Identifying Segments within the Youth Social Media Market

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Abstract

Through an exploratory study conducted among a convenience sample of 145 youth, being university students, it became apparent that in terms of their social media browsing behaviour, it may be possible to define specific market segments. Through factor analysis, initially using Principal Component Analysis, and thereafter Varimax and Promax rotation, it emerged that the 22 items used to describe how and why the youth browse social media loaded onto eight factors, each of which was labelled to define specific market segments. The following labels, namely, Network Creators, Network Critics, Network Optimists, Network Pessimists, Network Collectors, Network Joiners, Network Spectators, and Inactives were similar to the six social techno graphic profiles which define the youth in terms of their participation level on social media. The segments identified in this, albeit exploratory study, could point to the need for marketers to constantly explore new ways of interacting and communicating with youth consumers. Furthermore, for marketers, an understanding of these potential consumer segments provides invaluable insight as this can be the foundation for many marketing and communication strategies.

Keywords: social media, youth consumer behaviour, market segments

Introduction

Today's consumers anticipate that in order to trust products and brands, they should encompass the elements of customization, interactivity and a means for which consumer voices can be heard, thus enabling a two-way flow of communication (Ivanauskas, 2009). This two-way flow of information highlights the power shift from the marketer to the consumer where communication plays a service-oriented and experience-creating, as opposed to a persuasive role (Raaij 1998, cited in Ivanauskas, 2009). As a result, consumers should be viewed not only as targets for products but as producers of experience, thus implying the need to understand their needs and preferences better. Constantinides and Fountain (2008) suggested that consumer preferences and decisions are fundamentally formed and based on inputs provided by parties beyond the power of 'online' marketers such as friends and family using social media platforms, hence users of social media have the ability to exercise great influence over other consumers' purchasing behaviour and decisions without having any direct contact with them.

The aforementioned is consistent with the underlying premise of the Verblenain consumer behavioural model which, states "that a person's attitudes and behaviour is primarily influenced by several levels of society" (Kotler, 1965: 42). These include: culture, subculture, social classes, reference groups and face-to-face groups (Kotler, 1965). The Verblenain model further states that consumers to a large extent are greatly influenced and moulded by present group memberships and aspiring group-memberships (Kotler, 1965). For example, a consumer may make a specific purchase in order to achieve actual or symbolic membership to their aspiration group. Frequently, celebrities serve as aspiration groups for many consumers. Twitter is an example of a social network that makes use of celebrities as part of their overall strategy. US celebrity Kim Kardashian reportedly receives 10 000 dollars a tweet to advertise on Twitter (Rich, 2011). In addition, Twitter receives an endorsement from Oprah Winfrey as Winfrey has three million followers on Twitter which is the largest influx of women of a certain age group into the service in one day (Bhargava, 2010).

Thus, reference groups can exert incredible influence and pressure on an individual, often persuading and altering an individual's purchasing patterns and behaviour. For marketers, this therefore means that factors such as brand choice are greatly influenced by these groups, and understanding the dynamics of these groups becomes essential as social media is being utilized as a platform to market products and brands.

From the brief discussion above, it can be deduced that the power to influence no longer predominantly lies in the hands of marketing experts as it is increasingly easy to share opinions, thoughts and experiences and generate influence through social media. However, despite the opportunities created by social media for marketers to influence consumer behaviour, especially the youth, marketers have failed to capitalize on this opportunity (Kumara 2008; Stelzner 2009). One reason for the aforementioned is possibly a failure to understand the social media browsing behaviour of consumers who comprise the various segments among the broad (youth) market, since a cursory review of the marketing literature in general, and marketing communication literature in particular, does not reveal much research attempting to identify segments within the youth market, specifically with respect to their social media usage patterns. In light of the aforementioned, this exploratory study was conducted among a sample of university students to ascertain if market segments existed among the youth who browse the social media.

Social Media Browsing and Market Segmentation

Several marketers invest a great amount of time studying customer personas in order to understand who customers are and how they behave 'online'. Customer personas influence their interaction and engagement with marketers on social media platforms, as well as their purchasing behaviour 'online.' Treadaway and Smith (2010) assert that marketers can create successful marketing campaigns by identifying who their consumers are, and what their primary motivations are for being on social networks, since this will ensure that marketers are able to craft better marketing campaigns and target their market segments more appropriately. The aforementioned view is supported by Somosi (2011) who stated that segmentation strategies are of utmost importance to social media marketers as adopting a single marketing strategy is futile. According to Somosi (2011) segmentation strategies adopted by marketers recognises that consumers are not monolithic as consumers have different needs, wants, tastes and preferences. Hence possessing an understanding of these differences, and engaging with consumer segments allows marketers to achieve greater success. For example, often with social networks such as Facebook, there are user profiles, typically a common feature, which has significant value as it can provide useful insight to marketers when positioning their products and brands to consumers and segmenting the target markets.

CM Photographics (Jason, 2011) is an example of a business that has taken full advantage of information received from user profiles on Facebook in order to reach their target customers, control their advertising budget and encourage, generate and increase purchasing behaviour amongst consumers. Facebook user profiles, for example, has provided CM Photographics the ability to target their exact demographic which is women between the age group of 23-30 and whose relationship status is 'engaged' on Facebook. Over the course of a year, CM Photographics was able to generate approximately 40 000 dollars in revenue directly from a 600 dollar advertising investment on Facebook (Jason, 2011). Of the Facebook users directed to the CM Photographic website, 60 percent became qualified leads as users actively expressed their interest in more information. It is thus plausible to agree with Treadaway and Smith (2010) who stated that Facebook allows its marketers to segment who they want to market to, be it gender, age, occupation, etc. Thus, as social media permeates the lives of consumers, marketing strategies such as market segmentation are now being redefined since social media platforms allow marketers to target specific consumer segments, engage and interact with these segments on a more personal and reciprocative level (JSL Agency, 2011). Targeting specific market segments through social media platforms allows marketers to gain insight into consumer's personal qualities, likes, and dislikes which can be used as a basis for segmentation and could possibly lead to stronger and more long lasting consumer relationships. For example, research conducted by Chadwick Martin Bailey, Inc (2010) revealed that **c**onsumers engaged through social media such as Facebook and Twitter are over 50% more likely to buy and recommend brands to others.

Furthermore, a study by the Centre for Asia Pacific Aviation (2012) revealed how airlines are increasingly utilising social media platforms to address and exploit key market segments with significant success (JSL Agency, 2011). Several airline carriers such as AirTran, Lufthansa and Virgin Active have actively targeted college-aged consumers in order to take advantage of their familiarity with social media. In addition, social networking sites were specifically designed for targeting the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender/transsexual demographic which allows users to interact through virtual maps and recommend popular restaurants and events (JSL Agency, 2011).

Aimia (2012: 1) reports that some individuals actively engage on social media platforms and frequently access their accounts whilst others only browse social media platforms before disengaging. Hence marketers frequenting social media platforms continually struggle in understanding the true motivations and purchase intent behind customers' social media activity. Furthermore, research conducted by Aimia (2012:1) revealed that in order for marketers to generate effective marketing strategies, segmentation should be leveraged on, since proper segmentation strategies adopted by marketers on social media platforms helps to identify, understand and influence customers. In addition, segmentation can help marketers control their marketing expenditure more effectively by building long relationships with consumers based on their behaviour (Aimia, 2012).

Moreover, by focusing limited resources on a small and focused segment of the market, several marketers can create a loyal foundation necessary for expansion, and social media can facilitate this process at a fraction of traditional marketing expenditures (JSL Agency, 2012). For example, Amazon first targeted only serious book enthusiasts with Internet access and a willingness to buy books over the Internet, but by 2011 Amazon expanded to selling virtually anything online (JSL Agency, 2012). Hence penetrating and targeting smaller but marketable niches through social media channels can provide marketers with several advantages.

According to Treadaway and Smith, (2010), the following are a combination of human needs that social media users are motivated by:

- Love- Finding love or keeping up with loved ones;
- Self expression/emotion- Sharing life's details with friends;
- Sharing opinions/influencing friends- Making use of social platforms to influence opinions;
- Showing off- Sharing life's successes and/or achievements with others;
- Fun/escapism/humour- Making use of social media for a good laugh;
- Memories and nostalgia- Catching up with old friends and sharing old memories, and
- Making money- Making use of social media to support professional pursuits.

Given that the literature alluded to the existence of market segments among the youth consumers who actively engage on social media platforms and make purchase decisions based on information obtained on these platforms, this paper reports the results of a study conducted among a convenience sample of university youth to ascertain if they may be grouped into segments based on their social media browsing behaviour.

Methodology

Non-probability, more specifically convenience sampling was used since it was not expected from this exploratory study to make 'sweeping' generalizations (Sekaran, 2003). A purposely-designed questionnaire was developed and administered to 150 University of KwaZulu-Natal students by the primary researcher at two Media Studies tutorial classes, in computer LANS, and coffee shops at two campuses. The questionnaire comprised 37 items concerning possible market segments within the youth market, expressed on a 5 point Likert scale ranging from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'.

Although there are various types of validity, in this study, only content validity was assured, by extracting items from previous studies identified through the literature review, and pilot testing the questionnaire among 10 students. The pilot test revealed that there was no misinterpretation of the questions.

To ensure reliability of the questionnaire, the Cronbach's alpha co-efficient was determined. This process resulted in a co-efficient of 0.921, which is regarded as a good value, since the closer the value is to 1, the higher the internal consistency and reliability (Sekaran & Bougie, 2010: 162). The SPSS software was used to perform the statistical analyses of the data.

Empirical Findings

Considering that the target group was respondents (youth) between the ages of 18-24, it became evident that of the 145 respondents, 15 respondents belonged to the 18-19 age group, 86 respondents were between the ages 20-22 and 44 were in the 23-24 age group.

Market Segments within the Youth Market

Factor analysis (Hair, Robert & Ortinau, 2006: 59) was conducted, initially using Principal Components Analysis, in order to establish whether underlying factors existed among those acknowledged as influencing the market segments found within the youth market. The Kaiser Meyer Olkin (KMO) measure was used to determine the effectiveness of factor analysis, and since as per Table 1, the KMO and Barlett's test are fairly close to the possible maximum value of 1, this indicated that factor analysis was indeed a meaningful and effective analysis (Malhotra, 1993). Table 1 also shows the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin

(KMO) and Bartlett's tests of sphericity, which further confirm the suitability of the data for factor analysis.

Table 1: KMO and Barlett's Test (n=145)

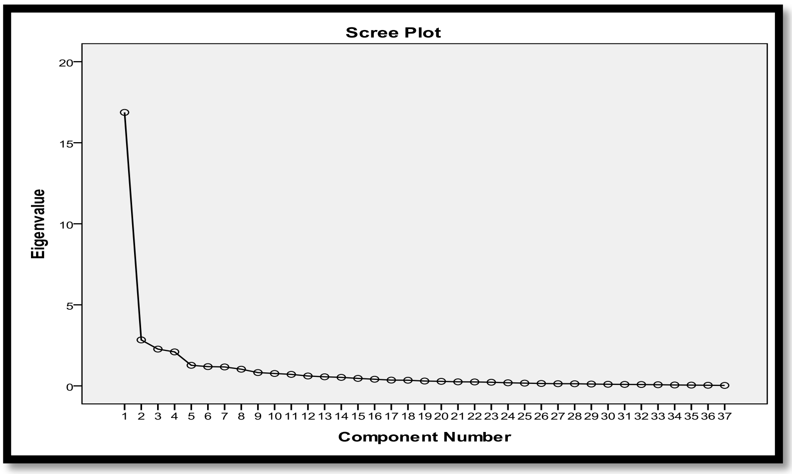
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		**.895**
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	**5384.226**
	Df	666
	Sig.	.000

According to the results presented in Table 2, a total variance of 77.65 % is explained by eight factors, and these factors are also confirmed by the Scree Plot in Figure 1, which shows that the graph elbows at eight, and the eigenvalue is one. For any higher number of components, the eigenvalue falls below one, indicating that the variance achieved is fairly low (Malhotra, 2001).

Table 2: Total Variance Explained (n=145)

	Initial Eigenvalues			**Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings**		
Component	**Total**	**% of Variance**	**Cumulative %**	**Total**	**% of Variance**	**Cumulative %**
1	16.872	45.599	45.599	16.872	45.599	45.599
2	2.835	7.663	53.262	2.835	7.663	53.262
3	2.269	6.133	59.395	2.269	6.133	59.395
4	2.096	5.665	65.060	2.096	5.665	65.060
5	1.271	3.435	68.495	1.271	3.435	68.495
6	1.189	3.213	71.708	1.189	3.213	71.708
7	1.168	3.158	74.866	1.168	3.158	74.866
8	1.029	2.780	**77.646**	1.029	2.780	**77.646**
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.						

Figure 1: Scree Plot



The data was further analysed using Varimax and Promax rotation since these two methods provide more reliable information for interpretation (UCLA Researchers, 2010). The outcome of the Varimax and Promax factor rotation process is reflected in Table 3 Table 4 respectively.

Table 3: Rotated Component Matrix: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization

	Component							
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**
Influence shopping patterns	.880	.222	.196	.067	.142	.072	.014	-.083
Opinion	.860	.217	.222	.100	.177	.038	.042	-.094
Influence to visit social media	.794	.291	.097	.044	.249	.007	.084	-.010
Like	.772	.150	.281	.199	.213	.181	.075	.017
Pleasure	.719	.307	.133	.301	.169	.240	.037	-.155
First to make purchases	.714	.110	.515	.168	-.026	.075	.005	.011
Advertisement	.686	.284	.117	.320	.358	.218	.036	.008
Engage in purchasing activity	.672	.296	.076	.341	.308	.153	.028	.025
Empowered	.657	.108	.254	.021	.199	.324	.248	-.239
Anonymous	.627	.302	.083	.138	.246	.431	-.036	-.112
Convenient	.609	.379	.040	.222	.143	.419	.085	.000
Admire	.608	.144	.244	.261	.067	.404	-.086	-.073
Cheapest	.578	.231	.282	.148	.520	.098	.010	-.082
Friends	.574	.164	.202	.130	.563	.045	.091	-.159

influence my 'online' purchasing activity								
Most likely to be asked about brands	.548	.380	.458	-.003	-.105	-.094	-.011	-.046
Valuable information	.314	.790	.060	.026	.131	.189	.082	-.090
No difficulty	.253	.769	.133	-.026	.021	-.061	.131	-.088
Satisfied	.445	.742	.080	.131	.036	-.107	.031	-.166
Electronic word-of-mouth marketing	.148	.687	.018	-.007	.225	.411	-.037	.055
Encourages purchasing activity	.336	.646	-.010	.085	.351	.142	-.051	.148
Salespeople	.116	.468	.256	.393	.287	.120	.434	.047
Compulsive shopper	.226	.074	.855	.223	.137	.039	.018	.001
Chance	.304	.041	.815	.124	.105	.195	.022	.070
Exceed my budget	.280	.067	.792	.197	.253	.029	-.010	-.020
Reliable	.146	.450	.451	.373	.189	-.082	.267	-.040
Complex	-.104	-.113	-.104	-.795	-.124	-.260	-.005	.090
Unreliable	-.170	-.141	-.236	-.752	-.136	-.310	-.103	-.065
Safe	-.221	-.006	-.068	-.731	.045	.179	-.100	.151
Risks	-.180	.095	-.210	-.728	-.146	.039	-.231	.060
Value for money	.433	.198	.265	.193	.713	.152	.037	.051
Favourably	.479	.285	.219	.169	.674	.059	.024	-.089
Discussion and conversation	.412	.173	.340	.051	.171	.653	.170	.008
Invasion of privacy	-.305	-.018	.051	-.150	-.027	-.602	-.061	.427
Passing trend	-.106	.039	.217	-.133	-.162	-.162	-.763	.195
Responsive	-.018	.237	.266	.249	-.182	-.069	.742	.116
Disinterested	-.044	-.033	.052	-.117	-.014	-.054	-.041	.866
Variety	.309	.256	.106	.072	.500	.205	.038	-.526

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

a. Rotation c

Table 4: Structure Matrix: Promax with Kaiser Normalization

	Component							
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**
Influence shopping patterns	.945	.524	.426	.344	.542	.416	.123	-.086
Opinion	.940	.527	.456	.378	.568	.393	.163	-.097
Like	.877	.479	.508	.476	.602	.501	.204	.041
Influence to visit social media	.860	.562	.332	.311	.588	.355	.178	-.018
Pleasure	.858	.593	.376	.556	.608	.571	.193	-.114
Advertisement	.829	.587	.371	.581	.736	.572	.189	.052
First to make purchases	.823	.408	.691	.416	.364	.328	.151	.029
Engage in purchasing activity	.799	.577	.333	.576	.674	.499	.181	.056
Empowered	.769	.406	.420	.317	.564	.584	.324	-.199
Anonymous	.756	.555	.274	.400	.639	.706	.069	-.041
Convenient	.737	.619	.264	.474	.570	.679	.195	.063
Admire	.727	.411	.416	.481	.473	.629	.044	-.009
Most likely to be asked about brands	.676	.552	.593	.220	.228	.124	.122	-.032
Valuable information	.526	.870	.224	.266	.474	.417	.204	-.012
Satisfied	.627	.839	.280	.334	.389	.182	.193	-.139
No difficulty	.444	.807	.272	.176	.301	.142	.250	-.045
Encourages purchasing activity	.504	.757	.167	.296	.600	.398	.061	.214
Electronic word-of-mouth marketing	.346	.737	.124	.201	.490	.556	.046	.169
Salespeople	.381	.637	.439	.605	.546	.336	.605	.123
Reliable	.422	.611	.605	.568	.439	.144	.478	.023
Compulsive shopper	.471	.309	.914	.438	.361	.197	.212	.082
Chance	.512	.292	.872	.364	.359	.329	.174	.156
Exceed my budget	.516	.319	.863	.425	.462	.226	.177	.057

Unreliable	-.386	-.356	-.422	-.860	-.445	-.484	-.317	-.151
Complex	-.302	-.283	-.270	-.842	-.393	-.426	-.220	.012
Risks	-.324	-.121	-.383	-.779	-.334	-.151	-.422	.046
Safe	-.323	-.157	-.248	-.724	-.165	-.009	-.294	.167
Value for money	.629	.484	.440	.463	.900	.489	.177	.123
Favourably	.678	.555	.403	.439	.884	.428	.175	-.030
My friends influence my ‘online’ purchasing activity	.723	.454	.389	.396	.793	.404	.217	-.126
Cheapest	.750	.521	.468	.426	.786	.448	.155	-.031
Variety	.508	.438	.208	.295	.704	.483	.154	-.450
Discussion and conversation	.576	.426	.454	.339	.532	.793	.239	.119
Invasion of privacy	-.385	-.172	-.026	-.289	-.325	-.696	-.102	.352
Responsive	.117	.317	.382	.362	-.007	-.034	.817	.116
Passing trend	-.134	-.083	.097	-.241	-.261	-.251	-.736	.211
Disinterested	-.144	-.059	.051	-.144	-.130	-.153	-.115	.843
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. **Rotation Method**: Promax with Kaiser Normalization.								

Table 4 illustrates how different the rotated solution can be from one other and what is meant by a simple structure. With an oblique rotation such as promax rotation, the factors are allowed to be correlated with one another, whilst with an orthogonal rotation, such as the varimax rotation (Table 3), the factors are not allowed to be correlated (UCLA Researchers, 2010). Oblique rotations form both factor patterns and factor structure matrices, whereas with orthogonal rotations, the factor structure and the factor pattern matrices are the same. The factor structure matrix represents the correlations between the variables and the factors and is often called the factor loading matrix (UCLA Researchers, 2010). In addition, Table 5 shows that rotation has been carried out using oblique rotation, since if orthogonal rotation was conducted the table would not appear in the SPSS output, because the correlations between the factors are set to 0, hence with an orthogonal rotation it is assumed that the factors are not correlated. In this case, however, the factors are highly correlated, allowing for correlations between the factors which are indicative of an oblique rotation (UCLA Researchers, 2010).

Table 5: Component Correlation Matrix: Promax with Kaiser Normalization

Component	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1	1.000	.552	.478	.428	.566	.438	.164	-.099
2	.552	1.000	.337	.369	.500	.339	.259	.083
3	.478	.337	1.000	.403	.281	.122	.282	.118
4	.428	.369	.403	1.000	.452	.354	.380	.037
5	.566	.500	.281	.452	1.000	.567	.188	.011
6	.438	.339	.122	.354	.567	1.000	.058	.058
7	.164	.259	.282	.380	.188	.058	1.000	-.071
8	-.099	.083	.118	.037	.011	.058	-.071	1.000

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
Rotation Method: Promax with Kaiser Normalization.

It is evident from Table 5 that the eight underlying factors that were extracted from this study and labelled as Network Creators, Network Critics, Network Optimists, Network Pessimists, Network Collectors, Network Joiners, Network Spectators, and Inactives, could be the possible market segments identified in this study, since they bear a certain degree of similarity to the six social techno graphic profiles identified by Li and Bernoff (2008).

As reflected in Table 6, Factor one (Network Creators) which addressed respondents' attitudes and perceptions towards social media platforms accounted for 46% of the 78% variance explained, with high factor loadings (.880, .860, .794 and .772), which is an indication of a fairly high degree of correlation among the items, which thus implies that the majority of the respondents in this study take on the role of 'network creators' on social media platforms.

Factor two (Network Critics) accounts for only 8% of the 78% variance explained and, included items with values of .790, .769 and .742. This included items on respondent's satisfaction with the amount of information, importance and value of information and the ease of accessing this information on social media platforms. Currently, several consumers in the youth market invest much time on research prior to making purchases as they value making informed decisions, and social media platforms are a medium that the youth are increasingly turning to and depending on for being informed (Mabry, 2008).

Factor three (Network Optimists) accounted for only 6% of the total variance explained. This is an indication that a very small percentage of participating respondents in this study have assumed the role of network optimists.

Factor four (Network Pessimists) explained 6% of the total variance explained and all the items which comprised this factor produced negative factor loadings. The first item, 'purchasing through social media platforms is complex' suggests that if purchasing through social media platforms was simple this would have resulted in a positive score/factor loading for this item. A similar interpretation applies to the other items which produced negative factor loadings and were clustered to form Factor 4.

Factors five (Network Collectors), six (Network Joiners), seven (Network Spectators) and eight (Inactives) all explained less than 5% of the total variance explained and are therefore less significant than factors one, two, three, four and five.

Table 6: Interpretation of Extracted Factors

Items	Factor Loadings
Factor 1: Network Creators	
I influence the shopping patterns of my friends on social media platforms	.880
My friends ask for my opinion when shopping over social media platforms	.860
I influence my friends to visit social media platforms for information when shopping for products and brands	.794
I like to purchase new brands advertised on social media platforms before others do	.772
Purchasing through social media platforms gives me a lot of pleasure	.719
I am the first to make purchases of products advertised on social media platforms as compared to my friends	.714
I have purchased products or brands after viewing its advertisement on social media platforms	.284
Social media browsing has encouraged me to engage in purchasing activity	.672
Brands and companies on social media platforms have empowered me to engage in commercial activity	.657
Purchasing 'online' allows me to remain anonymous	.627
Purchasing through social media platforms are convenient	.609
I admire people who purchase expensive items through social media platforms	.608
Social media platforms provide me with the cheapest brands	.578
My friends influence my 'online' purchasing activity on social media platforms	.574
Compared to my friends I am most likely to be asked about brands and products on social media platforms	.548
Factor 2: Network Critics	

I am able to obtain valuable information on products and brands on social media platforms	.790
There is no difficulty in obtaining information on brands and products on social media platforms	.769
I am satisfied with the amount of information on brands and products I can attain on social media platforms	.742
Information on social media platforms are the new electronic word of mouth marketing	.687
Social media browsing encourages purchasing activity	.646
With respect to brand information, social media information is more reliable than that obtained from salespeople	.468

Factor 3: Network Optimists	
I am a compulsive shopper on social media platforms	.855
I like to take a chance and purchase items through social media platforms	.815
I have made purchases through social media platforms that have exceeded my budget	.792
Social media information is more reliable than traditional advertising	.451
Factor 4: Network Pessimists	
Purchasing through social media platforms is complex	-.795
Payment facilities on social media platforms are unreliable	-.752
I will wait until purchasing on social media platforms become safe and then purchase, rather than take chances	-.731
I do not engage in purchasing activity over social media platforms because of the risks involved	-.728
Factor 5: Network Collectors	
I expect more value for money from brands that are promoted on social media platforms	.713
After having seen brand on my favourite social media website, I tend to view the brand more favourably	.674
Factor 6: Network Joiners	

Brands and companies encourage me to engage in discussion and conversation on social media platforms	.653
Advertising on social media platforms is an invasion of privacy	-.602
Factor 7: Network Spectators	
Social media is a passing trend	-.763
Consumers are more responsive to messages delivered through social media compared to traditional media	.742
Factor 8: In-actives	
Within the next five years I believe people will become disinterested in social media platforms	.866
Purchasing on social media platforms offer me a variety of products/items	-.526

Discussion, Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on their social media browsing behaviour, it is evident that there are indeed several segments among the youth. This finding, albeit from an exploratory study, highlights the need for marketers to factor this into their marketing and communication strategy. Although Li and Bernoff (2008) identified six socio techno graphic profiles of consumers, which could be regarded as market segments, other social media user profiles as emerged from this study, can be confirmed through further studies and added to this list.

Marketers need to be aware of how strangers on social media platforms influence purchasing behaviour, decisions and preferences. Furthermore, marketers should explore how different groups or communities can impact consumer behaviour on social media platforms, since social media has become a widespread and regular 'online' activity for consumers around the world and has acquired a role in pop culture.

This study has certain limitations, which calls for the findings to be treated as merely indicative, and pointing towards the need for a more comprehensive study to reach more generalizable conclusions. For example, the sample compromised only 150 students from a single higher education institution. Considering that all youth are not students, perhaps a larger more representative sample size which includes non-students may ensure that results can be generalized to the population. A more representative sample should include a heterogeneous sample, which could include employed youth.

Moreover, this study concentrated on the youth between the ages of 16-24. Future research can be extended to other age groups, since Kim (2008) argued that whilst teenagers were predominantly the primary users of social media, a growing population of 25 to 34 year olds and white collar professionals are now increasingly utilizing social media.

Notwithstanding the limitations, marketers need to be cognizant of the constantly developing media landscape and changing consumer behaviour presents new challenges and opportunities, and the growing popularity and usage of social media platforms has forced marketers to re-evaluate their marketing strategies in order to remain prevalent amongst post-modern consumers and influence and increase purchasing behaviour on these platforms. The youth in particular, actively seek out social media platforms in their daily practices and spend hours on these platforms, exposing themselves to greater influence and persuasion by marketers.

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