

## Social networking behaviour of students

Social media is a world of almost limitless possibilities ranging from an avenue to new expression of the self to a highway to new manners of interacting and empowerment; and it is growing. The importance of social media is not only underscored by the growth in the market, but also in terms of the roles that are played by consumers via social media. Companies need to understand the social media user in order to be able to interact with and to properly engage their consumers via such platforms. Social media platforms take many forms, and one of the most prominent is Social Networking Sites (SNS). In South Africa, Facebook and Mxit were identified as the most popular SNS in 2012, and the 18-25 years age group are the most active users.

A study was undertaken by a team of researchers, including [Dr Tania Maree](#) (staff member in the [Department of Marketing Management](#)) to develop a behavioural profile of young adult SNS consumers. The research adds to the existing body of knowledge on the use of SNS in South Africa by examining the behavioural patterns of young SNS users and developing consumer profiles that explain patterns of use. This study also assists in the development of suitable marketing communication strategies aimed at SNS consumers; it also provides scope for refining segmentation.

A large proportion of the respondents in this study indicated that they regularly use their cell phones to access SNS – it is therefore their primary choice of technology for accessing SNS. The respondents' most important reasons to use SNS are to chat with friends, to meet new people and to share photos. Demographically speaking, significant differences exist between males and females in terms of their frequency of SNS use. The women in the survey spent more time using SNS than the men. The time spent per day on SNS ranges from just over one hour to four hours. Motivations for use of SNS indicated that the most important reasons for the use of SNS were socially-driven (for example, to chat with friends and to meet new people). Therefore, the students' primary motivations can be considered to be socially integrative when considering the Uses and Gratification theory.

The results of this study have implications for segmentation strategies, as marketing communication via social media can be targeted more specifically to the segments that are members of SNS. Opportunities for wide exposure to this market via a medium that offers possibilities for interactive engagement exist. When targeting through SNS, the functionalities of technologies are important – as the majority of students' access SNS through their cell phones, the companies need to ensure that their advertising will translate well onto a mobile platform and not just the Web.

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