for certain establishments that they stand out in a saturated market (Kapferer, 2008). In this saturated market, consumers are guided by these branded experiences and do not have to consider many options when one source curates goods and limits the scope for them.

For instance, with certain fashion trends, most choices are presented to consumers and available to them in accessible spaces of consumption (Weeks *et al.*, 2021). With the onset of an online mode of consuming goods, one can easily locate goods. Bennett and Peterson (2004:1) define music scenes as follows: "The concept 'music scene'...is used to designate the contexts in which clusters of producers, musicians and fans collectively distinguish themselves from others." Such music scenes have their modes of music consumption that are influenced by geographical, economic and political necessity (Bennett & Peterson, 2004).

The marketplace in which the curators of the recorded music industry are located is made up of formal to emerging actors all operating in a range of spaces (Jansson & Hracs, 2018). There are also many levels to some of these curation processes. For instance, many VOMs might make use of certain playlists. These playlists might be set up through corporate management or a team of music enthusiasts. These curators might have made use of other curated playlists to curate their unique selection. The products consumers are presented with is, therefore, usually a result of many levels of curation.

Informal music curators formalise their worth through becoming recognised for their curation. Hobbyist curators set up their playlists usually through streaming platforms such as Spotify. Spotify playlists can be made public and listened to by anyone, and many of these personal public playlists attract many listeners. It is at this point that artists approach some of these curators to get playlisted and where the informal curator might be able to monetise their playlists (Thomas, 2021). Professional curators might also rely on these informal actors who are curating to base some of their choices on, or at least to start their search through. This is applicable for VOMs or those in charge of the playlists because they make use of music that has been curated through different levels.

The music marketplace can be daunting to navigate because it is so fast paced and vastly oversaturated (Jansson & Hracs, 2018). Thomas (2021) conducts "a novel empirical examination of how Spotify shapes the consumption of music, and in turn the structure of the recording industry". From this study, the way in which Spotify uses its algorithms to operate the platform

has a real influence on music scenes and the way they operate. This has a direct influence on nightclubs, which are fundamentally part of the music scene.

Picaud (2022) assesses the material role that music venues have in the formation and maintenance of the Parisian music scene. Understanding the role intermediaries of major music streaming platforms have on industries is gaining popularity. Although geographical limitations seem to define the nature of a music scene, as a result of technological improvements, music scenes are now less dependent on geography, political situations or economic factors. Music is extremely accessible globally and the nature of each unique music scene is influenced by this global market (Picaud, 2022). Artificial intelligence (AI) technologies help to guide curators through the vast amount of music in the digital sphere (Beaumont, 2022). Nunes and Birdsall (2021) recognise that music consumption is one of the spheres that has become highly shaped through digital means.

Music consumption modes, such as the technostalgic<sup>3</sup>, have emerged precisely in response to these fast-paced virtual modes of music consumption, as the technostalgic has less choice than its online counterpart and a materialness to it that is easier to build connections with (Roessner, 2011). One issue is that the music cannot be shared democratically and is not available across the globe. The mode of consumption is precisely hampered for this purpose, so that the consumer can spend more time with the art to build a physical connection with the art, something that many people feel is lacking with online modes of consumption (Roessner, 2011).

Doors have recently opened to stronger and more personal experiences with online music consumption. The autogenerative suggestions for music based on AI algorithms (building the data with music one has listened to) help to create a unique playlist for an individual (Eriksson & Johansson, 2017). This is one of the steps that Spotify has taken to make the mode of exploration of music feel accessible. The music suggested to consumers might more likely be readily accessible than music the consumers might search for on their own volition (Elverson, 2018). Spotify suggests music to consumers because it wants consumers to perceive that they are in control of their experiences (Siles *et al.*, 2019). The AI algorithm and consumer are acting as music curators in this case catering to the consumer's needs. The context involved in this curation process is dependent on the consumer. VOMs could use these tools interchangeably to arrive at a similarly unique branded playlist for their nightclubs.

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<sup>3</sup> Technostalgia refers to a reminiscence for outdated technology. Roessner (2011) specifically analyses the resurgence of cassette culture as an opposing force to modern music streaming technologies that lacks the deep connection that material modes of consumption offer.

The entire music scene is being influenced by these changing modes of musical consumption. Nunes and Birdsall (2021) note that the current era is defined by ubiquitous music and listening. One of the ways to keep up with these changes, especially with oversaturation, is to create branded musical experiences. Music is ubiquitous and ready to be consumed. One of the ways to make the consumer feel in control of the oversaturation of music is to create a branded experience for them with a unique selection of music. Importantly, these music streaming apps are designed to help the consumer through utilising many curators and technological advancements. Businesses can utilise these tools to improve their music curatorial processes. Businesses use music to create their unique brands and to communicate values within an existing and dynamic music scene (Meier, 2017). Music curation for businesses or brands exists within a music scene. It is within these scenes that cultural value is negotiated or recognised. A curator needs to understand the scene within which the music is curated for it to work well. Such scenes are often grounded in commercial realities (Carah *et al.*, 2021).

Because of virtual platforms, scenes are also becoming much more globalised and geographically detached (Stensvaag, 2021). This means that international values are being communicated at a local level (Barna, 2017). Furthermore, it means that any evaluation or understanding of context could start at a global level (Barna, 2017). Particular values of nightclubs, therefore, are established on a global level. These values are established and communicated through many forms of media. Music curatorial processes, by this logic, should be in dialect with international music scenes. There is, however, much that we can learn from examining a local music scene's influence on curation processes. For instance, Garcia (2013) recognises low visibility as a virtue in certain musical scenes. This would mean a brand or business would have to curate according to this value. They cannot employ an artist who has such a large following and exposure that the identity of the entire scene might be exposed.

## **2.4 The consumer**

Curators or intermediaries are the link between consumers and cultural goods such as music. They know the consumers well enough to know what they would want or like. Research is done in the cultural market to learn about the desires of the consumer, and curators have knowledge that helps them to determine what the consumers might like (Barna, 2017). In a broad sense, the consumer is the most important part of the context that the curator needs to understand.

Who are the consumers, what do they want and what would be the mode through which they will be consuming the goods? The latter is important to know in order to know how to present the goods (Jansson & Hrac, 2018). In the context of Noka, the nightclub VOMs are thus agents who understand the consumers and the music scene in which they partake and know how to convince

the consumers to consume these goods. I can presume that South African VOMs should be knowledgeable about the musical needs of South African students.

## **2.5 Musical culture of South African students**

This study will elucidate elements of the musical culture of South African students in an academic town. Students comprise an appropriate consumer market to analyse as they are from all walks of life with diverse economic standings. Students are drawn from throughout the country and hold unique tastes reflective of the country's diverse musical soundscape. A nightclub can measure its success by the number of students frequenting the venue. The VOMs can simply reflect on their sales to assess whether the music is successful. In cases where it is unsuccessful, the VOMs might consider the impact of music. They might then consider conducting research into their target market. VOMs might sponsor consumers or simply sponsor drinks in a friendly manner in exchange for feedback on why the consumers are attending the venue (Hartman, 2016). This is a method used by VOMs to learn more about the context that they need to curate for. Connecting with the consumer through a branded musical experience is a strong marketing tool. Consumers will frequent the venue that provides the music they like (Areni, 2003).

These consumers will consume within cultural spaces. Cultural spaces and places are created, maintained and fluid (Fang *et al.*, 2023). Fang *et al.* (2023) recognize that certain spaces are typically designed for certain uses and that this influences who eventually p use these space. Their focus is on the effect of spaces and places created for older retired people (Fang *et al.*, 2023). Studies in health sciences are concerned with creating better living eco-systems. Similarly, from an ethnomusicological point of view, spaces and the nature of their use is important to understand to interpret the performances of music.

González-Herrera *et al.* (2023) recognize a need for making cultural spaces accessible and a need to understand these spaces. They recognize that these spaces are shaped by “physical characteristics, personal conditions, gender, race, culture, etc “(González-Herrera *et al.*, 2023). Understanding how these spaces function allows a researcher to understand how participation is allowed and what it entails. This is important for a musicologist who wants to know how the performance context of a live music venue is shaped.

Cultural geographers investigate the relationships between humans and nature (Falcon, 2023:19). One of the current trends in a post humanist approach is to destabilize the dichotomy between the human and nature. The aim is to explore human-nonhuman relations yet allowing for broader ways of knowing than this dichotomy. Still, Falcon (2023) maintains the importance of our situatedness in our environment and how this applies to our knowing of ourselves. Our lives

and thinking thereof is shaped through our lived worlds, and these have been shaped through various artefacts.

Pulido (2023:1060) writes that cultural memory exists within certain artefacts and the commemoration thereof. While he mentions that cultural memory is a contested field, he writes that spaces influence cultural memory and create a way for people to be involved with ideas from the past (Pulido, 2023). Similarly, the cultural and urban geography of Noka have an influence on how students embody their lived experience and collectively assign memory to phenomena.

Cultural studies and political economy have always been divided over their ideas of culture and power (Grossberg, 1995). Grossberg (1995) argues that the two should be considered in accordance with one another. A political economy cannot be ahistorical according to him (Grossberg, 1995). The practice of contemporary cultural studies should return to questions of economics in new and interesting ways (Grossberg, 1995:80). He maintains that both fields should recognize the power of geography while simultaneously recognizing the geography of power (Grossberg, 1995:80).

Spanu (2023) recognizes the impact of power on the music scene. He investigates what role government subsidies or a lack thereof have on the music scene in Mexico and its capabilities to improve the lives of its citizens (Spanu, 2023). Spanu (2023) uses examples of how similar operations are treated differently in other countries and how this has a direct impact on the cultural scene. He paints a clear picture of how different power structures are involved in different music scenes and makes the reader aware of the lines between the cultural sector and the political economy. Similarly, music scenes in Noka are embedded within power relations which the owners need to understand and navigate.

The venues in Noka are embedded within the socio-cultural history of South Africa. As Noka is predominantly a student town and the VOMs mainly focus on students it is important to understand the socio-cultural situatedness of the current South African student. While South Africa started its fight against Covid-19 in March 2020 it ended in February 2021 and most students are going out and enjoying the night life activities which Noka has to offer.

While Covid-19 was a recent threat to nightlife it doesn't seem apparent that it still has an impact on student life; however, older events in South Africa still shape the scene as it is today. Healy-Clancy (2017:3) writes how apartheid schooling had not been similar to precolonial, missionary and state schools which served Black students. Schooling was used in the apartheid era as a matter of cultural and political power, using state schooling to build a white-ruled state (Healy-Clancy, 2017).

Bantu education of 1953 was to prepare African students for their most likely careers like semi-skilled labour. Around 1977 huge protests were held against the introduction of Afrikaans as a language of instruction replacing English, i.e. the Soweto Uprising. After the transition to democracy in 1994, Healy-Clancy (2017) argues, these protests remained important to Black education history.

In post-apartheid scholarship Healy-Clancy (2017:5) maintains that the focus has slightly shifted away from the events of the Soweto Uprising, diverging from an intergenerational narrative of student uprisings to a growing interest in gender and sexuality. While this might reflect some of the concerns of current students it is important to remember the long colonial past South Africa endured. Oliver and Oliver (2017:2) note that before 1994, when South Africa became a democracy, two European nations occupied the country. The Netherlands, 1652-1795 and 1803-1806, and Britain, 1795-1803 and 1806-1961 (Oliver, 2017:2). From 1961 when South Africa became a republic there was three decades of Afrikaner supremacy over black people in the country. Stiegler and Bouchard (2020:696) recognize the impact South Africa's segregationist history had and note that South Africa it is still the most unequal country in the world with 14 percent of the nation living in informal settlements.

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For Noka, a student town in post-apartheid, which is multicultural, the implications for VOMs currently is that various student demographics can be targeted. Almost thirty years after the end of apartheid the post-apartheid born student shares a nightlife with all other students. Shared spaces and participation in night clubs in Noka would be negotiated through whether students could afford to go to these establishments. Owners would most likely target students with money.

Certain clubs and venues have integrated systems that allow them to cue songs that the audience choose from their own devices that they want to listen to. These systems allow for more certainty that consumers are receiving the music that they like (Müller *et al.*, 2016). This is also a means by which the VOMs can learn from their target market and integrate their choices into their system. DJs are especially adept at this process of learning from the consumers while they perform (Beaumont, 2022). They navigate the night by making musical choices based on the immediate reactions of the audience and have more control than fixed playlists over the selection of music for the night (Gates *et al.*, 2006).

The choice of DJ that should perform at a venue is made by the VOM. Understanding why and how they curate their DJs and other musical events will elucidate how they navigate what their consumers would want in the current music scenes (Carah *et al.*, 2021). The choices the VOMs make indicate an understanding of the consumers' sentiments and suggest the VOMs know their consumers and what they want. While VOMs of nightclubs need this type of knowledge of their

music scenes and consumers, the consumers of nightclubs typically have to settle for a venue that is in their geographic proximity.

Current literature highlights that some consumers might bar hop after a gig and not support the venue that is hosting an artist at the bar (Carah *et al.*, 2021). Consumers might be oblivious to what it means for certain music to exist in their context, and for the consumer it might be about the night. The VOM might run a loss for the night because they are seeking to establish cultural value by having the artist at their establishment. Cultural value for the VOM might be adding to the mythos and character of the music scene they are moving in, and not necessarily just adding an act that will secure an income (Carah *et al.*, 2021).

There are certain aspects of consumers of music at nightlife precincts that curators might bear in mind when they curate music for the consumers. The consumers of music in nightlife precincts include people who often make use of the liminal spaces that venues provide to explore or escape certain behaviours that they would not perform in the daytime (Garcia, 2013). For instance, many EDM participants go out to consume substances and behave differently than what they might in their usual day-to-day work contexts (Garcia, 2013). A curator for such events would bear such behaviour in mind and aim to facilitate it or attract different consumers depending on their needs. The curators need to consider taste and behaviour. In Noka, audiences of nightlife venues are discerning. In the industry of nightlife consumption, curators could bear in mind that some of the needs of their consumers are to enjoy these liminal spaces away from their day-to-day life and that these people invest considerable time and resources to achieve this (Garcia, 2013). Venues are thus not only hosting cultural goods but are also allowing for certain ritualistic behaviour to take place (Garcia, 2013). The music, as well as the way in which it is presented, are both key to these rituals of dancing and alcohol consumption (Garcia, 2013).

## **2.6 Nightclubs as hosts of cultural goods**

Music venues such as nightclubs are a component of nightlife precincts. Cultural venues, such as bars, restaurants, clubs or pubs, all form part of nightlife precincts (Carah *et al.*, 2021). Strategies of VOMs can be brought to light through analysing how the nightclubs differentiate themselves. They all form part of a music scene with each contributing and creating the scene in a specific manner, while still maintaining their own unique cultural value. These nightclubs form part of the same scene and marketplace competing for the attention and attendance of consumers in their community. It can be shown how these sites function together. It will also be valuable to analyse how these sites interpret their own functions within this holistic environment.

Carah *et al.* (2021) note that music venues are cultural sites where cultural memory is created as well as sites that play a vital role in the formation of identity. Nightclubs inextricably contribute to

forming the identities of the South African students in the present study. Consumers are not just participants of these nightclubs; they are the reason that the nightclubs are what they are and the way they are. They are the reason that the nightclubs have been curated in the manner that they are. These students are part of a whole and consume the cultural goods that they want to consume in these places. If the venues only sold alcohol but did not provide music or dance venues, many students would possibly not attend.

Northcote (2006) performed an analysis of clubs as providing liminal spaces for young adults to enact informal rites of passage. Nightclubs form sites that play a vital role in the formation of identity (Rief, 2009). It is, therefore, important that the nightclub hosts the necessary features for the rite of passage to take place or for other rituals of the night (such as dancing). This means that the physical infrastructure of nightclubs is also an important focus for VOMs in order to facilitate the usual activities present at nightclubs.

Researching music in its performance context, and not in an abstract way that only looks at form and content, can be enriched through considering music as shaped through music venues. While club music is popular, it is not necessarily popular outside of clubs (Roads, 2015). It is particularly popular because of its functional nature. Many people listen to club music while they exercise in a gymnasium because of the inherent nature of the fast movement caused by the high beats per minute (BPM) of club music (Yadati *et al.*, 2017). Interpreting the themes of club music is much easier when within a club environment than doing so from home with only the form and content at your disposal (Garcia, 2013). Music that exists within these nightclubs is, therefore, culturally relevant to the community and works well for the venues' viability. This is because there are elements that the consumer can connect to and engage with, for instance dancing or singing.

The cultural goods that exist within these nightlife precincts are often a mediation between personal taste and what is financially viable (Carah *et al.*, 2021). The personal taste of VOMs might be completely opposite to the selection of music that would make the nightclub financially viable. As mentioned earlier, it is a situation where both the curator and the context play a role in delivering a uniquely curated range of cultural goods. In some cases, the curator's personal taste may not be the taste that attracts clients. The VOMs might want to delegate the responsibility of curation when they identify primarily as a business (Carah *et al.*, 2021).

Interpreting music scenes through nightclubs is a novel idea. The VOMs have much to consider when curating and, while it might not seem that music is such an important element in light of regulatory forces and market influences (Carah *et al.*, 2021), it remains quintessential to their business. VOMs assume responsibility for the profitability of events and thus much depends on

their curatorial choices (Carah *et al.*, 2021). As VOMs also have employees, they are responsible for the need to make informed decisions to maintain the viability of their businesses.

The VOMs are required to navigate between the symbolic value of goods rather than their material properties (Jansson & Hracs, 2018). For example, adding to the mythos of the music scene in which they are located might add more cultural value to their nightclub in the future (Carah *et al.*, 2021). This is fundamentally one of the more daunting aspects of curating. As mentioned earlier, the curatorial process is often described in vague terms. A song needs to be a “banger” or a “hit”, but this type of information does not help VOMs to navigate choices to help their businesses survive (Desztich & McClung, 2007). The rules that AI follow to create playlists are also unclear (Beaumont, 2022). What the present study aims to achieve is to encourage an interpretation of curatorial processes as guided through the context for which curation takes place. The value of cultural goods is oftentimes constructed and often renegotiated (Jansson & Hracs, 2018). This means that nightclubs constantly need to reposition and orient themselves in relation to their target market.

## **2.7 Night-time economies**

Night-time economies usually comprise of bars, restaurants, nightclubs and other entertainment venues (Kramer & Wittmann, 2023). Son *et al.* (2023) takes a more defined approach when describing the night-time economy as economic activities that take place between 6pm and 6 am. Central to the discussion surrounding these economies are questions about participation, the role of alcohol and other substances, violence and noise (Kramer & Wittmann, 2023). Participation is usually influenced by economic and social status with gender being a primary role player (Kramer & Wittmann, 2023).

Lobato (2006:63) contends that urban nightlife is a complex configuration of governance and capital overlapping with subcultural and bureaucratic practices. He furthers that nightlife can be understood, from a sociological perspective as a leisure activity that is possible because of industrialization and that these activities typically revolve around consumption (Lobato, 2006:64).

Robato and Fletcher (2013:171) write how members of a night-time economy have different forms of value that they can trade in, and that within a cultural economy, constructions of taste can become professional markers of pay and secure employment. Holt (2014) attests that such members able to operate and create value for themselves across a global economy as well.

Nofre & Garcia-Ruiz (2023) refer to researchers specialising in the night-time economy and culture as ‘nightologists’. The importance of nightlife research, highlighted by them, is that it sheds light on a terrain often neglected (Nofre & Garcia-Ruiz, 2023). Night life research can offer brilliant

insights into how we relate and interact with each other in the night time environments and how this is structured around aspects of identity and heritage (Nofre & Garcia-Ruiz, 2023).

Homan (2019) notices the trend that night-time economies have been becoming increasingly important aspects of a city's value. He writes that stakeholders aim to exploit the economic, social, and cultural potentials of these spaces (Homan, 2019). This is one of the reasons he believes that Australia has been trying to measure the economic worth of the music industries in their cities (2019:501).

Nightlife regulation happens through government lead initiatives such as licensing, zoning laws and the way the development of the town is planned around night life districts (Koren, 2024:36) Other regulation of such economies happens through the clubs themselves to ensure safety and to attract certain patrons with capital or cultural capital (Koren, 2024). Koren (2024) recognizes that clubs create their own form of spatial regulation through cultural production that cannot be anticipated when creating the mechanisms of regulation.

In reference to a political economy Homan (2022:68) frames it as a study of power relations which manifest in the production, distribution, and consumption of resources. Homan (2022) writes that it is important to understand the way spaces and places are being deployed in their various contexts within these political economies. Homan (2022) furthers that music should be interpreted within this framework for its ability to encourage economic growth.

Koren writes that “research on nightlife inequalities would benefit from a more thorough understanding of cultural production” (2024:23). Koren says of night-time economies “clubs format events through specific understandings and interpretations of genre to attract certain audiences while dissociating others” (Koren, 2024:23).

## **2.8 Nightclubs orientation**

Carah *et al.* (2021) studied a nightlife precinct in Australia in which the VOMs were interviewed. The authors concluded that, fundamentally, these VOMs assumed two types of positions: one was scene-oriented and the other was business-oriented. Carah *et al.* (2021) believe that venues can assume an orientation in which music is a part of the nightlife business rather than *vice versa*, that is, a facility of music of which business is a part of.

‘Business-oriented’ is an orientation where the business regards itself as part of a service of the nightlife instead of as part of a larger music scene (Carah *et al.*, 2021). This remains a perspective for a business to hold and one that could be fundamentally flawed for nightclubs given that music is so fundamentally interwoven into it. However, it might hold true when one considers the business aspect behind nightclubs and that its location or theme might be the important aspect

that the nightclub perceives it to be part of (Carah *et al.*, 2021). The nightclub would always make use of music. These musical choices would still betray what the nightclub is based on and what they could afford. This knowledge could bring us back to an understanding that this type of establishment is translating capitalistic ideals. If the music ties to this theme, then, yet again, there has been a level of curation to assert that some branding has taken place.

Commercial nightclubs are most likely based on globally dominant themes (Purcell & Graham, 2005). This type of unified theme could be reflective of VOMs who view the venues as a business. Owners that have a unique theme that is strongly supported through a relatively unique musical branding might also consider their practice merely a business. In some of these cases, the curatorial process could be outsourced and an initial curatorial choice influences this outsourcing of labour. At the other end of the spectrum, venues may be viewed as elements in a larger cultural movement instead of simply fulfilling an economic role. These venues, such as scene-oriented venues, might see value in making a financial loss for the night but acquiring cultural capital within a scene (Carah *et al.*, 2021).

My view is that there is not a real duality between scene-oriented venues and commercial venues. Both fulfil specific parts of a holistic music scene. They are both reliant on one another to create contrast within these scenes and to fund the scenes. While musicians benefit from the online music scenes, live music venues such as nightclubs are the actual places where the success of certain music is created and determined. Dissemination of music, performance spaces and payment of performance royalties are major aspects on which musicians depend on live music venues. The actualisation of EDM takes place on the dance floors (Garcia, 2013). It is the context for which it is created. It is a requirement of VOMs to help the music realise its full potential. Both scene-oriented and business-oriented venues create the musical landscape through which students live part of their nightlife (Thornton, 1996).

Especially for scene-oriented venues, commercial realities are a persistent problem. Such venues cannot radically support any music they want to. A preference other than commercial success and other scene-oriented values will always be in tension with choices that will contribute to the profitability of the venues (Carah *et al.*, 2021). If the venue capitalises on its participation in a music scene or their symbolic brand establishment, it has converted their symbolic goods into material goods. Therefore, the line between scene-oriented and business-oriented values seems to blur. The risk that the scene-oriented venues are taking could be considered in terms of some other type of investment.

Some elite clubs tend to pay DJs or artists exorbitant fees for a gig and on these nights the venue will make a financial loss (Coffey, 2020). First, they do this for the musical branding of their

business. Second, there is a hope that certain 'high-rolling' clients might become aware of the establishment and will spend considerable money at the venue in the future. It is a deliberate attempt at networking and luring their target market. The nightclub is still taking commercial realities into account through making this long-term investment in the brand of the establishment (Coffey, 2020).

Scene-oriented venues might see themselves as part of larger cultural circumstances and might value the fact that they are developing a local music scene and contributing to its aesthetic (Carah *et al.*, 2021). This might be the case for small venues. Such an example, especially in a nightclub context, could include someone who employs their nephew for the night knowing full well that it will not be a success. The VOMs might value the fact that they are assisting in artist development by making spaces available for performance through curation (Carah *et al.*, 2021).

## **2.9 Relationship between the nightclub and the music scene**

Carah *et al.* (2021:8) noted that "cultural studies of popular music will find (their study) interesting because it has implications for how we understand the role of venues in the formation and reproduction of music scenes". Acknowledging this tool, I proceeded to question my environment and its music scene as being dependent on venues. A music scene could be understood through the lens of the venue owners. Carah *et al.* (2021) confirm this when they argue that focusing on venues allows us to understand how music is shaped through their precincts. The authors note that debate surrounding music scenes often prioritises fans and musicians in its discourse and forgets to involve financially viable venues. This highlights that music scenes are embedded within the market and that VOMs need to mediate between the scene and the market (Carah *et al.*, 2021).

## **2.10 Conclusion**

The VOMs are situated within their geographically defined music scenes. VOMs need to understand the nature of their consumers, which means acknowledging their economic and social influences. It also means conceptualising the act of nightclubbing and realising how a business is run successfully. After pulling all these ties together, VOMs will curate their music accordingly. Determining how these curatorial choices are formulated requires a proper methodological approach to extract this information clearly.

## **CHAPTER 3      METHODOLOGY**

Zimmermann (2015:1) explains hermeneutics as interpretation. Many philosophers argue for a hermeneutic circle, which means our interpretation of the whole influences our interpretation of a part and vice versa (Zimmermann 2015:26). This is what the present type of qualitative enquiry seeks to extrapolate from real-world situations. It aims to situate the case within its real-world whole and also understand it as an influence of the world.

In this explorative case study, I realised that my understanding of each site and participant was enriched and renewed by the next. They all influenced my overall understanding of the larger context in which they formed a part. However, the overall context influenced how I then perceived each case. An explorative case study was used in this study as it was important to realise how these nightclubs were existing and establishing themselves in a similar environment (Yin, 2018).

My enquiry into the functioning of these nightclubs on the musical level was led by myself, the researcher. It was, therefore, essential to understand that my enquiry was also being influenced by my own interpretation of phenomena and hence also the hermeneutic circle of interpretation. One must resituate oneself and the context after each interview or interpretation of the text. This constant dynamic resituating guides the overall research methodology. The research methodology's main aim was to allow for this dynamic process to actualise naturally.

### **3.1    Research design**

The research was designed in line with an explorative case study. Merriam and Tisdell (2015:39) suggest that the phenomenon should be intrinsically bounded for it to be a case study that can be analysed. One of the suggestions they make is to ask whether there is a limit to the number of people involved who could be interviewed (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015:39). These authors further ask whether there is a finite time for observation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015:39).

For the former, there were six VOMs who met my inclusion criteria (see p.7). This meant that my geographic limitation of the study and the additional criteria had bound the case in regard to participants who could be interviewed. In addition, the case had been bound by time, because the inclusion criteria stated that the VOMs had to have performed music curation at their venues for six months before the interview. However, many of the experiences that the VOMs were reliant on were sometimes based on up to 30 years of experience in the context.

Yin (2018:16) observes that case studies seek to learn about defined or bounded phenomena within their real-world contexts. According to Yin (2018:16), research design becomes a vital strategy to collect data from people in everyday situations. Integration into real-world events is

quintessential for such enquiries. Yin writes that case-study research is not necessarily quantifiable and the researcher does not necessarily have a laboratory where quantifiable research is conducted (2018:16).

Therefore, an emergent design where the goal is vague and questions can change can allow a researcher to be dynamic and adapt to the challenges of the field (Creswell & Creswell, 2017:234). Merriam and Tisdell (2015:39) posit that the unit of analysis and not the topic of investigation characterises a case study. In the present case study, the unit of analysis is VOM experiences. Information can be extrapolated from these experiences because of this study's constructivist framework. Stake (1995:99) emphasises that constructivism is the idea that knowledge is constructed rather than discovered.

### **3.2 Research approach**

Individuals construct their reality through interaction with their social worlds (Merriam & Tisdell (2015:24). Constructivism is the basic underlying factor of any qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015:24). Therefore, the study's departure is an enquiry into participants' experiences and perceptions of their social world. Merriam and Tisdell (2015:37) argue that qualitative studies are reliant on the researcher as the primary instrument of the data collection and the analysis process. They further consider that qualitative research should lead to a highly descriptive end product that is rich (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015:37). The methodology for reaching such rich descriptive endings would be achieved through inductive investigative strategies.

Creswell and Creswell (2017:234) characterise qualitative research according to the following eight elements. 1) Qualitative research takes place in natural settings, usually where fieldwork is involved and people talk directly to others over a prolonged period. In the present case, the natural settings were the nightclubs themselves and the prolonged period included conversations with the VOMs. 2) The researcher is the primary research instrument and means of collecting and interpreting the data. I was involved in the research from the start of the study and am responsible for the direction in which the study matured. 3) Multiple data sources are usually used, and the design is usually not guided by a rigid methodology. Interviews as well as the literature review formed the basis for the present study. An emergent research design was used. 4) Interpretation of the data happens inductively with the generation of themes and then deductively to assess if some other theories support the themes. The data were regularly compared with the literature and themes were identified that were not prevalent in the literature. 5) Qualitative research is concerned with participants' meaning that they apply to the phenomenon. In this study the meanings VOMs attach to their experiences of curating music for their nightclubs was interpreted. 6) Qualitative research follows a somewhat vague emergent design that adapts and changes

during the research. As with other research in the EDM context, this study followed an emergent design and the outcomes were not anticipated beforehand (Garcia, 2013). 7) Qualitative research paints a complex picture of a situation, and the answers are not necessarily as straightforward as quantitative research. The findings of this study created a rich picture of Noka's nightclubs and the experiences of the VOMs regarding their curatorial experiences. 8) The researcher usually explores their role reflexively in the research process (Creswell & Creswell, 2017:234). This was constantly done during this research, as it was also important to realise my own influence in how the data was interpreted and shaped.

Avis (2023:3 ) explains that an ethnomusicology asks the question of not only what music is but 'why' it is. According to Avis (2023) an ethnomusicology does this through a wide range of resources in order to understand what shapes musical traditions around the world. Importantly an ethnomusicology emphasizes the role of performance and values this over analysis of music through music notation. However, it would maintain that music notation is only a means to an end to understand the structures at play in music in its performance.

McKerell (2021) takes this position as well and posits that an ethnomusicology uses performance as a tool to understand and translate musical phenomena and communicate aesthetics. My study positions itself, as does the ethnomusicologist, at the heart of where musical performance happens. In Noka this is done mostly in nightclubs. The study aims to elucidate how VOMs understand the performance environment of the music that they present to their patrons.

Each VOM is responsible for their own venue and VOMs make unique choices for their venues. How VOMs interpret and engage with the performance context is therefore unique in each case. Learning what formed these subjective accounts for the performance context meant that the research methodology would need to accommodate this qualitative data.

Creswell and Creswell (2017:37) state that in a constructivist world view meaning is added to our experiences. Meanings are complex and often vary, therefore the researcher tries to elucidate the complexity behind phenomena (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Subjective meanings are often created socially and through interaction with others and the nature of reality is socially constructed and negotiated (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Accordingly in this study experiences of the VOMs were extrapolated to understand how they were constructing their socially lived worlds.

While this study focused on bound cases - curation processes of VOMs during a certain time period - the enquiry also has similarities to an ethnography. Creswell & Creswell (2017:42) maintain that an ethnography is a line of enquiry coming from sociology and anthropology where an intact cultural group is studied over a prolonged period often through interviews and observations. One may argue that the VOMs or the students of Noka are this intact cultural group.

Bounding the study like this will however move attention away from the process of music curation. This study means to emphasize the meanings behind a performance of music curation.

### **3.3 Roles of the researcher**

As the researcher is the primary means of collecting and interpreting the data, I wrote reflexively to indicate to others how their own experiences have influenced the data (Creswell & Creswell, 2017:234). Through this descriptive writing, those interpreting the data presented could see my bias and possibly get closer to the truth of the data presented. I made my positionality clear so that the reader can avoid biased writing. As I conducted the interviews for this research, it is important to remember that I am also situated within the social dynamic of my environment. I conducted research as a postgraduate student as well as a local musician. I am also someone who frequents and supports some of the venues, so some of the owners have already recognised me or have socialised with me prior to the research.

This also means that I have observed some of the venues in the past simply through participating in the nightlife of Noka. While researching the venues, my observations were sporadic and dependent on whether I wanted to or could afford to go out for the night. The observations were not compiled and studied as meticulously as the interviews were, but were accessible to help me to gain an impression of the environment and to confirm information from the interviews. Descriptive observation tends to focus more on a general accounting of the phenomena, whereas focused observation uses cultural knowledge of the field to account for phenomena (Denzin *et al.*, 2008). My role was intertwined during observation between these two accounts. Sometimes I would just be generally observing the evening and sometimes I would be observing specific aspects of the evening related to my research field.

According to Hatch (1996:359), all description in an interpretation of a data set such as the present one is influenced by all uses of language and cultural projection, and therefore cannot be pure or true in a traditional scientific sense. This is why, as I was interpreting and analysing the data gathered from the study, my own use of language and understanding of the colloquial form of Afrikaans (which many of the participants used) helped inform me of minor subtleties. My own cultural projection was, therefore, also influencing the set of data that were analysed.

### **3.4 Participants**

The participants for this case study were VOMs of nightclubs in Noka who are in charge of curating the music for their venue. Their experiences of the music curatorial process were analysed in this study. Creswell and Creswell (2017:234) make us aware that it is precisely the meanings that

participants apply to a phenomenon under investigation in qualitative research such as this that we want to learn about. Without setting boundaries or a scope, there is no case study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015:39). The inclusion criterion was VOMs of nightclubs within Noka whose primary market was students.

As Noka is a university town, students are a significant market. Nightclubs that were not primarily targeting students were not critical to an understanding of the emerging musical scene. The inclusion criterion also meant that I only considered VOMs in charge of the music who have worked at the venue for at least 6 months. Four of the six people who were interviewed were owners of the establishments. The other two participants were managers who had much more than six months experience. Only interviewing people with more than six months experience meant that I had created an exclusion criterion that would eliminate unexperienced participants.

### **3.5 Data collection**

Creswell and Creswell (2017:234) write that qualitative research uses multiple data sources to reach findings. The most critical element of the data I collected was the interviews. Other elements of the data that were incorporated for this study included observation of the nightlife, literature, books, journals, magazines, newspaper articles and online sources such as social media, website articles and forums. As with each interview, my hermeneutic circle was enriched and what I believed to be the context of the Noka music scene changed. The data collection process took much longer than I expected as it was necessary to work around the interviewees' schedules. Yin (2018:138) recognises working around the participants' schedules as one of the difficulties of a case study such as this.

Another issue with interviews is that participants might not adhere to your line of questioning (Yin, 2018:138). To avoid this, one can incorporate open-ended questions to allow for diversion. Yin (2018:162) advises that a recording device is not a substitute for listening. During transcription of the data, analysing the interview quality is quintessential for a better understanding of how to listen and ask the right questions during future interviews (Yin, 2018:162).

Interviews allow researchers shortcuts into the history of current situations and events that could take longer to achieve from other sources of material (Yin, 2018:164). Merriam and Tisdell (2015:108) make the case for interviews, as they allow us to learn things from situations that we cannot do simply from observation. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2015:108), interviews allow us to learn from past events that we could not experience for ourselves.

Merriam and Tisdell (2018:110) argue that less-structured interview strategies account for the fact that respondents will experience the world in unique ways. A "why" question is typically the best

way to extract these causal relationships that the participants have formed (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015:119). Interviews are a great strategy, therefore, to learn about certain cases and can be conducted simultaneously with a literature review for an emergent study (Yin, 2018:164).

Yin (2018:165) mentions that case studies also highly depend on the researcher's observation of real-world events for data collection. In Taylor's (2023:10) study on the methodological challenges of researching an emerging scene, he suggests a more considered methodology that approaches live performances from an immersive perspective. He suggests autoethnographically experiencing spaces in which participants have performed and to have informal conversations with participants (Taylor, 2023:10). There were aspects during the interview to which I paid greater attention, such as the type of music VOMs would talk about, the genres, the reaction of the crowd in the club and any financial implications that music could affect (Interview protocol in Addendum E).

I did not have a strict observation protocol, as the methodological framework for doing research in an EDM environment is still emergent and takes on more of a descriptive form to account for its fluid nature (Garcia, 2013:17). My observations of the nightlife were spontaneous and also dependent on my past experiences of Noka's nightlife. It was also based on informal accounts within my own social circle. I have had the opportunity to observe all of the establishments on various nights throughout the past couple of years as a student as well as more recently during this study.

Merriam and Tisdell (2015:137) argue that observations are different from interviews in two ways. First, observation usually occurs when the phenomenon takes place in its natural setting in its natural way (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015:137). In the case of this study, it would be the observation of any events in the nightclubs that make up their unique musical attributes. Second, observation is a direct encounter of the phenomenon encountered and not an interpretation of it by the interviewee (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015:137). This was true in some instances where VOMs idealised their own nightclubs, which I could compare with my own observations of their nightclubs.

Merriam and Tisdell (2015:152) consider a method to use field notes to recall observations more easily. These methods include additional descriptions of the setting as well as the activities that happen there (Merriam & Tisdell 2015:152). Direct quotations of things people said while you were there are important (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015:152).

### 3.6 Data analysis

The overall process used for data analysis was emergent and the data analysis happened simultaneously with the data collection. The data are built from the bottom up to generate themes (Creswell & Creswell, 2017:234). Guiding the research was the axiom from early ethnomusicology, which holds that music is “a system of sound communication with a social use and a cultural context” (Qureshi, 1987).

This axiom led to the investigation of the performance context of nightclubs as influencing their music curatorial process. It was clear from all the interviews that many factors were considered from the performance context during the curation processes. Not only was it important to verify that “the performance context of nightclubs influences curation processes”, but it is also important to learn which aspects of the context were involved and how they were interpreted. Therefore, this study was not concerned with upholding a theoretical proposition but with learning through an emergent manner which aspects of Noka influenced music curatorial choices for VOMs.

This means that a ground-up approach was employed to interpret and analyse the data. According to Yin (2018:213), a ground-up approach can be arrived at after ‘playing with the data’ and noticing patterns. These patterns can then form a basis for an analytic path (Yin, 2018:213). As this was an inductive strategy, codes were assigned to the data according to emergent themes or concepts that were potentially useful (Yin, 2018:213). The inductive emergent strategy worked in a back-and-forth manner. Themes were developed, they were changed and finally, through deductive analysis of information that supports these themes, the themes were formed.

Computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) was a very useful tool during this study. This software assists the coding and categorising of large quantities of information (Yin, 2018:214). This implies that the researcher is still the one responsible for the analysis. It also makes the role of the CAQDAS clear. It is there to help sort data on a much larger scale than was previously possible. It is also there to facilitate the analysis process by providing algorithms that can sort and connect codes (Yin, 2018:214). Furthermore, it is a tool for retrieval and storage of information. Search functions allow researchers to find information more quickly, and correctly and more easily identify connections than with regular archives (Yin, 2018:214).

Many of the outputs generated with the assistance of CAQDAS were interpreted by the researcher to establish whether any of the data were meaningful or not (Yin, 2018:214). Yin (2018:214) describes the work that is done by the researcher as contextualising the data the computer might generate and he calls this process “post computer thinking”. Yin (2018:214) writes that the best methodology for gradually achieving data to answer a research question will come from manipulating the data. Merriam and Tisdell (2015:195) write that the timing of the analysis and

the integration of other tasks are usually simultaneous. "There is no particular moment when the analysis begins; analysis is a means of giving impressions to data from the start to the end" (Stake, 1995:71).

Merriam and Tisdell (2015:201) posit that the overall qualitative data analysis procedure is inductive and comparative. This process starts when the research begins, as soon as the first transcript is written. Merriam and Tisdell (2015:204) call this process as having a "conversation with the data". Stake (1995:73) holds that data analysis is usually a rich description of the context involved and describes it as "direct interpretations of the data" or "aggregation of various sets of data until something can be said about this set as a whole". Stake (1995:78) notes that a search for meaning is in the end a search for patterns and that a search for patterns is a search for correspondence. Merriam and Tisdell (2015:209) would call these sets of patterns or correspondence categories within the data set. They argue that there might already be tentative categories to work with when data are originally being sorted (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015:209). Naming the categories according to them is an intuitive process shaped by the researcher's orientation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015:209). The fewer categories that emerge, the greater the level of abstraction has occurred, and the easier it will be to communicate findings with others (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015:214).

Various data analysis levels can be used in a qualitative study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015:215), for instance, chronologically, which is a descriptive form, or from concepts that describe phenomena (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015:215). What makes the data analysis so intensive is that all of the case information is brought together from the transcripts and field notes to the literature (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015:223). Yin (2018:220) writes that a descriptive approach to the data analysis might help to identify appropriate explanations for the data set. Furthermore, he recognises that pattern matching is a desirable technique for applying logic to the data. Similarly, if there are no patterns, sometimes direct explanation or "explanation building" can be applied to interpret the data (Yin, 2018:228).

### **3.7 Validity**

Creswell and Creswell (2017:234) write that qualitative research tries to describe phenomena holistically. Furthermore, the qualitative approach paints a complex picture of real-world events (Creswell & Creswell, 2017:234). This approach does not mean simplifying real-world events to simple, straightforward answers but instead embraces complexity and richness (Creswell & Creswell, 2017:234).

With regard to evaluating my findings for their validity, I have compared my findings with Ellingson's (2009) concept of crystallisation as a methodological framework. This framework

advocates for richness and complexity within qualitative research's findings. The elements that are essential for this research are encapsulated in Ellingson's (2009:4) definition of crystallisation:

Crystallization combines multiple forms of analysis and multiple genres of representation into a coherent text or series of related texts, building a rich and openly partial account of a phenomenon that problematizes its construction highlights researchers' vulnerabilities and positionality, makes claims about socially constructed meanings and reveals the indeterminacy of knowledge claims even as it makes them.

Regarding the representation of knowledge within this research, many sources and genres of knowledge were compiled into this thesis. The research discusses its construction in its methodology chapter. The research has been explicitly partial to my own bias as the instrument that is guiding the study. For instance, the reflexive role that I inhabit has been discussed. Importantly, the research attempted to establish the socially constructed meanings formed around VOMs experiences of curating the unique musical attributes for their nightclubs. Lastly, findings were scrutinised as being socially constructed and unique to a dynamic context.

Other strategies employed throughout this study to ensure validity included member checking. The findings were preliminarily shared with the interviewees to ensure they were interpreted correctly. This is a method to ensure that information was not misread and was communicated well by a researcher (Creswell & Creswell, 2017:274). Creswell and Creswell (2017:275) also advocate for the peer debriefing method used throughout this study to validate findings and assertions. This process involved finding another musicologist with an invested interest in the research to make sure that the study made sense to others, not just the researcher.

### **3.8 Ethics**

Throughout the study, the participants were respected. Some of the first interviews illuminated the fact that there were personal stakes at hand for the participants in the research. Sharing their curation methodology might incur some financial losses. Therefore, confidentiality was prioritised. Pseudonyms were allotted to all participants and the town. It was also decided to askew narratives so that the data could be discussed while protecting the participants' curatorial strategies.

The review board application helped strategise the ethical approach the study should follow. After the Basic and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (BaSSREC) (NWU, 2022) approved the study, I embarked on the interviews (Ethics number, NWU-00980-22A7, Addendum C). BaSSREC also helped with formulating a clear informed consent statement (Addendum B). This ensured that I could avoid deception of participants in the study. The aims and intent of the study were made very clear in the informed consent statements.

Garcia's (2013) editorial makes us aware that there is currently no existing methodology for research in EDM contexts. Garcia (2013) is very concerned that the researcher should respect the participant's environment and not take away from their experience of the night's events for the sake of the research. Creswell and Creswell (2017) also advocate that researchers should respect the site and disturb it as little as possible during the research. This is not just important for the sake of participants and the study's ethics, but it is also crucial according to Garcia (2013) not to disrupt the flow of events. He advocates that one should experience the phenomenon without the capacity as a fieldworker, and then reflect upon it the following day. This allows the researcher to experience the ritual of the phenomenon as a participant and to get insight that they might not otherwise have achieved without first-hand knowledge (Garcia, 2013). These strategies were used for observations preceding this study.

Yin (2018:138) also puts the participant's needs first when explaining that researchers should realise that when they are making observations, they are intruding into the participant's world. It becomes the researcher's responsibility to make special arrangements not to disturb the environment that needs to be studied and not the other way around (Yin, 2018:138). This is especially why I did not attempt interviews that were not scheduled outside of business hours during this study.

### **3.9 Conclusion**

The methodology of this research was approached with the idea that the context to be studied is a very dynamic and fluid one. The emergent design was used so that rich descriptions of Noka's nightclub environment would emerge. This strategy opened the floor to many interesting discussions and ideas to emerge from the VOMs. Ultimately, I was still the one responsible for adding themes and a logic to many of these conversations. As will be seen in the findings the experience of curation is a very subjective, yet intricate one for each of the VOMs.

## CHAPTER 4 FINDINGS

The nightclubs in Noka are owned by individuals, each possessing a unique business sense, intuition, historical background, location within the town, connections, and personal incentives for owning and operating a nightclub. Consequently, each establishment has its own distinct identity and approaches to management of the business. The following research findings primarily assume a descriptive nature, given that each VOM had their own perspectives on business operations. These narratives were conveyed in an *ad hoc*, anecdotal manner, lacking strict cohesiveness and definitive purpose. The researcher's responsibility entailed organising and compiling the information to uncover underlying patterns in their accounts. The initial examination revolves around the venues' self-perception and their consideration of the venue's identity.

### 4.1 The six VOMs and their nightclubs in Noka

The successful operation of nightclubs in Noka requires VOMs to consider various aspects related to their venue's identity. Each owner has a distinct perspective on these aspects, leading to different reactions and approaches to situations. The owner of the Magic Paleis in Noka associates their venue's identity with an inherent sense of alternativeness that resonates with people (1:19)<sup>4</sup>. Furthermore, they perceive their venue's identity as aligning with democratic principles and the quest for self-discovery among modern individuals in a new South Africa (1:24). Magic Paleis, a franchise venue, differentiates itself from the mainstream nightclubs. The owner consciously targets an alternative market and student demographic, embodying a post-apartheid ethos of inclusivity and an Afrikaans liberal nostalgia reminiscent of the Voëlvry<sup>5</sup> movement. In addition, Magic Paleis serves as a safe haven for "harder" types of drug usage and consumption, reflected in the events it hosts, such as Psy-Trance<sup>6</sup> and Heavy Metal<sup>7</sup> gatherings. Magic Paleis is also known as a place where people can come to sit and chill (1:76).

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<sup>4</sup> In this research, citations within Chapters 4 and 5 will adhere to the following referencing format. Concurrently, numerical references within the Atlas.ti 22 software will also be structured accordingly. Specifically, the initial numeral designates the primary document (PD) identification (PD 1 in this instance), while the ensuing numeral signifies the specific citation located within that particular document (in this case, citation number 19). Employing this citation protocol will facilitate the reader's ability to locate the relevant textual content within the Atlas.ti 22 software, as exemplified by the citation (Friese, 2012:66). The Atlas.ti.22 copy bundle as well as instructions on how to access it is available in Addendum F.

<sup>5</sup> The Voëlvry movement can be briefly described as anti-apartheid Afrikaans protest music that emerged in the 1980s (Grundlingh, 2004).

<sup>6</sup> Psy-Trance is characterised by its high BPM music starting from 120 BPM and increasing, the songs usually last longer than 6 minutes, building up to climaxes and restarting this build various times throughout the song. Psy-Trance is steeped in EDM music traditions such as techno and house music (Cinetrance, 2021).

<sup>7</sup> James (2022a) describes Heavy Metal as being characterised by thumping basslines, energetic drumming and very powerful vocals accompanied by idiomatic heavy electric guitar riffs.

Moonshine, the oldest and most prominent nightclub in Noka, aligned themselves with more commercial ideals, although this was not originally the case. The establishment's enduring success and reputation can be attributed to its longevity in the face of emerging competition and other similar venues. Inspired by his visit to the United States, the owner named the club after a renowned street known for its vibrant jazz scene. A strong inclination towards live musical performances and skilled musicianship was one of his primary motivations in establishing the business within Noka. Moonshine's owner acknowledges the changing identity of their venue, which initially focused on jazz music but now serves a more commercial and capitalistic function (4:5). Moonshine's unique identity stems from its late closing time, being the only venue in the town permitted to operate until 4 a.m. This arrangement originated from conflicts between students returning to hostels after a night out, and having a centralised venue for police monitoring and control was deemed more manageable (4:82). While this late closing time provides an advantage by attracting a diverse clientele, it also poses challenges as the patrons who arrive at that hour are often heavily intoxicated (4:84).

However, as the music landscape evolved, Moonshine adapted its musical offerings, moving away from hosting live musicians. The owner expanded his investments and opened another live music venue called The Icicle, where live musicians and various events are now hosted. This is currently one of the only venues in town to offer its patrons the opportunity to attend a live band performance. Pieter acknowledges Moonshine has evolved into a nightclub over the years and has adapted to accommodate various music genres. During events such as Noka Festival, the venue featured three stages representing different trends in the Noka and broader Afrikaans music scene (4:30, 4:32). Recognising the changing landscape, the owner purchased the neighbouring venue to prevent the establishment of a nightclub with a different culture that could potentially attract undesirable elements (4:83). The owner emphasises the importance of allocating appropriate resources to meet the venue's evolving function, such as installing proper lighting, sound systems, and a DJ box (4:80). Consideration of the surrounding venues is also crucial for long-term success and prosperity. Pieter expresses concern about the potential negative impact of an unsafe environment surrounding his venue. To mitigate this, he invests in security measures to ensure the safety of patrons coming to his venue (4:83).

The owner of Kudus explicitly acknowledges their venue's identity as aligning with mainstream ideals, catering to a larger audience with commercial music (2:6, 2:7). Their location away from the bustling student area, known as the Hills, enables them to tap into a different market when students are not present (2:54). The owner also focuses on playing club music that has a timeless quality, rejecting music genres that may be passing trends (2:67). Through experimentation and observing the success of Kudus, the owner recognised the venue's enduring identity in Noka and invested accordingly (2:86). At Kudus, commercial music generally guarantees success, even if

it deviates from the typical genre expectations, such as the popular songs "[Jerusalema](#)" by Master KG and Mandoza's "[Nkalakatha](#)" (2:110). Kudus, the second-oldest venue included in the study, shares a comparable reputation with Moonshine. While it did not initially emphasise live music or "musicians' music," Kudus gained prominence in the Sokkie<sup>8</sup> and Vasdans<sup>9</sup> (traditional South African dance) cultures. Even today, the venue maintains two separate dance floors dedicated to Sokkie and Vasdans. Located somewhat further from the popular student hangout area called the Hills and closer to Noka's Central Business District (CBD), Kudus naturally attracts students who own cars or are willing to incur additional travel costs to reach the venue.

The identity of VIBES AND BEATS is encapsulated in its name (3:3). The owners take pride in their national recognition as one of the top five nightclubs in the country in 2019, despite being relatively young compared with other venues in town (3:7, 3:37). For VIBES AND BEATS, I engaged in conversations with two VOMs who had been part of the establishment since its inception in 2008. VIBES AND BEATS believe they revolutionised the local music scene by introducing club music and professional DJs, challenging the dominance of Sokkie events at the time. Collaborating with various alcohol and DJ teams, VIBES AND BEATS established itself as a branded venue, integrating high-quality speakers and impressive light and sound systems. Initially, other venues underestimated the potential of VIBES AND BEATS and regarded them as a passing trend. However, VIBES AND BEATS sustained presence and continued patronage proved otherwise.

The Sound House draws its name from a personal experience of the owner's friend who encountered a small café with the same name while visiting Yugoslavia. The café's ambiance included a farm stall, snow, and a guitarist (5:34). The Sound House is known as one of the popular pre-drink venues in Noka. During the interviews, I conversed with the owner's brother, who assumes a managerial role at The Sound House. The Sound House exudes a more clubhouse-like atmosphere compared with other establishments that lean more towards being clubs or bars. It frequently attracts patrons from nearby student hostels. The Sound House recognises that, although it primarily serves as a pre-drink venue, it can transform into a full-fledged club, particularly after events such as Karaoke nights (5:19). The VOMs have found success by not imposing cover charges or featuring DJs, setting them apart from other venues such as VIBES AND BEATS, Moonshine and Kudus (5:31).

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<sup>8</sup> "Sokkie is a freestyle couples dance form that is popular amongst white Afrikaans South Africans. The dance is practiced at Afrikaans nightclubs, weddings, and other social events." (Holtzhausen, 2020:25).

<sup>9</sup> "Vasdans" and its other form "Langarm" have developed from a similar tradition to Sokkie, but tend to be more formal and less free than Sokkie (Holtzhausen, 2020:28).

The nightclub Cowboys takes pride in its role within the local music scene, providing a stage for musicians to showcase their talents (6:21). Its identity lies in being an alternative student-oriented venue in contrast to mainstream establishments that primarily play popular music, such as VIBES AND BEATS (6:27). At Cowboys, I interviewed two VOMs responsible for music curation. The venue aspires to align itself with American hard rock traditions and iconic rock-and-roll figures. While it primarily serves as a pre-drink venue, Cowboys has recently incorporated a club section, which is still in the early stages of development. Notably, Cowboys is the only venue situated on the second floor of a building, with rock music greeting patrons as they ascend the stairs. The establishment prides itself on a specialised food menu and aims to embody an alternative and edgy ambiance, although not as dark and sinister as Magic Paleis. Inclusivity, a characteristic often associated with rock culture, also permeates the identity of Cowboys.

The VOMs all had unique experiences surrounding the curatorial experiences for their nightclubs in Noka. However, there were several key elements that each VOM took into account in some form or other. These elements included music as the core of the nightclub business, the crowd, music scenes, running a business, the different musical attributes that they need, events, their venue's identity and their relationship with other venues.

#### **4.2 Music is the core of nightclubs**

The relationship between business and music in the context of running a nightclub is intertwined. A successful nightclub venture requires proficient management of the business aspect of the venue, particularly in student towns where competition is fierce. One effective strategy to counter the competition is by offering superior musical experiences compared with that of new establishments [1:69]. The owner of Magic Paleis acknowledges the challenges of starting a nightclub in Noka, emphasising that, initially, other owners in Noka posed significant resistance after their opening for approximately 6–7 months before relenting [1:69].

Keeping up with the evolving trends of other businesses is crucial for the longevity of a nightclub. Noka, being a student town, witnesses rapid changes in the desires and preferences of the target market, necessitating an adaptive approach. The owner of Kudus, for instance, had to invest more than one million rand to update the dancefloor and accommodate the emerging club music trends in Noka [2:66]. Reflecting on their experience, the owner of Kudus stated, "We stuck with sokkie<sup>10</sup> music, but it became so bad that on a Friday night we only had ten people here. I realised there

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<sup>10</sup> For example, a song such as [Kaptein](#) by Kurt Darren.

was a big problem and that sokkie isn't the cool thing anymore. Sokkie was cool for 30 years and now after 6 months my business dipped to a zero because of music" [2:66].

Different nightclub owners adopt diverse strategies to navigate the competitive landscape. Kudus's VOM prefers monitoring the events hosted by other establishments to stay updated on trends and adapt their own offerings accordingly [2:59]. In contrast, Moonshine's owner takes a more aggressive approach, seeking to outperform and overshadow new competitors by providing superior musical events during their initial struggle to establish a presence in the market [4:76].

Although many VOMs initially start their establishments owing to their love for music and the industry, they often face the necessity of compromising their musical preferences for the sake of business viability. The need to strike a balance between artistic inclinations and commercial success arises as owners realise that playing their preferred music might not sustain the business. In some cases, owners who initially intended to centre their businesses around musical offerings find themselves compelled to prioritise generating revenue through the sale of alcohol [3:75]. As one VOM puts it, "We opened the club as a hobby and love for the industry and music, then the place grew so much it meant we had to start doing business" [3:75].

The owner of Moonshine acknowledges the importance of following certain trends to avoid being naive or stubborn. While bemoaning the decision to make dance music the main offering of his establishment, the owner expresses that aligning with popular trends was necessary to attract patrons and ensure the survival of the business. They acknowledge the impossibility of imposing personal music preferences on customers, stating, "I would have been the only person to patronise my establishment" [4:50].

Although alcohol sales constitute a significant revenue stream for nightclubs, owners perceive music, rather than alcohol, as the primary motivator for patrons to visit their venues [2:32]. Some VOMs even express a willingness to forgo alcohol sales if alternative income streams were available. For instance, if they were able to draw sufficient income from entrance fees or selling food or something similar during the evening, they would forgo alcohol sales. Entrance fees represent another revenue source for nightclubs, although it is noteworthy that, despite the existence of nightclubs for many years, alternative income streams are limited and primary reliance remains on alcohol sales [3:76]. One VOM emphasised the centrality of music to nightclubs, stating, "Music is the core of any nightclub - we have always said that if we could open a club and only play music without selling alcohol, we would" [3:76].

Alcohol pricing also plays a role in determining the target market and accommodating their income levels. Some owners align the music selection with the desired clientele, making efforts to attract wealthier patrons through the choice of music [4:45]. The music played at a nightclub can

influence the type of clientele it attracts and owners are cognizant of this fact. The ability of a nightclub to adapt to changing times and trends is a significant factor in its longevity. In Noka, numerous venues have opened and closed in recent years owing to their inability to adapt to evolving circumstances. Interestingly, the rate of new venue openings and closures decreased compared with when live music was more prevalent in these establishments [4:76].

Understanding and adapting to the target market is crucial for a nightclub's success. The VOM of The Sound House advises conducting thorough research on the target market and their preferences before opening a new venue, emphasising the importance of prior experience and familiarity with the market dynamics [5:60]. Furthermore, strategising roles in this curation process could help streamline the entire event according to the VOM.

#### **4.2.1 Exchanging music, often over a beer**

Curation roles within the business hierarchy are of significance in determining the selection of music for venue playlists. Typically, the final decision rests with the VOM, although certain VOMs adopt a more democratic approach that allows for greater freedom and spontaneity in playlist creation. At the Magic Paleis, the owner assumes the responsibility of live DJing in cases where employees fail to fulfil their duties or neglect to play music (1:15). In addition, all employees at the Magic Paleis contribute to and develop playlists for the establishment, each team member having their own playlist (1:39). To ensure continuity with the existing musical style, the owner encourages employees to explore similar music by utilising Spotify's Radio feature, which recommends music based on personal preferences (1:41).

The VOMs of Kudus primarily takes charge of the music selection process (2:2). They guide new DJs through a rigorous process that involves determining suitable genres. Although some artistic freedom is granted, the owner admits to exerting a strong influence over this process. To regulate the selection further, DJs are provided with specific playlists from which to choose songs. The owner particularly values songs that were popular classics several years prior and have since been remixed (2:16). This is because the owner believes the songs would be more instantly recognisable and relatable for the patrons.

At VIBES AND BEATS, a collaborative process determines which songs are added to the playlist and which songs are regularly featured for their branded experience (3:18). This process involves regular meetings where team members convene to discuss and exchange music, as well as evaluate its potential, often over a beer (3:18).

The owner of Moonshine, who used to be actively involved in the music curation of the establishment, now delegates this responsibility to trusted employees who are capable of

maintaining the desired atmosphere (4:11). The Sound House lacks a defined strategy for its curation process. However, VOMs recognise the need to differentiate the music played during daytime versus night-time. Consequently, they employ two teams: a day team responsible for setting the appropriate daytime ambiance and a night team managing the music selection for later hours (5:68).

Cowboys follows a similar approach to Kudus, with the owner primarily curating most of the playlist. However, the owner grants more autonomy to the floor managers and daytime staff in adding new music, albeit with less stringent oversight than the Kudus owner. Furthermore, similar to Kudus, the venue's managers manipulate the playlist order and song queue based on the night's mood (6:5). Curation of playlists at this scale is only possible because of current and emerging music technologies.

#### **4.2.2 Social media platforms are closely monitored**

The assessment of appropriate music selection is often determined by gauging the audience's response, a process commonly referred to as "reading the crowd" (1:13). Owners recognise the importance of curating technology that is user-friendly, cost-effective, and capable of automating specific curation tasks. Such technology aids in searching for new music based on predefined criteria, ensuring a desired ambiance.

At the Magic Paleis, the owner utilises Spotify, particularly its Radio feature, to explore new music. However, this feature is not infallible, requiring manual review of recommendations to determine their compatibility with the intended atmosphere (1:40). The owner and employees also engage in discussions to establish the desired vibe and review the effectiveness of previous Spotify Radio selections (1:43). Another recommended tool is Shazam, which facilitates the identification of songs heard elsewhere, allowing employees to expand their music repertoire (1:44). The app conveniently stores this information for review during meetings.

The owner of Kudus relies on YouTube as a primary source for discovering music. In addition, social media platforms, particularly TikTok, are closely monitored to identify emerging musical trends and ensure alignment with the venue's music selection (2:29). The owner emphasises the impact of TikTok, stating that it plays a pivotal role in shaping music trends (2:29).

At VIBES AND BEATS, the managers actively curate music from various platforms, including Spotify and Apple Music (3:16). They emphasise the significance of TikTok and Instagram Reels in promoting underground songs and facilitating their rapid rise to popularity (3:44). This trend enables VIBES AND BEATS to introduce new songs to their audience quickly, capitalising on their familiarity with the tracks, which previously required a longer wait for specific songs to gain

traction (3:45). By staying ahead of trends, VIBES AND BEATS can incorporate publicly recognisable songs within a week, ensuring customer enjoyment (3:48).

The Sound House relies on Spotify for music curation. The manager employs targeted search phrases such as "Best of 2022" to find suitable music, aiming to avoid an excessive focus on club-oriented playlists that may not align with the establishment's desired clubhouse-like atmosphere (5:12). The manager also listens to radio broadcasts to curate music, acknowledging the importance of assessing the audience's response, as even popular songs may not resonate with patrons at a particular venue (5:45).

The Cowboys VOMs utilise various platforms for music curation, with Spotify being the primary tool (6:62). However, they also highlight the effectiveness of YouTube Music in creating customised queues tailored to individual preferences. Sometimes, YouTube videos are used for music playback within the venue. Soundcloud is mentioned as an occasional tool for music discovery as well. In 2021, the transition from Apple Music or iTunes to Spotify was motivated by cost efficiency and the ability to maintain a consistent vibe across sessions (6:63–64). However, all curation is always dependent on who the imagined audience will be and VOMs tend to think of their imagined audience in terms of crowds.

#### **4.3 Music enhances the overall experience**

The VOMs must consider various aspects in relation to the crowd they will be presenting music to, for instance, the predominant crowd behaviour at their venue, what the crowd is consuming at the venue, the identity of the crowd, the potential openness of the crowd to new suggestions or the necessity of conforming strictly to their needs. All these characteristics are intertwined and VOMs make intuitive decisions based on their subconscious knowledge of the crowd.

The success of a nightclub is heavily reliant on the behaviour of the patrons who frequent the venue. The VOMs must carefully evaluate crowd behaviour to ensure the satisfaction and enjoyment of their customers. In this regard, the owner of Magic Paleis in Noka acknowledges the necessity of providing diverse spaces to accommodate various behavioural preferences (1:86). Here, the owner recognises that individuals have distinct preferences upon arrival. Some patrons prefer to immediately find a seat, while others are inclined to dance or head to the bar. In addition, specific customers may prefer engaging in activities such as playing beer pong or pool or enjoying pizza outdoors. Notably, female patrons often exhibit a desire to dance upon arrival, whereas male patrons may prefer finding solace outdoors (1:86). Those seeking a more intimate setting for serious conversations, perhaps during a breakup, tend to gather near the trees outside the venue.

The owner of Moonshine emphasises the importance of monitoring crowd participation and interaction, particularly during live performances. They recognise that acts capable of engaging the crowd effectively entice individuals to leave their tables and move towards the dance floor (4:77). According to the owner of The Sound House, music plays a vital role in enhancing the overall experience for patrons (5:66). Music is considered a valuable offering that establishments provide to their clients, contributing to a more enjoyable and pleasurable atmosphere.

The VOMs of Cowboys assert that the type of music played in the establishment can significantly impact crowd behaviour. They note that introducing more aggressive music often leads to more confrontations and altercations outside the venue (6:33), for example, in response to a song by the Thrash Metal band Slayer "[Delusions of Saviour](#)". Furthermore, the VOMs have observed that younger students, owing to their reliance on technology, struggle to socialise normally with friends when they go out. As a result, the establishment hosts games to encourage socialisation and maintains a lively atmosphere through loud music, mitigating potential awkward silences resulting from students' inability to socialise effectively.

The VOMs of Cowboys have also noticed student behaviour distinctions during different times of the evening. Students tend to frequent pre-drink venues earlier in the night, gradually becoming intoxicated, while later in the night, they migrate to nightclubs primarily for dancing. Cowboys incorporates a nightclub within their pre-drink venue to cater to this shifting behaviour, similar to the approaches adopted by Magic Paleis, The Sound House and Kudus.

The observations and strategies presented by VOMs underscore the importance of understanding crowd behaviour and providing diverse spaces to accommodate different preferences. By considering these insights, venue owners and managers can create enjoyable and engaging experiences for their patrons, ultimately contributing to the success of their establishments.

#### **4.3.1 Music can influence the consumption of alcohol**

The VOMs have a vested interest in understanding the substance consumption patterns of their customers and the underlying motivations driving these behaviours. This understanding is critical given the significant revenue generated from these activities. In addition, it enables VOMs to manipulate and regulate consumption to ensure a pleasant experience and maintain control over patron behaviour.

Kudus's owner argues that music quality becomes less relevant to individuals under the influence of alcohol. When confronted with criticism regarding the venue's music selection, the owner queries the time of the visitor's presence. If the time falls between 2 and 3 a.m., they dismiss the critique, asserting that any music is enjoyable in a state of intoxication (2:74).

The owner of Moonshine contends that the music played at a venue can influence the consumption of alcohol and other substances. The owner identifies specific music genres associated with drug usage (4:57), singling out Dubstep<sup>11</sup> as particularly attractive to an undesired crowd. The owner expresses moral objections to relying on a drug-consuming audience, leading to avoidance of genres that may provoke such situations. Moreover, the owner notes that the drug-consuming demographic tends to purchase less alcohol, potentially endangering the venue's viability (4:59).

The VOM of The Sound House believes that combining music and alcohol intensifies the intoxicating effect. When patrons enter the venue, the influence of alcohol and music, combined with their departure from their daily lives and responsibilities, creates a liminal space that fosters a feeling of a personalised event (5:18). The owner says that club music catering to avid clubbers offers more significant revenue potential compared with that of pre-drinkers. Clubbers tend to spend significantly on shooters, driving profitability (5:20). Conversely, pre-drink venues often capture most of an individual's expenditure for the evening, as their spending diminishes after reaching a certain level of intoxication (5:21). The VOM expresses a preference for managing pre-drink venues owing to the perception of more controlled and respectable behaviour among participants compared with that of excessively intoxicated patrons.

The VOM of The Sound House suggests aligning hosted events with specific alcohol specials, creating a cohesive theme that complements the alcohol being sold. For example, Karaoke nights coincide with a complimentary bottle of champagne for each group, while also featuring a tequila special to cater to the preferences of female Karaoke enthusiasts (5:70). The VOMs at Cowboys observed that intoxicated women are more inclined to engage in dancing, while men prefer to sit calmly and consume beer (6:38). These VOMs believe that music selection and playlist characteristics can influence crowd consumption. One VOM asserts, "Yeah, music influences your heartbeat as well... the more I'm pumping you up with blood flow is called faster and faster... So if I play heavy music and then I slow it down, you will be tired and go to the bar" (6:70).

In the realm of venue management, comprehending crowd consumption behaviours is crucial for VOMs. By understanding the influence of music on intoxication levels, aligning events with alcohol specials, and strategically curating playlists, VOMs can effectively manage and influence crowd behaviour to enhance the overall experience while maximising revenue generation. To influence the behaviour, it is necessary for VOMs to know the nature of the crowd's identity.

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<sup>11</sup> Dance music from Jamaica that developed from Reggae (Zorrilla & Beria, 2006).

### 4.3.2 Each era defines the new crowd

The VOMs of nightclubs in Noka exert influence over the crowd that frequents their establishments by anticipating and catering to their specific needs. This anticipation is based on the VOMs' understanding of the crowd, which is a projection rather than an absolute reflection of their preferences. Through this process of anticipating and shaping the needs of the crowd, VOMs play a role in fulfilling their own expectations.

The owner of Magic Paleis perceives the crowd at her venue to predominantly consist of rock enthusiasts, particularly students grappling with their position in the post-apartheid era. The owner views the venue as a liberal escape, offering these students an opportunity to reimagine their creative identity within the context of the new South Africa<sup>12</sup> (1:22). According to the owner, the venue's name, "Magic Paleis," contributes to its alignment with the white student demographic, symbolising their Afrikaner heritage. In addition, the owner believes that the patrons attracted have a broad appreciation for music (1:33). The owner contrasts Magic Paleis with a nearby establishment, Kudus, which the owner associates with a different ambiance referred to as Sokkie.

At Kudus, the owner estimates that approximately 80 per cent of their patrons are students. The owner emphasises the diversity of the venue, offering a range of musical genres, including rock and techno (2:8). The owner believes that the music played at the venue can influence the crowd. Although acknowledging that a performer such as Steve Hofmeyr<sup>13</sup> would likely draw a successful crowd, the owner does not desire the crowd associated with Hofmeyr's music to frequent the establishment (2:25); the crowd is deemed too polarised politically and is not necessarily there just for a good time. The owner observes shifts in the identity of their venue's crowd, from the tightly interwoven dance style known as Langarm to a more informal dance style called Sokkie. According to this owner, each era defines the new crowd while still being connected to the previous era.

The VOMs of VIBES AND BEATS perceive their patrons as primarily coming from the local farming community, reflecting their understanding of Noka as a farming town (3:54). They acknowledge the impact of globalisation and the internet on shaping the community's identity

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<sup>12</sup> The Apartheid regime persisted from 1948 to 1994 in South Africa and dictated that non-whites and whites had to be racially segregated. The new South Africa is the democratic society that followed the fall of this regime. Barbarin and Richter (2013:3) write that post-apartheid reconciliation is made up of "contrasting conditions of hope and peril that characterize life in South Africa".

<sup>13</sup> Steve Hofmeyr is a polarising figure within the South African music context and has recently been ordered by the equality court to pay a R100,000 fine. This was because he told his social media followers that the LGBTQIA+ acronym includes people who enjoy bestiality, and that these people groom children (Booyesen, 2023).

negotiation. Furthermore, they recognise that Noka will be reliant on genres such as Amapiano<sup>14</sup> and Afro House<sup>15</sup> to sustain their venue's popularity in the future (3:54).

VIBES AND BEATS also caters to students from major cities, such as Johannesburg and Cape Town. They believe that playing music commonly heard in these cities not only appeals to the nostalgia of these students but also positions their venue as a metropolitan destination, earning respect from their clientele. In addition, featuring artists from these cities offers an opportunity to introduce their patrons to local DJs in Noka (3:67).

The owner of Moonshine perceives that their venue's crowd is constantly evolving, with varying needs over time (4:7). Initially, a large military community patronised the venue, but they did not connect with the music being played. Subsequently, students from an education college became regulars, disliking blues, jazz, and even the music preferred by agricultural students (4:7). The owner had to adjust the music throughout the night as early evening visitors had different preferences from the later student patrons (4:8). The owner also notes a national decline in live music and musicianship (4:21). Consequently, the owner continuously updates the venue to align with the preferences of the evolving crowd. The owner acknowledges that a Sokkie dance style primarily characterised Kudus's previous crowd and seeks to attract a different clientele (4:31). The owner recognises the dynamic nature of the student crowd, which undergoes various phases and changes in taste and needs (4:52). Unlike some other VOMs, this owner actively aims to influence the crowd's identity, cultivating a deeper appreciation for live music among the patrons. However, the owner has yet to embark on this mission (4:71).

The VOM of The Sound House examines the crowd's dynamics in terms of age. Between 2003 and 2009, a significant number of third-year students frequented the venue, appreciating its calm and less party-oriented atmosphere (5:3). In its early days, The Sound House primarily attracted police officers (5:6). However, the VOMs later recognised the potential in the student market and modified the venue to cater to this demographic. Adjustments included menu changes and offering suitable drink specials to appeal to students (5:7). The Sound House aims to please the student demographic and especially those who like the clubhouse hostel culture.

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<sup>14</sup> "Amapiano emerged as a genre and music scene in 2016 and saw substantial growth in mainstream popularity from late 2019 onwards, is currently regarded as SA's most popular music genre and has received widespread national and international acclaim (Charisma, 2021). The name "Amapiano" combines the Zulu language's plural article, "ama" with the noun for the western musical instrument "piano". As a form of dance music, it is rooted in an amalgamation of related and evolving native musical styles, including Kwaito, a distinctively SA house music genre created in the 1990s, as well as Afro House, Gqom, Di Bicardi and jazz." (Long-Innes, 2022).

<sup>15</sup> "Afro House" is a subgenre of House music that mainly developed from South Africa. A blend of Kwaito, Tribal, Deep and Soulful House music, in South Africa it is often seen as strands of Deep House or Soulful House, although it has its own unique sound." (UM, 2023).

The VOMs of Cowboys believe that rock music possesses a fundamentally universal appeal, enjoyed by individuals regardless of their racial background. However, they acknowledge that the popularity of rock music has declined and occasionally consider hosting events that deviate from their traditional genre to attract a broader audience (6:44). They align their menu and musical offerings with the tastes of white students, assuming they appreciate rock music and can afford the food at their venue (6:49).

#### **4.3.3 Acknowledging the potential for different crowds on certain nights**

A nightclub's success largely relies on catering to the preferences of its patrons. The VOMs often encounter situations where customers make requests or seek offerings not provided by the establishment. In such cases, it becomes the responsibility of the VOMs to assess the atmosphere and negotiate whether incorporating the requested choice would be suitable.

The owner of Magic Paleis appreciates when patrons make song requests as it presents an opportunity to gauge the current atmosphere and determine the direction for the night (1:14). The VOM is also familiar with the regular crowd and their preferences compared with nights when a different demographic frequents the venue (1:27). While accommodating the needs of the different groups, the owner ensures it aligns with the character of the establishment, occasionally accepting requests such as Sökkie music (1:75). The venue staff are trained to listen to requests over headphones before queuing them onto the venue's sound system (1:65). Magic Paleis's crowd has a preference for alternative music over the mainstream music popular on the Hills, and they seek a different atmosphere by escaping to the former venue, which is physically farther from the Hills (1:76). When the crowd indicates a preference for dancing, the owner adjusts the music accordingly, transitioning to a more dance-friendly selection (1:83).

Kudus, on the other hand, recognises its alignment with the preferences of the mainstream crowd (2:7). They also acknowledge the potential for different crowds on certain nights due to their location far from the Hills. This means they cannot always assume they are catering exclusively to student needs and must recognise the dynamic nature of their crowd's preferences (2:55).

The VOM of Moonshine also acknowledges the evolving preferences of their regular crowd. They understand that overplaying a song that previously worked can eventually lead to its decline in popularity, emphasising the importance of strategically managing the usage of effective songs (4:39).

At The Sound House, the VOM states that they are in a favourable position where students have access to their Spotify playlists or can interact with the bartenders to influence the music selection. The crowd influences the mood for the evening, creating a platform that sets a consistent vibe for

the remainder of the night. Students often use phrases such as "new" and "best" when searching for music and collaboratively curating playlists (5:11). The crowd's preference can also change, especially for themed events such as ladies' night, for which they may have a prepared playlist (5:48). Although the VOM does not particularly enjoy it, patrons occasionally request country music. Similar to the owner of Magic Paleis, they play one or two of the requested songs and then swiftly transition back to the previous vibe (5:5).

The VOMs at Cowboys rely on the crowd's reaction to gauge whether they are playing suitable songs (6:9). The VOMs understand that the crowd's preferences are dynamic and require regular assessment. They believe there are specific genres, such as Rock, House<sup>16</sup>, and Bass Trance<sup>17</sup>, that resonate well with a particular segment of their crowd, which can be played in the regular bar section or the club section of the venue (6:47). When it comes to requests, they use their discretion to determine whether the requested music aligns with the overall atmosphere and flow of events, accommodating some requests accordingly (6:66). All crowds are, however, embedded in a larger system of crowds and the easiest means for VOMs to make sense of this has been through describing these larger landscapes of crowds and their interconnectedness as scenes.

#### **4.4 The music culture and scene in Noka differ from those in Johannesburg**

The VOMs of nightclubs in Noka possess a comprehensive understanding of the music scenes that shape and encompass their respective establishments. Although a precise definition of a music scene is elusive, it is commonly referenced in conversations with VOMs. One prevailing notion is that a music scene is closely linked to a geographical location and utilises the available resources within that vicinity, such as artists and venues hosting events. Thus, these VOMs describe scenes in relation to other scenes and locations, illustrating Noka's amalgamation, negotiation, and comprehension of its own scene *vis-à-vis* other scenes, particularly metropolitan scenes such as those of Johannesburg, Pretoria, Bloemfontein, and Cape Town. In addition, the VOMs acknowledge the influence of a global scene facilitated by the internet and other resources that connect Noka to the global music community.

The owner of Magic Paleis draws parallels between the establishment and others in different areas of South Africa as it is part of a franchise. The owner notes that one franchise tends to adopt a more commercial approach than their own venue. In this regard, the owner likens it to VIBES AND BEATS, another nightclub in Noka (1:34–37). When hiring DJs, the owner

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<sup>16</sup> Hawkins (2003) recognises that House music developed from Disco music, but tended to be a lot deeper and rawer but still quintessentially a dance genre.

<sup>17</sup> James (2022b) describes Trance music as different to other styles of electronic music and that, in particular, it is heavier and has its roots in 1980s German electronic music. Bass Trance has a particular emphasis on a louder bass.

occasionally collaborates with the VOM of another Magic Paleis to engage DJs who have previously proven successful (1:48). Moreover, the owner taps into the musical scenes of the major cities on certain occasions.

The owner of Kudus believes that DJs from Johannesburg are generally more established and prominent than those already employed in Noka. He mentions that visiting DJs often compliment Kudus, stating that it plays the same music as clubs in that city. Furthermore, some visiting DJs admire Kudus's lighting and operational aspects (2:50–52). Notably, DJs brought in from Johannesburg specialise in Tech House<sup>18</sup>.

VOMs also recognise that their current music scene has emerged from preceding elements, including past genres, actors, and resources. Consequently, they strive to contextualise and comprehend their present music scene by considering its historical development. Discussions pertaining to the past and the functioning of the music scene during previous periods are significant topics for most owners. Notably, the MK era<sup>19</sup>, which had a notable presence in Noka, holds particular relevance.

The owner of Kudus asserts that rock music declined in Noka alongside the demise of the MK television channel. This channel served as the Afrikaans equivalent of MTV, entertaining, exciting, and informing South African youth about rock and the music scene. Its absence adversely impacted the survival of the rock scene in Noka (2:113). Nevertheless, the owner of Kudus remains optimistic that rock music will regain dominance in the future. The VOMs of Kudus and Moonshine possess a profound understanding of the Noka music scene's development and its historical context, attributed to the longevity of their venues. The owner of Moonshine associates the start of the MK era with the decline of live music performances, particularly in terms of skilled musicianship. This decline may be attributed to the punk ethos<sup>20</sup> embraced by the MK era, which required less emphasis on exceptional musicianship (4:24). During the MK era, Moonshine facilitated three thriving music scenes in their establishment: new commercial club music, new commercial Afrikaans pop music, and punk rock music. They even designated three stages to accommodate these distinct genres (4:36).

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<sup>18</sup> Tech House is “a genre that sits somewhere between techno and house, but it’s also been influenced by Chicago house, Detroit techno, dub, minimal techno, electro house, and America’s West Coast house music scene.” (Kingery, 2014).

<sup>19</sup> “MK was a channel on the premium package of the paid Digital Satellite Television Service (DStv) of MultiChoice and kykNET during the period from 2005 to 2013. The channel broadcast music 24/7, using mostly Afrikaans as medium. Through its content and programming, it helped to build a new identity for the post-apartheid Afrikaans-speaking youth” (Carstens & Viljoen, 2023).

<sup>20</sup> The punk ethos is a DIY ethos where the artist takes a substantial part of the creative process into their own hands and avoid letting popular notions of what is good or expected from their art influence them. It is an anti-establishment way of creating art (Rosen, 2021).

While all venues are aware of the MK era, Cowboys stands out as a venue that strongly aligns itself with some of the values embodied during that era. The VOMs of Cowboys initially perceived Noka as a rock city and strived to maintain certain traditions within their venue. By veering away from mainstream music and focusing on alternative rock music, such as [ZZ Top](#) or [Creedence Clearwater Revival](#), they cultivated an alternative rock music scene (6:19, 6:28). The owner of Kudus speculates that rock music's decline in the Noka music scene, and in general, can be attributed to the closure of the MK channel (2:113). The MK channel played a significant role in educating students and facilitating the growth of bands. The owner expresses a lack of confidence in students' ability to identify or name prominent current rock bands (2:113).

Although the VOMs of VIBES AND BEATS personally enjoy heavy metal music, they acknowledge its non-existence within the Noka music scene (3:1). They take pride in being instrumental in establishing an electronic scene and music culture in Noka, which previously did not exist. They highlight their ability to book prominent artists, such as [Kyle Watson](#), [Chunda Munki](#), and [Cinimin](#), before any other venues in Noka (3:4). While they align themselves with radio hits and popular music to connect with the prevailing musical scene, they also embrace the opportunity to engage with emerging underground scenes. However, they express concern that the culture of DJ appreciation has yet to fully develop in Noka, estimating that only 0.5% to 1% of the population recognises their DJs (3:49). Moreover, they believe that the music culture and scene in Noka differ from those in Johannesburg, mainly due to Noka's rural community (3:53). They contend that nightclubs in metropolitan areas align more strongly with international trends than do nightclubs in Noka (3:67).

Cowboys strive to maintain certain traditions within their venue. By veering away from mainstream music and focusing on alternative rock music, such as ZZ Top or Creedence Clearwater Revival, they cultivate an alternative rock music scene (6:19, 6:28).

#### **4.5 Trends could manifest differently in various cities**

The phenomenon of trends in the context of music selection and creating a musical identity within venues emerged as a central theme during the interviews with VOMs of nightclubs in Noka. These individuals demonstrated a keen awareness of the dynamic nature of the cultural scene and the role that trends play in shaping their businesses. The concept of trends was frequently mentioned by the participants, indicating their recognition of the fluid and evolving nature of their industry. The VOMs actively sought out new trends from both domestic and international sources, aiming to gain a competitive edge by being the first to introduce these trends to the local market.

The owner of the Magic Paleis acknowledged the influence of trends within the franchise network, noting that trends originating from another franchise tended to resonate well in their own venue

(1:1). The owner also emphasised the contextual nature of trends, pointing out that trends could manifest differently in various cities and that what worked in one place might not necessarily succeed in another (1:2).

For the owner of Kudus, keeping up with trends was deemed crucial for running a successful nightclub. When booking artists, the owner prioritised selecting performers who were currently popular and recognised by the local market (2:26). He cited [Van Coke Kartel](#) and [Spoegwolf](#) as examples of current artists who would work in Noka (2:37). Moreover, he stressed the importance of regularly featuring new hits in the venue to maintain a perception of being up-to-date and in touch with the latest trends (2:43). The owner further invested significant resources in sound systems and lighting, striving to ensure that the venue remained ahead of the market in terms of technological advancements (2:46). The owner recounted an instance when the introduction of Deep House music by VIBES AND BEATS had a detrimental impact on their own patronage, necessitating substantial financial investments to accommodate the new genre and regain customer satisfaction (2:64). He firmly argued that trends significantly influenced the survival of businesses in a student town such as Noka (2:78).

The owner of Kudus also reflected on past trends to anticipate future ones and gain insights into the nature of trends themselves. He noted that, in the past, when Moonshine primarily hosted rock music, Kudus positioned itself as a competitor by also promoting rock music to attract the market interested in that trend (2:88). While both venues currently lean towards playing club music, the owner of Kudus believed that the Deep House trend introduced by VIBES AND BEATS more than a decade ago was gradually losing its appeal and predicted a resurgence of commercial and party songs in the future (2:99). The owner identified Tech House music as an emerging trend, influenced by DJs from Johannesburg who were known for playing this genre (2:112). In addition, the owner cautioned against the dangers of not adapting to new trends, emphasising the importance of remaining relevant and avoiding stagnation (2:112). The owner also highlighted the historical context of trends, suggesting that the resurgence and development of older genres played a role in shaping current trends. The influence of platforms such as TikTok in accelerating trend formation was also acknowledged (2:116).

The VOMs of VIBES AND BEATS demonstrated a high level of proficiency in tracking and researching trends (3:17). They paid close attention to national and international scenes, studying how DJs and artists evolved their brands, and adapting their own music selection to reflect new trends (3:38, 3:39). The VOMs recognised the significance of local music festivals and particularly emphasised the importance of observing trends at local Rage festivals, as the attendees were potential future clientele in a student town (3:41). The VOMs of VIBES AND BEATS consider Rage festivals as the most critical events to follow, as they attract matriculants who will become

future students and influence the musical preferences of the venue's target audience (3:87). In recent years, Rage festivals have transitioned away from featuring live bands, potentially impacting the support for local bands and live musicianship among prospective students (3:88).

They also believed that Noka had a tendency to be somewhat behind in terms of trends, describing it as a time capsule with a delay of approximately two years, which necessitated giving certain trends time to establish themselves before fully embracing them (3:44). This temporal aspect was seen as influential in the preference for songs that were familiar and even 10 years old among students (3:46).

The VOMs of VIBES AND BEATS acknowledged the significance of national scenes, as sources of inspiration for trends. They were aware of the rising international popularity of [Black Coffee](#) and anticipated that elements of his music might feature in future trends, highlighting Amapiano and Afrohouse as genres to be mindful of and gradually incorporate (3:58). The VOMs also emphasised the importance of not overlooking Durban and specifically mentioned the [Origin](#) nightclub as a trend indicator (3:66). VIBES AND BEATS positioned themselves as trendsetters in Noka, with other venues looking to them for guidance. They believed that studying European EDM festivals, particularly Tomorrowland, could provide valuable insights for identifying trends (3:82). They advocated for taking trends from other places and adapting them to the local context, describing it as "VIBES AND BEATS(ifying) it and then Noka(ifying) it" (3:82). Eurotech<sup>21</sup> and Techno<sup>22</sup> music were identified as genres expected to trend in the future (3:82).

Upon realising that the local music scene was changing, the owner of Moonshine engaged in strategic planning sessions with trendsetters in the student community (4:51). Although a revival of live music was hoped for, the owner expressed skepticism about its viability (4:86). Regarding future trends, the owner confessed uncertainty, stating, "if I knew where to make the next money, I would be very happy" (4:88). The VOMs of The Sound House acknowledged the impact of trends on specific events. They recognised that Karaoke, for example, experienced periods of popularity and decline, adapting ideas and trends from other venues to suit their own establishment (5:23).

The VOMs of Cowboys believed that they had the potential to set trends by offering a more unique and alternative experience. They described themselves as "the alternative to nightlife" and claimed to create trends (6:23). While they aimed to avoid being mainstream and kept an eye on

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<sup>21</sup> The VOM refers to Techno music, which is currently trending in Europe (3:82).

<sup>22</sup> James (2022c) describes Techno as a subgenre of EDM music but which is characterised as mostly consisting of synthesised sounds as well as high BPMs ranging between 120 and 150.

mainstream trends, they also sought to grow and provide a dynamic venue with diverse offerings (6:23).

## **4.6 The centrality of music**

The centrality of music within nightclubs, serving as the primary offering to their patrons, underscores the significance of comprehending how VOMs discern and conceptualise music. Six critical elements shaped their perspective: first, the VOMs gave due consideration to the artists behind the musical creations, with particular emphasis on DJs; second, they recognised the crowd that supports them; third, the value of inhouse DJs was considered; fourth, music as a catalyst of sorts was considered; fifth, specific music for specific nights was considered; and lastly, the changing nature of live music performances was considered. These elements collectively contributed to a comprehensive understanding of the approach of VOMs to music within the nightclub context.

### **4.6.1 Established artists lack trendiness**

The consideration of artists' dynamics is crucial for VOMs of nightclubs in Noka when deciding to engage artists for entertainment purposes. It is imperative to carefully assess the complex backgrounds of many artists before employing them at a venue. One important factor to evaluate is the artist's political involvement, as it can potentially lead to polarisation within the venue.

For instance, the owner of the Magic Paleis expresses apprehension about hiring someone such as [Steve Hofmeyr](#) for entertainment (1:52). The political nature of such artists makes the owner wary of potential controversies. However, it is worth noting that not all politically charged songs, such as Max Hurrel's "[ZOL](#)", necessarily polarise the crowd at a venue, as many individuals relate to the song's content and satire (1:53). The owner also considers identity politics when selecting artists, preferring figures such as [Radioraps](#) and [Bachus Nel](#) who better represent the venue's crowd (1:54). Furthermore, successful bands, such as [Just Jinger](#), [Springbok Nude Girls](#), and [The Parlotones](#), as well as artists such as [Koos Kombuis](#) and [Arno Carstens](#), have been warmly received at the Magic Paleis (1:55).

In contrast, the owner of Kudus takes pride in scouting emerging artists for performances before they attain significant fame and subsequently demand higher fees (2:22). This proactive approach involves monitoring social media platforms to stay ahead of emerging trends. Noteworthy successes include securing performances by [Brendan Peyper](#) and [Ray Dylan](#) who sang "[Hokaai Stoppie Lorrie](#)," and artists such as [Juan Boucher](#), [Robbie Wessels](#), and the band [Watershed](#) at a relatively affordable price of R5000 (2:33). The owner emphasises the importance of booking

artists who have only produced one or two hits but are clearly on the rise, citing the examples of [Biggy](#) and [Synth Peter](#), who drew crowds of 1000 and 1500 people, respectively (2:28).

Interestingly, the owner of Kudus observes a paradox where established artists may fail to attract the student population owing to a perceived lack of coolness or trendiness (2:38). This was evident in instances such as when [Lianie May](#), despite having impressive sales and streams nationwide, failed to draw a crowd to an event at the venue (2:39). Similarly, [Kurt Darren](#), despite his strong CD sales and streams, struggles to attract a student audience to Kudus. While some students may stream their music, they are not actively supporting these artists by attending live events.

In the case of VIBES AND BEATS, a different approach is needed for artist curation compared with that of other venues. Rather than relying on an artist to draw a crowd for the night and subsequently transitioning to club music, VIBES AND BEATS aims to attract people through the use of a DJ and maintain their presence with additional DJs. As a result, VIBES AND BEATS consistently identifies and discusses potential DJs who would be suitable for their venue (3:28).

#### **4.6.2 The crowd moved on**

The ever-changing nature of music holds true for all nightclubs in Noka. Several factors influence these changes, including the time of night, the cultural context of the surrounding area, the season, the attending patrons, the atmosphere, current trends and budget considerations.

At the Magic Paleis, the owner favours a dance-oriented music playlist on Friday nights in contrast to other evenings (1:7). The owner acknowledges that the arriving crowd often sets the musical tone for the remainder of the night (1:14). The venue's decor is sometimes thematically aligned with the music, aiming to create a holistic experience for the clientele. The owner of Magic Paleis opted for a South African flag, surfer vibe, and "Boelie Beef" atmosphere as these elements encapsulate a distinct South African ambiance. Initially, they reinforced this idea by playing a significant amount of South African music (1:21).

The Sound House VOMs have even extended their theme to their menu items. This led them to name certain pizzas after popular songs, such as "Sex on Fire" aligning the culinary offerings with their musical theme (5:64). Cowboys has a well-defined theme as a rock bar, adorned with prominent paintings or posters of renowned rock icons adorning the walls. They describe their overall theme as "Rock Rebellion but within Limits." The venue aims to position itself as an alternative to the mainstream nightlife in Noka, incorporating rebellious and non-conformist elements (6:22). By carefully considering these aspects, being aware of the local competition,

and establishing thematic elements, venue owners and managers in Noka can effectively differentiate their nightclubs and cater to their target audiences.

The owner of Kudus maintains a fresh and dynamic music selection by regularly updating the playlist queue system with new songs. Each week, the owner adds between 10 and 30 new songs to the playlist, relying on the Pioneer DJ system. The resident DJs then curate the music for the night based on the desired mood (2:12). While the specific songs may vary, the general character, feel, and genre of the music tend to remain consistent (2:13). The owner also recognises broader music trends and highlights how Kudus transformed from a Langarm or Sokkie establishment in the 1980s to a venue with a different vibe in 2015 (2:61).

VIBES AND BEATSs places significant emphasis on music, particularly on Friday nights. During these nights, they often book prominent guest artists, such as Kyle Watson, or play harder Tech music. Occasionally, they designate these nights as "Fist Bump Fridays" and aim to create an atmosphere similar to Ultra festivals such as H2O<sup>23</sup>, featuring more intense and energetic music (3:30).

The owner of Moonshine acknowledges the shifting nature of music and how people outgrow certain sounds and genres. He cites an example where a quality band named Georgia<sup>24</sup> used to perform at his venue, but the crowd that supported them has moved on, leading to a change in Moonshine's dynamics. Consequently, such a band may not be as successful at Moonshine as they were in their heyday (4:42).

The owner of The Sound House recognises that their establishment, being largely a pre-drink venue, can afford to play similar music night after night (5:21). They rely more heavily on events such as Karaoke to invigorate nights rather than varying the music itself, leaving that responsibility to other venues. They understand that their music selection attracts and retains clients and see no need to deviate from a recipe that already works (5:33). Notable variations in music occur during the transition between day and night when different teams take over and attract different clientele (5:68).

The management at Cowboys utilises curated playlists tailored to specific days and times of the week (6:1). During the final two hours of operation, they selectively curate the music to signal the impending closure of the venue (6:60). Particularly after 6 p.m., they alter the atmosphere by dimming the lights and increasing the volume of the music. Careful consideration goes into

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<sup>23</sup> H2O is Africa's biggest daytime to night-time EDM event, and has existed since 1999 (H2O about H2O, 2023)

<sup>24</sup> Consisting of three brothers, Georgia were praised for the ability of their lead singer, Ghapi, to play the drums and sing concurrently (Ghapi Official, 2022).

choosing the opening song for the night section of the nightclub, signaling a shift in the party atmosphere. Around 7:30 p.m. to 9 p.m., they transition to Afrikaans music to enhance the ambiance (6:76). By 10 p.m., they revert to mainstream Rock music, allowing patrons to engage in lively conversations without focusing too much on the music (6:77). This progression enables the night to unfold under the influence of music.

#### **4.6.3 In-house DJs are more successful**

The VOMs of nightclubs in Noka recognise the crucial role played by the DJs they hire. DJ selection has become an increasingly vital aspect of running a nightclub, particularly in a student town and more broadly in the nightclub industry. This is primarily due to the relatively lower cost of hiring DJs compared with other forms of entertainment. Furthermore, DJ performances have become culturally ingrained as an expected source of entertainment during a night out in a student town.

The owner of Magic Paleis leverages the success of DJs from the sister venues, ensuring that their proven track record translates into success at their own establishment as well (1:49). Reciprocally, the owner also shares successful DJs with the sister companies, fostering a collaborative environment among the franchise.

In contrast, the owner of Kudus acknowledges that feedback from employed DJs regarding the music selection may not always be accurate or sufficient for decision-making (2:73). To ensure a fair assessment, he recommends personally observing the crowd's response. He receives feedback from clients indicating that his establishment has the best DJs in town (2:73). One particular DJ garners praise for his well-planned approach, starting with more relaxed music and gradually building up to prime time by incorporating popular commercial hits and edited radio hits (2:76).

The VOMs of VIBES AND BEATS emphasise the importance of DJs possessing experience in the field (3:19). They recognise that hiring an in-house DJ requires training and experience, which can take several months to develop (3:20). They have provided opportunities for numerous aspiring DJs, approximately 200, to showcase their skills and gauge their compatibility with the venue (3:29). The owners also consider the movie "We Are Your Friends" as an accurate depiction of the qualities required to be a DJ. They additionally pay attention to the beats per minute (BPM) of the music played throughout the night, as a continuous tempo between 130 and 140 BPM may tire the crowd too quickly (3:74).

At Moonshine, the owner believes that the in-house DJs successfully create a branded experience not only for the venue but also for themselves (4:63). In-house DJs are deemed more successful

than externally hired ones, who tend to be more costly (4:64). The owner attributes this success to the in-house DJs' extensive research, explicitly instructing them to understand the music preferences of the current student population and demonstrate this knowledge (4:65). He notes that VIBES AND BEATS can afford guest DJs partly due to sponsorship or ownership by alcohol companies that have stakes in DJ conglomerate companies (4:81). These guest DJs, such as [Mark Stent](#), [Chunda Munki](#) and [Kyle Watson](#), attract a crowd for a portion of the night, aligning with students' inclination to visit multiple venues (4:81).

The owner of The Sound House advocates for DJs following a "two fast songs and then one slow one" principle, allowing patrons to experience a gradual buildup and cooldown throughout the night (5:13). He highlights the affordability of hiring DJs, which can be complemented by promotional offers on alcohol nights featuring a DJ (5:29). However, he warns against experimenting too much with DJs, as this may lead to a lack of understanding regarding the musical atmosphere of the establishment (5:34).

The VOMs of Cowboys acknowledge their diverse playlisting styles, influenced by personal genre preferences and strategies aimed at energising the night (6:3). They particularly emphasise controlling the buildup of the night, with one manager taking guests on an emotional journey through songs that gradually build up before breaking it down after two hours, allowing patrons to take a break and have a drink (6:68). Understanding the significance of DJs and their impact on the music selection process enables VOMs to curate an engaging and satisfying experience for their clientele.

#### **4.6.4 Music as a conversational catalyst**

The VOMs of nightclubs in Noka hold varying perspectives on how music functions and shapes their establishments (1:60). The owner of the Magic Paleis recounts an incident after the COVID-19 lockdown where their sound system and television were stolen. During one of the initial social gatherings at the venue, they played music from a small Bluetooth speaker, with [Roy Orbison's](#) music in the background. Surprisingly, no one seemed bothered by the diminished audio quality, as the primary focus was on the opportunity to socialise and engage in conversations (1:60). This highlights the owner's realisation that, while music often serves as the focal point of entertainment during a night out, there are instances where other elements take precedence, and music merely contributes to the ambiance. Notably, music plays a significant role in nightclub experiences as it provides stimulation for patrons (1:91).

According to the owner of The Sound House, the function of music extends to regulating the venue and influencing patrons' behaviour (5:16). If there are signs of potential conflict among guests, playing mellow and toned-down music can help mitigate tension and shape their mood

accordingly. The absence of music would render the venue non-functional, as it is considered a vital centrepiece of the business (5:63).

In the case of Cowboys, the VOMs believe that music serves as a facilitator for socialisation (6:35). They contend that music acts as a conversational catalyst, alleviating any awkward silences and enhancing interpersonal interactions. Moreover, music assists in demarcating transition periods, such as the shift from daytime to night-time, influencing the behaviour and energy of the clientele (6:71). In addition, music plays a pivotal role in establishing and reinforcing the thematic identity of the venue (6:78). These diverse perspectives underscore the multifaceted role of music within nightclub venues, including its function as a source of entertainment, mood regulator, facilitator of socialisation and thematic enhancer.

#### **4.6.5 Diversifying the music selection**

The understanding and application of music genres by VOMs of nightclubs in Noka play a significant role in creating a cohesive atmosphere and overall vibe for their establishments. To facilitate this process, they rely on tools such as Spotify, which offers powerful features for genre determination and music curation based on specific characteristics.

Understanding how VOMs interpret and utilise genre is crucial in shaping the identity and atmosphere of their establishments. Therefore, it is important to investigate their approaches to using these terms and their implications for venue creation and management. For instance, the owner of Magic Paleis acknowledges their preference for rock music but recognises the need to diversify their music selection to cater to a wider audience (1:6). They also emphasise the importance of danceable music on Friday nights, describing it as having a "dance vibe" (1:7). In addition, they mention hosting parties and events with a Psy-Trance ambiance (1:8).

The owner of Magic Paleis identifies other genres, such as Psy-Trance, Dubstep<sup>25</sup> and Trap<sup>26</sup>, which are played on specific occasions to cater to fans of these genres (1:10). Furthermore, specific days of the week are associated with specific genres, such as Rock and Roll on Saturdays, attracting a particular crowd (1:10). During weekdays, the venue plays a diverse range of music, spanning from [Pink Floyd](#) to [Billie Eilish](#) (1:11). The variety of genres played during weekdays allows the owners of Magic Paleis to be less strict in defining the genre, likely due to lower patron expectations and less crowded environments. Furthermore, the venue strategically leverages Psy-Trance DJs, distinguishing itself from other nightclubs that employ DJs specialising in different genres (1:45). The owner of Magic Paleis also places importance on the genre of

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<sup>25</sup> Dubstep can be understood as slowed-down reggae with heavier drums (James, 2022b).

<sup>26</sup> Trap music is part Hip Hop, EDM and Dub music (Audiomack, 2023)

music played on the dance floor, opting for trance music instead of Sokkie music, which is favoured by other venues in town (1:75). They recognise the presence of a market for trance music, albeit not the largest, with an easily identifiable audience aware of the event schedule (1:81). For more accessible dance music, artists such as [Synth Peter](#) or [Fatboy Slim](#) are preferred (1:97).

The owner of Kudus categorises the music at their venue as club music or remixes, maintaining a consistent genre throughout the day and week, while incorporating variations to prevent monotony (2:5, 2:13). They primarily define genre in terms of commercial music, which guides their music selection (2:14). The owner of Kudus also emphasises the significance of diversifying the music selection regularly to cater to changing tastes, suggesting that the feel of the venue should be diversified every hour (2:15). Music played at Kudus include Tech House, oldies<sup>27</sup>, singalongs, and radio hits (2:15).

The owner of Kudus recognises the historical association of their venue with Langarm music, which dominated from the 1980s until 2015 (2:62). Subsequently, they incorporated bigger hits, commercial music, and Sokkie (2:63). The owner acknowledges the shift in the music scene, where Deep House gained popularity and replaced Sokkie music, resulting in a loss of customers (2:66). Despite this shift, the owner believes that the identity of Langarm and Sokkie remains intrinsic to their establishment. To cater to different audiences, Kudus has two dance floors, allowing them to simultaneously maintain the traditional Langarm or Sokkie and appeal to the emerging crowd that favour Deep House (2:71).

According to the proprietor of Kudus, it is advisable to reserve significant commercial hits for the peak hours of the night when the venue is at its busiest (2:77). The owner asserts that a song's popularity can be gauged by its frequent airplay on radio stations (2:77). Furthermore, the owner distinguishes a particular genre referred to as "wedding music," suggesting that some DJs exhibit a predilection for playing music suitable for wedding venues or functions (2:81). However, such music generally fails to resonate well with audiences.

During the era when live bands held considerable appeal, Moonshine emerged as a prominent competitor to Kudus. Notably, despite occasional band performances, Kudus aimed to offer a slightly distinct experience (2:88). This period provided an opportune platform for Sokkie music to flourish and garner appreciation at Kudus (2:88). The owner of Kudus contends that Sokkie music was not inherently strongly associated with Afrikaner culture until around 2015 when it became

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<sup>27</sup> "Oldies music is a wide-ranging and ever-expanding catch-all term that has come to encompass most pop, rock, and R&B songs released and played on the radio between 1950 and up to at least 10–20 years before the present" (Gold, 2023).

synonymous with Afrikaans music. Prior to that, Sokkie denoted a formal dance style performed to popular English music of the time (2:91). The introduction of Kurt Darren's song "[Meisie Meisie](#)" marked a transformative phase in Sokkie music, wherein people desired to engage in this dance style to Afrikaans music featuring a stronger beat (2:91).

The owner of Kudus recalls that hits from the 1980s, including songs by [Bryan Adams](#) and [ABBA](#), were categorised as Sokkie music (2:93). However, despite the success of Afrikaans music and its dominance over the Sokkie genre, Deep House music emerged as the prevailing choice in Noka's student scene (2:97). The owner perceives artists such as Chunda Munki, who played a crucial role in pioneering the Deep House trends, as losing their appeal (2:99). Furthermore, the owner believes that Afrikaans music, in general, is currently experiencing a decline in popularity, together with rock music. Nonetheless, the owner holds optimism that stadium rock will eventually experience a resurgence (2:103).

Regarding Tech House music, the owner acknowledges that it is not advisable to play this genre for an extended period at Kudus. However, at VIBES AND BEATS, Tech House can be played throughout the evening, as it is more closely aligned with their venue and is almost expected by patrons (2:106). VIBES AND BEATS, in contrast, recognises its alignment with the commercial scene and occasionally incorporates popular radio hits into their music selection (2:9). Moreover, VIBES AND BEATS takes pride in venturing into underground music scenes and featuring alternative music. They express the belief that genres such as Drum and Bass<sup>28</sup>, Dubstep, and Trap are ill-suited for their venue, as they are not considered robust dance genres according to their assessment (3:10).

The VOMs acknowledge that curating and creating playlists is a democratic yet reductionist process, as it is impossible to please everyone simultaneously. Therefore, they must choose genres or music that can satisfy most of their audience or clientele (3:21). While they frequently include popular hits in their playlists, DJs ensure not to overplay them and collaborate on deciding the optimal time to feature such tracks during the evening (3:25).

The VOMs of VIBES AND BEATS firmly believe that genres such as Deep House, Tech House, and Bass House are gaining prominence in music scenes worldwide, coincidentally aligning with the primary genres played at their venue (3:59). They also recognise that Trance music tends to be less successful for their establishment because of its cultural specificity, with Trance, Psy-

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<sup>28</sup> Drum and Bass is a sister of EDM music with considerably darker tones and higher tempos varying between 160 and 180 BPM (James, 2022a).

Trance, and related genres being associated with a hippie culture rather than appealing to the farming community of Noka (3:61).

However, the most crucial factor for the VOMs of VIBES AND BEATS is not necessarily a song's affiliation with a particular genre but rather how easy it is to sing along with (3:68). They prioritise songs that are effortlessly singable, often referred to as bootlegs (3:70). Interestingly, the VOMs playfully criticise Kudus for frequently featuring such old singable songs, acknowledging that this strategy proves effective at Kudus, though they opt for a different approach to distinguish their establishment and provide a unique experience to their clientele. They perceive Moonshine as aggressively pursuing this strategy, noting similarities between Kudus and Moonshine, and emphasising their desire to set themselves apart.

The owner of Moonshine acknowledges the evolving nature of music genres played at their venue over time (4:17). In addition, they note the influence of the do-it-yourself (DIY) ethos associated with genres such as grunge and punk on the live music scene in Noka (4:22). The DIY ethos facilitated the entry of aspiring musicians onto the stage, irrespective of their virtuosity, resulting in the rise of grunge bands and the spread of the movement within the Afrikaans music scene (4:22, 4:46).

During the live music phase, cover songs were still prevalent in Moonshine, indicating a contentedness among the audience with familiar tunes (4:25). The emergence of Afrikaans Sokkie music as an alternative genre coincided with the development of the DIY punk movement, as highlighted by the owner of Moonshine and corroborated by the owner of Kudus (4:46). The inception of Afrikaans Sokkie music around 2012 led to a shift in trends, with people seeking music suitable for Sokkie (4:56).

The owner of Moonshine acknowledges that certain genres, such as Dubstep and Deep House, may not resonate well with the common student population in Noka (4:56). Mainstream music poses a challenge owing to the limited pool of widely recognised songs that patrons expect to hear during their night out (4:61). Nevertheless, the owner recognises the appeal of revamped or remixed versions of older songs, attributing their strong melodic ideas to their enduring popularity (4:66).

The VOM of The Sound House considers the genres and music played before 2010, with the younger staff curating music from 2010 onward owing to their familiarity with that era (5:10). They cautiously incorporate club music from 2022 onwards, aiming to avoid an excessive club-oriented atmosphere as their focus lies more on the pre-drinking scene (5:10, 5:44). Anchor songs, such as "[Common People](#)" by Pulp and Kelly Clarkson's "[Since U Been Gone](#)", serve as recognisable tunes associated with the venue (5:44).

The VOMs of Cowboys prioritise rock music, aiming to create a relatable and appealing environment for patrons across different age groups (6:15, 6:26). They also consider incorporating Sokkie music during specific times of the month to cater to mainstream Afrikaans students' preferences (6:39). Furthermore, they occasionally introduce metal music when their regular patrons are present (6:40). The inclusion of club or house music depends on the evening's mood and the operational status of the club section (6:42). During events or themed nights, such as Bar Olympics<sup>29</sup>, this genre is prevalent due to its energising effect on the crowd (6:43).

#### **4.6.6 Evolution of the live music product**

It is imperative for VOMs in Noka to comprehend the implications of live music performances when selecting the music to be played at their nightclubs. The Magic Paleis owner reveals the challenges they faced during the COVID-19-induced lockdown and their gradual recovery in the live music scene (1:46). They emphasise the patience exhibited by bands, such as that of Francois van Coke, who may be fatigued after performing at other venues for consecutive nights (1:57).

The owner of Kudus recognises the strategic value of featuring emerging artists rather than well-established ones. By booking trending artists, the venue can potentially secure their services at a more affordable cost while projecting an image of staying up-to-date (2:18). However, they highlight the predicament faced by bands regarding exposure and the lack of recognition they receive during performances (2:115).

Similarly, the VOMs of VIBES AND BEATS notice the challenge other venues might have of finding new local bands capable of opening for renowned acts such as [Spoegwolf](#) or [Fokofpolisiekar](#) (3:91). The owner of Moonshine acknowledges the evolution of the live music product offered at their venue over the years. They recall a time when bands and live musicians performed at the venue seven days a week (4:15). Presently, DJs have taken over, indicating a significant decline in the live music scene and performer presence in Noka. The owner mentions that their other venue, The Icicle, which promotes more live musicianship, struggles due to its size, hindering new local bands from entering the local music scene (4:72). Moreover, the owner acknowledges the financial challenges associated with live musicianship, including expenses for sound engineers and equipment (4:78). However, they firmly believe in the presence of musicians in town and the continued demand for live music, given the significant student population and influx of first-year students entering the music scene each year (4:87).

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<sup>29</sup> Their 'Bar Olympics' is an event that includes typical bar activities, such as arm wrestling and chugging.

The Sound House also had a history of featuring live music, but the financial feasibility of allocating R3000 per band for performances is currently unattainable for them (5:29). In contrast, Cowboys manages to support and enliven the local live music scene through their Tuesday night event. This event, established in October 2017, was a DIY artist initiative that hosted live music events for local unestablished musicians on a Tuesday night (6:18).

#### **4.7 COVID-19's devastating impact on events**

In the context of nightclub ownership in Noka, several crucial aspects must be considered by VOMs to ensure a successful business operation. It should be noted that each owner has a unique perspective on these aspects, leading to varied approaches and responses to different situations.

Collaboration among VOMs in Noka is recognised as essential to avoid detrimental competition (1:71). Moreover, collaboration with town-wide events, such as the annual prominent student event often sponsored by VIBES AND BEATS, is deemed important. The symbiotic relationship between venues and events such as Jool results in afterparties being held at VIBES AND BEATSs (3:33). In addition, hosting internal events at the venue, such as themed nights, or specific happenings, including the Bar Olympics at Cowboys nightclub, becomes crucial in attracting students and increasing profits (6:29).

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted venues in Noka, with restrictions on hosting events. Consequently, they are only now starting to regain stability in event hosting and financial viability (1:46). For instance, Magic Paleis was restricted to a maximum of 70 people during events in their garden. However, due to a sudden influx of more than 400 attendees, they opted to avoid large events altogether during lockdown (1:47). The lockdown period also brought setbacks, including theft of valuable assets from various venues (1:60). The VIBES AND BEATS VOMs lament that COVID-19 had a devastating impact on events and DJs, affecting the entire national DJ and clubbing community (3:85).

Various types of events play a significant role in the strategies of nightclub owners. The Kudus owner attends opening nights of new venues to identify potential trends and adjust their venue accordingly, anticipating future changes in Noka's student life dynamics (2:59). Recognising the wide range of events throughout the country, the owner of Kudus emphasises the importance of monitoring and interpreting them to adapt and curate events effectively (2:114). Previously, Noka Festival facilitated the introduction of bands to Kudus over time, successfully capitalising on the flourishing MK music scene. However, with Noka Festival's diminished influence, the rock music scene's presence in Noka has waned (2:114).

During the transition in the music scene between 2005 and 2010, the Moonshine owner strategically positioned the venue to accommodate the changing dynamics by incorporating three stages for different music genres (4:33). They had a Punk Rock stage, a popular Afrikaans music stage as well as the pre-existing stage for traditional live musicians who previously featured at the venue. Events such as Noka Festival allowed the venue to cater to audiences who enjoyed each of the emerging Afrikaans music genres during that time (4:38).

The Sound House hosts various events such as Karaoke, necessitating the observation and emulation of successful event organisation by other venues. After the successful relocation of Karaoke from a staff member's campus event to their own venue, the value of hosting proxy events in town before bringing them to one's own venue became evident (5:22). Other events attempted by The Sound House include Volleyball days, featuring an outdoor DJ and a makeshift sandpit to enhance the event experience (5:30). A local Idols event, heavily supported by female residents but occasionally chaotic for everyone involved, was also organised at The Sound House (5:70).

The VOMs of Cowboys consider themselves pioneers in Noka's event landscape. They initiated events such as "Jou Ma Se Noka," where local musicians perform live, "Lip Sync Battles" where students compete in dance and mimicking singing, and "Bar Olympics," which involve various bar-related challenges (6:29). Meticulous attention is given to curating the music for each of these events, ensuring a tailored experience for attendees.

#### **4.7.1 Creating spacious dance floors**

Running a successful nightclub in Noka requires VOMs to account for specific aspects. Each owner possesses a unique perspective on these considerations and responds differently to various situations. One crucial aspect VOMs need to navigate is the transition and transformation of their venues. This process often stems from the need to keep up with musical trends in town and entails both financial and practical implications.

The owner of Kudus, for instance, recognised that the audience's preference for Sokkie music was changing, prompting him to revamp the venue and focus on incorporating more commercial club music (2:68). This change was not gradual but rather required a significant investment. The music and DJs were changed promptly, and the venue underwent significant expansion (2:80).

Similarly, Moonshine underwent multiple changes over time and currently embodies a commercial club atmosphere. Initially, Moonshine focused on live music and jazz when it first opened (4:12). The decision to transition to a different vibe was sudden and necessitated various alterations within the venue. These changes included constructing a DJ box, rearranging lighting fixtures

away from the stage, repositioning speakers, and creating spacious dance floors—an endeavour fraught with logistical and practical challenges (4:80).

In addition to transitioning and transforming venues, VOMs in Noka must identify the type of venue they operate to streamline its operations effectively. Even within a single venue, different sections may serve distinct purposes. For instance, at Kudus, there is a pub area where 1980s music is predominantly played, while the club section features different music genres, rarely including Afrikaans music (2:21). The owner can gauge the appropriateness of the music selection based on the audience's response, as they may express their dissatisfaction vocally, considering the music as subpar (2:30).

VIBES AND BEATS acknowledges that they are a late-night venue and that they, together with Moonshine, are often the destinations for intense dancing and afterparties. They also recognise that Moonshine is the final stop for most clubbers, given its 4 a.m. closing time. However, VIBES AND BEATS does not fully comprehend why Moonshine was granted this privilege initially (3:35). They emphasise the significance of music for a nightclub establishment, expressing their belief that it is crucial to frame it as such in the thesis (3:42). VIBES AND BEATS aims to offer a unique music experience, incorporating distinctive renditions of popular songs compared with those at other venues (3:71).

The owner of Moonshine, who also owns the The Icicle venue, acknowledges that The Icicle has become a venue that only hosts bands of a certain calibre (4:72). Moonshine recognises itself as a mainstream venue, attracting people throughout the night, and aims to play music that satisfies most attendees (4:82).

The Sound House identifies itself as a student clubhouse open to the public (5:4). Cowboys describes itself as a venue similar to The Sound House, catering to the pre-drink market, but also capable of entertaining its patrons for an entire evening. According to Cowboys, Magic Paleis also caters to the pre-drink market (6:57). By considering these various aspects, understanding the need for transition and transformation, and identifying the appropriate venue type, owners and managers of nightclubs in Noka can effectively adapt to changing musical trends and cater to their target audience.

#### **4.8 Conclusion**

The VOMs all had a unique approach to navigate the activities that curation entails. For some VOMs it was necessary to delegate the work of curation and for others they took it in their own hands. Each venue has a unique narrative that has shaped its identity in Noka over the years. Each VOM had their own approach for following trends and updating their music. They also had

their own ways of exploiting music for events. Furthermore, VOMs are aware of live music and DJs for their venues as well as how to function and coexist in a competitive market. Various factors influence the curatorial style of each VOM. The most prominent factor that influenced the VOM's curatorial choices was dependent on how the VOMs perceived and anticipated the crowds that they sought to attract to their venues.

## CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION

This study explored the meanings VOMs ascribed to their experiences of the performance context that underpins the curation of music for their establishments in Noka. Drawing from relevant literature, several key aspects emerged as fundamental to the VOMs regarding music curation. These included the individuals responsible for curating the music, the process through which music selection occurs, the influence of context on these processes, and how curation practices shape the broader context.

### 5.1 Significant findings

One noteworthy finding was that each VOM possesses a distinct perspective of music curation. There is no “one size fits all” curation strategy employed by the VOMs. While these owners demonstrate an implicit understanding of music curation and its various aspects, they did not explicitly employ terminology such as “curation,” “context,” or “music culture of South African students.” Instead, their decision-making processes are often guided by instinct, rooted in deeper principles and subconscious understanding. There were instances when VOMs used the term “vibe” as a category of reference. For instance, the VOM of Magic Paleis referred to the vibe of a similar venue in a different town that they liked and on which they decided to base certain aspects of their venue (1:73).

This intuition of most VOMs was supported by their possession of at least several years of experience as VOMs. In Noka the VOMs’ experience varied from 30 years to two years. The less-experienced VOMs usually also had an extensive background or passion for music. While the conversations were not always academic, all of the VOMs realised the practical implications that their playlist curation had on the business aspect of their venue. This study elucidated some of the subjective storytelling and colourful scenarios that VOMs expressed during their explanation of their curatorial activities.

The curation process typically involves multiple actors, such as the VOMs, staff, the crowd and various technologies. Curation processes often extended beyond the VOM and encompassed predetermined playlists created by DJs, VOMs, or even AI algorithms such as that used by Spotify. Software mainly used to facilitate curation included Spotify, Apple Music, YouTube/YouTube Music, Pioneer DJ, Soundcloud and Shazam. Even with online tools, a human element is involved in initiating the selection process by setting a specific vibe. In addition, the person in charge of the evening's music continuously assesses the crowd's response and adjusts the music accordingly. Music curation is viewed as an ongoing and dynamic process involving various levels

and various music curators. Jansson and Hrac (2018) foregrounded this dynamism of curation processes and especially its embeddedness in the context of curation.

It is apparent from the interviews that curation must be mediated through the VOM. Usually, the VOM also has an employee or employees continually monitoring the music and if the vibe is suitable. The most dynamic curator is usually the DJ for the evening who has an explicit task of maintaining the crowd's interest in the venue. It is also apparent from the interviews that the behaviour of the crowd can be influenced through the proper use and selection of music. These processes are then supported and facilitated through various music technologies.

Knowledge of the context, including factors such as the crowd, type of evening, and time of day, significantly influences playlist creation. VOMs consider the frequency of playing certain songs throughout the evening and the overall music direction. Choices are based on their understanding of the venue's crowd, anticipating their preferences. For instance, they may deliberately delay playing a recently trending song until it becomes more widely recognised, demonstrating a nuanced understanding of timing and trend adoption. The VOMs of VIBES AND BEATS are especially pedantic on how to time TikTok trends as they might not have fully circulated (3:38).

VOMs also recognise instances where the crowd is less discerning, such as when patrons are intoxicated. In these situations, they can influence the crowd's musical preferences, although careful thought is given to using music strategically to create and release tension throughout the evening. For example, they may increase the tempo to encourage dancing and then slow it down to allow patrons to take a break or purchase drinks. Genre shifts are also used to signal changes in the night's pace or to prompt patrons to visit the bar. The VOMs of Cowboys understood the change of genre as a change in tempo and heartbeat, allowing them to tire their crowds to create opportunities for their patrons to go to the bar to purchase more drinks (6:87).

Consistent with the literature, VOMs demonstrate awareness of the scenes they are part of, encompassing local, metropolitan, national, and global contexts. They actively follow events such as festivals and monitor other venues in different districts to interpret scenes and stay informed. The consumer, particularly the student demographic, holds significant importance for VOMs. Existing literature fails to illustrate the ample market space available for venues to cater to specific subsets of students; owners explicitly target different student groups, aligning their venues accordingly. For instance, Cowboys, by targeting rock music especially, regards itself as the "alternative to nightlife" in Noka and builds its brand accordingly (6:58).

The VOMs also displayed an awareness of the music that would be unsuccessful at their venues. The VOMs were using projections of their knowledge of the music scene to reason whether or not certain music would succeed or not. The VOMs were of dissimilar ages and had their own

musical tastes. Almost all of the VOMs play music at their venues that is not necessarily their own musical taste. The two venues who target the alternative student group, play music that the VOMs themselves might enjoy.

While the VOMs do not necessarily identify themselves as scene- or business-oriented, they view their venues as either commercial or alternative. This aligns closely with the proposition by Carah *et al.* (2021) that a nightclub is either business-oriented (commercial) or scene-oriented (alternative). The VOMs displayed a notable awareness of their position within a larger music scene and their interactions within that scene. This shows an awareness of the activities and successes of other venues, as well as other events that shape the musical landscape in which their venues function.

## **5.2 Unearthing ancillary findings**

The literature on music curation was a starting point to realise the elements at play for VOMs in this study. I realised that music curation would be facilitated by many actors and various technologies. It also guided me in being aware of music scenes as a geographical contingency for nightclubs. All of these elements held true for the VOMs while they were navigating their music curatorial processes. Concepts such as trends and vibe were mentioned by VOMs in the interviews and led to some ancillary findings.

Throughout the study on the experiences of VOMs of nightclubs in Noka in curating their venue's unique musical attributes, several insights emerged from the findings that are not extensively addressed in existing literature. Additional to verifying some of the ideas presented in the literature, this study was able to shed light on the significance of trends, the interconnectedness of venues within the music scene, the influence of physical space, the impact of legal policies and the value of local DJs.

One notable finding was the prevalent discussion of "trends" among all participants, particularly in the context of commercial venues. Both commercial and alternative venues recognised the importance of trends but focused on different aspects. For example, in the alternative community, such as the Psy-Trance community, trending local or visiting DJs would be prioritised rather than playing music by artists from previous years. Commercial venues actively engaged with social media, scouting up-and-coming performers to ensure that their playlists and scheduled artists were current and trending.

The literature on music curation consistently mentions the importance of curators or intermediaries to establish and re-establish their worth within the cultural market (Jansson & Hracs, 2018). The present study highlights the importance of constantly re-establishing this worth.

Most curators are therefore not just curating from a position where they can continue to package the same items repeatedly and maintain their value as curators. The importance of “trends” signifies the creative role that curation serves, and that curation may contribute to amplifying trends. Curation is crucially important in the nightclub context and especially in the context of a student town.

Another aspect that is not prominent in the literature is the awareness of VOMs that they are part of a symbiotic ecosystem of other venues within the larger music scene. These venues recognised the need to provide variation for their consumers and understood that if other venues attracted students, they would also benefit from the increased patronage. The VOMs were cautious about overbooking on nights when big artists were playing at competing venues. Furthermore, the influence of the physical space of the venue played a significant role in nightclub music curation, both in terms of location and venue setup. Some venues strategically positioned themselves to attract crowds even when students were away, capitalising on the opportunity to serve as an escape for students. Venue setup, including dance floors, sound systems, and lighting, requires careful consideration to meet the specific requirements of different music genres. Moonshine and Kudus have multiple dance floors and spaces playing different music to cater to diverse consumer preferences.

This aspect of having multiple dance floors was also attributed to Noka’s history of being among the most prominent “Sokkie” or “Langarm” towns. The remnants of this history are still at play and some of the nightclubs utilise this aspect to gain as much patronage as possible. The use of two spaces for different types of music also indicates the embodied nature of music played at nightclubs. It is not possible to just play different music at different times. The dances themselves differ and are embodied by different crowds. The VOMs seek to maintain both these crowds.

VOMs in Noka were universally aware of the polarising effect that certain music and events could have. Almost all VOMs cited Steve Hofmeyr as an artist that should not be booked for their venue as he is too polarising. Although genres such as Amapiano might not be the prevalent genre in Noka, VOMs realised that there were certain Amapiano hits that would always work in their venue. The main value held here by the VOMs in terms of curation was that music should not be politically loaded or polarising. Although a performer such as Steve Hofmeyr could still draw a crowd, this is not the type of crowd that VOMs in Noka wished for.

Although the VOMs may not explicitly refer to “cultural goods,” they possess an understanding of cultural appropriateness. They recognise that certain acts, such as Steve Hofmeyr, could be politically divisive, while other cultural goods such as Amapiano music may not attract their desired clientele. However, they acknowledge the potential for shifts in cultural goods and

recognise that Amapiano could become a prominent trend in the future. The VOMs exhibit a strong awareness of South African student musical culture. This is evident in their social media monitoring to identify promising acts and songs that could resonate with their venues. Some venues actively analyse and interpret future trends among South African students by observing events such as the Rage festivals.

It became apparent from the interviews that most curatorial processes were a negotiation of many choices to select music for the night. Most VOMs realised that they would never make everyone in their venue happy with their musical choices. The music ultimately chosen is a form of 'democratic vote' that the VOM makes with respect to how they understand and project the crowd's values. This choice is constantly updated by the VOM through watching the crowd's reaction to the music.

Legal policies also have a profound impact on how venues interact with each other in Noka. The knowledge that only one venue could legally remain open until 4 a.m. shaped the dynamics among venues. Moonshine, as the only open venue at that hour, assumed a stable establishment role and influenced the atmosphere that spread to other venues in town. This aspect, often overlooked in the literature, demonstrated how legal policies could influence the dynamics of nightclub spaces. The venues knew that they would not be competing with Moonshine during those hours of the morning and would not try to have the same strategy for music as Moonshine because it is of no benefit to compete with them. Moonshine could also adopt a relaxed approach to music curation as they are assured of patronage every night.

Interestingly, some commercial venues observed greater success and crowd enjoyment with local DJs compared with guest DJs from metropolitan areas. This suggests that local DJs might have a better understanding of the crowd and context, or they have established a strong connection and familiarity with the patrons. From experience, VOMs would continue trusting local DJs with their crowds. Crowds also trusted local DJs over visiting DJs. Local crowds were sometimes friends with local DJs, or they were already familiar with the DJs and how they fashioned their sets.

Only VIBES AND BEATS would frequently employ visiting DJs from larger cities. This was also done with financial backing from their alcohol partnerships. Their use of visiting DJs also connected them to the musical scenes of neighbouring metropolitan areas and helped them to align their brand with some of the metropolitan nightclubs. VIBES AND BEATS wanted to be the club that most students who came from metropolitan areas would recognise and want to go to in Noka.

### 5.3 Extrapolation opportunities

This study, which explored the meanings VOMs ascribed to their experiences of the performance context that underpins the curation of music for their establishments in Noka, provides a strong foundation for future research. It has demonstrated that context-specific research to understand music curatorial processes is informative and that generalisable principles might be identified if similar studies are performed elsewhere. It has realised the importance of the phenomena 'trends' when researching curation processes. It has shown how enquiry into the curatorial experiences of VOMs can shed light on the sociocultural dynamics of a specific context. Furthermore, nightclubs are shown to be symbiotic with their surroundings and there are diverse levels of influences that affect the nature of each nightclub. The following major findings can be built on through further research.

First, this study highlights the significance of context-specific research in the fields of EDM and curatorship. It underscores the importance of moving from specific case studies to more generalisable principles. For example, it would be interesting to know if it is a general truth that most in-house DJs have more success than visiting DJs through exploring a different context with the same research question. Some of the principles are generalisable within the context of Noka. For VOMs in Noka, these principles have proven successful for almost 30 years. There is substantial reasoning behind the decisions of many of the VOMs. Music curatorial processes can, therefore, be structured and achieved through many of the same principles that these VOMs have employed. Those principles were: understanding the local music scene, continuously updating the music curated in relation to the crowd, subcontracting the responsibility for music curation to successful DJs and using various curation technologies to facilitate the curatorial process.

Second, this study highlights the prominent role of trends in the curatorial process for VOMs in a student town. This finding suggests that the dynamic nature of students and the need to attract the appropriate clientele may contribute to the significance of trends. Unearthing trends is particularly important for commercial nightclub venues, suggesting that similar attention to trends may be relevant for commercial nightclubs in other regions.

Third, this thesis explored an undocumented topic by posing previously unasked questions to VOMs of nightclubs, for instance, how they determine if their music is successful or not. Through enquiring into how VOMs experience making their curatorial choices, light was shed on the sociocultural dynamics and certain historical events of Noka. For instance, it became apparent that Noka is mainly understood as a student town and a small farming community lagging metropolitan trends. Furthermore, Noka hosts two main student groupings who could support a venue: the alternative students and the commercial students. Aligning a venue clearly with one

of these groups was regarded as an ideal strategy by VOMs. These findings provide insight into the history, dynamics, and cultural identity of a student town. Replicating this research in different regions would likely shed light on comparable area-specific aspects.

Lastly, this study offers valuable insights into the performance context of nightclubs in Noka and the reciprocal influence between these spaces and the town itself, including its identity, businesses, students, values, and culture. Any nightclub should be understood in terms of its relation to other businesses and the nature of their consumers. The study illustrates that music curatorial processes are determined by various levels of music scenes from the international stage down to the local music scene.

For future research, it would be beneficial to incorporate multidisciplinary approaches in a musicological analysis. These include the role players of music production and consumption as well as the structure of the music. If music, as explained by early musicologists, is “sound structured by society,” the nature of music economics at play and how businessmen are investing in music are important aspects to investigate. Ultimately, these role-players are shaping venues where patrons tend to go out for the night to socialise, have a drink, unwind, have fun and create themselves in. Exploring the roles of VOMs is a first step in such an enquiry and there remain many role-players contributing funds to music scenes who could be interviewed in similar studies to the present one.

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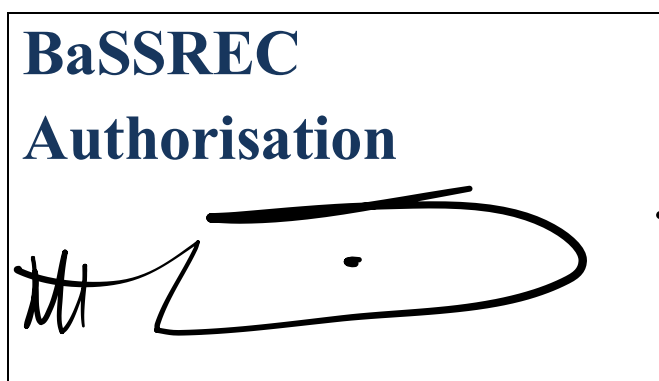
## ANNEXURES

### ADDENDUM A: INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT



Basic Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (BaSSREC)

**DATE: 31 July 2022**



### PARTICIPANT INFORMATION LEAFLET AND CONSENT FORM

<b>Title of the research project</b>	The meaning venue owners and managers of nightclubs ascribe to their experiences of music curation.
<b>Ethics number</b>	
<b>Principal investigator</b>	Jan-Meyer Verhoef
<b>Student number</b>	24673250
<b>Address</b>	<b>2 Drommedaris str. Noka</b>
<b>Email address</b>	<b>verhoefjanmeyer@gmail.com</b>
<b>Contact number</b>	<b>0825578425</b>

You are being invited to take part in a research project that forms part of my Master's dissertation. Please take some time to read the information presented here, which will explain the details of this project. Please ask the researcher any questions about any part of this project that you do not fully

understand. It is very important that you are fully satisfied that you clearly understand what this research is about and how you could be involved. Also, your participation is **entirely voluntary** and you are free to decline to participate. If you say no, this will not affect you negatively in any way whatsoever. You are also free to withdraw from the study at any point, even if you do agree to take part. Prior to publication of the study's results (or the point that publication is in process), you may also withdraw the data you generate.

This study has been approved by the **Basic and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (BaSSREC) of the Faculty of Humanities of North-West University (NWU.....)** and will be conducted according to the ethical guidelines and principles of the international Singapore Statement on Research Integrity (2010) and the ethical guidelines of the National Health Research Ethics Council. It might be necessary for the research ethics committee members or relevant authorities to inspect the research records to make sure that we (the researchers) are conducting research in an ethical manner.

### **What is this research study all about?**

- This study is an investigation of the experiences staff members of six clubs in Noka rely on to curate the music for their establishments and will involve the use of interviews.
- The researcher has been trained to conduct interviews.
- Approximately six participants will be included in this study.
- The objectives of this research are:
  - To learn which experiences underpin the curation of music for six clubs in Noka
  - To contribute to the knowledge generation of Noka's nightlife economy

### **Why have you been invited to participate?**

- You have been invited to participate because you are responsible for the curation of music for a nightclub in Noka that caters to the needs of the student community
- You have also complied with the following inclusion criteria: the venue you curate for is a nightclub, caters for Noka's students and approaches them as their main source of clientele.
- You have been included because you have been employed as Venue Owner or Manager responsible for curation for your venue, you have been doing this for six months or longer and are still employed in such a position.
- You will be excluded if you are not a curator for the establishment fulfilling the above-mentioned criteria.

### What will your responsibilities be?

- You will be invited to participate in the noted study for a face-to-face interview and one follow-up interview.
- You will have two weeks to indicate whether you would be willing to participate.
- You will be requested to sign this Informed Consent Statement before the commencement of the study.

### Will you benefit from taking part in this research?

- The direct benefits for you as a participant will probably be contributing to the knowledge generation of curators.
- The indirect benefit will probably be being able to learn how to align your business with the Noka nightlife economy.

### Are there risks involved in your taking part in this research and how will these be managed?

*The possible risks in this study, and how these will be managed, are summarised in the table below:*

Possible risk	Mitigation strategy
COVID-19 risk during face-to-face interviews.	Given the potential for COVID-19 infection, the researcher will observe the following rules during in-person/face-to-face data collection: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• If the current COVID-19 restriction levels do not allow for such in-person meetings, the interviews will not take place.</li><li>• That all persons wear a three-ply mask throughout the interview.</li><li>• That the researcher takes the temperature of the participants before the start of the interview and FGD. If this is too high, then you will not be allowed to participate.</li><li>• That hand-sanitiser (with 70% alcohol content) be used <i>before, during</i> and <i>after</i> the interview.</li><li>• That social-distancing of 1.5–2 metres be observed between all persons <i>before, during</i> and <i>after</i> the interview.</li><li>• If the participants do not have a three-ply mask or hand-sanitiser, this will be provided cost-free by the researcher.</li></ul>
Tiredness and discomfort.	Comfort breaks of 20 minutes.

Lack of privacy and comfort during interviews.	You have the right to withhold any information that you do not want to share with the researcher and you may withdraw from the study at any time.
--	---

- *However, we do believe that the benefits to you and to academia as noted in the previous section) outweigh the risks we have listed. If you disagree, then please feel free not to participate in this study. We will respect your decision.*
- *Should we learn, in the course of the research, that someone is harming you, or that you are intending to harm someone, then we must tell someone who can help you/warn the person you are intending to harm.*

### Who will have access to the data?

*The following procedures will be observed in line with the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA):*

<b>Principle</b>	<b>How will this be done?</b>	<b>When will this be done?</b>
<b>Anonymity</b>	I (the principal investigator) will assign a fictitious name to you before the interview starts. Only this name will be used in the research process.	Before the interview commences.
<b>Confidentiality</b>	Confidentiality will include the use of pseudonyms for participants, organisations and locations. It involves not disclosing any information gained from an interviewee deliberately or accidentally in ways that might identify an individual, organisation and location.	During the recruitment process.
<b>De-identification of data</b>	All identifiable personal information will be de-identified to ensure that no information identifies any participants, organisations and locations.	Before data analysis and the write-up of findings start.
<b>Data storage</b>	All data collected for the purpose of the research will be stored safely in electronic	During analysis and the write-up of findings.

	<p>format/hardcopy format for a period of five years after which it will be destroyed.</p> <p>The primary investigator will ensure data in both hard-copy (printed) and soft-copy (electronic) are safely locked away and password-protected, respectively. Only approved people in my research team will have access to my raw data where the need arises. At the analysis stage, as will be the case throughout, the use of coding will reinforce participants' non-identification, hence upholding the assurance of confidentiality and anonymity.</p>	
<b>Privacy</b>	<i>Privacy</i> will be ensured by not probing unnecessarily if you do not wish to discuss particular matters.	During the fieldwork and during follow-up fieldwork.
<b>Transcription/coding of data</b>	<p>I will not use a <i>transcriber</i> for the purpose of the transcripts after the interview.</p> <p>I will not use a <i>statistician/coder</i> for the purpose of the transcripts after the interview.</p>	Not applicable.
<b>Translation/interpreter services</b>	I will not use a <i>translator/interpreter</i> for the purpose of the interviews/explaining the informed consent, etc.	Not applicable

*Collection of only relevant personal information:*

<b>Collection of only relevant personal information</b>	I, the principal investigator and members of the research team (if applicable), will only collect personal biographical and opinion-related data about the topic I/we are studying.	What types of music the participant listens to personally.
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**What will happen to the data?**

The data from this study will be reported in the following ways: a Master’s dissertation and possibly as an academic journal article. In all of this reporting, you will not be personally identified. This means that the reporting will not include your name or details that will help others to know that you participated.

Data may be re-used in the form of academic journal articles.

**Will you be paid/compensated to take part in this study and are there any costs involved?**

No, you will not be paid/compensated to take part in the study. There will thus be no costs involved for participation in this study.

**How will you know about the findings?**

- The general findings of the research will be shared with you by the primary investigator.
- If you would like feedback on your personal results, then email the researcher at [verhoefjanmeyer@gmail.com](mailto:verhoefjanmeyer@gmail.com)

**Is there anything else that you should know or do?**

- You can contact Jan-Meyer Verhoef (researcher) at (082) 5578425 (cell phone number) and [verhoefjanmeyer@gmail.com](mailto:verhoefjanmeyer@gmail.com) (email address) if you have any further queries or encounter any problems.
- You can contact the chair of the Human Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (Prof. Erharbor Idemudia) at (018) 3892899 or [Erharbor.Idemudia@nwu.ac.za](mailto:Erharbor.Idemudia@nwu.ac.za) if you have any concerns or complaints that have not been adequately addressed by the researcher.
- You will receive a copy of this information and consent form for your own records.

## Declaration by participant

By signing below, I \_\_\_\_\_ agree to take part in a research study entitled: “Staff members’ experiences of the performance context that underpin their curation of music in six nightclubs in Noka.”

I declare that:

- I provide *informed consent*.
  - Thus, I have read and understood this information and consent form and it is written in a language with which I am fluent and comfortable.
  - Thus, I have had a chance to ask questions to both the person obtaining consent, as well as the researcher (if this is a different person), and all my questions have been adequately answered.
  
- I provide *voluntary consent*.
  - Thus, I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary and I have not been pressurised to take part.
  - Thus, I may choose to leave the study at any time and will not be penalised or prejudiced in any way.
  - Thus, I am aware of the fact that I may request that the researcher does not continue with said recording if I request it.
  
- I provide *specific consent*.
  - Thus, I understand that what I contribute (what I report/say/write/draw/produce visually) could be reproduced publicly and/or quoted, but without reference to my personal identity.
  - I provide *specific consent*. Thus, I consent to an audio and/or audio-visual recording of the interview.

Signed at (*place*) \_\_\_\_\_ on (*date*) \_\_\_\_\_ 20 \_\_\_\_\_

---

**Signature of participant**

---

**Signature of witness**

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| • You may contact me again   | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| • I would like a summary of the findings of this research  | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| • I would like feedback on my functioning/wellbeing as reflected in the questionnaires I completed | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No |

The best way to reach me is:

Name & Surname: \_\_\_\_\_  
Postal Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
Email: \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_  
Cell Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

In case the above details change, please contact the following person who knows me well and who does not live with me and who will help you to contact me:

Name & Surname: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone/ Cell Phone Number /Email: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Declaration by person obtaining consent (if not the researcher/primary investigator)**

I (*name*) \_\_\_\_\_ declare that:

- I explained the information in this document to \_\_\_\_\_
- I encouraged him/her to ask questions and took adequate time to answer them.
- I am satisfied that he/she adequately understands all aspects of the research, as discussed above.
- I did/did not use an interpreter.

Signed at (*place*) \_\_\_\_\_ on (*date*) \_\_\_\_\_ 20 \_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature of person obtaining consent**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature of witness**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Declaration by researcher/primary investigator**

I (*name*) \_\_\_\_\_ declare that:

- I explained the information in this document to \_\_\_\_\_
- I encouraged them to ask questions and took adequate time to answer them.
- I am satisfied that they adequately understand all aspects of the research, as discussed above.
- I did/did not use an interpreter.

Signed at (*place*) \_\_\_\_\_ on (*date*) \_\_\_\_\_ 20 \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature of researcher**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature of witness**

\_\_\_\_\_

## Declaration by researcher and participant

### Personal face-to-face interviews during COVID-19 restrictions (*if applicable*)

#### Additional declaration by participant in those instances where the participant requests to participate in a personal face-to-face semi-structured interview:

By signing below, I \_\_\_\_\_, acknowledge the following information related to the required measures regarding COVID-19:

I declare that:

- It is my personal choice and preference to participate in a personal face-to-face semi-structured interview with the researcher.
- This requires that I consent to the following strict measures to safeguard the personal health and safety of myself and that of the researcher/interviewer/primary investigator:
  - I consent to the researcher taking my temperature before the interview using a thermometer.  Yes  No
  - I confirm that my temperature measured at \_\_\_\_\_ degrees.  Yes  No
  - I consent to use the three-ply mask provided by the researcher.  Yes  No
  - I consent to wear the three-ply mask for the full duration of the interview.  Yes  No
  - I consent to the researcher sanitising the interview context using a sanitiser with an 80% alcohol content before the commencement of the interview.  Yes  No
  - I consent to the researcher using a sanitiser with an 70% alcohol content before and during the interview if required.  Yes  No

Signed at (*place*) \_\_\_\_\_ on (*date*) \_\_\_\_\_ 20 \_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of researcher

## **ADDENDUM B: Ethics Training Certificate**



### **Certificate**

**May 25, 2021**

**This is to certify that Mr. Jan-meyer Verhoef has successfully completed the Macquarie University Human Research Ethics Online Training Module for the Social Sciences and Humanities.**

**Macquarie University**

# ADDENDUM C: ETHICS APPROVAL LETTER



Private Bag X1290, Potchefstroom  
South Africa 2520

Tel: 018 299-1111/2222  
Fax: 018 299-4910  
Web: <http://www.nwu.ac.za>

**Senate Committee for Research Ethics**  
Tel: 016 103 4446  
Email: [nkosinathi.machine@nwu.ac.za](mailto:nkosinathi.machine@nwu.ac.za)

31 July 2022

## ETHICS APPROVAL LETTER OF STUDY

Based on approval by the **Basic and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (BaSSREC)** on **08/06/2022**, the Basic and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee hereby **approves** your study as indicated below. This implies that the North-West University Senate Committee for Research Ethics (NWU-SERC) grants its permission that, provided the special conditions specified below are met and pending any other authorisation that may be necessary, the study may be initiated, using the ethics number below.

<b>Study title: The meaning venue owners and managers of nightclubs ascribe to their experiences of music curation.</b>																															
<b>Study Leader/Supervisor (Principal Investigator)/Researcher: Prof Mignon van Vreden</b>																															
<b>Student/Research Team: Jan-Meyer Verhoef</b>																															
<b>Ethics number:</b>	<table border="1"><tr><td>N</td><td>W</td><td>U</td><td>-</td><td>0</td><td>0</td><td>9</td><td>8</td><td>0</td><td>-</td><td>2</td><td>2</td><td>-</td><td>A</td><td>7</td></tr><tr><td colspan="3">Institution</td><td colspan="5">Study Number</td><td colspan="2">Year</td><td colspan="5">Status</td></tr></table> <p><small>Status: S = Submission; R = Re-Submission; P = Provisional Authorisation; A = Authorisation</small></p>	N	W	U	-	0	0	9	8	0	-	2	2	-	A	7	Institution			Study Number					Year		Status				
N	W	U	-	0	0	9	8	0	-	2	2	-	A	7																	
Institution			Study Number					Year		Status																					
<b>Application Type: Single study</b>																															
<b>Commencement date: 13/06/2022</b>	<b>Risk:</b> <table border="1"><tr><td>Low</td></tr></table>	Low																													
Low																															
<b>Expiry date: 13/06/2023</b>																															
<b>Approval of the study is initially provided for a year, after which continuation of the study is dependent on receipt and review of the annual (or as otherwise stipulated) monitoring report and the concomitant issuing of a letter of continuation.</b>																															

### Special in process conditions of the research for approval (if applicable):

<p><b>General conditions:</b></p> <p><i>While this ethics approval is subject to all declarations, undertakings and agreements incorporated and signed in the application form, the following general terms and conditions will apply:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> The study leader/supervisor (principal investigator)/researcher must report in the prescribed format to the BaSSREC:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- annually (or as otherwise requested) on the monitoring of the study, whereby a letter of continuation will be provided, and upon completion of the study; and</li><li>- without any delay in case of any adverse event or incident (or any matter that interrupts sound ethical principles) during the course of the study.</li></ul></li><li><input type="checkbox"/> The approval applies strictly to the proposal as stipulated in the application form. Should any amendments to the proposal be deemed necessary during the course of the study, the study leader/researcher must apply for approval of these amendments at the BaSSREC, prior to implementation. Should there be any deviations from the study proposal without the necessary approval of such amendments, the ethics approval is immediately and automatically forfeited.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Annually a number of studies may be randomly selected for an external audit.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> The date of approval indicates the first date that the study may be started.</li></ul>
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## **ADDENDUM D: RECRUITMENT STRATEGY TELEPHONIC SCRIPT**

Good day sir/madam, I am Jan-Meyer Verhoef, a postgraduate music student at NWU Noka. I was wondering if you would be interested in answering a few questions about the music your establishment plays for my research project. You are completely free to say no to this request and your participation is completely of your own will. If you are interested, I will send a copy of the Informed Consent Form to your email so that you can get an idea of the safety procedures we have in place for such interviews. After we have discussed the form and you have signed it, only then will we arrange a date and time for the interview. Thank you so much for your assistance in this project sir/madam. Have a wonderful day.

## **ADDENDUM E: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**

Questions were included as a guide. The interviews were open-ended and colloquial.

1. What type of music do you like to listen to?
2. What type of music do you play at your venue?
3. How did you decide on your venue's theme?
4. When did your establishment open in Noka?
5. Who are your main clientele?
6. What do you use to compile music on?
7. How does your sound infrastructure work?
8. Which types of events do you organise at your venue?
9. What does a successful business in this industry mean to you?
10. Are you aware of what other venues are up to in town?

## ADDENDUM F: INFORMATION GUIDE TO ATLAS BUNDLES

To open the Atlas.ti 22 bundles that I have used for the coding of Chapters 4 and 5, follow the following steps (internet access is necessary for both steps):

1. Install the free trial version of Atlas.ti 22 <https://atlasti.com/free-trial-version>
2. Once the application is installed, follow the next link to the Google Drive folder where the Atlas.ti 22 bundle can be downloaded and opened  
[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1G5\\_kdI79akl5Na3sqyehiq5Uf8J\\_DM2a/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1G5_kdI79akl5Na3sqyehiq5Uf8J_DM2a/view?usp=sharing)

## ADDENDUM G: LANGUAGE EDITING

### DR ROBERT JAMES MCKENZIE

BSc Botany / MSc Botany / PhD Botany (University of Canterbury)

Language editing / Proofreading / Scientific editing  
29 Fairbairn Str, Worcester 6850, Western Cape  
Tel. +27 76 4616509 / robt.mckenzie@gmail.com

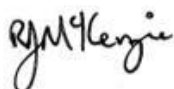
17 October 2023

**To whom it may concern:**

Re: Language and Copy-editing Declaration

This statement is to declare that I, Dr Robert J. McKenzie, have completed language and copy-editing of the dissertation by Jan-Meyer Verhoef (student no. 24673250) for the degree of Master of Arts in Musicology at the North-West University. The title of the dissertation is *The meaning venue owners and managers of nightclubs ascribe to their experiences of music curation*.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Robert J. McKenzie

Tel. +27 76 4616509  
robt.mckenzie@gmail.com  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7054-3308>