

A study of how the internationalisation of Amapiano has contributed to South Africa's soft power and created foreign market access opportunities.

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Abstract

Amapiano, a South African-originated music genre, operates as an emergent form of Soft Power for South Africa, which, through its global rise, has created a pathway for foreign market access for South African cultural businesses. The research paper explores three interlinked themes behind the global increase and internationalisation of Amapiano (1), South African soft power projection through cultural expression (2), Amapiano evolutions into a cultural ecosystem with local and global network links, and (3) the role that digital platforms play in the international acceleration of the genre.

The research paper leveraged an interpretivist qualitative design. Key insights were collected from 12 semi-structured interviews with three practitioner groups in the Amapiano ecosystem: talent management, interdependent record labels, brand and marketing agencies, and digital distribution companies. A narrative analysis approach was used to study and extract insights from the collected data.

Findings in the research paper demonstrated that Amapiano functions as a bottom-up soft power that translates visibility into commercial activities. The findings revealed that global collaborations are at the centre of this global rise, but weak industry professionalism risks the genre's global sustainability. The research paper offers a framework for the internationalisation and global rise of Amapiano and its soft power.

Keywords

Soft-Power, Amapiano, Cultural Products, Digital

Declaration

I declare that this research project the approach by multinationals to engage in knowledge spillovers to advance the entrepreneurial ecosystem in South Africa, is my own work. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Philosophy in International Business at the Gordon Institute of Business Science, University of Pretoria. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other University. I further declare that I have obtained the necessary authorisation and consent to carry out this research.

21 November 2025

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List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

AGOA - African Growth and Opportunity Act

ASEAN - Association of Southeast Asian Nations

BMA - Brand & Marketing Agencies

DDMA - Digital Distribution & Marketing Agencies

DIRCO - (South Africa's) Department of International Relations and Cooperation

DSPs - Digital Service Providers (e.g., Spotify, Apple Music)

DTIC - (South Africa's) Department of Trade, Industry and Competition

FOMO - Fear of Missing Out

GDP - Gross Domestic Product

GIBS - Gordon Institute of Business Science

ICC - International Criminal Court

IMF - International Monetary Fund

KOFICE - Korea Foundation for International Cultural Exchange

PR - Public Relations

ROI - Return on Investment

RQs - Research Questions

TMRL - Talent Management & Record Labels

TV - Television

UK - United Kingdom

UNESCO - United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

USA - United States of America

Glossary

Amapiano: A South African music genre from South Africa that emerged in the 2010s. The genre blends deep house, jazz and kwaito influences.

Cultural Industries: Sectors that produce and distribute cultural content, such as music, film, and art, for economic purposes

Internationalisation and global rise: The process of expanding a business, culture, and influence across borders for economic value.

IB Scholars: International Business researchers who study cross-border business activities.

Soft Power: A country's ability to shape its global outcome through its cultural appeal, values, and diplomacy rather than through coercion or payment.

Digital Platforms: Online/Internet technologies that enable content sharing, creation, and global distribution.

Amapiano Businesses: Businesses that manage the business affairs of Amapiano artists, including their music and content. These businesses and individuals are key because they set the strategic direction for the music, create the business operations behind it, and its content.

Cultural entrepreneurs: Individuals who build businesses by creating, managing and commercialising culture-based products such as music, fashion and art.

Cultural products: Tangible or digital output that embodies creativity and identity, such as songs, music videos, art pieces and performances.

Afrobeats: A modern Nigerian music genre that blends traditional rhythms with global pop, hip hop and electronic house.

Amapiano ecosystem: An interconnected network of artists, products, entrepreneurs, managers, DJs, promoters, digital platforms, distributors and audiences that sustain the commercial activities of Amapiano

Foreign audiences: Listeners and consumers from countries outside of South Africa who engage with Amapiano through streaming, social media, live events and cultural collaborations.

Playlist: A curated digital collection of songs organised around community and is accessed on digital platforms such as Spotify and Apple Music.

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Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

1.1 Introduction

This Chapter introduces the main research questions and explains why the researcher is studying the internationalisation of Amapiano's contribution to South Africa's soft power and foreign market access. The Chapter illustrates the research problem within the context of global cultural industries and international business. It presents the reader with both the business and academic perspectives of the study, highlighting how Amapiano's global success offers a new model for emerging-market participation in the international creative and cultural economy.

The Chapter identifies the research problems under study and potential gaps in the literature on soft power, cultural exports, digital platforms, and the internationalisation of African cultural industries. The Chapter provides the reader with a conceptual foundation for understanding how cultural products, such as Amapiano in the South African context, function as both an instrument that can propel national identity and a commercial pathway for cross-border activity.

The Chapter presents a descriptive background of South Africa's socio-economic and cultural landscape, with a particular focus on the cultural economy's role in shaping foreign audiences and creating market access for South African cultural businesses. The study seeks to understand, from the perception of key stakeholders in the Amapiano ecosystem, how the internationalisation of Amapiano has impacted South Africa's global image and what foreign market opportunities it has presented in its global rise.

1.2 Background to research

A country's image is shaped by multiple factors, including economic, cultural, social, and political factors (Dineri et al., 2024b). In an increasingly globalised world, the image of a nation shapes how domestic and foreign opportunities are perceived. Traditionally, a country's global image and reputation were primarily influenced by economic performance, governance, geopolitical alliances, and political stability.

These elements are classified as "hard powers" and have been used as tools to shape a country's credibility on the global stage; however, in the 21st century, the rise of digital tools such as social media and content streaming platforms such as Spotify and TikTok has resulted in the

democratisation of these communication tools. This democratisation has led to the rapid rise of cultural industries, which have expanded the channels and strategies countries can use to shape and influence their image (Ahmed, 2025).

In modern times, particularly with the advent and rise of social media, cultural and *pop-culture* industries such as fashion, television, film, and music have emerged as soft drivers and power tools capable of shaping and influencing a country's image on a global stage (Wang et al., 2020).

Soft Power refers to the ability to influence others through non-coercive means, relying on attraction and persuasion rather than domination and coercion. Pop culture, particularly in music, film, and fashion, has emerged as a driver and a powerful tool capable of shaping and influencing a country's image on the global stage, aiming to stimulate access to foreign markets (Li et al., 2022).

The argument that Li et al. (2022) makes is that although cultural industry trade seemingly plays a minor part international trade as a percentage in comparison to other key sectors such as manufacturing, commodities and logistics, etc, these sectors deserves attention as they can leverage as a strategic tool in increasing foreign market business activities while also attacking financial flows for their home countries.

Cultural industries as a strategic asset

Countries like the United States of America have been at the forefront of strategically positioning their country for decades by using cultural products as a strategic mechanism to shape their image and ultimately influence their access to foreign markets.

Manheim (2023) argues that the United States of America employs strategic communication tools to manage its international image effectively. He further describes this approach, used by the United States, as an applied transnational science of human behaviour that moves beyond traditional diplomacy by systematically leveraging cultural exports such as media content, film, and music to influence foreign audiences. Through these communication strategies, the United States of America essentially achieves two things: first, it promotes its cultural values worldwide, and second, it creates favourable conditions for its political and economic interests in foreign markets (Manheim, 2023).

In recent decades, countries like South Korea and Nigeria have begun to understand that leveraging their cultural values can create a more favourable business environment for their businesses in foreign markets. South Korea's "Hallyu Wave", which encompasses K-pop, K-drama, and other cultural exports, has influenced global perceptions and demand for South Korean Products. Research indicates that the "Hallyu" wave has influenced the nation's inbound tourism demand, particularly from countries such as the United States of America, China, Japan, and Hong Kong. The number of tourists visiting South Korea has increased from 300,000 in 1998 to 11.8 million in 2014 when the Korean Wave began (Bae et al., 2017).

In Nigeria, the film industry, popularly known as Nollywood, has emerged as a significant cultural export, contributing to the nation's soft power and economic diversification. Although the industry is regularly characterised by low-cost production and poorly edited media content, Nollywood's output, viewership, and global presence have risen from an average of 872 films in 2000 to 2500 in 2014 (Olusola Ogunnubi & Idowu, 2022).

South Africa's current global position

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has projected flat economic growth of 1.5% in 2025, primarily due to trade tensions, internal production weaknesses, and rising tensions between South Africa and the United States of America (Dybczak & Velculescu, 2025). The IMF has taken the position that, for South Africa to redirect its economic trajectory, it would need to implement aggressive fiscal consolidation strategies (Team, 2025). South Africa's economy also faces the risk of a further decline or stagnation because of the potential non-renewal of the Africa Growth and Opportunity (AGOA) Act from the United States Congress, which poses a threat to South Africa's export-driven sectors, particularly in manufacturing and agriculture (Agoa.info, 2023)

The Trump administration has adopted its aggressive stance towards South Africa over alleged human rights violations, which include claims of a "genocide" targeting the white Afrikaner tribe in South Africa (Patel, 2025). Domestic and international experts, as well as South African courts, have discredited these allegations. Analysts suggest that this aggressive position is a result of South Africa taking Israel to the International Criminal Court (ICC), accusing it of genocide in Gaza (Becker, 2024). The current United States administration has also publicly considered imposing sanctions against South Africa in response to some of our foreign policy positions, which has

created some uncertainty for bilateral relations between the two nations (The White House, 2025).

The global rise of Amapiano and internationalisation

South Africa's rich cultural base is shaped by its diverse ethnic groups and complex colonial and Apartheid history. Post-Apartheid South Africa, as a democratic nation, has made critical efforts to rebrand itself as a diverse nation. South Africa's commitment to cultural diplomacy has also contributed to its global standing and enhanced its soft power as the nation of Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu, who contributed to South Africa's global narrative (Bornman, 2006).

In the past, institutions such as the British Council have acknowledged South Africa's efforts to use culture as a means of international engagement, to build strong global relations for the benefit of South Africa, South Africans, and institutions in foreign nations (Council, 2015). South Africa's cultural exports, such as entertainers, music, and art, have gained international acclaim over the years, solidifying South Africa as a cultural powerhouse that has created domestic opportunities, such as tourism, and has also opened avenues for economic growth in foreign nations.

Amid substantial economic and political challenges South Africa has faced over the past couple of years, South Africa's cultural exports, particularly in the music industry, have experienced significant global growth, suggesting they could become an essential soft power. The emergence of a township-born music genre, Amapiano, originating from the streets of South Africa, has attracted international attention from multiple countries, citizens, and key cultural institutions (Eaby-Lomas, 2025).

Since the beginning of its global commercial growth in 2019, Amapiano has emerged as the fastest-growing music genre in Africa, with streams generated outside of Sub-Saharan Africa (e.g, the United Kingdom, Australia, Germany and the United States of America) growing by 563% on Spotify between 2019 and 2021 (Spotify, 2022). The global rise of the genre in foreign markets presents opportunities for South Africa to enhance its perception in those markets while enabling players in the sector to expand their business activities abroad.

South African Singers like Tyla have demonstrated the commercial potential of the genre by selling millions of streams and winning a Grammy for their global hit song, *Water*. Tyla became

the first South Africa solo musician to reach the United States of America's Billboard chart in over 50 years. At a broader genre level, Amapiano has seen a 5668% increase in global music streams between 2018 and 2023, reaching over a billion streams (Mag, 2025).

The Internationalisation and global success of Amapiano have also contributed to South Africa's nation branding efforts. According to Tourism South Africa, the growth of the genre and its international showcase contribute to "reshaping" international perceptions of South Africa, moving beyond 'traditional narratives' centred on political and economic issues. The global growth of the genre positions South Africa as a premier cultural destination (Tourism, 2024). This enhancement that the genre creates for South Africa needs to be captured and further supported to create more economic benefits for South Africa.

1.3 Business Relevance of the Study

This section outlines the business relevance of this study within the context of international business. The South African creative and cultural industry has emerged as one with the potential to significantly contribute to employment and entrepreneurship levels in South Africa, owing to its multiplier effect (DTIC, 2022).

The internationalisation of Amapiano represents an opportune moment for South Africa cultural entrepreneurs to leverage this foreign market access, which contributes to shaping South Africa's global image. Amapiano, as a South African cultural product, has opened new international markets for South Africa players in the Amapiano ecosystem, including record label owners, talent management agencies, and cultural entrepreneurs.

According to Eaby-Lomas (2025), Amafest is an Amapiano festival held in London. It is currently the largest Amapiano festival outside of South Africa, demonstrating the commercial potential of Amapiano for South African cultural entrepreneurs and creatives. Eaby-Lomas (2025) argues that the presence and participation of thousands of non-South Africa reflects the genre's global crossover and potential for South African entrepreneurs and creatives. This South African phenomenon has created opportunities for South African entrepreneurs and creatives to penetrate global cultural value chains in live entertainment, touring, brand partnerships, and digital streaming.

The internationalisation of Amapiano also demonstrates how digital platforms, such as streaming services like Spotify and Social Media platforms like TikTok, have enabled these cultural entrepreneurs to reach a global audience without the need for trade intermediaries. The digital-led internationalisation of the genre challenges the assumption that only emerging-market traditional sectors can internationalise and that internationalising your business requires a physical presence or capital-intensive infrastructure. For South African entrepreneurs, this presents an opportunity to build bridges and access global consumers. At a macroeconomic level, the success of the genre can contribute to South Africa's national brand equity and potentially attract investment in spillover sectors such as fashion and tourism (Mikić & Zbucnea, 2021). The success of Amapiano artists performing and touring in cities such as London, Berlin, Paris, New York, Tokyo, Bangkok, Dubai, Dar es Salaam and Lagos extends South Africa's symbolic reach and positions South Africa as a creative and modern economy that can contribute to the global cultural economy.

The study aims to gain further perspective from key stakeholders on the success of Amapiano and to create foreign-market access opportunities that would otherwise be challenging to penetrate due to the barriers of building multi-market businesses. The study aims to understand the mechanism behind this global rise, how foreign markets have proven fruitful for industry players, and, from the perspective of players behind this internationalisation, how foreign audiences perceive South Africa.

1.4 Academic relevance of the research

The study aims to use Amapiano and South Africa as a default construct to examine Soft Power Theory beyond traditional geopolitical frameworks. The study aims to investigate how the emergence of Amapiano as a cultural industry operates both as Soft Power for South Africa and as a means of facilitating foreign market access for South African cultural businesses. The study aims to use Amapiano as a construct in the context of South Africa to contribute to interdisciplinary discussion in international business and the global cultural economy.

Cultural industries in modern times struggle to demonstrate the intersection between the symbolic value cultural products create and the economic value attached to their commercialisation (Hesmondhalgh, 2019).

The study aims to demonstrate how the internationalisation and global rise of Amapiano is integrated by illustrating how its symbolic value and identity translate into economic and commercial outcomes. The study seeks to demonstrate how this integration is facilitated by digital intermediaries, such as TikTok, and by industry intermediaries, such as global festival promoters.

International business researchers have discussed digital platforms in terms of algorithmic amplification and participatory publics but have lacked academic literature on the mechanisms and constraints by which these platforms enable or hinder internationalisation (Cunningham & Craig, 2019). The study aims to further explore and identify mechanisms and constraints in the internationalisation of Amapiano and its global rise, extending to the concept of platformisation as discussed by Nieborg et al. (2020) in the international business literature.

Modern-age globalisation, with interconnected value chains, makes nations reliant on one another. This means that a country's success is becoming increasingly dependent upon its global image (Han et al., 2024). This study seeks to extend and contribute to Soft Power theory by Nye (1990) and extend it to the literature by Rabêlo Neto et al. (2021), who discussed Soft Power in the context of International Business Scholars, specifically in the areas of cultural industries.

Rabêlo Neto et al. (2021) argue that scholars from emerging markets need to study further how Soft Power is facilitated through cultural products beyond the areas they have investigated, namely Brazil and Portugal, which serve as the primary constructs. Rabêlo Neto et al. (2021) call on international business scholars to further study how cultural products can be used as a source of Soft Power between emerging markets and other emerging and non-emerging markets, rather than the over-studied Soft Power dynamics between developing and emerging markets.

The study also aims to investigate how Amapiano has penetrated global cultural value chains by leveraging digital infrastructure, such as music streaming and social media. This also contributes to Wang et al. (2020) call for more international business scholars to investigate how cultural industries from emerging markets contribute to global flows of influence.

The researcher studying the exportation of Amapiano into global markets such as the United Kingdom, Germany, and the United States of America introduces South Africa's perspective as an emerging market, which contributes to existing but limited work by researchers such as Ogunnubi & Idowu (2022) and Eaby-Lomas (2025). The researcher aims to bring a broader international business perspective to the existing but minimal African cultural industry literature.

The global business perspective the researcher seeks to explore in the study is how South African cultural entrepreneurs and creatives have gained access to foreign markets in a unique, non-capital-intensive manner.

Theoretical Underpinning: Core Theories

This study will be grounded on the Soft Power Theory as its Theoretical Framework. It will be complemented by applying the Cultural Industries framework as a lens to explore Amapiano's economic dynamics.

Table 1: Theoretical Underpinning

Main anchoring theory framework in the research:	1. Soft Power is a country's ability to influence other countries' perspectives, views, and foreign policies towards it without using force, but through attraction and persuasion. It relies on a nation's values, policies, and cultural norms that resonate with its citizens (Nye, 1990).
Supporting framework	2. Cultural Industries framework, was first conceptualised by scholars like Hirsch in (1972) but was further tailored and synthesised by modern international business scholar such Wang et al. (2020), and he explains cultural industries as “the system of organisations involved in the creation, production and distribution of goods and services that carry symbolic, aesthetic or artistic value” (Wang et al., 2020, p. 665).

Source: Owners Source

1.5 Research Problem

Despite Amapiano's global rise and internationalisation, there are limited academic perspectives on the genre. The proposed research problem is driven by a desire to understand how Amapiano, as a cultural product, functions as a form of Soft Power for South Africa and what foreign-market business opportunities have been realised for South African cultural entrepreneurs and creatives

as a result of this global rise. Eaby-Lomas (2025) highlights that Amapiano's success can also be attributed to how it leverages digital platforms creatively and innovatively (Eaby-Lomas, 2025). The study also seeks to investigate the mechanisms that cultural entrepreneurs and creatives leverage to gain global market access.

1.6 Research Questions

The main research question is generated from the existing literature on soft power, cultural industries, and digital platforms. The research questions were also crafted in line with international business scholars' calls to examine further how internationalisation from emerging markets operates beyond state-driven diplomacy. The research questions highlight three under-researched areas in the context of Amapiano.

- How can cultural industries enhance soft power beyond the scope and frameworks of government-led entities?
- How can soft power create and enhance real global business opportunities and market access?
- How and to what extent do digital platforms help cultural industries in reaching international audiences?

Based on these reach areas, this study aims to explore how Amapiano contributes to shaping South Africa's image and to creating foreign-market access for South African cultural entrepreneurs and creatives.

1. **Main Research Question:** Research Question 1: How does Amapiano function as a form of Soft Power for South Africa and create a pathway for foreign market access for cultural business?
2. Research Question 2: How has the rise of Amapiano as a cultural industry contributed to South Africa's visibility and economic value in the global cultural economy?
3. Research Question 3: What roles have digital platforms (e.g., streaming, social media) played in the internationalisation of Amapiano and in its being a form of Soft Power?

1.7 Research Aims

The main aims of this research are to critically investigate and explore the role of Amapiano as a form of soft power for South Africa, and to understand how its rise onto the global stage has

contributed to South Africa's cultural visibility and the symbolic economic value it presents as a cultural asset. The study seeks to unpack how this genre, which originated in a South African township, has become a cultural export that has influenced global perceptions of South Africa and facilitated foreign market access for cultural industries.

1.8 Research contributions

Academic Contribution

The research aims to expand on and provide a South African perspective on Nye's (1990) concept of Soft Power. The study demonstrates that South Africa's Soft Power does not have to be created by the government but can also be generated by cultural industries and entrepreneurs. The study aims to demonstrate how Amapiano, as a cultural product, can contribute to South Africa's global image and create a pathway for foreign market access for cultural entrepreneurs and creatives.

The researcher aims to integrate soft power theory and international business by demonstrating how Amapiano, as a cultural tool, can be leveraged to gain foreign market access. The study will demonstrate how Amapiano, as a cultural product, creates opportunities for South African businesses to engage in cross-border activities such as festivals, brand partnerships and global music streams.

Most soft power literature in the context of cultural industries focuses on the perspectives of countries such as the United States, South Korea, and Japan (Rabêlo Neto et al., 2021). The study provides a South African, African, and emerging-market perspective by showing how Amapiano, as a South African genre, can influence the global cultural industry and enhance global business networks.

Digital platforms have played a key role in democratising access to emerging markets (Yang et al., 2025). The study aims to extend the literature by demonstrating how digital platforms such as TikTok and Spotify have enabled cultural entrepreneurs and creatives in the Amapiano sector to reach global audiences and contribute to South Africa's international image through significant capital investments or state support.

Business practitioners' perspective

The study provides insights into how Amapiano cultural entrepreneurs and creatives can leverage digital tools and cultural collaborations to expand and reach new global markets and audiences.

The study provides policymakers and governments, such as DTIC and Brand South Africa, with insights into how they can better support cultural industries as part of national branding and cultural export strategies.

The study also provides future international business scholars with a foundation for further research on the relationships among cultural industries, cross-border business activities, and the influence of global audiences in the context of South Africa, Africa, and emerging markets. The study provides future scholars with a reference for comparing Amapiano with other global genres that have been studied as sources of soft power, such as K-pop and Afrobeats.

1.9 Scope of study

The study focuses on the Amapiano ecosystem as a cultural industry embedded in South Africa yet connected to a network of foreign market stakeholders through touring, festivals, collaborations, and digital platforms.

This dynamic nature of a cultural ecosystem involves multiple stakeholders such as entrepreneurs, artists, producers, managers, promoters, labels, distributors, curators, and platform partners who interact and collaborate to turn the symbolic value created by the creatives (e.g music, videos and identity) into economic and commercial value (e.g streams, festivals and brand partnerships). Wang et al. (2020) argue that digital platforms and intermediaries facilitate these interactions within this ecosystem. The paper examines how Amapiano travels across borders and contributes to South Africa's soft power and foreign market access.

The study positions South Africa's Amapiano industry as a cultural ecosystem deeply rooted in South African music networks, with linkages to global music networks. Locally, these roots are in places like Soweto and Pretoria, where the genre was founded in township streets.

Globally, it connects with foreign audiences and stakeholders in markets such as the United Kingdom, Europe, Australia, and the United States of America (Eaby-Lomas, 2025). These linkages demonstrate that the study had to broaden its scope to foreign markets because digital

and cultural networks cross borders and enable entrepreneurs and creatives to engage in business activities there (Hesmondhalgh, 2019).

The study focuses on Amapiano internationalisation, and the global rise between 2019 and October 2025 has influenced South Africa's soft power and created foreign-market access for cultural entrepreneurs and creatives. The study does not measure the full economic impact of the cultural sector or compare Amapiano with other global cultural industries, such as K-pop and Afrobeats. Instead, it aims to explore and understand its global rise (Spotify, 2022).

An interpretivist qualitative approach was used to collect the insights and experiences from key stakeholders during the interviews (Leitch et al., 2010). Data was gathered from individuals in the Amapiano ecosystem who are behind the internationalisation and global rise of Amapiano. The study approach was suitable, as the researcher sought to uncover deeper meanings, experiences, and perceptions of how Amapiano has contributed to South Africa's global image and foreign market opportunities.

1.10 Structure of the report

The rest of the report will be organised into six chapters, excluding Chapter One, which covers the background of the study and its academic and business relevance. Chapter two will examine the relevant scholarly literature on the topic and the research questions. Chapter three will present the research questions and the hypothesis that will guide the study.

Chapter four will explain the research design, data collection process and analysis methods. The Chapter will discuss the broader methodological process the study leveraged. Chapter five will present the research findings from the interviews and participants. Chapter six discusses the findings in relation to the literature. Chapter seven concludes the study by highlighting key insights, limitations, and recommendations derived from the insights extracted in the paper.

This Chapter concludes the background and introduction to the research problem. The next Chapter presents the literature review.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction to literature

This chapter reviews the theoretical foundation for investigating how Amapiano facilitates soft power, contributes to South Africa’s cultural visibility in the global cultural community and creates a pathway for foreign market access. Amapiano, as a South African music genre, exists in the cultural economy. The cultural economy exists to produce and distribute cultural content, such as music, film, and art, for economic purposes. Amapiano is relevant to the literature, as it aims to assess how cultural industries function as a soft power and how those dynamics translate into foreign markets. The literature seeks to highlight case studies and use cases that demonstrate this dynamic.

The review is guided by three constructs, (1) soft power, referring to the influence a nation can exert to foreign countries (Nye, 1990) (2) Amapiano as a cultural product, which sits in the broader framework of Cultural Industries (Hirsch, 1972; Wang et al., 2020) and (3) digital platforms, which have functioned as a facilitator for the internationalisation of the genre through global distribution and audience engagement (Yang et al., 2025).

Together, these three constructs provide a lens for framing and analysing the research questions and hypotheses. Specifically, the Soft Power Theory and Cultural Industries framework, augmented by insights from global digital platforms, will serve as the analytical lens through which the research questions and hypotheses are examined.

Table 2: Structure of the literature review

2.2 Soft Power Theory:	2.3 Cultural Industries	2.4 Digital Platforms and Internationalisation of Culture
2.2.1 Theoretical Foundation	2.3.1 Cultural as a Global Force	2.4.1 Digital Platforms in Modern Globalisation
2.2.2 Evolution of soft power in the modern society: Digital and Globalised Era	2.3.2 Emerging Markets and Global Cultural Value Chains	2.4.2 Digital platforms as a cultural amplifier

2.2.3 Cultural Industry as a Soft Power - The role of Culture in Diplomacy	2.3.3 Culture as Value, Not Commodity	2.4.3 Audience Co-Creation and Participation in the Global Cultural Industry
2.2.4 Nation Branding and Image Projection Through Music and Case Studies	-	2.4.4 Digital acceleration facilitated by the COVID-19 pandemic
2.2.5 Governmental-Led and Non-Governmental Cultural Diplomacy (Grassroots Model)	-	-

Source: Author's Own

2.2 Soft Power Theory:

2.2.1 Theoretical Foundation

Political scientist Joseph Nye initially developed the concept of Soft Power, which is broadly described as a country’s ability to influence other countries’ perspectives, views, and foreign policies without using force through attraction and persuasion. Nye (2004) described soft power as the ability to get others to want the outcomes you desire. He specifically states:

“When one country gets other countries to want what it wants, it might be called cooperative or soft power in contrast with the hard or command power of ordering others to do what it wants”

Nye (2004) further described soft power in comparison to hard power as the ability to draw in and persuade others who may or do share similar interests, goals, and values with you. In contrast, hard power coerces others into achieving the desired outcome.

More modern scholars describe soft power as the ability to gain and exert power and influence through cultural and political channels, positioning a country in ways that are appealing to the world (Bell, 2016). Willson (2008), similar to Nye (2004), defines soft power as the capacity to persuade others to adopt or agree with one’s ideas without coercion. These core concepts laid

the foundation for the notion that power can be “soft” when it shapes perspectives through attraction, distinct from the “hard” power of force or coercion.

The literature aligns with the hypothesis the researcher identified. The researcher argues that Amapiano has transmitted the ideas and cultures embedded in South Africa’s DNA to the rest of the world. These ideas and cultures serve as a vehicle for shaping foreign audiences’ perceptions of South Africa.

In this paper, the focus will be on one of the three primary sources of soft power, as defined by Nye (2004): a country’s political views, its foreign policy, and its culture. The area this paper will focus on is a nation’s culture and how it is exported through entertainment, the arts, and language, fostering admiration among audiences abroad.

2.2.2 Evolution of soft power in the modern society: Digital and Globalised Era

The spread of the internet from the 1990s accelerated globalisation, ushering in what we now call the digital era. (Akbaş, 2018) Argued that there was a shift in cultural content before and after the 1990s that saw, post the 1990s, an emergence of more media promotional lead content because of rising regional demands, particularly in the case of Japan. The widespread spread of the internet and digital platforms has accelerated that phenomenon.

In today’s modern society, we have witnessed digital platforms democratising international influence beyond the scope of states. At the same time, NGOs, Private Individuals, and Companies project key narratives globally at scale at minimal cost (Percara, 2025).

Percara (2025) argues that digital platforms such as TikTok and YouTube have evolved from being ordinary entertainment enablers to strategic tools of political influence and transnational activism, enabling ordinary individuals, organisations, and institutions to shape the global perception of foreign audiences. Online communities have emerged from these platforms, where audiences across markets and countries can share common causes and play a central role in producing soft power, at times independent of state agendas.

Globalisation has accelerated cultural interconnectivity, making soft power more critical and strategic for a country’s agenda. In the 21st century, trends cross borders and markets almost instantaneously at times. In the case of K-pop, music videos, TV shows, and other cultural products accumulate billions of views for multiple markets, carrying the values and cultures of South Korea (Oh & Jang, 2022).

Borna Zguric et al. (2023) argue that this interconnectedness has created ripe competition in the area of soft power, where every country and its cultural stakeholders are constantly broadcasting culture and viewpoints. Borna Zguric et al. (2023) further argue that soft power in modern society has evolved from being known as soft power to a 2.0 version of Digital Soft Diplomacy.

Borna Zguric et al. (2023) offer a different perspective on globalisation, facilitated by digitalisation, which has introduced new challenges and nuances to the concept of soft power. He argues that it presents aspects of fragmentation where once the internet was a borderless area with nothing to limit boundaries, but today we are faced with what he refers to as “digital balkanization”, where countries are erecting and building digital infrastructure, such as firewalls and algorithms to drive a country’s cultural appeal.

Percara (2025) argues that although athagrammatic governance has become a central mechanism for digital repression globally, digital platforms are key enablers and accelerators of soft power. Digital platforms offer an opportunity for multiple voices to reach the world and collectively shape a nation's perceptions.

2.2.3 Cultural Industry as a Soft Power - The role of Culture in Diplomacy

Culture has always been at the centre and a critical pillar of soft power theory (Nye, 2004), identified as a nation's primary source of soft power. In the domains of internationalisation and international relations, the concept of soft power gave rise to cultural diplomacy, using cultural exchange to foster mutual understanding and advance national interests. Cultural diplomacy is a form of soft power in action; it is anchored on the belief that the exchange of ideas, values, beliefs and cultures can strengthen relationships and promote national interests. (Zanella et al., 2024).

Dubinsky (2019) argues that, in modern society, cultural diplomacy can serve as public diplomacy, enhancing a country's image by leveraging its cultural products. He further claims that a nation's cultural products, such as film, music, and sport, can attract global audiences to the country in question.

Historically, during the Cold War, cultural diplomacy emerged as a key tool of the United States of America. The United States Department of State’s Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs funded global jazz tours as a mechanism to export “American Culture” and the ideals of freedom (Davenport, 2017). Davenport (2017) notes that these tours were strategically created and

supported to counter Soviet ideological influence worldwide. Jazz, as a musical and cultural product, was leveraged to present authentic expressions of American culture.

In modern society, national culture is increasingly viewed as a strategic global resource actively seeking to generate symbolic and economic value. Cultural diplomacy functions more broadly as a tool for a country, including the domains of foreign direct investment, enhancing exports, stimulating tourism, and strengthening the country-of-origin effect (Clarke, 2020).

Zanella et al. (2024) further argue that cultural exchanges build relational capital among global audiences, creators, and entrepreneurs, strengthening people-to-people connections by fostering a mutually understanding and trusting dynamic that lays the groundwork for potentially reducing transaction costs and creating a smoother pathway for business in foreign markets.

In the context of international business, modern international business scholars have emphasised that national culture influences a firm's behaviour in foreign markets and that driven effort countries and their governments can shape the global legitimacy of such firms (Szkudlarek et al., 2020).

2.2.4 Nation Branding and Image Projection Through Music and Case Studies

The internationalisation of culture has become a strategic enabler and mechanism for nations in developing their soft power. Nations strategically leverage their traditional and cultural assets from the creative industries, such as music, television, and the arts, to enhance their country's image and position their nations as key destinations for foreign audiences (Navarro, 2015).

Modern scholars refer to this dynamic as the cultural turn in contemporary international business literature, whereby we are witnessing the power of intangible assets such as cultural products, cultural narratives, and artistic production gaining symbolic capital that can compete with, and at times overtake, traditional forms of state influence (Clarke, 2020). Brown (2020) further argues that shifts from traditional to modern forms of influence reflect shifting power dynamics, particularly in the post-Cold War era, where cultural crafting and building have become central to a nation's global strategy.

Modern scholars build the argument and demonstrate that music, as a cultural form, has the elements and potential to function as both a country or place branding tool and a diplomatic tool that can capture and export a nation's identity into the imagination of global audiences. Through

music, nations can narrate their identities, cultures, and narratives, and simultaneously cultivate commercial markets for their cultural exports (Linardaki & Aslanides, 2020).

United Kingdom

Ang et al. (2018) suggest that, as evidence of music being a driver in Nation branding strategies, researchers have identified pop and Western classical music as the two music genres that have built a case study for the hypothesis. In the case of the United Kingdom (UK), Kim and Lee (2018) argue that the rise of pop music in the nation was identified by government leaders such as Tony Blair to adopt marketing strategies supported by government agencies such as the Department of Culture, Media and Sport in the United Kingdom to position Britain as a nation that is youthful and modern.

South Korea

In the case study of South Korean music and popular culture, including film, television, and the arts, the government recognised that the industry could play a pivotal role in shaping how the nation is perceived in foreign markets, especially amid the rise of globalisation.

South Korea recognised that investing in industries such as the cultural sector would be key to projecting an image in foreign markets, particularly in tough economic times when resources would be constrained (Navarro, 2016). Kim and Lee (2018) argue that South Korea serves as a successful case study of national branding because the government serves as the leading actor in leveraging the cultural industry to gain soft power, as evidenced by the creation of institutions such as the Presidential Council on National Branding (PCNB).

The return on investment from these strategic decisions made by South Korea's government proved fruitful. "K-pop" or "Hallyu" products contributed \$1.8 billion (R32.4 billion) to South Korea's GDP in 2019 (Fahrisa, 2022). South Korea has become the global leader in the realm of "culture", so much so that over the years, 26 Korean words have been included in the Oxford dictionary, demonstrating the level of influence and soft power the nation has (Fahrisa, 2022).

The Korean wave, also known as the "Hallyu," encompasses a wide range of cultural products, including music, fashion, television, and cosmetics. A KOFICE (Korean Foundation for International Cultural Exchange) research report found that for every \$100 (R1800) of content exported from South Korea, \$ 248 (R4500) of consumer products are exported (Lee, 2021).

The global success of the South Korean film Parasite further underscores the international force of cultural industries and the benefits they bring to host countries. Lee (2021) draws a correlation and causation in the global success of Korean products such as noodles because of the worldwide success of Parasite, and Lee (2021) further argues that this has contributed to South Korea's soft power because it highlights the country's national identity.

Kim and Park (2020) build on Lee's (2021) case that K-pop, as a music genre, has also proven its ability to shape consumer preferences across South Korea's borders in other ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) markets and to influence perceptions of Korean-made products.

Kim and Reijnders (2017) extend their analysis of these choices in cultural strategies across other countries in the Asian region. They argue that Asian cultural industries have given foreign audiences a glimpse of *Asian realities beyond how they were portrayed in Hollywood, and this change in perception has been one of the factors driving* the rise in Korean Tourism.

Brazil

In a similar vein to South Korea, as a soft power and social diplomacy tool that demonstrates how cultural products can function as symbolic capital and a competitive advantage, we see similar dynamics in the case of Brazil. Rabêlo Neto et al. (2021) argue that in the study of internationalisation, consumer infatuation for a country's culture (such as music, film, etc) significantly increases their preference for that country's cultural product. This creates a pathway for the internationalisation of cultural goods. In their study, they found that Portuguese consumers' positive reception of Brazilian music led to a greater presence of Brazilian cultural products in Portugal.

Nigeria

Nigeria's Nollywood, derived from the term "Hollywood", has become the world's second-largest film industry by output and a dominant cultural force across Africa and the diaspora. As Tella (2019) highlights, Nollywood has significantly played a role in altering the globally dominant narrative of Nigeria, shifting perceptions away from stereotypical images towards more objective cultural understandings.

From as far back as 2012, Miller (2012) described Nollywood's business model as an "alternative global network" in film and music production and distribution that bypasses traditional Western gatekeepers. The success of Nollywood in creating alternative business models aligns with the argument made by International Business scholars Wang et al. (2020) that cultural products from emerging markets derive their strength not from dominance that capital creates, but from projecting local voices to foreign audiences.

South Africa

Although the academic literature on South Africa's Amapiano is limited, the genre is beginning to demonstrate aspects of cultural diplomacy, particularly because of its township and local origins, and scholars are beginning to write about it. Eaby-Lomas (2025) argues that Amapiano's global rise and internationalisation demonstrate growing cultural exchanges and transnational collaboration in the broader music and cultural industry. He argues that the growth of Amapiano has been facilitated by a sophisticated use of digital platforms such as TikTok to circulate the genre and its cultural products into key global markets, including the United States, the United Kingdom, and Nigeria.

The circulation of Amapiano cultural products simultaneously expands South Africa's cultural footprint in the global cultural market, led by pioneers, musicians, and entrepreneurs in the Amapiano space. Modern scholars refer to this approach as the *bottom-up mode of cultural internationalisation or diplomacy*, which essentially refers to the process where a nation's cultural values and narratives emerge in foreign markets but not through the primary interventions of the state through government programs and initiative but rather through the efforts of industry players, individuals, cultural entrepreneurs and diasporic networks (Kolokytha, 2022).

2.2.5 Governmental-Led and Non-Governmental Cultural Diplomacy (Grassroots Model)

An emerging debate amongst scholars in the field of cultural diplomacy concerns which form of diplomacy is most effective: government-led initiatives or stakeholder-led initiatives.

Clarke (2020) argues that some countries in modern-day society only rely on state coordination and initiatives on promoting and exporting their country's cultural products, while other countries strive to achieve cultural impact through independent contributors such as artists, independent

organisations and diasporic communities acting outside the mandate and controls of government departments and initiatives. Scholars are beginning to present an alternative and hybrid view that enables both groups (government and non-government actors) to execute on a hybrid model, which highlights the evolving nature of diplomacy (Kolokytha, 2022).

Government-Led Model

The government-led model in diplomacy is typically coordinated by resource mobilisation and strategic calculations. In the case of the Korean government, an entity and purpose-driven organisation founded by the South Korean government called the Presidential Council on Nation Branding (PCNB). The entity was created to drive a top-down cultural diplomacy strategy in which the state embedded culture within broader trade, tourism, and global image-building agendas (Kim & Lee, 2018).

The government of South Korea strategically leverages the Korean Wave as an implicit cultural policy. The government, through state agencies, private and public corporations, and the media, used the Korean Wave as a form of soft power (Lee & Zhang, 2021). Lee and Zhang (2021) further argue that, through state-owned entities such as the Financial Services Commission and Samsung, they build cultural products embedded with narratives that intertwine the state development ethos, encouraging young Koreans, both locally and domestically, to follow their dreams and become more entrepreneurial.

Non-Government Led (Grassroots Model)

The bottom-up model, also known as the grassroots model of cultural diplomacy, operates through community-driven, artist-led networks. Citizens can be more effective at enhancing a city's and a country's national image. He argues that people-to-people engagement enhances a nation's image, and in his study, the majority of participants who attended a festival in Greece were drawn to this dynamic (Kolokytha, 2022).

Similarly, in the case of Nigeria and its cultural products, it has also functioned as a bottom-up diplomacy process and approach. Olusola Ogunnubi and Idowu (2022) argue that Nigeria's cultural exports, such as Afrobeats, have grown in popularity among foreign audiences and that the export of cultural products has shifted global perceptions of Nigeria and positioned the country as an entrepreneurial and creative nation.

TV programs and shows such as Big Brother Nigeria have become a significant vehicle for Nigeria's soft power, which is broadcast and viewed in millions across 49 countries across the world, promoting local music, language, lifestyle, cultures and narratives, reshaping the perception of Nigeria globally (Akinola & Ogunnubi, 2020).

2.3 Cultural Industries

2.3.1 Cultural as a Global Force

In modern society, cultural industries have been characterised as a network of organisations, locally and globally, that engage in the creation, production and distribution of cultural goods and services with artistic, symbolic and cultural value, and have become a global economic, political and social force (Hesmondhalgh, 2019).

In today's modern society the global cultural economy, the cultural and creative industry which includes the music industry functions as a significant driver for social and economic growth and value, these industries are major for job creation globally but they also drive export revenues in related and non-related industries while shaping the identity, value and public narrative of the nation (Ortiz-Ospino et al., 2025).

Cultural industries have emerged as a global force across economic, social, and political spheres (Kalfas et al., 2024). Pyykkönen and De Beukelaer (2025) argue that as the world evolves, cultural industries will play a progressive role in global economics, contributing to eradicating poverty and creating complete and meaningful employment in the future.

International Business scholars, such as Wang et al. (2020), have identified areas of cross-pollination between cultural industries and international business. He argues that cultural sectors have played a role in attracting foreign direct investment and, more critically, in improving a country's foreign trade position and competitiveness.

Scholars further this argument by stating that cultural industries can create spillover effects on other sectors and industries because they have the potential to spark creativity and innovation across multiple sectors. Cultural industries have also been recognised for driving innovation in innovation-driven sectors (Mikić & Zbuceha, 2021).

According to Liu (2021), the sector's innovative characteristics were driven by two phenomena: (1) the rise in digitisation and (2) policy shifts that have accelerated the evolution of the cultural

industry by creating and embracing open innovation ecosystems in which collaboration among stakeholders and users drives exchange and intellectual property generation.

2.3.2 Emerging Markets and Global Cultural Value Chains

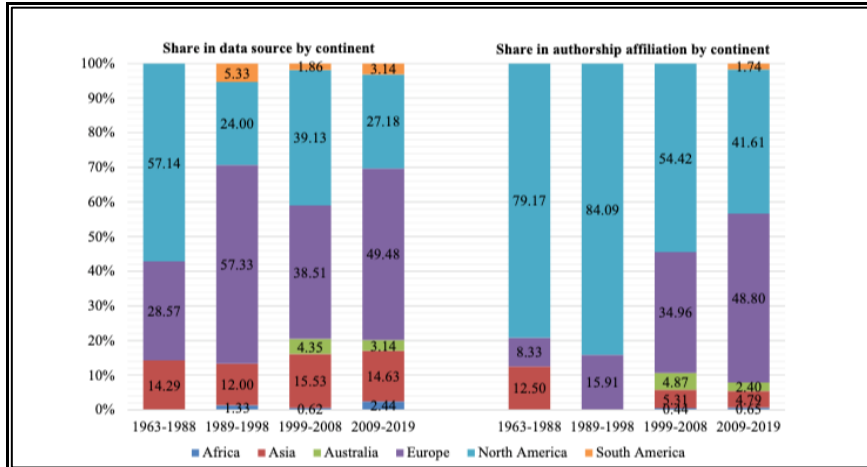
The global cultural economy was highly dominated and concentrated in content, cultural products, and influence from a few markets, particularly Hollywood and the United States of America, and a few European markets. These cultural products have been critical to these nations' dominance across markets, and the consequences of this dynamic have also included the marginalisation of local voices (Liang, 2021).

Wang et al. (2020) argue that the current structure of the global cultural industries has shifted significantly over the past two decades, with inflows and outflows of business activity, and that the United States of America has declined in dominance.

This shift has been primarily driven by digitalisation, new productions, and diversification of consumer demand, and has seen several emerging economies enter the global cultural economy value chain as creators and entrepreneurs, contributing to the production and export of cultural goods (Wang et al., 2020).

Although significant shifts have been made in the participation perspectives of emerging markets in the global cultural value chain, scholars present another perspective and argument that one of the challenges that prohibits emerging market cultural entrepreneurs from penetrating global value chains is the system classifications, such as genres and industry conventions, that result from these embedded and reproduced inequalities. These classifications create a layer that determines who is eligible to participate in different creative domains and further inequalities (Alacovska & O'Brien, 2021).

Figure 1: Share of cultural products and authorship by continents



Source: Stephanie Lu Wang et al.,

Nigeria’s Nollywood is a key African case study. Nollywood and Afrobeats modernisation is driven by professionalisation and gentrification, as she terms it the “new Nollywood”; this evolution of Nigeria’s cultural industry is guided by intentionality from cultural entrepreneurs pursuing global legitimacy (Ezepue, 2020).

Oguamanam (2020) makes this argument by describing Nigeria’s cultural industry as a model of technological opportunism and high levels of collaboration. Oguamanam (2020) further argues that the industry’s hybrid model of informal and formal structures, coupled with low barriers to entry, has created an inclusive network in which cultural entrepreneurs can participate at scale and produce cultural products that serve local markets and diaspora communities.

2.3.3 Culture as Value, Not Commodity

The topic of culture as a value, not just a commodity, dates back to 2005, when the argument was to create a protective and promotional lens for the global cultural industry. International institutions such as UNESCO, which operates under the rules of the World Trade Organisation, recognised that protecting this industry could create an environment that accelerates global trade (Pyykkönen & De Beukelaer, 2025).

In the case of the United States of America, scholars argue that the United States recognises that subsidies in the cultural industry are not for profit-making but for strategic purposes. The government understands that the mass and at-scale creation of cultural products and cultural

entrepreneurs does provide economic gains. Still, the primary purpose of the subsidies is to implement cultural, national identity and social objectives (Messerlin & Parc, 2020).

Yin and Phillips (2020) argue that cultural products have non-quantifiable/ambiguous value, and that their actual worth is often uncertain and context dependent. In a post-industrialised world, where there are vast numbers of competing products and differentiation becomes more difficult to identify, more industries are bound to jump the picket line and turn to cultural industries as those boundaries blur.

As these boundaries become more blurred, international business scholars argue that this may be a positive sign for emerging markets. Countries have shifted over the years and are beginning to adopt a mindset that challenges the ideas and normative assumptions of Hollywood-dominated cultural flows, or what we can refer to as Hollywood Cultural Hegemony (Wang et al., 2020).

The concept of emerging markets building capabilities to participate in global value chains in the international cultural industry dates back to 1999. Semati and Sotirin (1999) emphasise that cultural products from emerging markets derive their strength not from dominance in capital but from their ability to bring light to local voices and narratives, thereby creating cultural authenticity and resonating with diverse global audiences.

2.4 Digital Platforms and Internationalisation of Culture

2.4.1 Digital Platforms in Modern Globalisation

Modern-day digital platforms, such as social media platforms like TikTok and Meta, and digital streaming platforms such as Spotify and YouTube, have fundamentally reshaped how culture is distributed, discovered, and experienced across borders in multiple markets (Yang et al., 2025).

Digital platforms such as YouTube, Spotify, and TikTok have enabled cultural products to bypass traditional intermediaries and channels, enabling direct access to global markets (Nasta, 2025). Wang et al. (2020) argue that digital platforms have significantly contributed to the internationalisation of cultural industries and that, in particular, internet-enabled technologies have created a borderless environment for design, production, and distribution.

Research on the global emergence of platformisation of cultural production and its products shows that these digital platforms have functioned as mechanisms to circulate these products, but also as sources of logistics for creativity, participation, and visibility (Nieborg et al., 2020).

Prey et al. (2020) argue that digital platforms such as TikTok, Instagram and YouTube facilitated the movement of these logical products by integrating algorithmic recommendation systems and processes that amplify the creation of communities on digital platforms by propelling niche cultural products such as music genres and user-generated content, which create an environment for cultural entrepreneurs and creative participations.

In emerging markets, digital platforms have become a tool for cultural entrepreneurs overcoming poor infrastructure and institutional barriers (Samara & Terzian, 2020). Gawer and Bonina (2024) argue that although the dominance of popular digital platforms could create monopolies, they enable digital ecosystems for creators, allowing cultural entrepreneurs to participate economically in global markets.

In the context of Nigeria and Nollywood, we see the global participation of cultural entrepreneurs in the film industry. Kasim Adoke and Ishaq Saidu (2022) further argue that these filmmakers leverage platforms like YouTube for distribution and that, even with the presence of global digital platforms such as Netflix, because of YouTube's decentralised nature, Nigerian filmmakers still dominate on that platform.

Oloruntoba (2025) further argues that the creation of these digital communities that are geared and supported by these algorithmic recommendations creates an environment that collapses geographic boundaries, that aggressively enables transnational cultural flows and the rise of modern non-Western driven or controlled genres such as Amapiano, which circulates in the local South African market and while penetrating global markets.

Nieborg et al. (2020) presents an argument and a different perspective that although these digital platforms created an environment that lowers barriers for cultural entrepreneurs and creatives to develop multiple market international business, he also argues that these platforms being driven by algorithms creates a centralised intermediary in the global cultural industry and this may have the potential of becoming a barrier in itself and gatekeeper.

These evident cultural shifts, particularly in emerging markets and economies, illustrate how digital shifts have become strategic intermediaries, the most dominant intermediaries that mediate and facilitate global cultural exchange, ultimately shaping audience engagement and the economic structure of the international cultural industry (Yang et al., 2025).

Although digital platforms play a significant role in cultural internationalisation, Mihailova (2023) argues that the opportunities they offer do not guarantee international success and that businesses that rely on them need to adapt their business models to local conditions to achieve full internationalisation.

2.4.2 Digital platforms as a cultural amplifier

In modern times, digital platforms have become a strategic tool, serving as a powerful cultural amplifier for cultural industry entrepreneurs in their pursuit of global access for their cultural products. These digital platforms change the dynamics of access, whereas in the past, achieving global access for cultural entrepreneurs often required partnerships with major corporations such as production houses, film studios, broadcasters, and record labels. Now, cultural entrepreneurs and these individuals can upload cultural products and make them accessible worldwide instantly (Morris, 2020).

The democratisation of the cultural industry and the dilution of the power held by major multinational corporations in the sector have benefits and consequences. The democratisation has created an environment that enables greater diversity of cultural voices and products to gain global access and participate on world stages because audiences can now engage with and consume cultural products such as music instantaneously by clicking a button, rather than being constrained by traditional media (Prey et al., 2020).

The other phenomena that digital streaming platforms have created in the global cultural industry include the speed and acceleration of digital products, which have accelerated the internationalisation of these cultural products and providers' immediate feedback loops and insights (Vlassis, 2021). Jürgens and Stark (2022) argue that this broad internationalisation and the acceleration of cultural products highlight that the internet and the configuration of internet-

based technologies, such as cloud-based technologies, have created borderless markets and distribution, creating multi-market entrepreneurs and creatives.

2.4.3 Audience Co-Creation and Participation in the Global Cultural Industry

One of the drivers and key elements of the internationalisation of cultural products and its global influence is the participation of audiences and fans in the cultural industry. Nieborg et al. (2020) argue that this participatory culture, where audiences co-create content linked to cultural products and circulate it on their own social media platforms, involves a networked co-creation where users interact with creators and each other through the recreation of the cultural product, thereby shaping the meaning and reach of the cultural product.

Zulli and Zulli (2020) highlight the significance of TikTok as a digital platform in the internationalisation of cultural products and the rise of participatory culture. He argues that audiences on TikTok organise their participation through imitation and memetic replication, which scholars have termed “imitations publics,” creating an environment for collaborative, high-volume video routines around the cultural product.

Research from scholars demonstrates that TikTok, as a digital platform, is an enabler for creating a co-creation culture and participatory culture for cultural products because the platform's memetic design encourages audiences on TikTok to participate in imitation and replication as a default practice that embeds co-creation into everyday practice and lifestyle (Pilipets, 2023).

Papacharissi (2015) introduced the concept of “affective publics,” which has enabled groups on digital platforms to congregate and create cultural communities to share perspectives, emotions, and narratives. These public forms are translated through acts of expression and the circulation of identity. King-O’Riain (2020) argues that this participatory culture has created a mechanism for cultural diplomacy. This angle is illustrated by South Korea and K-pop and Culture, where strategic encouragement of social media platforms such as YouTube and TikTok creates coordinated global campaigns that reinforce both national and cultural identity.

2.4.4 Digital acceleration facilitated by the COVID-19 pandemic

Scholars argue that one unintended consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic was the aggressive digitisation of cultural products and their consumption worldwide. Scholars argue that this acceleration was driven by the global lockdown and social distancing measures that led to the closure of concerts, festivals, cinemas, and nightclubs, and that this dynamic forced cultural entrepreneurs and creators to migrate and leverage digital platforms (Jeannotte, 2021).

Belitski et al. (2021) argue that the accelerated digitalisation of global cultural products created an environment that forced cultural entrepreneurs and creatives to adapt to the material conditions of the time, and failure to adapt and quickly move their activities to digital platforms would have compromised their existence.

Belitski et al. (2021) further argue that internet technologies, including digital platforms, forced many of these cultural entrepreneurs and creatives to reorganise their interactions and engagement with their audiences through virtual platforms facilitated by players such as TikTok and Meta.

The transformation and shift of cultural products to being dominated by digital platforms was not just a shift but went beyond temporary adaptation; the shift required a profound and systemic structural shift in how cultural products are produced, distributed globally and monetised, and this dynamic ultimately reconfigured the structure and value chains of the industry (Agostino et al., 2020).

Comunian and England (2020) argue that the COVID-19 pandemic forced the global cultural industry to condense and accelerate its digitalisation from years into a few months, propelling it into a technology-led, technology-driven industry. Banks and O'Connor (2021) describe this phenomenon as a vital emergency that fundamentally restructured how the sector functions, and timely responsiveness was both keen and detrimental to its sustainability.

2.5 Conclusion

The literature review critically examined the academic literature on the three interconnected theoretical constructs that underpin the research argument of this paper. (1) Soft Power, (2)

Global Cultural Industry and (3) Digital Platforms. The literature review across these three areas and constructs reveals both convergence and contestation arguments from the different scholars.

The literature review aimed to establish a rigorous theoretical and academic lens for understanding Amapiano's global spread as a complex interplay among cultural productions, digital platform-facilitated circulation, and informal soft-power projection. The literature review aims to support the academic argument that Amapiano is not an entertainment outlet for South Africans but is now a symbol of South Africa's cultural identity that has created global business opportunities for South African cultural entrepreneurs while shaping how the country is seen abroad.

More broadly, the literature review demonstrates that, in the modern digital era, soft power is no longer confined to state-led cultural diplomacy. Instead, the literature review indicates that cultural entrepreneurs and creatives are shaping this global influence primarily by leveraging digital tools. The literature review demonstrates the academic argument that cultural entrepreneurs and creatives have successfully projected and exported cultural projects without formal policy support. Demonstrating a bottom-up cultural diplomacy approach and democratisation of critical levers in the cultural industry.

The literature review confirms the central proposition of this research paper: Amapiano represents a new model and mechanism of cultural internationalisation for South Africa, shaped by informal soft power, global cultural value chains, and digital platforms as facilitators.

Research Limitations

1. The literature review is primarily focused on music, with occasional reference to the film and fashion industry. It does not explore in detail other soft power areas and mechanisms, such as cuisine, sport, or tourism, which can also be used as domains for studying soft power.
2. Although the study draws on case studies from Africa, Asia, and Latin America, much of the A-grade academic literature remains with Western scholars. A lack of South African-specific scholars also adds depth to the academic arguments.
3. The existing literature on Amapiano is minimal, particularly in A-grade academic journals. The comprehensive analysis draws on other cultural industries and emerging markets with conditions similar to those of Amapiano and South Africa.

4. The theory of digital platform dynamics is still developing in the context of international business. While emerging insights have been used, the nature of digitisation means that concepts may evolve quickly.

This chapter concludes the literature review. The upcoming chapter discusses the research questions

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH QUESTION

Chapter Three presents the research questions that were introduced in Chapter One in more detail. The purpose of Chapter Three is to align the practical/business problem given in Chapter One with the study's theoretical grounding. The question discussed in the literature emerged directly from the literature review in Chapter Two. The literature discussed in Chapter Two considered three key constructs: soft power, as mentioned by Nye (1990); cultural industries, as discussed by Wang et al. (2020); and digital platforms (e.g., TikTok and Spotify) as a foundation for this study, as discussed by Yang et al. (2025).

Across these constructs, the literature offers international business scholars an opportunity to investigate how cultural industries, particularly those from emerging markets, turn the symbolic values of cultural products into economic and commercial international opportunities. Literature by scholars such as Hesmondhalgh (2019) and Ortiz-Ospino et al. (2025) demonstrates the value and potential of cultural industries to create global value at a macro level. Still, it does not offer practical steps that entrepreneurs and creatives in the space can follow to achieve market access.

Eaby-Lomas (2025) positions Amapiano as a cultural product accelerated by digital platforms. Its global acceleration presents an opportunity for the researcher to investigate the missing practical steps and insights in its internationalisation as an emerging-market cultural industry, which have not been highlighted by scholars such as Hesmondhalgh (2019) and Ortiz-Ospino (2025).

Nieborg et al. (2020) have demonstrated that digital platforms such as Spotify and TikTok have reduced barriers to entry into the global cultural economy and its value. Wang et al., (2020) argue that platform systems, such as digital platforms, have the potential to spread content more rapidly. As a result, this dynamic is gradually diminishing the hegemony of the Western world in the global cultural economy.

Together, these scholarly insights present an opportunity for South Africa International Business scholars to examine how Amapiano, as a case, demonstrates how a grassroots South African genre has leveraged digital platforms to transform attention to South Africa and its culture into tangible global opportunities and commercial value.

Main Research Question - RQ1: How does Amapiano function as a form of Soft Power for South Africa and create a pathway for foreign market access for cultural business?

This research question is built on the foundation literature of Nye (1990) on the concept of Soft Power. The literature by Percara (2025) broadens the realm of soft power mechanisms beyond traditional political and state-driven initiatives in modern times. The question seeks to understand Amapiano's mechanisms that do the work, which results in it being or not being a soft power for South Africa, such as cultural identity and representation and global collaborations, and how that shapes South Africa's image and creates opportunities abroad.

H1: *Amapiano contributes positively to South Africa's soft power by shaping international perceptions of the country and has created foreign opportunities for the South African cultural industry.*

RQ2 How has the rise of Amapiano as a cultural industry contributed to South Africa's visibility and economic value in the global cultural economy?

Wang et al. (2020) argue that emerging markets have begun to contribute significantly more to the global cultural economy because barriers to entry have decreased. The research question investigates the industrialisation of the Amapiano and the results that it has achieved in relation to the global cultural economy.

H2: *The global rise of Amapiano has contributed to South Africa's global cultural visibility and contributes to the economic value of the global cultural economy.*

RQ3. What role have digital platforms (e.g., streaming, social media) played in the internationalisation of Amapiano, and how have they contributed to it being a form of Soft Power?

H3 *Digital platforms (e.g Spotify, TikTok, Youtube) have significantly facilitated the internationalisation of Amapiano on to global stages.*

The literature by Yang et al. (2025) and Nasta (2025) discusses how digital platforms such as Spotify and TikTok have fundamentally reshaped the exchange of cultural products globally and created an alternative for cultural entrepreneurs and creatives to access global markets. Percara (2025) literature discusses that digital platforms have become a driving force of Soft Power in modern times. The research question focuses on the platform mechanisms, such as playlisting, algorithmic recommendation, and audience co-creation, that have commercially exported Amapiano while spreading the narratives of South Africa to foreign audiences.

This Chapter concludes the research questions. The next Chapter presents the methodology.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the research methodology and the study design the researcher followed. The study and approach discussed were relevant to addressing the formulated research questions presented in Chapter 3.

An exploratory study was deemed relevant, as it aimed to generate answers to the research questions from participants using “How” and “What” questions. The exploratory research aims to uncover insights from participants that could identify specific gaps in the existing literature, with the intention of uncovering unknown theoretical explanations (Doz, 2011; Leitch et al., 2010).

4.2 Choice of Methodology and Design

4.2.1 Choice of research approach

The study plans to employ a qualitative research methodology grounded in an interpretivist paradigm (Leitch et al., 2010). This choice in philosophy and lens to conduct the research from looks at the role players being the participants in their natural environment and anchors on their experiences (Saunders et al., 2019).

The research approach and design were found to be ideal for the study because the research aims to understand how Amapiano, as an exported cultural product, functions as a form of soft power for the South African cultural industry and has created foreign market access for South African Amapiano entrepreneurs and creatives. A qualitative design was relevant to the study because it yields contextualised insights from key stakeholders whose work ensures that Amapiano is commercialised, marketed, and distributed internationally.

Given that the argument of the study is based on the perceptions and lived experiences of the participants, an interpretivist method is best suited for the study because the study is not measuring objective facts such as tourism growth and economic growth, but rather the lived experiences of the participants in the internationalisation and global rise of Amapiano.

4.2.2 Research Assumptions

The research assumptions this study will be anchored in are the Ontological Assumptions and the Epistemological Assumptions. Ontological looks at theories of the nature of reality, and Epistemological looks at theories of the nature of knowledge (Poulis & Poulis, 2018). These research assumptions are particularly relevant because we are conducting the research within the interpretivist paradigm, in which knowledge and insights are collected through participants' interactions and experiences.

1. Ontologically, the study assumes that reality is socially constructed. Ideas like soft power, ownership, and market access do not have a single truth, and their meaning depends on the context of the participants whose data and insights are collected.
2. The study assumes that knowledge and insights are co-created through conversations and shared interpretations between the participant and the researcher.

4.2.3 Research Strategy

The researcher employed a narrative research strategy within a qualitative, interpretivist paradigm. A narrative strategy approach focuses on participants' stories and lived experiences to understand how and why they interpret these events in the context described by Wolgemuth and Agosto (2019).

The research strategy is relevant because the researcher aimed to extract insight from participants in their own words, explaining key events and turning points in the internationalisation and global rise of Amapiano. The researcher aimed to extract insights around key moments such as first global playlist placements, breakthrough collaborations, participation in global award ceremonies, global tours, brand deals and global festivals.

The researcher ran twelve semi-structured interviews with participants who play different but key roles in the Amapiano ecosystem and have been at the forefront of the internationalisation and global rise of Amapiano:

1. Talent management & independent labels
2. Brand & marketing agencies
3. Digital Music Distribution Companies

The researcher's strategy prioritises depth over breadth of data and insights. It presents what participants meant in their responses and provides readers with valuable insights into how Amapiano drives soft power and market access, without generalising across all participants' responses.

4.3 Population

A population is a group of people, objects, events, or similar interests that share various characteristics of interest to the researcher (Saunders et al., 2019). This study is situated in the South African Amapiano ecosystem, which has international touchpoints. The population leveraged in the study comprises key stakeholders involved in the Amapiano ecosystem across talent management, commercialisation, cultural entrepreneurship, distributors, and brand partners etc.

4.4 Target Population

The researchers identified the target population to study and extract data and insights from the compromises of South Africa-based cultural practitioners within the Amapiano ecosystem who are actively driving and pursuing the internationalisation and global rise of Amapiano. This target group includes both entrepreneurs (founders and owners) and formal professionals (employees/intrapreneurs) who work in South African-based or South African-founded firms to open and expand foreign market opportunities.

The target population includes three participant groups: people who run and work for Talent management & independent record labels, Brand & marketing agency professionals, and Digital Music Distribution Companies. These practitioners occupy intermediary roles and functions in the Amapiano ecosystem. These practitioners, in coordination, translated local momentum into foreign-market access through global playlisting, targeted social media campaigns, international collaborations, brand deals, and licensing opportunities. The target population includes both entrepreneurs and employees because the researchers recognise that the ecosystems' internationalisation outcomes are produced by founders who have built cultural businesses that have scaled cultural products into foreign markets, and by professionals who have worked in

South African cultural organisations and have scaled Amapiano cultural products into foreign markets.

Table 3: Classification of participant groups

Participants Groups	Role in the ecosystem <i>(entrepreneurs and employees)</i>	Type of internationalisation activities (from South Africa
Talent management & independent record labels	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Individuals involved in signing, promoting and developing Amapiano artists 2. Individuals who operate as booking agents and promoters who facilitate local/international performances for Amapiano acts 3. Individuals who run and work for Management Agencies that oversee Amapiano artists' brands, booking and positioning 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Music release planning and cross-border collaborations 2. Bookings and tour international routes and contracting 3. Structuring international PR and media outreach 4. Pitching to digital distributors for global playlisting and editorial opportunities
Brand & marketing agencies	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Individuals who strategise and build global marketing campaigns aim to position Amapiano in foreign markets. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. International Campaigns 2. Brand and sponsorship deal in foreign markets 3. Measure cross-border analytics
Digital music distribution companies	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Digital music distributors who facilitate global distribution through platforms such as Spotify 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Delivering releases to DSPs (Spotify, Apple) 2. Editorial and playlist pitching 3. Data-driven releases, geo-targeting and audience monitoring

Source: Owners Own

Africa and conduct internationalisation activities and initiatives from South Africa. Diaspora or foreign-based professionals were not included in the target sample.

Inclusion criteria:

- South African-based practitioners in the Amapiano ecosystem.
- Practitioners active in the Talent management & independent record labels, Brand & marketing agency professionals and Digital distribution companies.
- Entrepreneurs who have built businesses and employees who work for organisations that operate in the Amapiano Ecosystem.
- Individuals who provided signed consent

4.5 Unit of Analysis

According to Yurdusev (1993), a unit of analysis is the primary element or aspect that a researcher focuses on in a study, from which data will be collected. The unit of analysis that will be studied and analysed is individuals' practices and narratives *within the Amapiano music ecosystem/industry that have worked with artists and music that has experienced a level of international and cross-border exposure, which includes individuals from Talent management & independent record labels, Brand & marketing agency professionals and Digital Music Distribution Companies.*

The level of analysis used in narration-based studies refers to the scale at which relationships are examined and is distinct from the unit of analysis (Yurdusev, 1993). The level of analysis the research examines is the organisational level, focusing on South African organisations and teams within the Amapiano ecosystem, exploring how they organise and coordinate internationalisation activities.

4.6 Sampling

4.6.1 Sampling techniques and size

The researcher's sampling strategy was built around answering the central question of how Amapiano operates as South African soft power and how it enables foreign-market access,

which was addressed by going directly to practitioners within the Amapiano ecosystem whose jobs are to make those outcomes happen. Consistent with the interpretivist design, the researcher used purposive and snowball sampling to obtain the insights needed to answer the research question.

Purposive sampling is the deliberate selection of collecting data from a sample of individuals who have direct experience and knowledge relevant to the topic (Campbell et al., 2020). The target population identified by the research sits in the Amapiano ecosystem and includes both entrepreneurs who run their own businesses and professionals who work for organisations within the ecosystem, the participants operating in three roles and organisation segments that, together, enable cross-border outcomes: talent management and independent record labels; brand and marketing agencies; and digital music distribution companies.

Access to these stakeholders was facilitated by the researcher's proximity, which was appropriate for the role-specific, expertise-dependent populations (Palinkas et al., 2015). To extend the reach beyond the immediate network and the researcher's vicinity, the researcher expands the study's sample pool. Snowball sampling is a technique that involves asking initial participants to refer to others with similar characteristics who fit the profile of the target population (Goodman, 1961).

Process for building the sample

The sample was built by intentionally constructing role type and organisation depth to achieve triangulation of perspectives (Denzin, 2017). The researcher first sought the perspectives and voices of talent management and independent labels, as these practitioners, in their daily operations, manage artists' careers, plan releases, and co-create and implement internationalisation strategies with creatives and other key stakeholders. These practitioners' vantage point is that they are closest to cultural products (songs, videos, collaborations, etc.).

Second, the researcher included brand and marketing agency professionals because, in their daily operations, they are responsible for positioning and packaging artists and their cultural products within communications strategies that capture the attention of global audiences and ultimately translate that into commercial activity. This would be achieved by strategically building export-facing campaigns, from PR to targeted media that speak to foreign audiences.

Third, the researcher includes digital music distribution companies because these practitioners are responsible for delivering releases (songs, videos) to digital platforms such as TikTok and YouTube for playlist pitching and editorial placements. These participants are essential because they leverage data and analytics across cultural products, campaign tactics, and international audiences on these platforms.

The researcher intentionally included the perspectives of these three segments because, together, they enable cross-checking of narratives and perspectives on the same processes and activities in the internationalisation of Amapiano. These three segments interact daily within the broader Amapiano ecosystem. The researcher also wants to draw on their experiences because they are the most involved and vital segments in the internationalisation of Amapiano and its cultural products from the perspective of local players in the broader ecosystem.

Eligible Criteria Sampling Process

The researcher was sought out for participants who are primarily based in South Africa and are actively working within the Amapiano genre and can provide evidence for direct cross-border activity, including pitching for editorials/playlisting, designing export campaigns, facilitating international bookings and festivals and coordinating international collaborations and partnerships.

The researcher was also intentional about firsthand experience and exposure because it does shape judgment about foreign audiences and key global stakeholders within the broader Amapiano ecosystem. The researcher applied a further criterion by sampling participants who had recently travelled abroad for business-related Amapiano work.

In each segment, the researcher included both entrepreneurs who have built global-facing South African cultural businesses operating in the Amapiano ecosystem and employees and intrapreneurs who have helped scale South African organisations into foreign markets.

Excluded ecosystem players

1. The researcher did not include audiences and primary consumers of the Amapiano and its cultural products.
2. Traditional and digital media commentators.
3. Policy and government professionals.
4. Foreign-based professionals.

The researcher intentionally kept the participants' segments targeted and South African-based. The researcher sought to extract and paint insights from the perspectives of South African practitioners and South African-based businesses involved in the internationalisation of Amapiano.

Find the Amapiano ecosystem model, Appendix 4

Sample Size

The researcher conducted a total of twelve interviews, which were found to be adequate to gather insights from multiple perspectives. The interviews included six participants from talent management and independent labels, four from brand and marketing agencies, and two from digital distribution companies.

The participation of these twelve participants from different segments of the ecosystem enabled triangulation of research findings. The researcher was able to provide objective insights and conclusions because the 12 participants came from 11 other organisations and were considered adequate for data extraction and the generation of rich findings. According to Boddy (2016), a sample of twelve participants in a single country is considered sufficient for a qualitative study.

Table 4: Interviewed research participants segments

#	Unique identifier	Participants segments	Frequently Visited Foreign Markets
1	TMRL 1	Talent management & independent record labels 1	Netherlands United Kingdom Australia

			Middle East
2	TMRL 2	Talent management & independent record labels 2	United Kingdom France Australia Middle East
3	TMRL 3	Talent management & independent record labels 3	United Kingdom Portugal Middle East
4	TMRL 4	Talent management & independent record labels 4	Middle East Thailand
5	TMRL 5	Talent management & independent record labels 5	United Kingdom Spain Australia Middle East
6	TMRL 6	Talent management & independent record labels 6	United Kingdom Germany Middle East Netherlands
7	BMA 1	Brand & marketing agencies 1	United States of America Middle East
8	BMA 2	Brand & marketing agencies 2	United States of America United Kingdom
9	BMA 3	Brand & marketing agencies 3	Netherlands Portugal
10	BMA 4	Brand & marketing agencies 4	United Kingdom Turkey
11	DDMA 1	Digital music distribution companies 1	Netherlands

			United Kingdom
12	DDMA 2	Digital music distribution companies 2	United States of America

4.7 Research Instrument

The study aims to collect high-quality, rich data and insights from the participants' experiences and knowledge. To achieve this, the study will employ semi-structured interviews as an instrument in the data collection process to capture the participants lived experiences into a transcribed conversation with the researcher (Syed & Nelson, 2015)

During the Semi-Structured Interviews, the researcher structured the interview questions to be open-ended to elicit the participants' experiences and gain in-depth knowledge (Gillham, 2005).

The interview guide was developed iteratively into four steps. The first step the researcher followed was formulating interview questions that directly addressed the three research topic areas as stipulated in the research questions. (1) Amapiano as a soft power, (2) how digital platforms grow their reach, and (3) what foreign market access does it create. Second, the research transformed the interview question to prompt participants to share insights on specific moments in their internationalisation. Third, the researcher includes neutral follow-ups in the interview questions to unpack who did what, when, and why, to extract more insights from their experiences.

Table 5: Research Instrument

Research Questions	Core Literature	Interview Guide
---------------------------	------------------------	------------------------

<p>Primary Question - Research Question 1: How does Amapiano function as a form of Soft Power for South Africa and create a pathway for foreign market access for cultural business</p>	<p>Nye (1990), Dubinsky (2019), Kim and Lee (2018), Rabêlo Neto et al. (2021),</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Please introduce yourself and describe your role in the Amapiano ecosystem and industry. • Which foreign markets have you been exposed to through your work in the Amapiano ecosystem, and why? • In your experience, what aspect of Amapiano and its culture makes it distinctly South African? • Have you observed or analysed how Amapiano has influenced international audiences' perceptions of South Africa? • In what way, if any, do you think Amapiano serves as a soft power for South Africa? From a cultural, economic or social perspective?
<p>Research Question 2: How has the rise of Amapiano as a cultural industry contributed to South Africa's visibility and economic value in the global cultural economy?</p>	<p>(Wang et al., 2020), Tella (2018), Lee (2021)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What economic opportunities (e.g tours, shows, partnerships and licensing, etc) have emerged for your business or clients because of Amapiano's global success? • In your view, how does the genre shape the perceptions of South Africa's talent and cultural landscape?

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In your view, does the genre add symbolic or cultural value to the global cultural economy?
<p>Research Question 3: What roles have digital platforms (e.g., streaming, social media) played in the internationalisation of Amapiano and in its being a form of Soft Power?</p>	<p>Wang et al. (2020), Mihailova (2023), Gawer and Bonina (2024)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which digital platforms have played a key role in influencing the musicians you work with or have worked with in growing audiences internationally? • What type of Amapiano content in your experience typically goes viral, and why do you think it does? • How have platforms like TikTok, YouTube, Spotify, etc, played a role in you reaching foreign markets? • Do digital platforms create any challenges or barriers that you had to overcome or strategise around in internationalising your clients' music?

Source: Author's Own

Full Interview protocol: Appendix 2

4.8 Data Collection Process

The researcher identified the qualitative, narrative approach as a suitable means of extracting the appropriate level of data and insights from the participants. According to Wolgemuth and Agosto (2019), narrative studies seek to extract insights from the lived experiences as narrated during the interviews in the data collection process.

Before data collection, the researchers obtained ethical clearance for the research paper from the Research Ethics Committee at GIBS. They received approval on the 11th of August 2025 via the K2 system, before the researcher began any data collection from the participants. The approval via the K2 system included the interview guide, methodology, and consent form template, all of which were approved on 11 August 2025. These steps ensured that the researcher had complied with all institutional standards before collecting data.

The researcher leveraged the purposive sampling method, which could speak to the experiences of stakeholders in the Amapiano ecosystem and included both entrepreneurs who run their own businesses and professionals who work for organisations within the Amapiano ecosystem. To reach a wider audience, the researcher leveraged the Snowball sampling technique, which involves asking initial participants to refer to others with similar characteristics who fit the profile of the target population (Goodman, 1961).

The researcher collected data and insights through 12 semi-structured interviews guided by a targeted interview guide and research questions. The researcher asked open-ended questions about specific moments involved in the participants' internationalisation experiences. The researcher conducted in-person and virtual interviews that lasted, on average, 40 minutes (35-50 minutes). The researcher used a backup recorder to avoid any technical problems. After each interview, the researcher uploaded the visual and audio files to a secure cloud storage platform, where the data will be kept for a minimum of 10 years, in accordance with GIBS business school standards and guidelines.

In total, the twelve interviews lasted an average of 40 minutes across the three participant segments: Talent management & independent labels, Brand & marketing agencies, and Digital Music Distribution Companies. Data saturation in qualitative studies becomes apparent when the researcher stops generating new codes during data analysis (Boddy, 2016). The researcher began to notice data saturation by interview nine.

The data collection processes the practitioner followed were inductive and exploratory, in which participants shared their stories and experiences (Saunders et al., 2019). The participants shared their stories and experiences, and the researcher identified patterns and differences in how they achieved internationalisation in practice. The researcher intentionally triangulated multiple perspectives during data collection by interviewing participants from the three identified segments, allowing the researcher to compare convergences and diverse perspectives across Talent management & independent labels, Brand & marketing agencies, and Digital Music Distribution Companies.

A narrative analysis is a method used in qualitative studies to interpret participants' experiences in their daily operations, extracting and providing valuable insights into the decision-making processes they follow (Syed & Nelson, 2015). The researcher then employed a narrative approach during interviews with participants in the Amapiano ecosystem to ensure that the data collected directly addressed the study's central question and sub-questions.

4.9 Data preparation process

Upon the completion of each interview, the researcher saved the audio and video recordings and the initial draft of the transcripts on a cloud platform for security purposes. The interviews were all conducted on Microsoft Teams, recorded and transcribed during the dialogue between the researcher and the participants. Transcribing interviews as soon as they are completed improves data quality and helps the researcher gain initial context for the data analysis process (Moon et al., 2016).

The researcher read through the Microsoft Teams-generated transcripts and began applying necessary edits to capture the participants' sentiments. The researcher supplemented this process by listening to the recordings while editing the transcription to correct errors and validate participants' sentiments.

4.10 Data analysis process

The researcher leverages the narrative analysis strategy, which is best used to gain insights around the 'experiences of the participants in their daily operations' (Syed & Nelson, 2015). A

Thematic Analysis of the narratives shared by the participants was also leveraged to identify and interpret patterns and meanings (Braun & Clarke, 2006). For a qualitative narrative study, qualitative scholars recommend an inductive, data-driven approach to identify common themes in narratives based on experiences from multiple participants' perspectives within your sample (Syed & Nelson, 2015).

Post the data processing phase, the researcher uploaded all twelve transcripts into a narrative coding tool called [Atlas.ti](#) to begin the data analysis and coding process. To maintain the golden thread from data to findings, the researcher tagged each first-order code to the relevant research question (RQ1-RQ3) in [Atlas.ti](#) at the point of coding. The researcher also implemented an additional manual process by creating an Excel sheet to track the codes generated in [Atlas.ti](#), merges of codes and the final map of codes, which formulated the core narratives and ultimately the themes discussed in Chapter 5.

Table 6: Data Processing Flow

Data Analysis Process				
Research Questions	1st order Codes	2nd Order Codes	Core Narratives	Emerging Themes

Sources: Author's own

Five-step coding and analysis process

1. The researcher read each of the twelve transcripts, identified all relevant quotations that provided significant insights aligned with the research questions, and assigned first-order codes in [Atlas.ti](#). This process produced an initial 123 codes across the twelve interviews.
2. Reducing the number of duplicated codes that repeat the same insights in thematic analysis providers' research with clarity in the data analysis process (Nowell et al., 2017). The researcher went on to consolidate the codes and create harmonisation by removing duplicates and merging near-synonym codes (e.g., different labels for the

same playlisting action). This step reduced the code list from 123 to 78, improving clarity and reliability.

3. From the 78 codes, the researcher clustered them into second-order codes/code groups based on similar insights, meaning and process. Moon et al. (2016) refer to this as an inductive conceptual list that moves beyond raw labels to more targeted categories that align with broader literature. The RQs were kept consistent within each code group, providing a clear line of sight.
4. After creating the second-order codes, the researcher formulated short cross-case storylines that describe what typically happens within the second-order codes/code groups (e.g., Amapiano could be a more strategic asset for South Africa). These storylines began to formulate core emerging narratives housed by the relevant code groups.
5. Once the core narratives were formulated, the researcher aggregated them into themes and then checked each theme against the transcripts, codes, and code groups in line with the RQs.

Table 7: Codes: First Order, Second order, narratives, themes against RQs – example RQ1

First Order Code	Second Order Code	Core Narrative
Amapiano has created a spotlight on South Africa (6)		
Amapiano is non-strategic yet powerful, Influential (12)		
Unrealised Soft Power Potential (10)		
Amapiano is a soft power for South Africa (7)		

South Africa is becoming more visible globally due to Amapiano (7)	Non-State Cultural Diplomacy	<i>Amapiano could be a more strategic asset for South Africa.</i>
South African – Cultural Representation (9)		
National image – Amapiano shapes it positively (6)		
National Image – Amapiano can do more/better (4)		
Amapiano does not have external support to become soft power (5)		
South African – Cultural Representation (5)	Heritage & unity	<i>South Africa's culture is being received Well, in foreign markets</i>
Language as a cultural market (5)		
<i>Amapiano is attractive to cities with young people (2)</i>	Demography & youth appeal	<i>Amapiano find a place in cities with young people who are not South African.</i>
<i>South Africa does not have a large diaspora (1)</i>		
<i>Authentic/non-curated content goes viral (5)</i>	Authenticity drives attention and shapes perception	<i>Amapiano receives global attention because it authentically reflects South Africa's culture.</i>
<i>Viral Content – Dance (8)</i>		
<i>The foreign audience wants to learn about South Africa and Amapiano (3)</i>		

<i>Pan-Africanisation of the genre (5)</i>	Pan-African networks & diaspora	<i>One of the reasons for Amapiano internationalisation was that it becoming a genre dominated in Africa.</i>
<i>Non-SA – Diaspora Engagement (5)</i>		
<i>Nigeria has a large Diaspora (3)</i>		
<i>Amapiano attracting global A-List Star Collaborations (7)</i>	Global exchanges & partnerships	<i>Global Artists are endorsing Amapiano, which is accelerating the genre's growth in those markets.</i>
<i>Building Bridges between South Africa and other Countries (6)</i>		
<i>Foreign People travelling to South Africa – Tourism (2)</i>	Attraction & travel flow	<i>Foreign audiences are increasingly visiting South Africa because of Amapiano, but this could grow further with government support.</i>
<i>Tourism Opportunities being missed (6)</i>		

Source: Author's Own

Complete Code list: Appendix 3

Consistent with Syed & Nelson (2015), thematic analysis is best leveraged to identify patterns in narrative data. Braun & Clarke (2006) thematic analysis as an iterative process in making meaning of data and narratives. The researchers' data analysis process resulted in a trial that demonstrated the process from raw experiences to themes, supported by [Atlas.ti](#). Codebook record of how 128 codes were refined to 78 codes, moved to being second-order group codes to narratives and ultimately themes that will be discussed in chapter 5.

Table 8: Data analysis steps

Phase	Outcomes	Quantity
1	<i>First order codes</i>	78

2	<i>Second-order codes</i>	24
3	<i>Identified Themes</i>	14

Source: Author's own

4.1.1 Quality and rigour of the study

According to Smith (2016), the quality of qualitative studies is achieved when the researcher displays transparent, carefully documented processes that yield findings that reflect participants' lived experiences. The researcher implemented quality checks and processes across every stage of the project design, data gathering and storage, analysis and reporting.

The researcher ensured that all participants' voices were represented in the assessment and interpretation of their insights (Campbell et al., 2020). The researcher sampled South Africa practitioners directly involved in the exportation of Amapiano; employed multi-perspective triangulation across the three identified segments in the Amapiano ecosystem (talent/independent labels, brand & marketing agencies, digital distribution); and leveraged qualitative semi-structured interviews focused on participants' experiences.

The researcher does not claim statistical generalisability but instead offers a thorough description of the South African Amapiano ecosystem, the roles involved in its export process, and the typical sequence of events in its internationalisation activities. This systematic documented process that the researcher followed enables the readers to apply levels of judgment when assessing the context the researcher presents (Smith, 2016)

The researchers maintained confirmability by following a process that ensured the findings discussed in the paper were not the researchers' preferences but the participants' narratives. The researcher kept evidence of the interview transcripts and recordings and displayed the processes by which the interview raw data were transformed into codes, narratives, and themes. The researcher also ensured that the transcripts were anonymised.

Through a careful sampling process based on qualitative and interpretivist principles, triangulation across the three role segments, a detailed, documented analysis process, RQ-mapping to themes, thorough descriptions, anonymisation, and secure data storage. The study meets the standard trustworthiness criteria for qualitative research.

4.12 Ethical considerations

The researcher complied with the ethical conduct requirements outlined by the MPhil Research Ethics Committee, as per the ethical clearance standards provided to the researcher on 15th of August 2025. Data collection began only after participants provided ethical clearance. A copy of the approved ethical clearance is available in Appendix 1.

According to Wolgemuth and Agosto (2019), narrative studies seek to extract insights from the lived experiences as narrated during the interviews in the data collection process. The researcher ensured the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants by removing their identities, names, and organisations. Participation was also voluntary; participants were requested to sign the consent form, and during the interviews, the researcher ensured to ask participants whether they consented to the recording.

Participants were interviewed in their personal capacity; organisation permission was not required. The researcher leveraged his professional network but also followed clear inclusion criteria for the study. The researchers collected data, in the form of transcriptions and recordings, stored in a password-protected folder and backed up on a secure cloud storage platform. The secured data will be kept for a minimum of 10 years on a safe platform.

4.13 Study limitations

The study's findings reflected the views and experiences of only 12 practitioners across the three identified segments of the Amapiano ecosystem. The views discussed in the study's findings do not reflect those of the broader South African music and Amapiano industry. This aligns with the interpretivist qualitative design, in which the researcher seeks depth over breadth (Leitch et al., 2010).

The data and insights shared by the practitioners depended on what they remembered and how they understood the questions. The researcher asked questions about specific moments and experiences (who/what/when/where) and, when necessary, rephrased the questions in a non-leading way. The study was limited to a few months, so only 12 interviews were conducted during the data-gathering phase. The researcher began to notice saturation between interviews 8 and 10. This supports depth but limits breadth across the participants.

The researcher gathered data from a single data source. Findings are based solely on semi-structured interviews conducted during data collection. Adding surveys and analysis of streaming platforms could have provided stronger triangulation, but that went beyond the scope. The study presents findings that are time-bound to the period from 2019 to October 2025; dynamics that affect the Amapiano ecosystem are consistently evolving.

This Chapter concludes the methodology. The upcoming chapter discusses the research findings.

CHAPTER 5: RESEARCH FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings gathered through a rigorous data collection and analysis process, aimed at systematically formulating responses to the research questions outlined in Chapter 3. The research questions, which are also described as academic problems and potential research areas, are highlighted in Chapter 2.

The chapter presents key findings of the study through an interpretive analysis of the data by the researchers, which was collected through twelve (12) semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders operating within the South African Amapiano ecosystem and who have had exposure to international opportunities through Amapiano as a vehicle.

The chapter aims to explain and demonstrate, from the participants' perspective, how Amapiano functions as soft power for South Africa and how it creates a pathway to foreign-market access for South African cultural businesses. The chapter also aims to explore the genre's contribution to South Africa's visibility and economic value in the global cultural economy and the strategic role that digital platforms have played in enabling its internationalisation and cultural influence.

5.2 Overview of Participants and Context

The three participant groups were created and accurately classified in Atlas.ti, according to key areas of the Amapiano value chain. These individuals and their organisations are responsible for developing, distributing, marketing, and monetising the genre's cultural outputs in these foreign markets. While the study does not seek to compare these groups, the chapter will reference their perspectives to contextualise the sources.

Table 9: Classification of the participant groups, the colour highlights the quotation for each participant group

Participant Groups	Role in the Amapiano ecosystem	Final Number of participants

Talent Management & Independent Record Labels	Talent management, curation, and commercialisation of the cultural products	6
Brand and Marketing Agencies	Commercial partnerships for cultural products	4
Digital Distribution Music Agencies	Distribution of cultural products on digital platforms	2

Source: Author's Own.

5.3 RQ1: How does Amapiano function as a form of Soft Power for South Africa and create a pathway for foreign market access for cultural business?

5.3.1 Introduction

RQ1 starts with a “How” question; thus, it is exploratory in nature. It aims to determine whether the internationalisation of Amapiano has become a soft-power mechanism for South Africa and has created a pathway to foreign-market access for South African cultural businesses. The themes discussed in the findings aim to validate the question being studied. The table below presents the themes to be explored and whether there is evidence supporting each theme from the three participant groups.

Table 10: Discussed Themes from RQ1:

Theme	Insightful	Discussed
Theme 1.1 - Amapiano as South Africa’s Informal Soft power	YES	YES
Theme 1.2 - Cultural Representation and National Identity	YES	YES
Theme 1.3 - Collaboration and Cultural Bridge-Building	YES	YES
Theme 1.4 - Amapiano as a cultural diplomacy tool	NO	NO
Theme 1.5 — Tourism &	NO	NO

cultural diplomacy		
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Source: Author's Own

5.3.2 RQ 1: Theme 1: Amapiano as South Africa's informal soft power enabler

The first theme discussed in RQ 1 is that Amapiano serves as a form of soft power for South Africa; however, it operates in a non-strategic, informal manner. Despite this, South African music entrepreneurs have successfully seized the foreign market access opportunities it presents. Participants across all three groups shared this insight.

Participants' experiences indicate that Amapiano is a national cultural force that has projected South Africa's identity globally without formal state intervention. Participants' experience was that the rise of the genre was not driven by the government or external forces, but rather by the energy and 'authenticity' of artists, cultural business owners, including managers and distributors, and audiences consuming the music.

BMA1 conveyed this experience and sentiment when he explained that Amapiano has elevated the South African music industry from merely being a consumer of foreign cultural products to becoming a contributor to the broader global music landscape.

Amapiano as South Africa's informal soft power enabler
<i>"We've pivoted from the music business to the business of music, and it's created an entrepreneurship lens for creatives." - BMA1 - 1:05</i>
<i>"Amapiano has given us a sense of identity and national pride. I think it has created a spotlight on South Africa." - BMA1 - 6:28</i>

Source: Author's Own

DDMA1 narrated that in her experience, particularly in the events and initiatives that she and her organisation have curated across the multiple markets where they export their cultural products. Even though South Africa may not explicitly have a cultural export strategy formulated by key stakeholders, including the government. The genre has nonetheless carried the nation's image across countries, cities and continents.

DDMA1 further emphasises that global audiences clearly recognise that the genre and its cultural products originated in South Africa. DDMA1 explains that through digital platforms such as TikTok, international listeners actively engage with Amapiano’s cultural content. An unintended yet strategic benefit for South Africa is that this engagement fosters a deeper understanding of the country’s cultures and lifestyle. So much so that foreign audiences intentionally follow developments in the South African Amapiano scene, drawn to the vibrant culture and lifestyle it represents.

Amapiano as South Africa’s informal soft power enabler
<i>“Amapiano is not only experienced in Europe, but also people from around the world understand that Amapiano comes from South Africa. It is not something we have to sell or talk about; they already know who to call and who the artists are. They keep tabs on South African artists.” DDMA1 - 9:27</i>

Source: Author’s Own

Furthermore, BMA2 shared that, based on their experience in the music industry and the broader cultural sector, South Africa has for the first time begun to shift its strategic position within the global cultural landscape. Historically, the country functioned primarily as an importer of cultural products. However, it is now reshaping the narrative by emerging as an exporter of cultural content to Western markets, including the United Kingdom, Europe, and the United States of America.

Amapiano as South Africa’s informal soft power enabler
<i>“It’s changed. Historically, we imported culture from the West; now we’re exporting it. People want to learn from us.” BMA2 - 8:02</i>

BMA3 shared a slightly different light and perspective, although the government, as a strategic stakeholder, has not played a role in accelerating Amapiano as a cultural diplomacy tool. His experience with some of the government-led initiatives he is pursuing is that the government is becoming more intentional about the support it provides to the Amapiano ecosystem and about using the genre as a tool to drive South Africa's narratives, values, and message internationally.

Amapiano as South Africa's informal soft power enabler

"Amapiano has the potential to become a soft power. I am beginning to see the government take it seriously; we are building cultural exchange programmes. At the G20 that is coming to South Africa, Amapiano is playing a big role in making sure the cultural sector is recognised."
BMA3 - 12:59

Source: Author's Own

TMRL1 stated that his clients have become one of the most popular Amapiano duos. This success has positioned his business as a leading talent management agency that has directly benefited from international opportunities, including tour curation, live performances and partnerships with foreign brands. TMRL1 further stated that his agency has pursued business opportunities across multiple continents, including Australia, Europe, the Middle East, Asia, Africa, and North America, and that the scale of these opportunities has turned it into a global talent management firm.

Amapiano as South Africa's informal soft power enabler

"The success of the genre and my clients has led us to cover every continent. I don't think we have covered any continent, but most of our work comes from Europe, with the Netherlands leading and the UK second. We've done Asia, the Middle East, we've gone everywhere."
TMRL1 - 3:45

5.3.3 Conclusion RQ 1: Theme 1: Amapiano as South Africa's informal soft power enabler

The collective experiences of participants across the different groups demonstrate how Amapiano organically became a bottom-up tool for South Africa's soft power, cultivated not through policy

or intentional cultural diplomacy but through the creativity of stakeholders in the Amapiano ecosystem. The participants' experiences also demonstrate that the global phenomenon has yielded significant cultural and economic returns for these stakeholders. Participants like TMRL1 reported that the global success of the genre has directly translated into new business opportunities in touring, performance, and brand partnerships across continents, including Australia, Europe, the Middle East, Asia, Africa, and North America.

Participants like BMA2 narrated that, in their experience, Amapiano had shifted South Africa from being a market for cultural imports to one for cultural exports, particularly with countries in the West. Participants like BMA3 also shared that, in their experience, the government was beginning to recognise the potential of Amapiano as a soft-power tool and was investing in initiatives to propel it further with global audiences.

In conclusion, the collective experience of the participants demonstrated that Amapiano functions as a cultural diplomacy mechanism not through the direction of policymakers but through the efforts of entrepreneurial individuals within the Amapiano ecosystem.

5.3.4 RQ1 Theme 2 - Cultural Representation and National Identity

The second theme discussed in RQ1 is that Amapiano functions as a cultural diplomacy tool. It communicates South Africa's culture and national identity in foreign markets, and the theme shows that foreign audiences can engage with South Africa through Amapiano cultural products.

The experience narrated that, in their knowledge, Amapiano provides a mirror for South Africa's modern identity. Participants narrated that, in their experience, Amapiano mirrors the identity of South Africa, a nation that is vibrant, multilingual, entrepreneurial, creative, and unapologetically local. Participants reported that the use of South Africa's native languages has not been a barrier for foreign audiences but has instead helped export our national identity.

According to TMRL 1, Amapiano's unapologetic use of South Africa's vernacular signals authenticity and South African identity, which he argues is why foreign audiences have gravitated towards it as it resists conformity.

TMRL1 further narrates that the use of native South African languages and South African "township slang" is not a limitation but rather a strength that travels globally through feeling rather

than translation. TMRL3 narrates that understanding the languages is secondary for foreign audiences; they know the languages are from South Africa and consume cultural products without understanding them.

Cultural Representation and National Identity

"I think the one thing that makes Amapiano stand out, which is quite obvious, is the languages in the music? When people listen to it, they know it is proudly South African. A lot of our artists make music in Zulu, Tswana, and Pedi, and that is what makes it authentic." TMRL1 - 18:54

TMRL3 further elaborated that Amapiano communicates South Africa's culture to foreign audiences through South Africa's authentic fashion and lifestyle, and this view into South African culture also attracts foreign audiences and drives cultural diplomacy.

Cultural Representation and National Identity

"I feel like what makes Amapiano distinctively South African is how we dance, but also how we dress and look, it showcases authentic South African culture like Skhotani Culture." TMRL3 - 8:59

Sources: Author's Own

TMRL5 narrates that in his experience, when travelling abroad for business, particularly on tour or for performances with his clients, foreign audiences are usually excited by the fact that they're from South Africa, and they perceive South Africa as a vibrant country because of the narrative Amapiano paints to foreign audiences.

Cultural Representation and National Identity

"South Africa excites these people. It excites them so much. Every time you say, I'm from South Africa, they're like, Oh, really, South Africa, where? Cape Town or Johannesburg, they know us as this vibey state." TMRL5 - 4:52

Sources: Author's Own

TMRL4 narrates that, in her experience, South African identity is synonymous with Amapiano. TMRL4 explains that when travelling abroad, people often associate her with Amapiano as soon as they learn that she is from South Africa.

Cultural Representation and National Identity

“It is in small things like. When you get to border control, in comparison to when I began travelling internationally four or five years ago, to now, they’ll refer to Amapiano in some way to demonstrate that they know about South Africa.” TMRL4 - 4:17

Sources: Author’s Own

5.3.5 Conclusion RQ1 Theme 2 - Cultural Representation and National Identity

The collective experiences of the participants confirmed that Amapiano authenticity is one of the driving forces for its soft power. Participants narrated that through language, lifestyle and culture, the genre provides foreign audiences with a view of what modern South Africa looks and feels like, and this view into South Africa has created business opportunities.

TMRL4 narrates that the South African identity Amapiano translates into business opportunities in touring and performances for his clients and for foreign audiences seeking to engage with the South African identity Amapiano showcases and highlights.

In conclusion, participants indicated that the representation of South Africa through Amapiano is not only symbolic but also economically generative. They emphasised that the export of authentic cultural products expanded foreign markets by enabling international audiences to engage more intimately with South Africa and its cultures.

5.3.6 RQ1 Theme 3 Collaboration & Cultural Bridge - Building

The third theme discussed in RQ1 is the growth of Amapiano, and its soft power was also propelled through collaborations with foreign brands and acts. Participants reported that these

partnerships have increased visibility and built bridges for South African stakeholders in the Amapiano ecosystem to export Amapiano and its cultural products to foreign markets.

TMRL5 narrated that, in his experience, once they began collaborating with strategic promoters for tours and performances, it opened their business to multiple markets. He further explains that these collaborations build credibility among the promoter networks, which in turn opens more opportunities in other markets for his clients and business.

Collaboration & Cultural Bridge - Building

“Promoters engage with my client’s music on digital streaming platforms, and this results in them reaching out to collaborate with us for a tour or performance in their country. Other promoters will see this, and their rationale is that since you’ve been able to perform in this state, you will be able to perform successfully in this other state.” TMRL5 - 6:24

Sources: Author’s Own

BMA1 narrates that, in his experience, Amapiano has become a gateway for corporate collaborations at the global and headquarters office levels, rather than at the local South African office level. BMA1 explains that he witnessed an Amapiano musician sign a global brand partnership deal with a large apparel company after the company’s founder saw his performance at a show in Italy.

Collaboration & Cultural Bridge - Building

“Daliwonga travelled to Italy, if I’m not mistaken, to perform at some show. The founder of Diesel happened to be in the room and was like Wow, I love this kid. I love the music. Where’s he from? They’re like South Africa. South Africa is one of our highest-consuming markets for our diesel brand. Why aren’t we collaborating with this guy? And they’re like. We don’t know whether the South African office has deployed an agency with a different direction. And right

then and there, he signed an endorsement deal with Diesel, and now, he's one of the faces for Diesel.” - BMA1 - 10:08

Sources: Author's Own

DDMA1 states that, in her experience, collaborations with digital streaming platforms such as Spotify have been central to expanding into foreign markets. DDMA1 further recounted that these platforms, through their collaborations with Amapiano artists, whether through playlist or in-app covers, have propelled the genre to foreign audiences.

Collaboration & Cultural Bridge - Building

“It's in the best interest of the DSPs for Amapiano to be a great thing, an international thing, that's why they will push for I'm a piano playlist. They will push to have the biggest artist on their cover.” - DDMA1 - 25:39

TMRL5 further narrates that, in his experience, Amapiano has attracted attention from some of the biggest acts in the global music industry, which has brought significant opportunities for collaboration and positioned Amapiano as a rising global genre. In addition, TMRL5 notes that these collaborations have expanded Amapiano's international reach and accelerated the genre's cultural and commercial diffusion.

Collaboration & Cultural Bridge - Building

“Big A-listers artists want to come back here to South Africa, collaborate with us and get the sound. For example, I’ll make a close reference to Davido and the work my client has done with him. Musa Key has two songs with Davido, one of which was nominated for a Grammy award.” - TMRL5 - 14:09

Source: Author's Own

5.3.7 Conclusion RQ1 Theme 3 - Collaboration & Cultural Bridge - Building

The collective experience of the participants confirms that collaborations are a key component in the internationalisation of Amapiano and its emergence as soft power. Participants reported that, through strategic partnerships, South African artists, managers, and cultural entrepreneurs have turned cultural connections into a global opportunity.

BMA1 narrated his experience of how cross-border collaborations, such as the Daliwonga and Diesel example, can bypass local offices because of Amapiano's strength as a cultural diplomacy tool. TMRL5 narrated how his client and business have received business opportunities by collaborating with global promoters. TMRL5 further states that he has observed the appetite of global A-list artists to collaborate with Amapiano musicians, as they also seek to benefit from the rising phenomenon.

DDMA1 shared that, in their experience, Spotify's role in strategic collaborations has accelerated the growth of Amapiano and its artists among international audiences.

5.4 RQ2: How has the rise of Amapiano as a cultural industry contributed to South Africa's visibility and economic value in the global cultural economy?

5.4.1 Introduction

RQ2 starts with a “How” question; thus, it is exploratory. It aims to understand the extent to which the global rise and internationalisation of Amapiano as a cultural industry has enhanced South Africa's visibility and economic value within the global cultural economy. RQ2 aims to explore the structural and economic results of that influence. The table below presents the themes to be explored and whether there is evidence supporting each theme from the three participant groups.

Table 11: Discussed Themes from RQ2:

Theme	Insightful	Discussed
2.1 – Amapiano as a Cultural-Industry Ecosystem	YES	YES
2.2 – Cultural Commercialisation and Global Market Positioning	YES	YES
2.3 - Structural Barriers and Global Market Entry Challenges	YES	YES
2.4 - Cultural Visibility and Global Legitimacy	NO	NO
2.5 — Global market entry & competition	NO	NO

Source: Author's Own

5.4.2 RQ2 Theme 2.1 – Amapiano as a Cultural-Industry Ecosystem

The first theme in RQ2 is the internationalisation and global rise of Amapiano, driven by the development of its ecosystem to support this growth. Participants reported that this ecosystem is supported by a web of interconnected entrepreneurs, artists, global promoters, global brands, digital streaming platforms, and social media platforms that have driven this global cultural and economic impact.

BMA3 narrated that, in his experience, one of the downfalls and limitations of Amapiano was that the industry lacked support from external stakeholders, such as policymakers, to ensure that entrepreneurs in the ecosystem were building sustainable businesses. BMA3 further stated that the sustainability of the genre globally will require stakeholders, such as the government, to empower entrepreneurs in the space to scale and sustain businesses already trading and competing in foreign markets.

Amapiano as a Cultural-Industry Ecosystem

"We are bridging the gap when it comes to the area of economic value, through the Department of Arts and Culture and International Relations, and now we are building a relationship with the Department of Tourism to involve them. Now we are entering the business side of it with the Department of Small Businesses, building incubators. SARS is now involved in trying to teach entrepreneurs in the space on how to pay their taxes."

- BMA3 - 2:46

Source: Author's own

TMRL5 shared that, in their experience, the more they performed and toured in different countries, the more their network expanded and introduced them to additional promoters within the global touring ecosystem.

Amapiano as a Cultural-Industry Ecosystem

"Promoters engage with my client's music on digital streaming platforms, and this results in them reaching out to collaborate with us for a tour or performance in their country. Other promoters will see this, and their rationale is that since you've been able to perform in this state, you will be able to perform successfully in this other state." TMRL5 - 6:24

DDMA2 narrates that, in his experience, a key component of Amapiano's ecosystem that has propelled the genre's global growth and economic success has been digital platforms. He explained that all digital platforms have played a key role, but TikTok has been the leading platform for Amapiano's ecosystem. DDMA2 describes TikTok in the Amapiano ecosystem as the 'new radio' to demonstrate how impactful the platform has become within the industry.

Amapiano as a Cultural-Industry Ecosystem

"I would give more of the credit to social media platforms as a whole, especially with the introduction of TikTok. We've seen the impact it's had. We call TikTok the new radio. In this day and age, we know that TikTok campaigns definitely translate into streams. Using the correct creators, hashtags, and snippets works. As well as obviously pitching for playlist covers and pitching for our clients to be playlisted abroad onto bigger playlists helps." - DDMA1 - 25:39

5.4.3 Conclusion RQ2 Theme 2.1 – Amapiano as a Cultural-Industry Ecosystem

The collective experience of the participants demonstrates that Amapiano functions as a self-sustaining cultural industry ecosystem that exhibits elements of cultural influences and commercial activity. Participants painted a picture of how the ecosystem requires different elements to continue its global success. Participants also demonstrated that this ecosystem extends beyond South African stakeholders to include partners beyond South African borders.

BMA3 narrated that stakeholders, such as the government in South Africa, are beginning to invest in genres and support artists and cultural entrepreneurs to build infrastructure and systems that enable sustainable multi-market businesses.

TMRL5 narrated that collaborating with multiple foreign promoters expanded their network and increased the number of promoters and partners in their ecosystem. DDMA1 reported that, in their experience, digital platforms, especially TikTok, have been a key partner in enhancing their clients' cultural influence and commercial activity.

5.4.4 RQ2 Theme 2.2 – Cultural Commercialisation and Global Market Positioning

The second theme in RQ2 discusses the cultural commercialisation and global market positioning that the global rise of Amapiano has experienced. Participants reported that Amapiano's rise has transformed the genre from a South African township sound into a commercial and strategic cultural industry, positioning South Africa competitively in the global cultural market, particularly in music.

BMA1 narrated that, in his experience, he has witnessed Amapiano evolve from a local South African genre to one widely recognised globally. BMA1 further narrates that Amapiano acts are already sharing the stage with some of the most prominent artists in the world at major festivals in the United Kingdom and the United States of America.

BMA1 states that these festivals host only the most prominent musicians in the world, and Amapiano's presence at such festivals signifies the genre's commercial viability and growing influence in the global cultural market.

Cultural Commercialisation and Global Market Positioning

“The fact that the Major League DJs have already commanded global attention means that they are collaborating with the likes of Wizkids, performing at some of the major global festivals. So, we can see they've been able to captivate a global audience that follows their music.” - BMA1 - 19:07

DDMA1 narrates that in her experience, the rise of Amapiano has coincided with a shift in global pop-culture brands such as Adidas, *Don Julio*, and Jägermeister, which have increasingly invested in the South African market. DDMA1 noted that these brands collaborate with Amapiano artists through brand placements and global endorsement campaigns, thereby amplifying both the genre's visibility and its commercial viability.

DDMA1 further explained that these brands have also strategically partnered with Amapiano acts and adopted Amapiano cultural nuances, such as slang, in their campaigns, demonstrating their commercial viability as a growing industry.

DDMA1 also argues that, although these brands are accelerating Amapiano's growth and giving it global credibility, artists and acts are being taken advantage of because of the value brands are deriving from them.

Cultural Commercialisation and Global Market Positioning

“Look at how Hennessy is such a big brand now because it's associated with Amapiano, brands like Don Julio, Jägermeister, Clothing brands, Adidas, Nike, it's unbelievable, but it's only working for the brands.” - DDMA1 - 19:07

BMA2 narrated that, in their experience, they have witnessed Amapiano acts participating in major global cultural events, even beyond music-specific events. BMA2 argues that the global rise of Amapiano and its position in the international cultural economy can be seen in some spillover indicators.

BMA2 further explains that the presence of Amapiano at major global fashion events and exhibits demonstrates that the voice of Amapiano, and by extension the voice of the South African cultural industry, is beginning to be demanded and valued in these strategic rooms.

Cultural Commercialisation and Global Market Positioning

"We are the face of Africa now, we've got Scorpion Kings, we've got Tyla. Uncle Waffles, who is rubbing shoulders with your Pharrell Williams and Louis Vuitton Fashion shows, because just like this genre." - BMA1 - 19:07

5.4.5 Conclusion RQ2 Theme 2.2 – Cultural Commercialisation and Global Market Positioning

The collective experience of the participants demonstrated that Amapiano is becoming a cultural commercialisation that is simultaneously enhancing South Africa's global cultural market position. The participants revealed that the ongoing internationalisation of Amapiano, driven by its artists and entrepreneurs, is creating an industry that is becoming commercially viable globally.

BMA1 narrated that the presence of the genre and its acts at global festivals demonstrates Amapiano's commercial positioning. DDMA1 narrated that the genre is attracting many international brand partnerships, but argues that the value for the Amapiano acts is not reciprocal. BMA2 further expresses that the presence of the genre and its acts at global fashion shows and exhibits indicates the global demand and viability of Amapiano.

5.4.6 RQ2 Theme 2.3 - Structural Barriers and Global Market Entry Challenges

The fourth theme in RQ2 discusses the structural barriers and global market entry challenges Amapiano has faced and is facing in its internationalisation quest. Participants reported that, despite Amapiano's international success, the genre's globalisation continues to face systemic barriers, both internally (structural and institutionally based) and externally (competitive and market-based).

BMA3 stated that, in his experience, Amapiano and its internal stakeholders have managed to drive their internationalisation. However, it still lacks a structural policy, systems, and infrastructure to propel it to greater heights. BMA2 narrated that these structural barriers are not only the responsibility of the government but also highlight that digital streaming platforms can also contribute more significantly to removing constraints in the Amapiano ecosystem.

BMA3 argues that digital streaming platforms are not sufficiently invested in enhancing artists' and entrepreneurs' capabilities in the industry, particularly in building multi-market small businesses.

Structural Barriers and Global Market Entry Challenges

“There are not enough artist development programs to make sure young entrepreneurs are trained when it comes to issues like visas. They need to be training these young people on how to operate and how to penetrate the global space.” BMA3 - 10:15

Sources: Author's Own

BMA2 narrated that in her experience, one of the challenges that Amapiano faced and still faces to a certain extent, is that Nigeria's Afrobeats has been a significant and dominating African genre. BMA2 further stated that Afrobeats had already penetrated the global market, but its position in the global cultural market as the “African” genre potentially casts a shadow over Amapiano.

BMA2 narrated that the internationalisation of Amapiano created a challenge over ownership of its 'narrative', and global audiences began to question whether it originated in Nigeria or South Africa.

Structural Barriers and Global Market Entry Challenges

“During or just after COVID, our neighbouring countries played a huge role in the internationalisation of Amapiano. Or rather let me say in the continent, especially Ghana, Nigeria, even though there's a bit of a tussle between Afrobeats and Amapiano.” BMA2 - 5:46

TMRL1 narrated that, in his experience, Africa, including Nigeria, has been a challenging market to penetrate. TMRL1 further explained that Nigeria is a demanding market due to its large population, extensive diaspora, and the volume of artists there.

TMRL1 stated that his experience in the United States has been challenging as well. Still, because it is so professionalised, Amapiano acts tend to miss out on opportunities due to their lack of professionalism.

Structural Barriers and Global Market Entry Challenges

“Nigeria is an interesting market. They have their own artists, a huge population, and a whole lot of upcoming artists experimenting with different sounds. So, their market is a bit hectic to penetrate.” TMRL1 - 6:19

“The industry hasn’t given us enough time to understand how we professionally present ourselves to determine our longevity in this thing. And I just feel like some of the things are, you know, rushed and some of the things, which is one of the biggest reasons why we’re struggling to push into the US market, because the US market is seen as the hub of global entertainment, and it takes a lot to get into that space.” - TMRL1 - 13:15

5.4.7 Conclusion RQ2 Theme 2.3 - Structural Barriers and Global Market Entry Challenges

The collective experience of participants demonstrates that, although Amapiano has achieved significant international recognition, its global economic potential and soft power are constrained by structural and market barriers. Participants showed that domestic policy alignment, institutional support, and export infrastructure can enable South African Amapiano artists and entrepreneurs to scale their businesses.

BMA3 argues that external stakeholders, including digital streaming platforms and the government, could be intervening more decisively to support the genre and its global rise. BMA2 narrates that, in their experience, Amapiano could’ve lost control of the South African narrative to Nigeria due to Nigeria’s African dominance.

TMRL1 narrated that, in their experience, Nigeria and America have been complex markets to penetrate due to their size, scalability, and the professionalism and infrastructure in those markets.

5.5. RQ3: What role have digital platforms (e.g., streaming, social media) played in the internationalisation of Amapiano and contributed to it being a form of Soft Power?

5.5.1 Introduction

RQ3 begins with “What”, demonstrates that the question is exploratory, and aims to understand the role of technological infrastructure in the global rise of Amapiano. It seeks to understand how digital platforms, particularly music streaming platforms and social media networks, have facilitated Amapiano’s internationalisation and its soft power influence. The table below presents the themes to be explored and whether there is evidence supporting each theme from the three participant groups.

Table 12: Discussed Themes from RQ3:

Theme	Insightful	Discussed
3.1 TikTok and DSPs as Cultural Amplifiers	YES	YES
3.2 – Audience Co-creation and Digital Spread	YES	YES
3.3 COVID-19 and Digital Acceleration	YES	YES
3.4 — Digital Democratisation and Global Market Penetration	NO	NO

Source: Author's Own

5.5.2 RQ3 Theme 3.1 – TikTok and DSPs as Cultural Amplifiers

The first theme in RQ3 discusses how TikTok and digital streaming platforms have become influential and key drivers of Amapiano’s internationalisation. The theme explores how these platforms serve as digital amplifiers of South African culture, enabling Amapiano to reach audiences beyond South Africa.

DDMA2 narrates that in his experience, there is a formula for creating music that achieves significant streams. DDMA2 reports that, in his experience creating digital campaigns, there is a clear correlation between the success of TikTok campaigns and results on digital streaming platforms such as Spotify and Apple Music. DDMA2 further states that TikTok has become a significant tool for amplifying content to foreign audiences and that it is almost guaranteed that a successful TikTok results in streams.

TikTok and DSPs as Cultural Amplifiers

“In this day and age, because when you break something on TikTok, we know it definitely is going to translate into streams. Whether those people will stay streaming the song is something else, but we know 90% of the time people are going to find that record and consume it after hearing it on TikTok.” - DDMA2 - 11:28

TMRL2 narrates that, given the success of Amapiano trends and campaigns on TikTok, digital streaming platforms have been compelled to adopt a more intentional approach to supporting the genre. TMRL2 narrates that historically, Afrobeats used to dominate key playlists that amplify African music, but as a result of this growth on TikTok, the digital platforms have had to support it

TikTok and DSPs as Cultural Amplifiers

“DSPs have put a lot of money into Amapiano. They've put a lot of support behind the playlist, including premieres on key Apple Music playlists like African Heat and African Now. They started featuring Amapiano more, at times putting us toe for toe with Afrobeats.” - TMRL2 - 9:12

5.5.3 Conclusion RQ3 Theme 3.1 – TikTok and DSPs as Cultural Amplifiers

The collective experience of participants demonstrates that TikTok and DSPs have been a major driver of Amapiano’s internationalisation and its soft power. The participants showed that TikTok and DSPs have become the principal amplifiers of Amapiano, transforming it into a global digital movement. Participants reported that these digital platforms serve as new intermediaries in South Africa’s cultural exchanges with international audiences.

DDMA2 narrated that successful TikTok campaigns directly influence the performance of songs on digital streaming platforms such as Spotify and Apple Music. DDMA2 explained that in his experience, creating effective TikTok campaigns leads to increased streams and greater commercial value.

BMA2 emphasises that music in modern society is discovered through TikTok and that Amapiano acts have created campaigns that attract global audiences, resulting in many viral moments.

TMRL2 reported that, in their experience, DSPs have invested heavily in playlisting Amapiano music due to its high demand among audiences across multiple markets, especially on the African continent.

5.5.4 RQ3 Theme 3.2 – Audience Co-creation and Digital Spread

The second theme in RQ2 discusses how audience involvement in the creation of Amapiano-related content on social media platforms, notably, has contributed to the spread of the genre and its cultural product. The theme demonstrates that the global rise of Amapiano and its soft power was driven not only by artists, creatives, and entrepreneurs in the space but also by audiences.

BMA2 reports that TikTok has become the new way to discover music, with global audiences primarily discovering new songs through its campaigns. BMA2 also notes that successful

campaigns are usually those in which audiences can participate, and Amapiano acts, creative, and entrepreneurs have proven they can create such campaigns.

Audience Co-creation and Digital Spread

“TikTok has played a significant role in one music discovery through dance challenges, through people creating content and spreading that music all over” BMA2 - 18:13

TMRL2 narrates that in his experience, he witnessed the power of audience participation in making a song viral with a collaboration one of his clients worked on with Davido, a prominent Nigerian artist. TMRL2 narrates that the song is a blend of Afrobeats and Amapiano, but that South African dancers created the dance challenge. The overall symbolic and economic value of that song benefited South Africa so much so that the music video was shot in South Africa, and the general narration of the video tells a South African story.

Audience Co-creation and Digital Spread

*‘If you want your song to do well on TikTok, you should consider doing a dance challenge in South Africa. For example, my client worked on a song with Davido and the guys that started the unavailable dance challenge, which is an Afrobeat song heavily influenced by Amapiano.’
- TMRL2 - 6:37*

TMRL1 narrates that, in his experience, there is a formula for creating a song or moment that galvanises audiences to engage with a challenge on social media platforms, particularly TikTok. TMRL1 narrates that in his experience, when strategising around viral content, (1) the song itself needs to be trendy, catchy and sonically good enough to capture the attention of audiences, and (2) the dance challenge needs to be easy enough for audiences to learn, replicate, record and share on their digital platforms

Audience Co-creation and Digital Spread

'To get your TikTok challenge right, you have a song that you can create a dance to. After that, you get a couple of people to do the dance and see if the fans catch on. Most of the challenges catch on if the song is fire and the dance is quite easy for people to grasp' - TMRL1 - 6:37

TMRL4 narrates that, in their experience, songs or moments that catch the attention of audiences and encourage co-creation are “authentic.” She explains that, in their view, audiences can see moments that are over-engineered rather than genuine, and not too polished. TMRL4 further notes that the authenticity of this content captures audiences' attention and encourages their participation and co-creation.

Audience Co-creation and Digital Spread

"I love the fact that Amapiano is all about authenticity. You know, it doesn't matter what you're wearing. It's about you being authentic. You know, you can go onto TikTok with the bonnet on and you can blow up, you know. It doesn't have a landscape." - TMRL4 - 19:28

5.5.5 RQ3 Conclusion Theme 3.2 – Audience Co-creation and Digital Spread

The collective of participants demonstrated that the involvement and co-creation of content have been among the drivers of Amapiano's internationalisation and soft power. Participants showed that TikTok challenges and moments have been a significant driver of Amapiano's internationalisation.

BMA2 narrated that, in their experience, audiences generally discover new music and content on digital platforms, and that the success of digital campaigns determines how successful the content or music becomes.

TMRL2 reports that, in their experience, they have collaborated with artists from other markets. If the dance challenge is created in South Africa and gains digital traction, it can shape the song's narrative and its cultural products into a South African cultural narrative.

TMRL1 narrates that there is a formula for creating a song that goes viral on TikTok, encouraging audience participation to drive that digital reach. TMRL4 narrates that in their experience, the content and moments that encourage co-creation from audiences are when the original content is authentic and not over-engineered.

5.5.6 RQ3 Theme 3.3 – COVID-19 and Digital Acceleration

The third theme for RQ3 discusses how the COVID-19 pandemic was a turning point for Amapiano’s digital acceleration and internationalisation. Participants narrated that as a result of the global lockdown during the pandemic, the live performance economy was completely disrupted. The absence of touring and performances led Amapiano players to social media, which unexpectedly boosted the genre's global visibility. Participants reported that this phenomenon gave local and foreign audiences a view into an emerging South African township genre and culture.

BMA4 narrated that lockdown catalysed Amapiano’s global breakout because, at times, traditional TV shows went on production breaks due to social distancing. This gap and lack of entertainment saw Amapiano acts and entrepreneurs leveraging social media platforms to create content that drew the eyes of audiences from all over the world into the world of Amapiano.

COVID-19 and Digital Acceleration

<i>“During COVID, when all the traditional TV shows went on like production breaks because of social distancing. And the one thing that kept giving us fresh, new content through platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook was Amapiano, because these guys were having studio camps and house parties and sharing it live on social media. They were like bending the rules.” BMA2 - 16:51</i>

BMA4 narrates that this moment demonstrated the entrepreneurial nature of Amapiano, as these digital initiatives initiated the genre's internationalisation at scale. BMA4 narrates that Amapiano acts and entrepreneurs build demand by creating FOMO (fear of missing out) through underground, private parties held in violation of lockdown regulations and live-streamed for the world to see on digital platforms.

COVID-19 and Digital Acceleration

“The kind of content that came out was like gold, and the whole world was watching because everyone was under lockdown, everyone was sitting on their phones, their favourite TV shows aren’t on TV anymore.” - BMA4 - 18:11

TMRL2 narrates that in their experience, South Africa’s lengthy lockdown was one of the reasons behind the acceleration and internationalisation of Amapiano. TMRL2 stated that the extended lockdown in South Africa forced Amapiano artists and entrepreneurs to travel to countries with more relaxed restrictions.

TMRL2 reported that foreign audiences and promoters were already demanding Amapiano acts due to their broad digital reach. Because there were limited earning opportunities in South Africa at the time, this accelerated the export of the sound to different markets.

COVID-19 and Digital Acceleration

“The first country that we did work in was Tanzania, purely because the Amapiano blew up in lockdown, and Tanzania was essentially not locked down. So they were booking a lot of Amapiano artists, and some of our clients. So, I’d say Tanzania, Kenya, those were the two main countries.” - TMRL2 - 3:01

5.5.5 RQ3 Conclusion Theme 3.2 – COVID-19 and Digital Acceleration

The collective experience of the participants demonstrated that the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the digital spread and dominance of Amapiano on platforms such as TikTok. Participants showed their entrepreneurial spirit when mobility paused, digital platforms became the only stage available, and South African artists and entrepreneurs emerged.

BMA4 narrated that the pause in traditional TV shows opened a window of opportunity for Amapiano acts and entrepreneurs to provide audiences, locally and globally, with alternative content through relatively low barrier means with vast potential for access. BMA4 further narrated

that Amapiano acts and entrepreneurs were creative in how they caught the attention of audiences through underground and private house parties, and in capturing those moments on live platforms.

TMRL2 narrated that the extended lockdown in South Africa forced Amapiano acts and entrepreneurs to export the sound to other markets, not only because of demand but also because those markets, despite tighter restrictions, were the only sources of revenue available due to the severe limitations in South Africa.

This chapter concludes the presentation and discussions of the research findings.

The next chapter addresses the interpretation of these findings and their comparison with existing literature.

Chapter 6: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

6.1 Introduction

This Chapter presents a discussion of the findings from Chapter Five in relation to the theoretical and academic literature reviewed and explained in Chapter Two. The purpose of this Chapter is to discuss and interpret results from Chapter five through the lens of Soft Power theory, the Cultural industries framework, and Digital platforms economy as articulated by the scholars and researchers discussed in Chapter two, Nye (2004, 2011), Clarke (2020) and Wang et al. (2020), etc. The discussions in this Chapter will follow a similar structure to Chapter Five, addressing each research question and identified theme.

Each theme will be discussed by comparing participants' findings with insights from the literature to determine whether the findings confirm, extend, or contradict existing academic literature. Where themes do not cover the existing literature, this will present a potential gap as a theoretical contribution.

The validation of the existing literature against the findings discussed in Chapter Five followed a systematic approach to analyse each of the nine identified themes. Step one included a thorough, targeted search for keywords using the search functions in the literature review in Chapter Two. Step two included investigating other literature from key scholars identified in the literature review, and their frequent references, and identified key scholars. Step three involved conducting standard journal searches using keywords from the primary constructs being studied on academic literature platforms such as Google Scholar. Only if the researcher completes Step three and finds no relevant literature would it be considered a potential new contribution to the field. New literature was introduced into the study during the execution of Steps two and three, as presented in the discussions of Chapter six with the appropriate references; however, this material was not included in Chapter two.

Additionally, the credibility of the findings was established through a rigorous interview selection process, in which participants with substantial expertise were selected, specifically individuals with experience working with Amapiano artists across multiple markets, who had travelled internationally and conducted business in diverse contexts.

6.2 RQ1: How does Amapiano function as a form of Soft Power for South Africa and create a pathway for foreign market access for cultural business

Research Question One aimed to explore how Amapiano, as a cultural product, operates as a vehicle for soft power and the extent to which it contributes to South Africa’s national image and global market access. Four themes emerged as a result of the research findings:

Table 13: RQ1 Themes, Literature and identified literature

Themes:	Literature covered
Theme 1.1 - Amapiano as South Africa’s Informal Soft Power Enabler	(Rabêlo Neto et al., 2021, Percara, 2025, Wang et al., 2020, Clarke, 2020).
Theme 1.2 - Cultural Representation and National Identity	(Linardaki & Aslanides, 2020; Clarke, 2020; Ogunnubi & Idowu, 2022).
Theme 1.3 - Collaboration and Cultural Bridge-Building	(Wang et al., 2020; Zanella et al., 2024; Tella, 2019; Kolokytha, 2022)

6.2.1 Discussion of the findings: RQ1 - Theme 1.1 - Amapiano as South Africa’s Informal Soft Power Enabler

The findings in the discussions are from participants in two of the three target groups, being Brand Management Agencies and Digital Distribution Music Agencies. The discussion reveals that, according to participants' experience, Amapiano has given South Africa a voice and presence in foreign markets.

Academic literature by Clarke (2020) highlights that, in modern society, non-state actors such as creatives and cultural entrepreneurs are increasingly strategic in shaping a nation's reputation through soft power mechanisms, including cultural diplomacy. The literature is consistent with participants' findings, which describe and paint Amapiano as grassroots (bottom-up) driven form of soft power that emerged and found its global place organically through cultural entrepreneurs and creatives rather than through initiatives and strategies led by the state.

The academic literature highlights that digital platforms have democratised access and can contribute to shaping a nation's image and to participating in mechanisms of cultural diplomacy (Percara, 2025). The evidence presented in the findings supports the literature. Participants demonstrated that the primary place where global audiences engage with Amapiano's cultural products, and where global demand is initiated, is on digital platforms such as TikTok and YouTube.

Wang et al. (2020) highlight that emerging market nations offer unique advantages for internationalisation, particularly in cultural industries, due to their flexibility and diaspora audiences, enabling them to internationalise through innovation rather than high-capital initiatives. This argument aligns with participants' findings, who reported that cultural entrepreneurs and creatives in the Amapiano ecosystem leverage digital platforms to enter the global cultural industry and build a collective South African voice.

The literature review calls for international business scholars to study how emerging markets in the Global South are beginning to influence cultural flows through creativity and aesthetic appeal (Rabêlo Neto et al., 2021). The participants' findings illustrate how Amapiano's internationalisation and global rise demonstrate a bottom-up, non-state-led approach to cultural diplomacy. Historically, South Africa was mainly a consumer of Western cultural products, but it is now beginning to act as an exporter to Western markets.

6.2.2 Conclusion of the findings: RQ1 - Theme 1.1 - Amapiano as South Africa's Informal Soft Power Enabler

The findings demonstrate that cultural entrepreneurs and creatives in the Amapiano ecosystem can collectively create internationalisation attraction independent of state-led initiatives, which is in line with existing literature.

The theme extends to the existing literature, as participants have demonstrated that cultural entrepreneurs have created a form of soft power for South Africa through Amapiano, without government or official state cultural institutions intervening. The finding extends to existing literature by scholars such as Percara (2025), Wang et al. (2020), and Clarke (2020), but more specifically, Rabêlo Neto et al (2021) called for international Business researchers from emerging markets to study how cultural products from their markets function as a soft power to non-emerging markets.

6.2.3 Discussion of the findings: RQ1 - Theme 1.2 - Cultural Representation and National Identity

The findings are from participants in the Talent Management and Record Label segment, who described Amapiano as an authentic, modern, and living reflection of South Africa's national identity. The participants demonstrate that this is encompassed in local language, culture, and urban lifestyle, transmitted through the music. Participants identified the genre's authenticity as its primary global differentiator and representation of South Africa's national identity.

Participants consistently reported that, based on their experience in foreign markets, global audiences are intrigued and fascinated by what South Africa stands for and represents through their engagement with Amapiano and its cultural products. Modern scholarship highlights that cultural industries, including the music industry, can serve as mechanisms for communicating nations' identities and values (Clarke, 2020).

Olusola Ogunnubi and Idowu (2022) extend this argument and place it in the context of African cultural industries, using Nigeria's Afro beats as a domain and case study. The argument highlights that the global growth of Afrobeats and its cultural products for foreign audiences and markets has shaped perceptions of Nigeria as a highly entrepreneurial and creative country. Scholarly arguments provide empirical evidence that African cultural products, such as Amapiano, can shape a nation's image, which aligns with the experiences narrated by participants in the research findings.

Scholars in the literature review argue that music and the narratives it creates about a country's values and cultures can transmit a nation's identity while simultaneously cultivating commercial

markets for those cultural products to be exported to foreign markets (Linardaki & Aslanides, 2020). This argument aligns with the participants' findings, as they have narrated that, through their experiences, they have witnessed demand from audiences in foreign markets rise because Amapiano conveys an authentic view of South Africa through its cultural products.

6.2.4 Conclusion: RQ1 - Theme 1.2 - Cultural Representation and National Identity

The research findings illustrate how the internationalisation of Amapiano and its global rise have enabled and contributed to South Africa's national image and identity, positioning it in foreign markets for foreign audiences. The findings illustrate that South Africa's cultural uniqueness, as reflected in its languages and cultural lifestyle, paints a positive image. These findings align with the literature and the arguments made by the scholars highlighted above.

It is therefore found that the findings in the theme are consistent with existing literature, as the participants have demonstrated how the authenticity and uniqueness of Amapiano function as a branding and diplomatic tool. The findings are consistent with the existing literature by Linardaki & Aslanides (2020), Clarke (2020), and Ogunnubi & Idowu (2022).

6.2.5 Discussion of the findings: RQ1 - Theme 1.3 - Collaboration and Cultural Bridge-Building

The findings are from participants across all three target segments: Talent Management and Record Label, Brand Management Agencies, and Digital Distribution Music Agencies. The segments are described and emphasise that the collaborative nature of the Amapiano ecosystem has been critical to its global expansion. Participants describe the collaborative culture among global promoters, brands, curators, and digital platforms as a key enabler that has created this network, propelling Amapiano to international heights.

Scholars in the literature argue that collaborations in the cultural industry, facilitated by digital platforms and particularly from emerging markets, have the potential to create economic value and global legitimacy (Wang et al., 2020). This argument is well aligned with the findings from Chapter Five. Participants reported that global promoters and brands primarily engage with Amapiano cultural products through digital platforms and, as a result of the demand these

platforms generate, collaborate with cultural entrepreneurs in the Amapiano ecosystem to create foreign-market opportunities, such as tours and performances.

Zanella et al. (2024), in their literature review, argue that collaboration within the cultural industry can build “relation capital” among creative and cultural entrepreneurs and ordinary citizens in the market. Zanella et al. (2024) further argue that this capital has the potential to transform connections into strategic networks that can facilitate the participation of cultural entrepreneurs and creatives in global cultural value chains that bridge markets.

Participants aligned with arguments made in the literature review narrated that in their experience, when one continuously collaborates with one type of global stakeholders, such as tour promoters, it presents other strategic opportunities, such as brand deals in those foreign markets, which increase their participation in various elements of the global cultural value chain.

Tella (2019) brought the perspectives and arguments on collaboration in the cultural economy to the context of Africa. Tella (2019) argued that Nigeria’s cultural economy has developed over the years through collaborations into diplomatic functions that generate informal transnational connections, thereby enhancing Nigeria’s soft power. This perspective by Tella (2019) aligns with the participants' findings, who highlighted that collaborations with prominent A-listed global artists such as Davido have enabled South African Amapiano artists to be included on platforms such as the Grammys, particularly in the cases of Musa Key and Tyla.

Participants also highlighted that these collaborations created broader benefits for the South African cultural economy, with foreign global artists becoming more intentional about touring and performing in South Africa and embracing South African culture.

The research findings reveal that collaborations in the Amapiano industry and its ecosystems inherently serve dual roles. Commercially, these collaborations have enabled cultural entrepreneurs to access new markets through partnerships with promoters and global brands, while also functioning as a diplomatic bridge, facilitating cultural exchanges that normalise South Africa’s presence in the international cultural economy.

Kolokytha’s (2022) literature aligns with the participants' findings. Kolokytha (2022) argues that, in diplomacy, interactions and collaborations among ordinary people in the cultural industry can substitute for formal state-to-state diplomacy and build stronger cultural bridges than state institutions.

6.2.6 Conclusion of the findings: RQ1 - Theme 1.3 - Collaboration and Cultural Bridge-Building

The research findings illustrate how the internationalisation of Amapiano and its global rise were propelled and accelerated through collaborations with international artists and brands. The research findings further illustrated that, through these strategic partnerships, Amapiano and its cultural products have not only served as a mechanism to create economic opportunities for entrepreneurs and creatives but also as an informal vehicle for diplomacy, exporting South African culture.

It is therefore found that the findings in the theme extend to the existing literature, as participants have demonstrated that collaborations in the context of South Africa's Amapiano industry function as both a channel for global commercial opportunities and a diplomatic bridge, normalising the culture and narratives of South Africa to international audiences. The finding extends to the literature by Wang et al. (2020), Zanella et al. (2024), Tella (2019), and Kolokytha (2022), which argues that collaborations act as a dual engine.

6.3 RQ2: How has the rise of Amapiano as a cultural industry contributed to South Africa’s visibility and economic value in the global cultural economy?

Research Question Two aimed to explore how the global rise and internationalisation of Amapiano as a cultural product have contributed to South Africa’s visibility and economic value in the global cultural economy. The four themes emerged as a result of the research findings:

Table 14: RQ2 Themes, Literature and identified literature

Themes:	Literature covered
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Theme 2.1: Amapiano as a Cultural-Industry Ecosystem	(Wang et al., 2020; Hesmondhalgh, 2019; Eaby-Lomas, 2025).
Theme 2.2: Cultural Commercialisation and Global Market Positioning	(Nieborg et al., 2020; Belitski et al., 2021; Mikić & Zbucnea, 2021; Agostino et al., 2020).
Theme 2.3: Structural Barriers and Global Market Entry Challenges	(Comunian & England, 2020, Belitski et al., 202, Wang et al., 2020, Tella, 2019, Eaby-Lomas, 2025).

6.3.1 Discussion of the findings: RQ2 - Theme 2.1: Amapiano as a Cultural-Industry Ecosystem

The findings are from all three target segments, Talent Management and Record Label, Brand Management Agencies and Digital Distribution Music Agencies segments highlight that Amapiano has evolved from a local South African-based township genre into a self-sustaining ecosystem that has network connections with entrepreneurs, creatives, global promoters, global brands, content creators and digital platforms.

The literature review finds that cultural industries, particularly those seeking global market access, are required to build a network of economic systems that link symbolic value to a system that generates demand and transforms that demand into material value creation (Hesmondhalgh, 2019). The academic argument that Hesmondhalgh (2019) presents is aligned with the findings from the participants, which highlight that the global and economic success of Amapiano as a cultural industry has resulted from building a cultural ecosystem that has a network of international and local players who create demand for these cultural products and export them to foreign markets.

Literature by Eaby-Lomas (2025) argues that the global rise and internationalisation of Amapiano and its cultural products, particularly in key cultural markets such as Nigeria, the United Kingdom,

and the United States of America, were facilitated by digital platforms. Eaby-Lomas (2025) argues that digital platforms such as TikTok have become a critical enabler in the Amapiano cultural industry ecosystem, and that global success for entrepreneurs and creators depends significantly on their ability to leverage them. These findings from the academic literature align with those of participants, who highlighted that digital platforms such as TikTok and Spotify have emerged as strategic players in the Amapiano ecosystem and actively collaborate with entrepreneurs and creatives to export the genre.

Wang et al. (2020) argue in their literature that cultural ecosystems, particularly those from emerging markets, are ordinarily agile because of their lack of industry structural processes and mechanisms, framing this phenomenon as an advantage of emergingness. The finding from the participants align with the academic literature, the participants highlighted the lack of structures, regulations and support from players like government in the Amapiano industry has not been ideal but the positive side of it is that it has enabled entrepreneurs and creatives to seize opportunities quickly and find their positions within the ecosystem and value chain without having to compete with larger multinational institutions such as major record labels.

6.3.2 Conclusion of the findings: RQ2 - Theme 2.1: Amapiano as a Cultural-Industry Ecosystem

The research findings illustrate how the internationalisation of Amapiano and its global rise have been propelled by the deliberate development of an ecosystem supported by key players in both local and foreign markets. The research findings illustrate that cultural industry ecosystems, particularly those in emerging markets, succeed in building this ecosystem when reliance on digital platforms is high and operating processes are agile and independent.

The findings in the theme align with the existing literature, as participants have demonstrated and mapped out that the global rise and internationalisation of Amapiano result from an ecosystem that includes both local and foreign players who convert visibility and buzz into commercial activity. The findings extend to the literature by Wang et al. (2020), Hesmondhalgh (2019), and Eaby-Lomas (2025).

6.3.3 Discussion of the findings: RQ2 - Theme 2.2 Cultural Commercialisation and Global Market Positioning

The findings from participants in two target segments, Brand Management Agencies and Digital Distribution Music Agencies, highlight that Amapiano has consistent visibility and a high frequency of audience engagement with Amapiano products. This shift, facilitated by players in the ecosystem, is translating into commercial activities ordinarily reserved for global “A-List artists”, such as central festival performances and global brand partnerships. Participants also presented the view that, although Amapiano has experienced significant international success, it has created asymmetric value capture, with the global rise of Amapiano yielding unequal commercial benefits in favour of global brands.

The academic literature finds that digital platformisation in the global cultural industry and ecosystem has created a phenomenon in which the modern environment enables entrepreneurs and creatives to control significant elements of the value chain, from creation to the global distribution of their cultural products. The academic literature shows that shifts in industry structure have created opportunities for cultural entrepreneurs and creatives to have direct access to their audiences and control monetisation (Agostino et al., 2020).

The argument in the literature presented by Agostino et al. (2020) is aligned with the findings from the participants, as they highlighted that because of their ability to engage with audiences more easily due to the strategic and significant control of elements in the value chain, it has allowed them to internationalise their products and have substantial control of the commercial value.

The academic literature argues that cultural industries that have built significant global presences have the potential to create spillover benefits to other cultural industries, for example, fashion spillover benefits for entrepreneurs and creatives in the music industry (Mikić & Zbuceha, 2021). Participants also highlight that, because of their control over strategic elements of the value chain, they have been strategically included and engaged in global fashion events such as the Louis Vuitton fashion show, which is evidence of Amapiano's commercial viability globally.

The review literature argues that the 2019 COVID-19 pandemic presented a significant shift in the global cultural economy that created an opportunity for cultural entrepreneurs and creatives to build global brands through digital platforms as the whole world was consuming cultural

products through platforms such as TikTok and Youtube and that this moment presented a unique opportunity for them to penetrate the global cultural market (Belitski et al., 2021).

The literature aligns with the participants' conclusions, who highlighted that the COVID-19 pandemic was the first moment when Amapiano received significant global commercial traction, as it flooded the market with cultural products through digital platforms, thereby beginning to shape Amapiano's position in the global cultural economy.

Nieborg et al. (2020) present an alternative and cautionary argument that, although the digitisation shift in the global cultural economy has the potential for algorithms from digital players to become a consequence of centralisation, this can result in gatekeeping behaviours. The findings from Nieborg et al. (2020) align with the participants' conclusions, who highlighted that the global commercialisation of Amapiano has presented benefits for them, but not in proportion to the benefits the global brands, such as digital platforms, have received.

6.3.4 Conclusion of the findings: RQ2 - Theme 2.2 Cultural Commercialisation and Global Market Positioning

The research findings illustrate how the internationalisation of Amapiano and its global rise have turned it into a commercially viable industry within the global cultural economy. The research findings from participants demonstrated the viability of Amapiano participation in live global events and how the platformisation shift in the market has created direct access to audiences, thereby enabling global monetisation opportunities.

The findings in the theme are consistent with the literature, which shows that festivals, fashion, brands, and platforms facilitate the global rise of players in the cultural economy. The findings are also consistent with the literature, which shows that cultural industries in emerging markets face commercial challenges similar to those faced by global brands. The findings are consistent with the literature by Nieborg et al. (2020), Belitski et al. (2021), Mikić & Zbucea (2021), and Agostino et al. (2020).

6.3.5 Discussion of the findings: RQ2 - Theme 2.3 Structural Barriers and Global Market Entry Challenges

The findings are from the participants from all three target segments, Talent Management and Record Label, Brand Management Agencies, and Digital Distribution Music Agencies segments highlight that Amapiano, although has achieved significant global success in a relatively short period of time, participants also narrated that the genre still faces structural barriers that create capacity gaps and market power asymmetries that create constrained equitable internationalisation. Participants highlighted these challenges as (1) structural barriers where the Amapiano ecosystem still lacks relevant support from key stakeholders and (2) global market entry challenges, where specific markets have been difficult to penetrate, unlike other markets.

The literature finds that the accelerated digitisation in the cultural industries has forced all stakeholders to reconfigure their operations and respond more quickly to global demands, as the digital shift has created an instant-gratification expectation among global audiences (Comunian & England, 2020). The findings from the literature review align with those from the participants. They highlighted that the internationalisation and global rise of Amapiano have led some entrepreneurs and creatives to miss out on opportunities due to a lack of professionalisation and supporting elements within the ecosystem that would enable them to seize such opportunities abroad.

Belitski et al. (2021) argue that in fast-moving markets accelerated by digital platforms, entrepreneurs in the space need to ensure their practices and systems are reorganised to meet international requirements. The findings from Belitski et al. (2021) align with those of the participants, who highlighted that the USA market has been one of the most challenging to penetrate, unlike the United Kingdom, Germany, and the broader African market, aside from Nigeria.

They highlighted that this challenge in the American market stems from a lack of professional systems that are perceived as legitimate by their American counterparts. The participants also highlighted that the American market is highly regulated and that the barrier to entry requires collaboration with key players in their ecosystem, such as public relations agencies and media organisations, which becomes extremely expensive for South African cultural entrepreneurs due to South Africa's currency fluctuations and challenges.

The international business literature argues that the failure of emerging markets to penetrate foreign markets and convert the visibility created through digital platforms into durable market access results from institutional voids (Wang et al., 2020). The findings from the participants align with findings in the literature because participants highlighted that the lack of support from the government in the context of DIRCO, Home Affairs and South African embassies in facilitating quirkier visas and permits is diminishing the efforts being made abroad.

The academic literature argues that the internationalisation and global success of Afrobeats are the result of Nigeria's large diaspora, which has propelled the genre globally and exported it to multiple markets (Tella, 2019). Eaby-Lomas (2025) argues that the global rise and internationalisation of Amapiano are evident in its growing presence and influence in the Nigerian music industry. These findings align with those of the participants, who highlighted that the global rise of Amapiano accelerated when the Nigerian market began to consume it, but also noted that this moment created friction that is not discussed or covered in the literature.

Participants highlighted that the rise of Amapiano in the global market has created a potential tussle between Afrobeats and Amapiano players, especially as it began to find audiences in Nigerian markets, including the diaspora. Participants highlighted that Nigeria consistently contests the global ownership and identity of Amapiano, as Nigeria's cultural economy largely aligns with international systems and structures that create a level of professionalism South Africa's cultural economy lacks. This dynamic creates challenges in penetrating and controlling the Amapiano narrative in markets like the United States of America.

Although Chapter Two did not include literature on *Nigeria–South Africa relational frictions* in the cultural industry, the researcher conducted a supplementary literature review on Google Scholar, as stipulated in Step Three of the Chapter Six introduction. The scan identified relevant literature on soft-power tensions between Nigeria and South Africa, as well as the proposed role the cultural industry can play in managing these challenges (Olusola Ogunnubi et al., 2022).

6.3.6 Conclusion of the findings: RQ2 - Theme 2.3 Structural Barriers and Global Market Entry Challenges

The research findings illustrate how the internationalisation of Amapiano and its global rise have presented specific structural and market-entry challenges that Amapiano players have had to navigate. The research findings from participants demonstrated that the Amapiano ecosystem needs to graduate to a higher level of professionalism to sustain its global rise and influence. The participants also highlighted that specific markets are challenging to enter due to broader structural limitations.

It is therefore found that the themes extend to the existing literature. Participants' findings demonstrate that Amapiano entrepreneurs and creatives are experiencing South African-specific challenges, including a lack of artist development, export support, and visa issues. In the context of penetrating the United States of America, participants highlighted challenges around USA professionalism thresholds, the costs of entry, currency challenges, and policy alignment to build export capabilities at scale.

The participants' findings also align with the supplementary literature, as they demonstrated that, in their experience, a regional tussle between Afrobeats and Amapiano creates a commercial and diplomatic context that shapes narrative ownership and market entry in key markets like the United States of America. The findings extend to the literature by (Comunian & England, 2020; Belitski et al., 2022; Olusola Ogunnubi et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2020; Tella, 2019; Eaby-Lomas, 2025).

6.4 RQ3: What role have digital platforms played in the internationalisation of Amapiano and its soft-power influence?

Research Question 3 aimed to explore the role of digital platforms in the internationalisation of Amapiano and their soft-power influence. The three themes emerged as a result of the research findings:

Table 15: RQ3 Themes, Literature, and Identified Literature

Themes:	Literature covered
Theme 3.1 – TikTok and Digital Streaming Platforms (DSPs) as Cultural Amplifiers	(Agostino et al., 2020, Prey et al., 2020, Zanella et al., 2024, Eaby-Lomas, 2025).
Theme 3.2 – Audience co-creation and Digital Spread	(Nieborg et al., 2020, Belitski et al., 2021, King-O’Riain, 2020)
Theme 3.3 – COVID-19 and Digital Acceleration	(Jeannotte, 2021; Agostino et al, 2020; Banks and O’Connor, 2021).

6.4.1 Discussion of the findings: RQ3 - Theme 3.1 – TikTok and Digital Streaming Platforms (DSPs) as Cultural Amplifiers

The findings from all three target segments, Talent Management and Record Label, Brand Management Agencies and Digital Distribution Music Agencies segments highlight that digital social media platforms, particularly TikTok and Digital Streaming Platforms such as Spotify, have become key enablers in the internationalisation of Amapiano and spreading its cultural products. Participants highlighted that these platforms play a strategic role in creating instant visibility, virality, and discovery of cultural products, and that they have been the primary engine for Amapiano's export.

The literature review finds that digital platforms such as TikTok have transformed over the years, become the dominant intermediaries of cultural exchange in today’s society, and reconfigured the global cultural industry value chain (Agostino et al., 2020). The academic argument presented by Agostino et al.(2020) is aligned with the findings from the participants who have highlighted the dominance of digital platforms have allowed entrepreneurs and creatives to really focus on creating the right product because if they products (e.g a song) resonates with audiences, digital

platforms almost guarantee that it can become viral and spread globally instantaneously, without the influence and control of traditional players.

Prey et al. (2020) argue that digital platforms such as TikTok have become major cultural amplifiers by design and structure because they embed algorithmic recommendation systems and processes. These algorithmic systems create consistency among audiences with similar artistic interests, resulting in digital communities born on digital platforms. The academic argument presented by Prey et al. (2020) aligns with participants' findings, as they highlighted that a successful TikTok campaign can create challenges on TikTok that expand a song's reach through the viral effect of TikTok's algorithms.

Zanella et al. (2024) argue that the exchange of cultural products builds relational capital between global audiences and the creators of these products, creating people-to-people connections and potentially making business transactions in those markets' smoother. The argument presented in the literature above aligns with the participants' findings. The participants highlighted that, in their experience, once a connection is established between audiences and a cultural product through a platform such as TikTok, this connection begins to translate into commercial activity, including bookings for live performances and tours, and monetary streams from digital streaming platforms such as Spotify.

Eaby-Lomas (2025) argues that Amapiano's spread has been facilitated by TikTok trends and its consistent presence on digital streaming playlists. The literature argues that this phenomenon has created a form of consistent digital diplomacy in which foreign audiences consistently engage with South Africa's culture through Amapiano. The argument presented by Eaby-Lomas (2025) is consistent with that of the participants, who highlighted that Digital Streaming Platforms such as Spotify and Social Media Platforms such as TikTok have invested heavily in Amapiano because they have experienced significant ROI from the genre in foreign markets.

6.4.2 Conclusion of the findings: RQ3 - Theme 3.1 – TikTok and Digital Streaming Platforms (DSPs) as Cultural Amplifiers

The research findings illustrate how digital streaming platforms and TikTok have significantly contributed to the internationalisation of Amapiano and its global rise. The research findings demonstrated how the dominance of TikTok and Digital Streaming Platforms, and the emergence

of Amapiano, have become a formula for success, and how this dynamic has spread South African culture globally.

It is therefore found that the findings are consistent with the existing literature, as the participants demonstrated that Amapiano's internationalisation was facilitated through its virality on TikTok and DSP playlisting, illustrating how digital infrastructure amplifies soft power through consistent visibility. The findings are consistent with the literature by Agostino et al. (2020), Prey et al. (2020), Zanella et al. (2024), and Eaby-Lomas (2025).

6.4.3 Discussion of the findings: RQ3 - Theme 3.2 – Audience co-creation and Digital Spread

The findings from two of the target segments, the Talent Management and Record Label and Brand Management Agencies segments, highlighted that the internationalisation of Amapiano and its dominance on digital platforms are due to the content co-creation culture among Amapiano's audiences. Participants in the research highlighted that audiences globally re-create Amapiano content through dance challenges and remixes, which drive the spread of the genre's cultural products and turn into global festival bookings and streams for entrepreneurs and creatives.

The literature review finds that digital platformisation shifts in the global cultural economy have created an environment that breeds a participatory culture among cultural entrepreneurs and international audiences, in which audiences co-create content linked to these cultural products and circulate it on their own social media platforms. This dynamic has become a major driver and accelerator of cultural content, ultimately determining how successful your products become (Nieborg et al., 2020).

The academic argument presented by Nieborg et al. (2020) aligned with the participants' findings, as it highlighted that, in their experience, the success of a song is becoming increasingly dependent on how easy it is for audiences to replicate the dance challenge and on the effectiveness of their audience-recruitment campaign. Participants further narrated that once you have created a product that resonates with audiences and you attach it to an easy enough dance challenge, audiences globally will catch on and recreate it, which ultimately results in spillover commercial benefits such as international and local festival bookings and streams.

Belitski et al. (2021) literature also further emphasised the academic argument that cultural entrepreneurs and creatives had reorganised their interactions and engagement models with their audiences, which is essentially a shift in business model to a virtual platforms approach facilitated by players like TikTok and Meta. This literature by Belitski et al. (2021) aligns with the participants' findings, as they highlighted that dance challenges are a key enabler for your music to be discovered.

Participants went so far as to describe TikTok as the 'new radio' in modern society and to say that dance challenges are a mechanism for increasing activity and spreading their products on TikTok and other social media platforms.

Papacharissi (2015) introduced the concept of “affective publics”, which holds that the co-creation of cultural products leads groups on digital platforms such as TikTok and Meta to form cultural communities and share values and narratives. King-O’Riain (2020) extends this argument to recent times, arguing that, in the case of South Korea and K-pop Culture, its global success was the result of the co-creation of culture on digital platforms with the intent of reinforcing both national and cultural identity.

The findings from the academic literature by Papacharissi (2015) and King-O’Riain (2020) align with the participants' experiences, who highlighted that, in their collaborations with global A-List artists, they experienced. Leveraging co-creation practices, such as South African dance challenge campaigns, to promote the song could shift the narrative of these collaborations/cultural products toward a South African-dominated frame and transfer the overall symbolic and economic value to South Africa’s cultural industry.

6.4.4 Conclusion of the findings: RQ3 - Theme 3.2 – Audience co-creation and Digital Spread

The research findings illustrate how the audience's co-creation culture has accelerated the international spread and global rise of Amapiano and its cultural products. Participants demonstrated that the success and internationalisation of your cultural products depend heavily on the success of your co-creation campaigns.

The findings are consistent with the existing literature, as participants demonstrated that participation through participatory platforms and campaigns converts crowd actions into cultural visibility, economic value, and soft-power amplification. The findings are consistent with the literature by Nieborg et al. (2020), Belitski et al. (2021), and King-O'Riain (2020).

6.4.5 Discussion of the findings: RQ3 - Theme 3.3 – COVID-19 and Digital Acceleration

The findings from two of the target segments, Talent Management and Record Label and Brand Management Agencies segments, highlighted that the COVID-19 pandemic and the global movement restrictions presented were a turning point for Amapiano. The genre, which had largely been local, found resonance among global audiences who were restricted to only consuming music through digital platforms such as TikTok, YouTube and Spotify and as a result, this gave global audiences a front row seat to consuming Amapiano in real-time, which ultimately became the birth of its internationalisation and international rise.

The academic literature argued that the COVID-19 pandemic created a black swan event for the global cultural economy. The unintended consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic were the aggressive digitisation of cultural products and their consumption worldwide, leading to the global closure of concerts, festivals, and nightclubs. This dynamic forced cultural entrepreneurs and creators to migrate and leverage digital platforms (Jeannotte, 2021).

The academic literature presented by Jeannotte (2021) aligns with the participants' findings, as they highlighted that one reason Amapiano found global resonance was that its entrepreneurs and creatives quickly shifted their strategies to online platforms such as TikTok when movement restrictions were imposed. Participants reported that the result of this speedy response was that traditional entertainment channels began to stop broadcasting their content. This created a demand vacuum for entertainment content, and Amapiano entrepreneurs and creatives quickly seized the opportunity through digital platforms.

Agostino et al. (2020) argue that the COVID-19 pandemic forced entrepreneurs and creatives to implement a system and structural shift in how cultural products are produced, distributed globally and monetised. The findings from the participants align with Agostino et al. (2020) literature as they narrated in the research finding that when the movement restrictions were placed, the

industry had to begin creating content that would (1) capture the attentions of audiences such as Instagram Live which allowed the audiences to engage in their lives instantaneously and (2) also introduce and sell their cultural products because audiences were already glued to digital platforms such as TikTok.

Banks and O'Connor's (2021) literature argues that the COVID-19 pandemic was a redefining moment for the global cultural industry, requiring timely responsiveness to avoid detrimental effects on its sustainability. The participants highlighted that in their experience, the rest of the world was seeking to book them for festivals and performances when South Africa's entertainment market was still restricted. Participants narrated that this quick shift to performing outside South Africa and regional re-routing was a matter of survival for them, which turned those initial bookings into repeat bookings and marked the beginning of global promoters' participation in the Amapiano ecosystem.

6.4.6 Conclusion of the findings: RQ3 - Theme 3.3 – COVID-19 and Digital Acceleration

The research findings illustrate how the COVID-19 pandemic became a Digital Acceleration enabler for the Amapiano industry, accelerating its internationalisation and global rise. Participants demonstrated that closure of traditional entertainment presented a key opportunity for Amapiano entrepreneurs and creatives to supply global audiences with alternative content, which ultimately created a significant global consumer base.

Therefore, the findings are consistent with the existing literature, as participants demonstrated that the global rise of Amapiano during the COVID-19 pandemic facilitated a rapid digitisation, rapid audience engagement, and co-creation, converting attention into international commercial success. The findings are consistent with the literature by Jeannotte (2021), Agostino et al. (2020), and Banks and O'Connor (2021).

6.5 Conclusion

Chapter six aimed to systematically interpret the findings from Chapter five against the theoretical lenses and arguments presented in Chapter two. Overall, the findings are broadly consistent with the literature covered and studied and also provide the reader with evidence of potential areas where the findings extend beyond the existing literature.

The research yielded nine themes, of which seven provided evidence consistent with the existing literature. Two of the themes extended perspectives on existing literature, particularly in the context of Amapiano as an emerging market cultural industry, adding new, context-specific insights into collaborations as diplomatic tools, structural challenges and bottlenecks, and regional narrative competition between South Africa and Nigeria.

This Chapter concludes the discussions of the research findings. The next Chapter presents the study's conclusion and recommendations.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

7.1 Introduction

This chapter formulates the study's conclusions, brings together the answers to the three research questions, and distils the principal theoretical findings that emerged from the analysis and discussions in Chapter Six. In Chapter Seven, the research begins by stating the conclusions for each research question. Then it integrates them into a concise conceptual framework that explains how Amapiano has translated cultural attention and visibility into a soft-power mechanism and into access to foreign markets.

Chapter seven then outlines the study's contributions to knowledge and management recommendations for stakeholders, such as industry key players and policymakers. The Chapter also outlines the paper's limitations and suggestions for future research areas.

7.2 Principal theoretical conclusion

The principal theoretical conclusion sections organise the three research questions. For each question, it discusses the theoretical conclusion by comparing the study's findings with the existing literature. In contrast, it notes key similarities and differences and identifies new insights as additions to the literature.

7.2.1 Conclusion on Research Question 1

Main Research Question: Research Question 1: How does Amapiano function as a form of Soft Power for South Africa and create a pathway for foreign market access for cultural business?

The aim of research question one was to identify the soft-power mechanisms that Amapiano has leveraged to project South African cultures and narratives and to convert the attention gained into foreign-market access for cultural businesses.

The empirical findings across the three themes discussed in Chapter Six were largely consistent with the existing academic literature, except for one theme that extended the findings of the literature that was discussed.

Participants demonstrated that cultural industries from emerging markets, such as Amapiano, can create bottom-up soft power effects without government intervention by leveraging digital platforms. These findings are consistent with the literature by Rabêlo Neto et al. (2021) and Wang et al. (2020) discussed in Chapter Six. In the context of Amapiano, participants demonstrated that the findings extend existing literature by showing that the genre currently generates soft power and opens up opportunities for foreign market access without state-led institutional intervention.

The participants demonstrated that Amapiano, as a cultural product, communicates and exports South Africa's national identity, ensuring that South African cultures and narratives are present across global audiences. The participants demonstrated that Amapiano serves as a cultural diplomatic tool, communicating an authentic, contemporary image of South Africa.

The consistent presence of Amapiano has created a pathway for South Africa's national identity to be experienced from a different perspective that aligns with the modern South African narrative. These findings are consistent with the literature by Olusola Ogunnubi & Idowu (2022) and Linardaki & Aslanides (2020).

Global collaboration with key stakeholders involved in exporting Amapiano, such as promoters, platforms, brand partners, festival promoters and playlist editors, has normalised Amapiano in the global entertainment circuit. The participants highlighted that this normalisation of the Amapiano global entertainment circuit has resulted in both international commercial opportunities and functioning as a diplomatic bridge, exporting South Africa's culture and narratives to foreign audiences.

These findings from the participants extend to the existing literature by Zanella et al. (2024), which discusses that collaboration within the cultural industry builds relational capital, while Wang et al. (2020) argue that collaborations facilitated by digital platforms have the potential to create economic value and global legitimacy.

In conclusion, the findings from research question one indicates that Amapiano functions as a form of soft power built by key stakeholders within the Amapiano ecosystem without the involvement of state-led institutions. The participants' findings also demonstrated that Amapiano serves to export South Africa's culture and national identity, and, through collaborations, the genre has built commercial bridges while also functioning as a diplomatic tool. The themes in research question one largely aligns with the literature but also extend it within the context of Amapiano as a South African cultural product.

7.2.2 Conclusion on Research Question 2

Research Question 2: How has the rise of Amapiano as a cultural industry contributed to South Africa's visibility and economic value in the global cultural economy?

The aim of research question two was to identify how the global rise and internationalisation of Amapiano as a cultural industry has contributed to South Africa's visibility and economic value in the international cultural economy.

The empirical findings across the three themes discussed in Chapter Six were largely consistent with the existing academic literature, except for one theme that extended the findings of the literature that was discussed.

Participants in the research findings discussed that the global rise and internationalisation of Amapiano were due to the genre having built an ecosystem of key local and foreign stakeholders who played distinct yet complementary roles in the export of the genre and its cultural products. Participants explained that this ecosystem includes entrepreneurs, creatives, managers, distributors, promoters, platforms, and brands.

Hesmondhalgh's (2019) literature highlights that cultural industries seeking to build global market access need a network of economic systems that link symbolic value to a system that generates demand. These findings by participants are consistent with the existing literature discussed in Chapter Six.

The global rise and internationalisation of Amapiano have proven to be not just a trend, but also one that has not generated commercial or economic value for the genre's entrepreneurs and creatives. The participants demonstrated that the genre has proven commercially viable at a global level, as evidenced by the participation of Amapiano's entrepreneurs and creatives in the broader global cultural value chain. Agostino et al. (2020) argue that the platformisation of the cultural industry has given cultural entrepreneurs and creatives greater space to participate across the value chain.

Mikić & Zbucea (2021) highlight that cultural industries with global presence can benefit from spillovers from other cultural sectors. The participants demonstrated this commercial viability by showing, in the findings, that the genre had begun to experience demand from spillover industries such as fashion, consistent with the literature.

The participants also discussed that the genre has received significant international growth and commercial activity. There is still a mismatch between the commercial gains industry players derive from major global brands and multinationals. The findings are consistent with the warning in Nieborg et al.'s (2020) literature about the risks cultural industries potentially face in modern times.

The research found that although the genre has experienced global success, structural barriers, such as systems and processes, hinder its sustainability in international markets. The study also identified that specific markets have posed existential challenges to the internationalisation of Amapiano.

According to the literature by Comunian & England (2020), the industry's accelerated digitisation has not given players enough time to professionalise their operations. The research findings highlighted that the accelerated growth of Amapiano in the global cultural sector, among key stakeholders and consumers, has forced entrepreneurs and creatives to meet global demand quickly. Still, the lack of professionalism in the border industry is compromising the sustainability and international legitimacy of the genre.

The research found that Amapiano struggles to penetrate markets such as the United States of America, key markets in the global cultural economy, because the genre fails to meet the professional standards in those markets. Wang et al. (2020) argue that institutional voids will be the most significant challenge for cultural industries in emerging markets. The research found that a lack of support from South Africa government entities has also created additional barriers to entry for entrepreneurs and creatives in the Amapiano industry, consistent with the literature.

The research found that the global rise of Amapiano has created potential friction between Afrobeats and Amapiano players, especially as it began to find audiences in Nigerian markets. The research found that this friction was about which country controls the global ownership and identity of Amapiano. These findings were consistent with additional and supplementary literature by Olusola Ogunnubi et al. (2022).

In conclusion, the findings from research question two indicated that an emerging ecosystem with key local and foreign stakeholders facilitates the global rise and internationalisation of Amapiano. The research findings also demonstrated that Amapiano has become a globally commercialised and recognised emerging global genre, but structural challenges have the potential to compromise its global sustainability. The themes in research question two are mainly consistent

with the literature but also extend to the literature on Amapiano as a South African cultural product.

7.2.2 Conclusion on Research Question 3

Research Question 3: What role have digital platforms (e.g., streaming, social media) played in the internationalisation of Amapiano and in its being a form of Soft Power?

The aim of research question three was to identify the role that digital platforms such as Spotify and TikTok played in the internationalisation of Amapiano and its emergence as a form of Soft Power for South Africa.

The empirical findings across the three themes discussed in Chapter Six were consistent with the existing academic literature.

The research findings indicate that digital platforms, specifically social media platforms TikTok and other Digital Streaming platforms like Spotify, have enabled the amplification of Amapiano to foreign audiences, resulting in its global rise and internationalisation. The research found that TikTok was the most impactful digital platform for entrepreneurs and creatives because of its instant visibility, virality, and discovery of cultural products. Agostino et al. (2020) discuss how TikTok has revolutionised the cultural industry, which aligns with the findings in Chapter Six.

The research findings also highlight that TikTok, as a platform, enables global and local audiences to create virtual communities around narratives and cultures that Amapiano communicates through its products. The participants highlighted that once these communities rally behind your product (e.g., a song) and consistently engage with it on TikTok, digital traffic will translate into commercial activity. Zanella et al. (2024) are consistent with the findings from the discussions.

The research findings demonstrated that the audience co-creation culture also accelerated the global rise and internationalisation of Amapiano. The findings highlighted that a co-creation culture among audience's spreads Amapiano's cultural products by encouraging global audiences to create their own remixes of dance challenges.

The research findings demonstrated that, because of the audience co-creation culture, entrepreneurs and creatives had to strategically restructure their business models to cultivate audiences capable of recreating. Nieborg et al. (2020) discuss in their literature that audiences' re-creation of cultural products has become an accelerator for the cultural industry's businesses.

Nieborg et al. (2020) argue that the success of a song is based on how effective its dance challenge is. The findings in the discussions are consistent with the conclusions of the literature. The research findings highlighted that TikTok has become the primary way people discover music in modern society. The participants demonstrated that TikTok is effective because of its algorithmic and viral nature, positioning it as the new radio. Participants found that TikTok has become the most critical communication tool for entrepreneurs and creatives.

COVID-19 in the research findings was highlighted as a turning moment for the global rise and internationalisation of Amapiano. The participants emphasised that Amapiano was primarily a regional genre confined to South Africa's borders before the COVID-19 pandemic. The research found that Amapiano entrepreneurs and creatives took advantage of the high levels of digital consumption enabled by the pandemic. Jeannotte (2021) argued that culture entrepreneurs and creatives had to quickly shift their strategies during the pandemic to remain relevant.

Participants' findings highlighted that, during lockdown, entrepreneurs and creatives resorted to creative means, such as hosting live sessions on social media platforms that streamed private parties and studio sessions. Participants highlighted that these initiatives helped build a global fanbase and audience, which ultimately became commercially viable.

The participants also highlighted that entrepreneurs and creatives turned to touring and performing in foreign markets like Tanzania because their lockdown had ended before South Africa's. These findings by Banks and O'Connor (2021) are consistent with the discussions, as the literature highlights that the pandemic required entrepreneurs and creatives to act decisively.

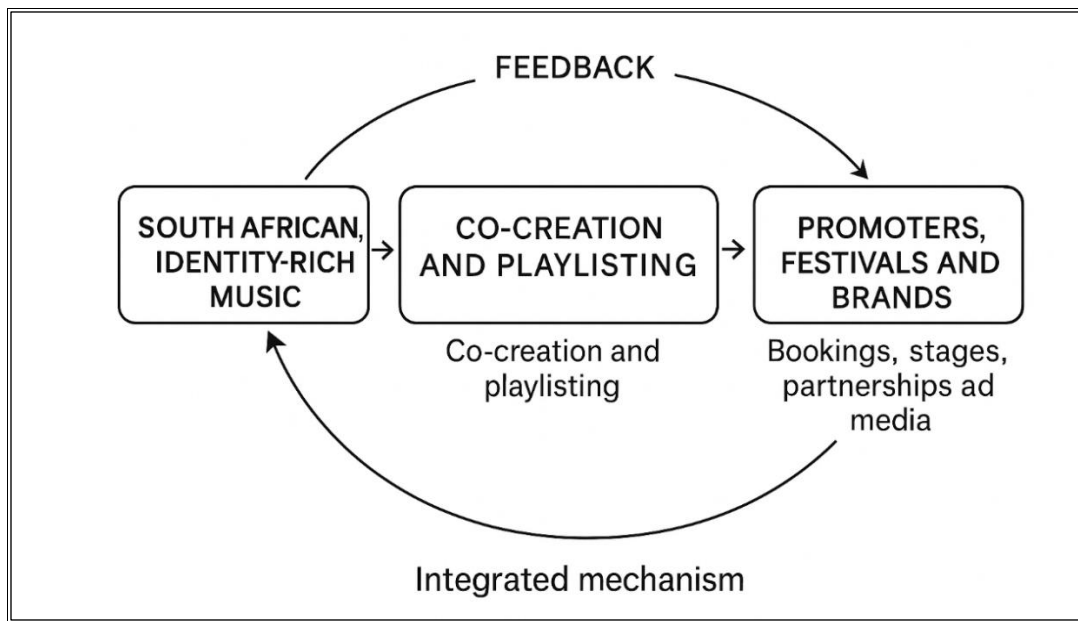
In conclusion, the findings from research question three indicated that digital platforms, particularly TikTok and other streaming platforms, have become major amplifiers of Amapiano and South Africa's culture. The research findings highlighted that the audience co-creation culture has become a strategic tool and mechanism for spreading Amapiano and its cultural products, and that the COVID-19 pandemic marked the official turning point in the global rise and internationalisation of Amapiano.

7.2.4 Principal theoretical conclusions: a textual conceptual framework

South Africa's cultures, identity, and narratives are captured and translated into cultural products, such as a song. This cultural product is amplified by audiences' co-creation, playlisting and social media challenges. These initiatives create demand, and festivals, promoters, and brands convert

it into commercial activities. These commercial activities feedback into cultural visibility and legitimacy.

Figure 3: Conceptual framework for the internationalisation and global rise of Amapiano and its soft power



Source: Author's own. Compiled based on Wang et al. (2020), Zanella et al. (2024), Tella (2019), Kolokytha (2022), Comunian & England (2020), Belitski et al. (2022), Olusola Ogunnubi et al. (2022), Tella (2019), Eaby-Lomas (2025), Jeannotte (2021), Agostino et al. (2020), and Banks and O'Connor (2021).

7.3 Research Contributions

Contributions in the context of existing literature

The research study aimed to understand Amapiano as a soft power mechanism, how it enhances and contributes to South Africa's image, and how it creates opportunities for cultural businesses to access foreign markets.

The research study confirmed that when digital platforms feature songs through playlists, global audiences co-create content around them, which drives online attention and trends (Agostino et al., 2020). This results in entrepreneurs and creatives being demanded to feature on international stages at festivals, tours, and award ceremonies (Hesmondhalgh, 2019). This builds the

confidence of major decision-makers in the global cultural economy to involve artists in more global opportunities, and, if this is done consistently, it exports the narratives and cultures of the home markets of those cultural products to international audiences (Clarke, 2020).

What this study contributes

- 1. Genre identity contestation** - The study revealed that genres from countries without sophisticated global music ecosystems risk having their narratives and identities contested by sophisticated music markets, as discussed in the findings. The study found that, in the case of Amapiano, participants reported ongoing contestation over its identity between South Africa and Nigeria. The study revealed that this dynamic occurred because Nigeria's Afrobeats has built a sophisticated global ecosystem.
- 2. Export limitations** - The study revealed that to build a sustainable international genre, the ecosystem requires professional capabilities and standards to compete sustainably alongside other global genres. The study found that, in the case of Amapiano, its ecosystem still lacks capabilities such as visas and permits, global public relations and media engagements, and general professionalism requirements in line with global music industry standards.
- 3. Digital platforms' reliance** - The study revealed that work and tasks around digital platforms have become core, survival-level work within the music industry's business model. The study showed activities such as social media campaigns, social media engagements, pitching and playlisting on digital streaming platforms, and using data collected from these platforms to create strategies. The study, specifically regarding Amapiano, revealed that entrepreneurs and creatives relied heavily on digital platforms to promote Amapiano activities.

7.4 Limitations of the research study

The limitations of the study are that it is first focused on one emerging market, South Africa, and on one specific cultural industry, Amapiano, and its business activities in that context, thus limiting the study's scope. The research study's narrow, specific focus helped the researcher collect data and provide depth rather than volume. This depth also limits how applicable the research's conclusions and recommendations are to other countries and cultural industries, such as different genres.

The research study's conclusions were based on a qualitative design that relied on a limited number of interviews from three specific segments of the Amapiano ecosystem. These limitations in perspectives are a result of time and access constraints, as the research study had to be completed in a limited number of months.

The study's conclusion was based on retrospective findings, which were influenced by participants' biases. Finally, the study makes recommendations around digital platforms. The processes and mechanics on digital platforms are constantly evolving because of rules, algorithmic patterns, and other factors. The study reflects how things have worked in the context of Amapiano between 2019 and October 2025; these findings and hypotheses around digital platforms could look different in the future.

7.5 Recommendations for management and other stakeholders

The identified structural barriers and global market-entry challenges in the study create sustainability risks for Amapiano as a cultural industry. Entrepreneurs and creatives in the ecosystem should consider lobbying government institutions to bring them into the ecosystem, particularly around obtaining visas and permits. The entrepreneurs and creatives should study sophisticated ecosystems in the music industries that have internationalised from emerging markets. The learnings from this analysis should begin to be implemented in the Amapiano ecosystem.

The identified reliance on TikTok and digital streaming platforms as cultural amplifiers proved critical to the internationalisation of Amapiano. Entrepreneurs and creatives in the ecosystem should consistently train and upskill to keep up with shifts and changes in digital platforms, or work with consultants and advisors to stay up to date. The researcher identified that keeping up with these changes will remain critical to Amapiano's global sustainability.

The identified global market entry challenges are particularly around controlling the narrative and identity of Amapiano. Stakeholders in the Amapiano ecosystem, particularly local stakeholders, need to collaborate on creating initiatives and campaigns. These campaigns and initiatives should focus on communications that clearly demonstrate that Amapiano is a South African-born genre. This collective effort will accelerate communication and outputs to manage the narrative.

The identified Amapiano cultural-industry ecosystem found that the absence of relevant government departments poses potential challenges to its existence. Entrepreneurs and creatives

in the Amapiano ecosystem, particularly local stakeholders, need to collectively lobby key government agencies to develop a small office or desk to fast-track their internationalisation efforts.

7.6 Suggestion for future research

Future international business researchers can extend the scope of the research study by conducting a longitudinal comparison between Amapiano and Afrobeats across key foreign markets, such as the United Kingdom, the United States of America, and Europe, to examine market-entry dynamics that shape the internationalisation of the genres in the context of the global cultural economy.

In addition, international business researchers can focus on measuring soft power more quantitatively by leveraging a mixed-method approach that links digital platform data to economic indicators, such as touring and festival bookings, to examine whether correlations exist. Furthermore, future studies should thoroughly investigate institutional voids, including government policies and their effects on cultural industries in emerging markets that are internationalising their businesses.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Consent Form

Informed consent for interviews

Note: This standard informed consent letter to be used in qualitative interviews, must be separate from interview guide, must be signed before the interview commences. The signed form must be stored separately from the data collected

I am conducting research on **How has Amapiano influenced South Africa's Soft Power by shaping international image and enhancing foreign market access.** Our interview is expected to last **60min**, and will help us understand How **does Amapiano function as a form of Soft Power for South Africa and create a pathway for foreign market access for cultural business.** **Your participation is voluntary and you can withdraw at any time without penalty.** By signing this letter, you are indicating that you have given permission for:

- The interview to be recorded;
- The recording to be transcribed by a third-party transcriber, who will be subject to a standard non-disclosure agreement;
- Verbatim quotations from the interview may be used in the report, provided they are not identified with your name or that of your organisation;
- The data to be used as part of a report that will be publicly available once the examination process has been completed; and
- All data to be reported and stored without identifiers.

If you have any concerns, please contact my supervisor or me. Our details are provided below.

Signature of participant: ____
____Date:

Signature of researcher: _
____Date:

Source: Author's Own

Appendix 2: Interview Protocol

Research Questions	Interview Guide
<p>Primary Question - Research Question 1: How does Amapiano function as a form of Soft Power for South Africa and create a pathway for foreign market access for cultural business</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Please introduce yourself and describe your role in the Amapiano ecosystem and industry. • Which foreign markets have you been exposed to through your work in the Amapiano ecosystem, and why? • In your experience, what aspect of Amapiano and its culture makes it distinctly South African? • Have you observed or analysed how Amapiano has influenced international audiences' perceptions of South Africa? • In what way, if any, do you think Amapiano serves as a soft power for South Africa? From a cultural, economic or social perspective?
<p>Research Question 2: How has the rise of Amapiano as a cultural industry contributed to South Africa's visibility and economic value in the global cultural economy?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What economic opportunities (e.g tours, shows, partnerships and licensing, etc) have emerged for your business or clients because of Amapiano's global success? • In your view, how does the genre shape the perceptions of South Africa's talent and cultural landscape?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In your view, does the genre add symbolic or cultural value to the global cultural economy?
<p>Research Question 3: What role have digital platforms (e.g., streaming, social media) played in the internationalisation of Amapiano and in its being a form of Soft Power?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which digital platforms have played a key role in influencing the musicians you work with or have worked with in growing audiences internationally? • What type of Amapiano content in your experience typically goes viral, and why do you think it does? • How have platforms like TikTok, YouTube, Spotify, etc, played a role in you reaching foreign markets? • Do digital platforms create any challenges or barriers that you had to overcome or strategise around in internationalising your clients' music?

Source: Author's Own

Appendix 3: List of codes used

Research Question	First Order Code (78 Codes) Atlas.ti	Second Order Codes (24 Codes)	
<p>RQ1 — How Amapiano functions as Soft Power & opens pathways to foreign market access</p>	<p>Amapiano has created a spotlight on South Africa (6)</p>	<p>Non-State Cultural Diplomacy</p>	
	<p>Non-Strategic but yet powerful Influence – Amapiano (13)</p>		
	<p>Unrealised Soft Power Potential (10)</p>		
	<p>Amapiano is a soft power for South Africa (2)</p>		
	<p>South Africa is becoming more visible globally due to Amapiano (2)</p>		
	<p>South African – Cultural Representation (2)</p>		
	<p>National image – Amapiano shapes it positively (1)</p>		
	<p>National Image – Amapiano can do more/better (1)</p>		
	<p>Amapiano does not have external support to become soft power (5)</p>		
	<p>South African – Cultural Representation (2)</p>		<p>Heritage & unity</p>
	<p>Language as a cultural market (5)</p>		
	<p>Amapiano is attractive to cities with young people (2)</p>		<p>Demography & youth appeal</p>
<p>South Africa does not have a large diaspora (1)</p>			

	Authentic/non-curated content goes viral (5)	Authenticity drives attention and shapes perception
	Viral Content – Dance (8)	
	The foreign audience wants to learn about South Africa and Amapiano (3)	
	Pan-Africanisation of the genre (5)	Pan-African networks & diaspora
	Non-SA – Diaspora Engagement (5)	
	Nigeria has a large Diaspora (3)	
	Amapiano attracting global A-List Star Collaborations (7)	Global exchanges & partnerships
	Building Bridges between South Africa and other Countries (6)	
	Foreign People travelling to South Africa – Tourism (2)	Attraction & travel flow
Tourism Opportunities being missed (6)		
RQ2 — Visibility & economic value in the global cultural economy	Transition from Informal Business to Structured (8)	Entrepreneurship & Home-Based Employment
	Youth Empowerment (4)	
	Contribute to the global cultural economy (6)	Export activity
	Business Expansion Abroad – Physical (3)	
	Business Avenue – Brand Deals (5)	Brand/label avenues

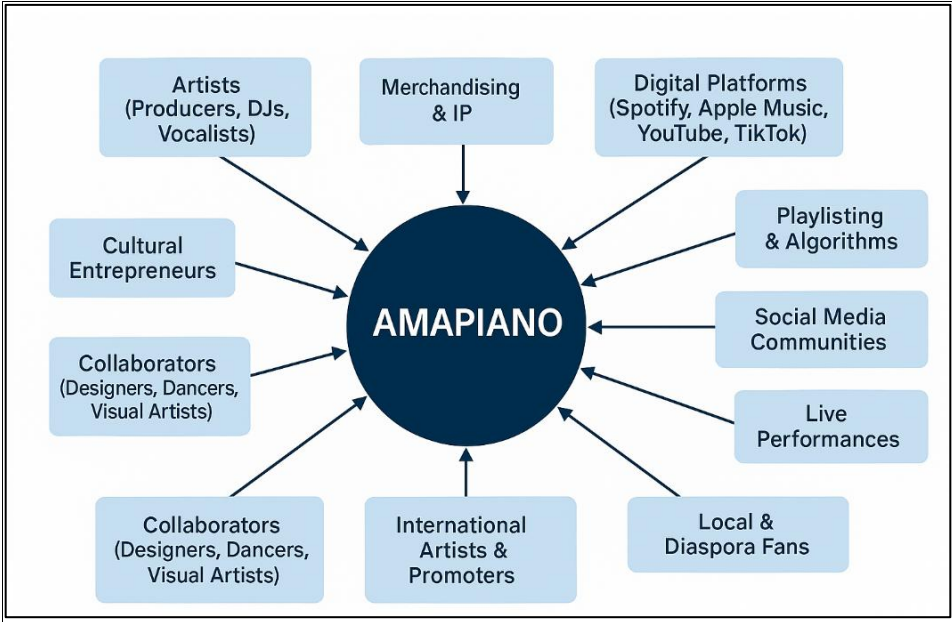
	Business Avenue – Label Services (2)	
	Fashion Spillovers benefits (7)	Lifestyle/fashion economy
	Global fashion brands performing well in South Africa (1)	
	Amapiano participates in the Grammy's (4)	Awards & platforms
	Spotify billboards overseas – propelled (1)	
	Amapiano Festival in Foreign Markets (4)	Festivals & demand
	Demand for Amapiano artists in major festivals abroad (2)	
	Global Reach (2)	
	COVID-19 – Become a propeller for Amapiano (5)	
	Amapiano industry global infrastructure lacks (3)	Infrastructure & governance limits
	Government entities not seizing opportunities (2)	
	Independent artists struggle to get brand deals (1)	Gatekeeping & bargaining power
	Local office of global brands gatekeeping (2)	
	Major record labels are still gatekeepers (1)	
	Major record labels lost control of Amapiano (1)	

	Market Entry Barriers (2)	Market access barriers
	Market Entry Barriers – USA (4)	
	Amapiano VS Afrobeat (3)	Industry competition
RQ3 — Role of digital platforms in internationalisation & soft power	TikTok as a cultural amplifier (13)	TikTok & short-form discovery
	Other social media platforms are not as effective as TikTok (1)	
	Digital Streaming Platforms have been the main propeller (3)	Streaming infrastructure & playlists
	Spotify playlisting as an amplifier (3)	
	YouTube – Has been a propeller (2)	
	African DSPs as an Amplifier (3)	
	Business – Digital music platform doesn't have significant revenue (1)	Platform economics
	Digital Streaming Platforms' fees are a barrier (1)	
	DSPs could be playing a more significant role (1)	
	Major Record labels are barriers in digital platforms (2)	Multinational control
	Social media barriers (2)	
	COVID-19 – Become a propeller for Amapiano (5)	Lockdown-to-global shift

	Digital Streaming Platforms have been the main propeller (3)	
	Digital platforms have democratised foreign market access (1)	Democratised access
	Foreign Market – Europe (13)	Geographic penetration
	Foreign Market – UK (4)	
	Foreign Market – Tanzania, 1st Africa Market to open to Amapiano (5)	
	Foreign Market – Africa (6)	
	Foreign Market – Middle East (3)	
	Foreign Market – Asia (2)	
	Foreign Market – Australia (2)	
	Foreign market – USA (1)	
	Travelling abroad presents global opportunities (8)	
	Global audience sees similarities with Amapiano in their cultures (1)	

Source: Author's Own

Appendix 4: Amapiano Ecosystem



Source: Author's Own