

Full Length Research Paper

# The relationship among certain youths' demographic variables and their social media browsing behaviour

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The increased use of social media particularly amongst youths has placed greater importance of social media as a marketing and communication tool. Based on this, this work is an exploratory study conducted among a convenience sample of 150 youths (university students); the relationship amongst their age, gender, social media browsing and purchasing behaviour was examined. It was ascertained through both multiple regression analysis (R-value of 0.98; R-square of 0.009; adjusted R-square of .003; standard error of estimate .469) and Pearson Chi-Square test result ( $p=0.086$ ) that with respect to the sample of youth consumers, there is no significant relationship between age and the frequency of purchase using social media. However, with respect to the relationship between gender and social media browsing behaviour, the Pearson Chi-Square test value of  $p=0.009$  indicated that with respect to the sample of respondents, there is a significant relationship between gender and social media browsing. Furthermore, three factors, namely, important communication channel, better product and brand choice and spending power emerged as influencing youths' purchasing behaviour through social media browsing. The implications of the findings although exploratory, are obvious, in that marketers need to re-evaluate their marketing and communication strategies in order to influence the purchasing behaviour of youths through social media platforms.

**Key words:** Social media, youth consumer behaviour, social media browsing.

## INTRODUCTION

Through the constantly changing world of information technologies, new media has paved the way for an array of innovative communication techniques which have contributed to the success and profitability of marketers. Social media in particular affects how marketers connect with and communicate with consumers and influence their purchasing decisions and preferences. Social media represents the 'online' technologies and practices that individuals make use of to share opinions, insights, experiences and perspectives with each other (Kumara, 2008); it represents a significant change which summarizes the importance and consequences of interaction between consumers and the community (Universal

McCANN, 2008). Social media which takes on various forms including social networks, wikis, blogs, micro-blogs, vlogs, podcasts and content communities (Kumara, 2008) contributes to an important shift which marks the change from a traditional, objective, rational and institutional perspective to a subjective, emotive, personalized and human perspective (Odden, 2008).

In a survey of 700 international marketers, Wilfred App (Mershon, 2012) discovered that nearly all marketers find value from social media and, that 75% of marketers planned to increase their media spending in 2012. The top two benefits highlighted by these marketers are increased brand awareness and the ability to engage

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in dialogue directly with their consumers. Similar results were reported in 2011, where it was found that 88% of marketers also indicated increased exposure to be the number one benefit of social media marketing (Mershon, 2012).

Since the youths are growing up in a world of new and rapidly changing technologies, they are therefore likely to make use of new media in their daily activities (Carenzio, 2008). Despite the growing usage of social media, which is indicative of a potentially new marketing and communication platform, little evidence exists of academic research which explores how South African marketers make use of social media to influence consumers' behaviour, especially among the youths. In light of this, this study will explore, with respect to the youths, the relationship amongst age, gender, social media browsing and purchasing behaviour.

### **Social media, marketing communication and consumers' behaviour**

Although social media has created enormous opportunities for marketers around the world, they have not fully capitalized on this opportunity to influence purchasing behaviour amongst consumers, especially the youths (Kumara, 2008; Stelzner, 2009). Social media can be regarded as one of the fastest growing areas of the internet (eMarketer, 2009), and according to the Strategy Analytics Report (2008), social media users will exceed one billion by 2012. Research conducted by Universal McCANN's annual social media tracker in 2009 revealed that 25% of South Africa's active internet users have uploaded videos on social media platforms, two million have had an encounter with at least one social website and, 2.8 million South Africans are users of Facebook, the social networking site (Universal McCANN, 2009). Research conducted by Headstream Consulting in November 2010 reports that the marketers of brands that have embraced social media correctly as a part of their marketing and communication efforts include Nike Plus, Converse, Dell, Starbucks, Innocent, Giffgaff and Groupon UK (Copyright Company, 2008).

The youth market consists of young consumers aged between 18 to 24 years (MiMi.hu Company, 2000). Over the past decade, marketers have been actively targeting the youth market as this market is demographically and economically more attractive and more rewarding (MiMi.hu Company, 2000). In South Africa, for example, it is reported that young people between the ages of 8-22 years have an estimated spending power of R95.3 billion (Lange, 2010). In their attempts to penetrate the youth market, marketers have to constantly create new ways of communicating with them, and communication and engagement has become easier with the interactive nature of social media (Lange, 2010).

Through a review of the literature, it became evident that in South Africa, marketers are hesitant to make use of social media as a medium for influencing purchasing behaviour compared to several countries overseas (Universal McCANN, 2009; Levitt, 2010). Thus, an investigation into social media and its influence on the purchasing behaviour of the youths is essential as it will afford South African marketers the opportunity to recognise the strength of social media as a tool for influencing youth consumers' behaviour.

### **METHODOLOGY**

The target population was the youths residing in Durban, South Africa. However, due to the exploratory nature of this study and, bearing in mind the factors outlined by Sekaran (2003) with regard to sample size, a convenience sample size of 150 respondents was deemed adequate. The sampling frame used comprised all students between the ages of 18-24 studying at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Westville Campus and Howard College).

#### **Data collection**

A structured questionnaire, specifically designed as per guidelines proposed by Ghauri et al. (1995) was administered to 150 students by the primary researcher to ensure that the respondents were from the specified age (18-24 years) group. The questionnaire was administered over a three week period, at two Media Studies tutorial classes, in computer LANs and, coffee shops at the Westville and Howard College campuses of the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

The first two questions were screening questions (Hair *et al.* 2006: 460) which required the respondents to state whether or not they actively sought product and company information from social media platforms. If a respondent answered 'No' to screening question, the interview was terminated and the participant was thanked for his or her willingness to participate. The remaining questions addressed the objective of the research, namely, to ascertain how youths' demographic variables such as age and gender are associated with youth social media browsing and purchasing behaviour.

### **RESEARCH FINDINGS**

Of the 145 respondents between the ages of 18-24, 15 belonged to the 18-19 age group, 86 were between the ages 20-22 and 44 were in the 23-24 age group. There was a reasonably equal representation of male (70) and female (75) respondents.

#### **The relationship amongst age, gender and social media browsing**

##### **Age and social media browsing**

The relationship between age and social media browsing was investigated by cross tabulating the variables 'age' and the question which was worded 'do you actively seek

**Table 1.** The relationship between age and social media browsing.

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	exact Sig. (1-sided)	point Probability
Pearson Chi-Square	.918 <sup>a</sup>	2	.632	.781		
Likelihood Ratio	1.042	2	.594	.781		
Fisher's Exact Test	1.129			.605		
Linear-by-Linear Association	.796 <sup>b</sup>	1	.372	.521	.280	.169
N of Valid Cases	145					

a. 3 cells (50.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .72. b. The standardized statistic is -.892.

**Table 2.** The relationship between gender and social media browsing.

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	(2- Exact Sig. (1-sided)	Point probability
Pearson Chi-Square	6.865 <sup>a</sup>	1	.009	.014	.009	
Continuity correction <sup>b</sup>	4.984	1	.026			
Likelihood ratio	9.561	1	.002	.014	.009	
Fisher's exact test				.014	.009	
Linear-by-linear association	6.817 <sup>c</sup>	1	.009	.014	.009	.009
N of valid cases	145					

a. 2 cells (50.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 3.38. b. Computed only for a 2x2 table. c. The standardized statistic is 2.611.

out brand pages on social media platforms?' The results of the cross tabulation captured in Table 1 reveal a Pearson's Chi-Square test value of  $p=0.0632$ , which implies that there is no significant relationship between age and social media browsing. This finding is supported by other researchers such as Hargittai (2007) and Treadaway and Smith (2010).

### Gender and social media browsing

A cross tabulation was also conducted between gender and social media information search, in order to determine if there is a relationship between gender and social media browsing. The Pearson Chi-Square test value of  $p=0.009$  reflected in Table 2 indicates that with respect to the sample of respondents, there is a significant relationship between gender and social media browsing. The aforementioned is also supported by several researchers, inter-alia, Hargittai (2007), Hargittai and Shafer (2006), Boyd (2001), Bimber (2000), and Smith and Kollock (1999). Furthermore, some researchers (Jackson et al., 2001; Ono and Zavodny, 2003) have also shown that men spend more time 'online' and claim higher-level computer skills.

From the above findings, marketers need to realize that

the 'offline' identities of consumers such as gender affect their 'online' interactions, which have a direct impact on their social media browsing patterns and purchasing behaviour.

### Social media browsing and youths' purchasing behaviour

Considering that factor analysis was selected as the most appropriate technique for establishing factors which influenced how social media browsing in the youth market led to purchasing, the Kaiser Meyer Olkin (KMO) (Malhotra, 1993) measure of sampling adequacy and the Bartlett's test of sphericity (Foulger, 2011) were conducted to ascertain if factor analysis was indeed appropriate. Since according to Malhotra (1993) high KMO values on a scale of 0 to 1 reveal that factor analysis is an appropriate technique, and values below 0.5 reveal that factor analysis is inappropriate, and given that the data produced a KMO value of 0.925 (Table 3), which is reasonably close to the possible maximum value of 1, it became apparent that factor analysis was indeed an appropriate and meaningful outcome for the variables shown in Table 4. Furthermore, the Bartlett's test of Sphericity which is an indicator of the strength among the

**Table 3.** KMO and Barlett's Test.

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		.925
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	3582.180
Df		231
Sig		.000

**Table 4.** Total variance among the factors.

Component	Initial Eigen-value			Extraction sums of squared loadings		
	Total	% of variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of variance	Cumulative %
1	13.423	61.014	61.014	13.423	61.014	61.014
2	1.874	8.517	69.531	1.874	8.517	69.531
3	1.091	4.958	74.490	1.091	4.958	74.490

Extraction method: principal component analysis.

variables (Foulger, 2011) revealed an observed significance level of .0000 and a Sphericity value of 3582.18 (Table 3), which suggests that there is not only a strong relationship among the items in Table 4, but also the appropriateness of the data for factor analysis.

### Age and frequency of purchase using social media

Cross tabulation was initially conducted in order to explore the relationship between age and frequency of purchase with respect to the youths. According to the Pearson Chi-Square test result ( $p=0.086$ ) reflected in Table 4, there is no significant relationship between age and the frequency of purchase, with respect to the sample of respondents. Further support for the aforementioned was obtained through multiple regression analysis, which produced a R-value of 0.98 (R-square of 0.009; adjusted R-square of .003; standard error of estimate .469), suggesting that with respect to the sample of youth consumers, there is no significant relationship between their age and frequency of purchase. Hence, it may be assumed that with regard to the youth (18-24 year olds) market, age does not influence the frequency of purchase through social media browsing.

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The constantly developing media landscape and changing consumers' behaviour present new challenges and opportunities for marketing practitioners. As consumers proliferate, engage and connect on social media platforms, they are creating several new opportunities and avenues for marketers to increase the impact and return on investments of marketing and influence the purchasing behaviour of consumers.

The youths in particular, actively seek out social media platforms daily and spend many hours on these platforms, exposing themselves to greater influence and persuasion by marketers. However, marketers using these social media platforms need to use social media differently from traditional media for marketing and advertising due to the unique characteristics of social media, which characteristics include its search capabilities and ability to congregate consumers and archive their thoughts. Leveraging social media platforms requires marketers to be transparent, honest, interactive, relevant, engaging in sustained and continuous efforts and guiding and contributing in the co-creation of user generated content.

This study has revealed that marketers cannot afford to overlook the phenomenon of social media since it has become a preferred means of direct communication with consumers which significantly influence their purchasing behaviour. Social media influences several aspects of consumers' behaviour which include: information search, purchase decisions, purchase preferences and purchase behaviour and thus social media is an important and valuable marketing and communication tool which can be exploited by marketers in order to generate and increase sales and influence purchasing behaviour of consumers. Social media platforms have surfaced as second generation web based services which have transformed the way in which marketers interact, communicate, advertise and conduct business with consumers.

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