

Mxit marketing communications' influence on liking and preference among Gen Y

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ABSTRACT

The advent of digital and social media has resulted in noteworthy changes in the advertising and marketing environment, which have required companies to approach young consumers in a different manner. Gen Y (young adults) consumers are dependent on the Internet, social network sites, instant messaging and mobile devices to search, organise and transmit information, as well as for entertainment purposes. Marketers are, therefore, compelled to communicate with these digital savvy consumers on social platforms, which they frequent on a regular basis. While organisations have constructed social network profiles and buy online advertising space to promote their brands, many still do not fully comprehend how to successfully integrate social media into their marketing communication strategies. Research on social media marketing communications and the perceptions of users are somewhat limited in a developing country such as South Africa. Mxit is a large social network site in South Africa that mainly uses a mobile platform for users to text each other at a low cost. The inquiry's main aim was to ascertain Gen Y's affective attitudinal responses to Mxit marketing communications. The survey design was utilised to sample 1 185 Gen Y participants. These Gen Y respondents demonstrated positive perceptions to Mxit marketing communications in terms of liking and preference hierarchy response levels with several usage and demographic characteristics also having a noteworthy impact. This research serves as a clear indication that marketers should commence or continue to use Mxit as an effective online marketing communication tool, and makes contributions in terms of the application of cohort and attitude theories in the context of Gen Y respondents' attitudes towards SNA in a developing nation.

Keywords: Mxit, mobile social network sites, marketing communications, Gen Y, affective attitudes, liking, preference

The phenomenal growth of technology, especially in terms of social media, has impacted on almost every aspect of daily life over the past decade. This digital interactive Web 2.0 platform has changed the way that people and organisations communicate and operate globally. Social network sites (SNS)

are the largest social media conduit that aims to facilitate the building of social relations and networks among individuals who share activities, backgrounds, interests and real-life connections within their personal networks via virtual online communities (Boyd & Ellison 2007:210-211; Safko, 2010:21-26). SNS have

quickly altered the manner in which people interact on personal and professional relationship levels, as well as in terms of consumers and marketers' communication patterns (Shambare, Rugimbana & Sithole, 2012:578). This change has brought along new challenges for marketers, as they have to adapt their marketing communications to address these changes in order to achieve any success with consumers. The greatest change can be observed among the youth (also referred to as Gen Y) who are technology and mobile device addicts, as well as primary advocates of SNS such as Mxit, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, LinkedIn and many others in South Africa (SA). There are literally millions of people at any one given time who share information on social networks in SA (Alemán & Wartman, 2009; Safko, 2010:21-26). Mxit was recently dethroned as the number one SNS in SA, but still remains one of the top five social mediums (Wronski & Goldstruck, 2014). A number of companies, NGOs and government departments use Mxit as a marketing communication platform to interact with their followers (Mxit, 2014b).

The effectiveness of marketing communications or advertising is frequently evaluated by a series of effects that comprise hierarchical responses, brand attitudes and perceptions (Maddox & Gong, 2005:677). A great deal of academic inquiry has investigated the value of advertising on the Internet based on the aforementioned factors (Lin, Gregor & Ewing, 2008:40-57; Naik & Peters, 2009:288-299; Shankar & Batra, 2009:285-287; Tsai, Cheng & Chen, 2011:1091-1104; Bianchi & Andrews, 2012:253-275; Thales, Wedel & Pieters, 2012:144-59; Thompson & Malaviya, 2013:33-47), but little academic attention was previously given to social network advertising (SNA) and its effect on attitudes. It has only been in the last five years that an increased number of academic publications on SNA have begun to emerge, but given the initial slow increase in SNA spending, the dearth of research attention was expected. A majority of

these inquiries were conducted in the United States (US) and Europe, but there is still a lack of social media marketing communications research in Africa, which has shown the most prolific growth (eMarketer, 2014d; Okazaki & Taylor, 2013:57). Global ecommerce sales were \$1 250 trillion in 2013 and are expected to climb to \$2 000 trillion by 2016, with the largest amount of growth being displayed in developing countries (eMarketer, 2014b). There has been a scarcity of clear theoretical viewpoints from which research on SNA could be formulated and tested in empirical studies, since theoretical development is frequently a cumulative process, which takes some time for significant theories to be posited in literature (Peters, Chen, Kaplan, Ognibeni & Pauwels, 2013:296; Yadav, De Valck, Hennig-Thurau, Hoffman & Spann, 2013:320). Hence, this research aims to contribute to the application of cohort and attitude theories in the context of Gen Y respondents by investigating their attitudes towards Mxit marketing communications in SA.

RESEARCH PROBLEM AND OBJECTIVES

Traditional advertising was used to develop hierarchy response models nearly a century ago, but there has been a paucity of research, which has investigated this model in terms of SNA (Barry, 1987:252). Therefore, Lutz (1985:46) maintained that attitudes towards the advertising are only viewed from an affective perspective (namely liking and preference), with the cognitive and behavioural components excluded from consideration, since attitudes can be described as a tendency to respond in a positive or negative way to a certain advertising stimulus during a specific exposure event. Many companies spend large sums on advertising via this conduit to reach the elusive Gen Y (Wronski & Goldstruck, 2013:114-115; Mxit, 2014c). Thus, the first two objectives of this paper are as follows: To determine whether

Mxit marketing communications has an effect on the “liking” hierarchy response level of Gen Y; and to establish if marketing communications on Mxit has an influence on the “preference” hierarchy response level among Gen Y in SA.

De Lanerolle (2012:18) discloses that most users utilise mobile devices to access Mxit; therefore, it is important to ascertain whether there are differences in the attitudes amongst Gen Y regarding how they connect to this conduit. Other usage characteristics that will be investigated to determine whether they have an effect on attitudes towards marketing communications and Mxit include: profile update incidence; log-on frequency; log-on duration; and length of usage. This study is important for academics and companies, as it will offer an improved indication of young adults Mxit usage characteristics’ effect on affective attitudes, and permit predictions of this fickle cohorts’ future consumer behaviour. Consequently, the next two research objectives are as follows: To ascertain Gen Y’s usage characteristics impact on the “liking” hierarchy response level as a result of marketing communications on Mxit; and to examine if usage factors of Gen Y in SA have an effect on the “preference” hierarchy response level owing to Mxit marketing communications.

Bolton, Parasuraman, Hoefnagels, Migchels, Kabadayi, Gruber, Loureiro and Solnet (2013:257) proposes that more inquiry was necessary to examine if there were notable differences amongst Gen Y regarding their utilisation and perceptions of social media. Petzer and Meyer (2013:382-386) discloses that a large Black middle class had emerged since SA’s change to a democracy, but there were still large differences in education and income levels, as well as technology access. Few studies have determined the influence of age within a particular cohort on attitudes. Hence, the last two research objectives are as follows: To explore if demographic variables

have an influence on the “liking” hierarchy response level among Gen Y owing to Mxit marketing communications; and to ascertain if demographic factors have an effect on the “preference” hierarchy response level as a result of marketing communications on Mxit marketing communications among Gen Y in SA.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Social media marketing communications overview

Social media has irrevocably altered the marketing communication landscape of brands, where consumers take a more dynamic role as marketers of brands that have become social currency (Walsh, Henning-Thurau, Sassenberg & Bornemann, 2010:130). The relatively passive website has been transformed into an active dialogue between the consumer and organisations. Social media has created new ways to share content, communicate and, more importantly, advertise online, as well as become a conduit for consumer socialisation that has changed the face of consumer behaviour (Uitz, 2012:1). The proliferation of social media has forced many marketers to adopt digital interactive marketing communication strategies, and hence lured them to SNS due to the huge number of unique visitors that they attract. SNA was found to be generally tolerated by users since it kept the SNS free of charge (Kelly, Kerr & Drennan, 2010:16; Hadija, Barnes & Hair, 2012:2), but whether SNA is effective remains to be seen. Nonetheless, online advertising is growing at a tremendous rate and is predicted to be in the region of \$121 billion in 2016 (eMarketer, 2014a). A majority of the SA population does not have access to computers, but makes use of mobile phones and other devices to communicate with each other and to access the Internet and SNS (Petzer & Meyer, 2013:386).

Marketers' primary objective in SNS should be to establish themselves within a given community where online virtual communities utilise Web 2.0 technologies to forge strong bonds online. A continual flow of communication is obligatory to keep social media advocates entertained and campaigns should be intriguing, engaging and authentic to users (Mothner, 2010). SNS users' information on social media is not only divulged to users' networks of contacts, but also to marketers for more targeted marketing communication opportunities (Bayne, 2011:13; Stokes, 2013:375). Pustyl'nick (2011:70) asserts that SNS should not be utilised as the solitary advertising means for a product, in spite of their affordability and availability, since a huge quantity of information is posted on SNS and results in clutter, which ultimately transforms the advantage of SNA into a drawback. Barreto (2013:132) also stresses that being aware of the full advertising potential of SNS would accelerate the number of marketers in reaching their target audiences more effectively. Though, the question of whether the SNA is correctly implemented, or if it really works, largely remains unanswered (Barreto, 2013:9-10). Accordingly, this study seeks to investigate attitudes towards marketing communications on SNS, particularly Mxit.

Mxit synopsis

Mxit is one of the dominant SNS in SA, with nearly 5 million monthly users, of which a majority (88%) resides in SA (Wronski & Goldstruck, 2013:116; Wronski & Goldstruck, 2014). Mxit is an inexpensive platform since it does not use much data; hence, users tend to spend a great deal of time interacting with friends and/or brand applications (apps), playing games, downloading music and pictures, and using the learning channels. The average users spend nearly 2 hours daily logged on to this platform (Wronski & Goldstruck, 2013:116-119). Mxit mainly reaches the developing youth market, with half

of Mxit users aged 18 – 24 years old, and in many instances, is the first online experience for low LSM users via mobiles devices (Mxit, 2014a). This SNS can be accessed via over 8 000 mobile devices, including tablets and computers (McConnachie, 2013; Mxit, 2014a). Mxit releases a brand index every 30 days that provides a rank of brands based on how many users who have joined or interacted with the brand's page or app. The most recently released brand index (October 2014) shows that SuperSport has over 2 million subscribers, whereas 24.com, Rhythm City, KFC and DSTV all had over 1 million subscribers (Mxit, 2014b). This SNS is used as a marketing communication tool by 10% of large brands in SA, but the number of organisations are forecasted to increase their efforts to reach younger consumers that are located in the lower to middle LSMs (Wronski & Goldstruck, 2013:18,115). Organisations have a number of avenues on Mxit to reach their target market by means of brand apps, sponsorships, branded chat rooms, banner advertisements, broadcast posts, competitions and many other promotional elements (Mxit, 2014c).

Academic discourse has largely examined Mxit in terms of why this medium was used so extensively, particularly by SA's youth, and/or from an education viewpoint. Francke and Weideman (2008:81-94) explored the usage traits and influence of Mxit on the youth. A potential negative influence was found in terms of safety, emotional welfare and work productivity. Chigona, Chigona, Ngqokelela and Mpofu (2009:1-16) investigated the use and perceptions of instant messaging via a mobile platform among the youth in SA. The inquiry revealed that Mxit played an intricate role in users' lives, and was primarily used for social networking. Kaufman (2011:5) considered Grade 12 learners' Mxit experiences as a means of peer-support during their final year of school. Butgereit and Botha (2011:1-11) observed how a model could be used to identify suitable mathematics topics in

dialogue over Mxit in the Dr Math program, which is an online tutoring system for learners who use Mxit to assist with homework by volunteer tutors. Roberts and Vänskä (2011:243-259) evaluated how a mobile platform such as Mxit was employed to support mathematics at schools. No studies have examined the attitudinal effect of Mxit as a marketing communication tool in spite of this interactive SNS's widespread popularity among millions of SA's youth. Accordingly, the lack of academic work in this area necessitates additional investigation.

Gen Y cohort theory précis

Gen Y (also known as Millennials, Digital Natives and/or Generation Next) refers to those who were born during the early 1980s and to the mid-1990s to early 2000s, however, these years vary according to different authors (Berndt, 2007; Wessels & Steenkamp, 2009:1040; Black, 2010:92; Morrissey, Coolican & Wolfgang, 2011), but for the purposes of this research, those aged between 18 and 30 years will be deemed to constitute the Gen Y cohort. Prensky (2001:1) asserts that Gen Y is notorious for their digital linguistics of computers, mobile device obsession and Internet capabilities. Consequently, young consumers assimilate information and think in a totally different manner in comparison to earlier generations owing to the pervasive context of notebooks, laptops, smartphones, tablets, video games, iPods and other digital interactive devices. Oblinger and Oblinger (2005) observe that Gen Y is social, connected, digital, experiential and need instant gratification, and learn via engagement, experience, peer-to-peer, teams and visual elements. Gen Y does not enjoy reading long chunks of information, as they prefer to be exposed to pure content without any periphrasis. They are addicted to digital technology, especially mobile devices, hence they are not comfortable with long textual content, which is a reflection of a true multimedia generation. Gen Y favour direct

messages, which they observe in regularly frequented media such as SNS, mobisites and other online websites (Wilson, 2007:35-40; Tapscott, 2009).

An understanding of Gen Y's characteristics is important in terms of marketing, but it could be perilous to make broad assumptions about this cohort owing to divergence within this group (Kennedy, Judd, Churchward, Gray & Krause, 2008:108-109; Skene, Cluett & Hogan, 2007). Since Gen Y has grown up in the epoch of computers and the Internet, these young consumers are quick to filter out boring and irrelevant messages and focus their attention on creative brand messages. This cohort is brand savvy with a collectively large buying power, and they have learnt how to influence purchase decisions early in their lives, hence they are able to rapidly discern unreliable brands (Wilson, 2007:35-40). McDonald (2014) discloses that Gen Y spend in excess of \$200 billion per annum in the US and more than R100 billion in SA (Levin, 2013). Moore (2012:442) confirms the aforementioned sentiments by establishing that Gen Y purchases products online at a lesser rate than prior generations, although this phenomenon did not appear to arise from accessibility or income constraints, but rather from using SNS for other purposes such as entertainment and to interact with brands online. Therefore, the attitudes of this fickle cohort warrant further inquiry to establish if Mxit marketing communications have an impact on their perceptions.

Hierarchy of Effects Model and attitudes context

Over the past century a number of Response Hierarchy Models have been developed to portray the stages that consumers may experience before they purchase in order to measure advertising effectiveness (Barry, 1987:251). The best known models include the AIDA, Hierarchy of Effects, Innovation Adoption, and Information Processing models

(Belch & Belch, 2015:158-159). The most frequently cited model, namely Hierarchy of Effects, was developed by Lavidge and Steiner (1961:59-62), and proposes that consumers experience number of stages over a period of time, commencing with product "unawareness" to actual purchase. The hierarchy demonstrates an implicit causal relationship between different attitudinal stages from cognition (awareness and knowledge hierarchy response levels) to affect (liking and preference hierarchy response levels) to conation/behaviour (intention-to-purchase and purchase hierarchy response levels) (Belch & Belch, 2012:157). Attitudes towards advertising, and the abovementioned hierarchy response levels, can be evaluated in terms of favourable or unfavourable consumer feelings towards brand advertising (MacKenzie, Lutz & Belch, 1986:130-143). Although Attitudes Towards Advertising theory is important in order to understand consumers' opinions and views about online advertising, it should be taken into cognisance that attitude formation occurs differently via divergent mediums such as television (TV), the Internet and SNS (Hadija et al., 2012:22). Response Hierarchy Models are still applicable to SNS, but are different to TV and traditional websites, since social media is a community-oriented platform that facilitates the sharing of information. Attitudes towards SNS marketing communications have not been measured in South Africa in terms of the Hierarchy of Effects model stages. Therefore, the dearth of research on attitudes towards SNA in terms of a recognised theoretical framework (Yoo, Kim & Stout, 2010:49) and, as mentioned in prior text, the fact that Lutz (1985:46) maintained that attitudes towards the advertising are only viewed from an affective attitude perspective (namely liking and preference hierarchy response levels), have instigated this study.

A number of research inquiries have explored different elements of SNA in terms of affective responses. Dlodlo and Dhurup

(2013:335) found that Gen Y generally have positive affective attitudes to social media. Hollebeek, Glynn and Brodie (2014:156-161) established that consumers who engaged with brands on SNS had a favourable effect on affective attitudes, which resulted in greater brand involvement and usage intent. Yang (2012:56) revealed that SNA enhances consumers' affective attitudes that increase brand purchase intentions. Labrecque (2014:138-139) disclosed that favourable affective (liking) attitudes regarding brand interaction on social network environments strengthen brand relationships with consumers. Wang and Sun (2010:342) proposed that SNA must be presented in a creative manner to be enjoyable and stimulating in order to attract consumers' attention in an online context that is cluttered with marketing communication messages and other user-generated content. Saxena and Khanna (2013:23) suggested that SNA had poor content and entertainment value and was perceived as irritating. De Vries, Gensler and Leeftang, (2012:88-89) examined brand post appeals in terms of how entertainment (affective) and several determinants affected SNS liking. Entertaining brand posts were found to have a negative impact on the number of likes. Mir (2012:280-282) concluded that entertaining SNA did not have a favourable impact on consumer attitudes. These conflicting research findings mostly emanated from first-world nations, which used small student samples. Therefore, this empirical study aims to reveal Gen Y's affective responses towards marketing communications on Mxit in a developing country, namely SA.

METHODOLOGY

Sampling

Gen Y are principal users of digital and online media, especially SNS (Goldenberg, 2007:12; Norum, 2008:269; Van der Walldt, Rebello & Brown, 2009:450; Smith, 2012:86; Bolton et al., 2013:247; eMarketer, 2014c). A number of

inquiries have solely utilised students as participants to investigate attitudes towards SNA (Subrahmanyam, Reich, Waechter & Espinoza, 2009:420; Orpana & Tera, 2011:79-80; Haigh, Brubaker & Whiteside, 2013:60; Logan, Bright & Gangadharbatla, 2013:164; Yaakop et al., 2013:157). However, it is essential to draw a sample that includes Gen Y from all of their different life stages, as mandated by Yaakop, Anuar and Omar, (2013:161), hence, young adults that were employed and unemployed; lived in townships and suburbs; and from rural and urban areas; were targeted to obtain a balanced representation of this cohort. The Western Cape accounts for 11.2% the South African population (Statistics SA, 2012:15), and was used as the sample frame, which is a representative subsection of the research population (McDaniel & Gates, 2004:270). The study utilised multi-stage sampling within a number of different organisations. Sports clubs, churches, youth groups, businesses and tertiary education institutions were identified and contacted to obtain the necessary permission to survey their Gen Y members. Thereafter, systematic sampling was employed, where every third respondent was asked if they would participate in the survey on a voluntarily basis (Du Plooy, 2009:118-119).

Data collection and questionnaire formulation

Bhattacharjee (2012:73) emphasised that surveys were one of the best ways to measure unobservable data such as respondents' attitudes and when the research population was too large to observe directly, while it also facilitated the detection of small effects when analysing multiple variables, as in the instance of this study. The data was collected by means of a self-administered survey, which allowed participants to complete the questionnaire without the assistance of fieldworkers. Self-administered surveys reduce interviewer bias and are able to attain a high response rate from

substantial research populations (Burns & Bush, 2012:155). Gen Y members were asked two pre-screening questions to qualify to participate in the inquiry - firstly, to establish if they had used Mxit and, secondly, to determine if they had observed any Mxit advertisements. The first part of the questionnaire included five multiple-choice questions that verified the users Mxit usage variables; and the next part measured affective attitudes in terms of the two hierarchy levels, that is, liking and preference as a result of perceiving Mxit marketing communications. The construct, namely liking, was developed from Duncan and Nelson (1985:40-41); Ducoffe (1996:28); and Lin et al. (2008:56). The second construct, namely preference, was developed from Martin, Bhimiy and Agee, (2002:474) and Wang and Sun (2010:338). A five-point Likert scale, which ranged from strongly disagree to strongly agree, was employed to measure the construct items. The last part of the questionnaire collected the respondents' demographic information and comprised of three multiple-choice questions. A pre-test was employed among fifty respondents to establish if the questionnaire and collected data was reliable, valid and relevant (Bhattacharjee, 2012:23). Several construct items were rephrased in a bid to improve the reliability and a couple of questions were amended. A total of ten fieldworkers were used to disseminate the questionnaires and to conduct the survey, which yielded 1 185 useable questionnaires.

Data analysis

Data analysis generally involves reducing the collected data to a manageable size, creating summaries, looking for discernable trends and relationships, and utilising statistical techniques to interpret in order to ultimately answer the research objectives (Emory & Cooper, 1991:89). The statistical software, SPSS (version 22), was utilised to capture and analyse the data. Basic descriptive statistical analysis methods (means, standard deviations

and frequencies) were utilised to present a simple description of the findings (Tables 1, 2 and 3). Validity refers to the degree to which a research instrument or construct assesses what it is supposed to assess (Field, 2009:795). As discussed, a pre-test was conducted and several items were reworded to ensure the construct validity of the instrument, as mandated by De Vos, Strydom, Fouché and Delport (2011:242-243). The strength and direction of the linear relationships between the dependant variable items (liking and preference) were also determined by using Pearson's correlation coefficient (Tables 2 and 3), which affirmed that the construct items were largely, positively related to each other (Maree, 2007:234; Pallant, 2010:123). Analysis of variance (ANOVA) is employed when a single individual quantitative measure needs to be compared to more than two independent variables (Maree, 2007:229). ANOVA utilised the Wald's statistic that has a Chi-Square distribution (applied as a Generalised Linear Model (GLM)) to determine if there were significant differences between the dependent affective attitude variables (liking and preference) and the independent usage and demographic factors (Field, 2009:269-271). A post ad hoc test, Bonferroni adjustment, was employed to locate the differences between the aforementioned variables (Tables 4 and 5) (Pallant, 2010:234).

RESULTS

As anticipated, Mxit was largely accessed by means of mobile devices (74.6%) by a majority of participants who characteristically used Mxit on a daily basis (63.3%), spent one (22.4%), two (26.8%) or three (21.9%) hours per log-on session, and over 70% updated their profile at least once a week. The sample of 1 185 participants included a majority of females (56.4%); a majority of the participants were 18 - 20 years old (69.6%) replicating Mxit's audience profile (Mxit, 2014a), and the population groups in essence duplicated the

TABLE 1
Mxit usage characteristics and demographics

Mxit Usage Characteristics	n	%
<i>Access</i>		
Mobile Device	884	74.6
PC	97	8.2
Mobile Device & PC	204	17.2
<i>Length of usage</i>		
≤ 1 year	125	10.5
2 years	230	19.4
3 years	278	23.5
4 years	222	18.7
≥ 5 years	330	27.9
<i>Log-on frequency</i>		
Daily	750	63.3
2 - 4 a week	216	18.2
Once a week	125	10.5
2 - 4 a month	48	4.1
Once a month	46	3.9
<i>Log-on duration</i>		
≤ 1 hour	266	22.4
2 hours	318	26.8
3 hours	260	21.9
4 hours	149	12.6
≥ 5 hours	192	16.3
<i>Profile update incidence</i>		
Daily	392	33.1
2 - 4 a week	260	21.9
Once a week	202	17.0
2 - 4 a month	98	8.3
Once a month	233	19.7
Demographics		
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	517	43.6
Female	668	56.4
<i>Age</i>		
18 - 20	825	69.6
21 - 24	294	24.8
25 - 30	66	5.6
<i>Population group</i>		
White	67	5.7
Black	684	57.7
Coloured	396	33.4
Indian/Asian	38	3.2

ethnic orientation in the Western Cape with Black respondents (57.7%) and Coloured respondents (33.4%) being in a majority. (Statistics SA (2012:17) reported the Western

TABLE 2
Mxit marketing communications liking scale

	Mean	Std. Dev.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Cronbach's α
Advertising on Mxit has made me like the brands more (1)	3.25	1.299	1									0.74
Advertising on Mxit adds to the enjoyment of using Mxit (2)	3.21	1.264	.625**	1								
Advertisements on Mxit are irritating and annoying ^s (3)	3.43	1.280	.191**	.180**	1							
Advertisements on Mxit are entertaining and fun (4)	3.30	1.153	.690**	.626**	.331**	1						
Mxit has a positive influence on me liking advertised products (5)	3.05	1.133	.425**	.587**	.072	.506**	1					
Advertising on Mxit has made me like the products less ^s (6)	3.30	1.107	-.085	-.193**	.429**	-.112**	.027	1				
I have positive feelings for brands that are advertised on Mxit (7)	3.29	1.188	.607**	.498**	.148**	.670**	.378**	-.164**	1			
There are too few advertisements on Mxit (8)	2.97	1.261	.288**	.513**	.000	.382**	.336**	-.256**	.345**	1		
Mxit has a negative effect on me liking advertised brands ^s (9)	3.51	1.141	.050	.005	.582**	.082*	.000	.465**	.111**	.206**	1	

^s Negatively phrased statement scores were recoded

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Cape Black population at 32.9% and Coloured population at 48.8%. Table 1 provides a complete overview of usage characteristics and demographics of the Gen Y participants who utilise Mxit.

As mentioned in prior text, descriptive statistics (frequencies, means and standard deviations) were used to display the results (Tables 1, 2 and 3). The respondents' affective attitude responses were measured by two scales, one for each of the hierarchy-of-effects levels, namely liking and preference (refer to Tables 2 and 3).

Cronbach's α was employed to measure the liking and preference scales in terms of reliability, which assesses the degree of internal consistency between variables that measure a single construct. Values of 0.7 or more are considered to be adequate (Tavakol

& Dennick, 2011: 53-55). Negatively worded statements were incorporated in each scale, in order to reduce response bias, but needed to be recoded so as not to adversely affect the Cronbach's α outcome (Field, 2009:674-677). However, item 6 was removed from the liking construct and item 16 from the preference construct to increase the degree of internal reliability to acceptable levels. Cronbach's α was 0.74 for Mxit's advertising liking scale (Table 2) and 0.7 for the preference scale (Table 3), thereby reflecting acceptable internal consistencies. Tables 2 and 3 exhibited a positive medium ($r > 0.3$) and a positive strong ($r > 0.5$) relationship for a majority of the items in the liking and preference measurement scales in terms of Pearson's correlation coefficient analysis, which indicates that the respondents generally displayed favourable perceptions in terms of

TABLE 3
Mxit marketing communications preference scale

	Mean	Std. Dev.	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	Cronbach's α
I have no interest in brands that are advertised on Mxit [§] (10)	3.45	1.272	1									0.7
Advertisements on Mxit have increased my preference for specific products (11)	3.14	1.270	.026	1								
Advertising on Mxit improves the image of companies (12)	3.32	1.290	.005	.438**	1							
I avoid products that are advertised on Mxit [§] (13)	3.20	1.138	.569**	.003	.000	1						
Advertisements on Mxit are relevant to me and my interests (14)	3.08	1.089	.104**	.559**	.342**	-.055	1					
Advertisements on Mxit are effective in stimulating my preference in brands (15)	3.07	1.107	.075	.360**	.490**	-.067	.435**	1				
Advertisements on Mxit are ineffective in gaining my interest in products [§] (16)	3.25	1.199	.393**	.007	-.026	.533**	-.074	-.125*	1			
I prefer brands that are promoted on Mxit (17)	2.97	1.205	.126**	.527**	.213**	-.062	.593**	.462**	-.207**	1		
Advertisements on Mxit have a positive effect on my preference for brands (18)	3.08	1.167	.086*	.389**	.453**	.007	.491**	.618**	-.120**	.513**	1	

[§] Negatively phrased statement scores were recoded

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

liking and preference as a result of Mxit advertising.

The GLM ANOVA, employing the Wald's Chi-Square statistic and the post ad hoc Bonferroni adjustment, were used to determine if there were significant differences between the participants' affective attitudes (dependent variables) regarding Mxit marketing communications and the usage factors (independent variables) and demographic characteristics (independent variables). The GLM ANOVA was used as a result of the unbalanced data, as standard errors are bigger for a lesser number of observations for certain independent variables (for example, there were fewer respondents Indian/Asian respondent compared to Black respondents), which the GLM takes into consideration and "normalises" the data (Van Schalkwyk,

2012:3). The effects in terms of the Wald's Chi-Square statistic, which are based on the Bonferroni adjustment pairwise post hoc test among the estimated marginal means, are presented in Tables 4 and 5.

The Wald's Chi-Square test showed that there was a significant difference at $p < 0.001$ for liking (mean = 3.26, Std. Dev. = 0.66) owing to Mxit marketing communications (Table 4). No significant differences were found for access, log-on frequency, profile update incidence and gender, whereas *Bonferroni correction* pairwise comparisons revealed significant differences between the following elements (Table 4):

Length of usage ($p < 0.05$): Respondents who had used Mxit for 1 year resulted in greater liking than those who had used the SNS for 5 years;

Log-on duration ($p < 0.001$): Participants who logged on for ≤ 1 hour displayed lower liking levels than those who remained logged on for 3 hours, 4 hours and 5 hours;

Age ($p < 0.001$): Mxit users who were aged 18 - 20 years resulted in higher liking than those aged 21 - 24 years; and

Population group ($p < 0.001$): White ($M = 3.11$, $SE = 0.087$), Coloured and Indian/Asian participants exhibited lower liking levels compared to Black participants.

The Wald's Chi-Square test disclosed that there was a significant difference at $p < 0.001$ for preference (mean = 3.17, Std. Dev. = 0.62) as a result of Mxit marketing communications (Table 5). No significant differences were found for access, usage length, log-on frequency, profile update incidence, gender and age; however, Bonferroni correction pairwise comparisons showed significant differences among the subsequent elements (Table 5):

Log-on duration ($p < 0.001$): Participants who logged on for ≤ 1 hour exhibited lower preference levels than those who remained logged on for 3 hours and 5 hours; and

Population group ($p < 0.001$): Black respondents displayed greater preference levels in comparison to White and Coloured respondents.

DISCUSSION

Mxit marketing communications caused favourable affective responses among this sample of Gen Y in SA (as indicated in Table 4), hence fulfilling the first research objective. Taylor, Lewin and Strutton, (2011:269) concluded that for successful SNA implementation, marketers needed to generate marketing communication messages that provided unequivocal value to SNS users. Taylor et al. (2011:269) also found that entertainment (liking) value was the most highly rated by SNS users, which affirmed the findings of this study. Schivinski and Dąbrowski (2013:9-10) also ascertained that

organisations' SNS communications resulted in favourable brand affective attitudes, which was found to be the same for Mxit marketing communications. Hutter, Hautz, Dennhardt and Füller, (2013:348) reported that a consumer's interaction with an organisation's SNS page led to unfavourable affective responses owing to an overload of information. However, social media is largely deemed to be less invasive than other promotional endeavours, as consumers can easily discern the degree of exposure to marketing communication content. The results of this research revealed that Mxit marketing communications tended to support the latter view. It is apparent that young consumers liked advertisements that engaged them (such as playing games), which are fitting for SNS such as Mxit sites that are used to relieve boredom and allow them to socialise (Kelly et al., 2010:21).

Certain usage characteristics were shown to have a positive impact on Gen Y's liking and preference attributable to marketing communications on Mxit, thus affirming the second research objective. Gen Y who had utilised Mxit for 1 year had created higher levels of liking when compared to those who had used interactive platforms for 5 years or more. This is a fair notion, as consumers who lack experience would be more vulnerable to the allures of marketing communications. A number of inquiries (Hoffman, Novak & Peralta, 1999:80-85; Helander & Khalid 2000: 612-617; Martinez-Lopez, Luna & Martinez, 2005:322-323) have also determined that the level of experience on online conduits was an important factor that influenced buying decisions on the Internet. Furthermore, Previte and Forrester (1998) confirmed that more experienced online users have unfavourable attitudes towards advertising on the Internet in comparison to online users with less experience. Respondents who spent 3 hours or more on Mxit at a time generally produced higher liking and preference levels in comparison to those who logged on for one

TABLE 4
Effect of usage characteristics and demographics on Mxit marketing communications liking

	Mean	Std. Dev	p
Liking (overall)	3.25	0.66	0.000*
Access			
Mobile Device (1)	3.27	0.66	0.074
PC (2)	3.42	0.61	
Mobile Device & PC (3)	3.14	0.66	
Length of usage			
≤ 1 year (1)	3.31	0.66	0.017** (1) - (5) ^Β
2 years (2)	3.29	0.63	
3 years (3)	3.33	0.62	
4 years (4)	3.23	0.69	
≥ 5 years (5)	3.16	0.69	
Log-on frequency			
Daily (1)	3.26	0.66	0.624
2 - 4 a week (2)	3.25	0.64	
Once a week (3)	3.25	0.72	
2 - 4 a month (4)	3.35	0.66	
Once a month (5)	3.18	0.64	
Log-on duration			
≤ 1 hour (1)	3.10	0.62	0.000* (1) - (3, 4 & 5) ^Α
2 hours (2)	3.20	0.67	
3 hours (3)	3.40	0.59	
4 hours (4)	3.36	0.62	
≥ 5 hours (5)	3.28	0.76	
Profile update incidence			
Daily (1)	3.27	0.62	0.274
2 - 4 a week (2)	3.32	0.72	
Once a week (3)	3.25	0.65	
2 - 4 a month (4)	3.20	0.69	
Once a month (5)	3.19	0.66	
Gender			
Male (1)	3.23	0.68	0.225
Female (2)	3.28	0.64	
Age			
18 – 20 (1)	3.31	0.63	0.000* (1) - (2) ^Α
21 – 24 (2)	3.10	0.71	
25 – 30 (3)	3.24	0.70	
Population group			
White (1)	3.11	0.63	0.000* (1, 3 & 4) - (2) ^Α
Black (2)	3.32	0.67	
Coloured (3)	3.21	0.65	
Indian/Asian (4)	2.85	0.49	

TABLE 5
Effect of usage characteristics and demographics on Mxit marketing communications preference

	Mean	Std. Dev	<i>p</i>
Preference (overall)	3.17	0.62	0.000*
<i>Access</i>			
Mobile Device (1)	3.18	0.63	0.683
PC (2)	3.15	0.51	
Mobile Device & PC (3)	3.14	0.62	
<i>Length of usage</i>			
≤ 1 year (1)	3.21	0.58	0.559
2 years (2)	3.20	0.56	
3 years (3)	3.19	0.61	
4 years (4)	3.19	0.65	
≥ 5 years (5)	3.11	0.66	
<i>Log-on frequency</i>			
Daily (1)	3.15	0.62	0.060
2 - 4 a week (2)	3.13	0.59	
Once a week (3)	3.29	0.68	
2 - 4 a month (4)	3.27	0.62	
Once a month (5)	3.27	0.62	
<i>Log-on duration</i>			
≤ 1 hour (1)	3.06	0.62	0.002** (1) - (3 & 5) ^B
2 hours (2)	3.16	0.63	
3 hours (3)	3.24	0.57	
4 hours (4)	3.20	0.63	
≥ 5 hours (5)	3.23	0.64	
<i>Profile update incidence</i>			
Daily (1)	3.19	0.60	0.355
2 - 4 a week (2)	3.21	0.62	
Once a week (3)	3.16	0.65	
2 - 4 a month (4)	3.18	0.68	
Once a month (5)	3.11	0.60	
<i>Gender</i>			
Male (1)	3.16	0.63	0.651
Female (2)	3.18	0.61	
<i>Age</i>			
18 – 20 (1)	3.18	0.60	0.406
21 – 24 (2)	3.13	0.66	
25 – 30 (3)	3.22	0.71	
<i>Population group</i>			
White (1)	3.04	0.59	0.000* (1 & 3) - (2) ^A
Black (2)	3.25	0.64	
Coloured (3)	3.07	0.58	
Indian/Asian (4)	3.03	0.61	

* Wald's Chi-square test showed a significant difference at $p < 0.001$

** Wald's Chi-square test showed a significant difference at $p < 0.05$

^A Bonferroni correction pairwise comparisons mean difference is significant at the 0.001 level.

^B Bonferroni correction pairwise comparisons mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

hour or less. This is a rational result, since a longer period of time would provide young adults with a greater opportunity to perceive and interact with marketing communications on Mxit. Conversely, Yang (2003:43-65) indicated that online users who used the Internet extensively were likely to view advertising negatively, but their research examined websites, and not SNS. Wronski and Goldstruck (2014) confirmed that Mxit users spent one and three-quarters of an hour on this digital channel nearly every day, and also showed the highest level of engagement in comparison to all of the other social media platforms in SA. Therefore, it can be concluded that the longer Gen Y users spend logged on to Mxit, the more favourable their affective attitudes towards marketing communications on this SNS. The respondents' usage characteristics, which were identified by this study, have a positive influence on Gen Y's affective attitudes, and also have important implications for marketers who intend to use Mxit as a marketing communications conduit.

Several demographic variables had an effect on Gen Y's affective responses to Mxit marketing communications, hence supporting the third research objective. Only gender was proven not to have an impact on liking or preference because of Mxit marketing communications. Younger respondents' liking perceptions towards Mxit marketing communications were proven to be more positive in comparison to the older Gen Y respondents. Several other studies have also revealed that age has an influence on SNS use and perceptions (Ellison, Steinfield & Lampe, 2007:43–68; Pempek, Yermolayeva & Calvert, 2009:227-238; Pfeil, Arjan & Zaphiris, 2009:643-654). Maddox and Gong (2005:683) established that younger consumers maintained elevated favourable attitudes towards online advertising. Madahi and Sukati (2012:157) confirmed that younger Gen Y

members have positive behavioural responses owing to marketing communications. Furthermore, younger consumers displayed a greater probability of liking brands owing to friends' social recommendations and endorsements (Ipsos OTX, 2012). Black respondents showed more favourable affective responses to Mxit marketing communications in comparison to the other population groups. De Lanerolle (2012:8-9) reported that the demographics of the Internet have changed over the past five years, with two-thirds of online users speaking an African language, which was primarily driven by mobile devices. Petzer and Meyer (2013:382-383) indicated that a significant Black middle class had arisen, since the establishment of the new government, whose purchase power has overtaken their White counterparts. Although, nearly a quarter of South Africans are still below the breadline, they have aspirations for the future, which has created a demand for products that are not usually associated with these consumers. Social media is new to a majority of these consumers, but for many Mxit is their first exposure to SNS and SNA, and numbers are steadily climbing among this population group (Petzer & Meyer, 2013:383-386). Grier and Deshpande (2001:220) found that Black South Africans were more likely to be influenced by traditional advertising than their White counterparts; and Shavitt, Lowrey and Haefner, (1998:7-22) also confirmed that Black respondents had more favourable attitudes towards online advertising.

THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

This empirical investigation established that Mxit marketing communications produced a favourable effect on the affective responses of Gen Y, which verifies the fundamentals of hierarchy response models that were developed via traditional media. Therefore, it can be postulated that SNA caused similar liking and preference perceptions in

comparison to above-the-line advertising. Moreover, the findings of this study are comparable to primary research in the US and Europe, specifically in terms of affective responses owing to SNA, thereby confirming analogous attitudes between the aforementioned first-world countries and developing countries such as SA (Taylor et al., 2011:269; Powers, Advincula, Austin, Graiko and Snyder, 2012:485; Schivinski & Dąbrowski, 2013:9-10; Hollebeek et al., 2014:156-161; Labrecque, 2014:138-139). The results also show that Mxit marketing communications yield similar affective attitudes compared to online advertising in developed countries (Wang & Sun, 2010:342; Yoo et al., 2010:56). Gen Y is viewed as a homogenous cohort across the world (Moore, 2012:443), but there has been debate as to whether this notion is true, especially in terms of developing versus first-world nations, which have superior infrastructure, resources and information and communication technology (Lesame, 2013:82-86). Several of the abovementioned international studies also principally investigated Gen Y (Taylor et al., 2011:269; Schivinski & Dąbrowski, 2013:9-10), and the current study's similar findings substantiated the notion that Gen Y, across countries, have similar behaviours and attitudes. Hence, this inquiry has made noteworthy contributions in terms of the application of cohort and attitude theories in the context of Gen Y respondents' affective attitudes towards SNA in an emerging country; and cohort theory. As recommended by Bolton et al. (2013:257), it was important to explore whether there were significant variances within the Gen Y cohort in terms of usage and attitudes towards social media. The study substantiated that particular usage characteristics, namely length of usage and log-on duration, had an influence on Gen Y's liking and preference owing to Mxit marketing communications. The analysis also found that certain demographic variables, namely age and population group, had an effect on Gen Y's affective attitudes towards Mxit marketing

communications. Hence, variances were found within the Gen Y cohort, and since there is a lack of inquiry, which examines the impact of usage and demographic characteristics on SNA and attitudes; this pioneering endeavour has furthered the application of cohort and attitude theories in the context of Gen Y in terms of social media.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MARKETERS

Mxit marketing communications resulted in a noteworthy effect on liking and preference among these Gen Y respondents in SA, thereby confirming that marketers who have allocated significant portions of their marketing communication budgets to SNA would have employed the correct tactic (Wilson, 2013). However, only one in ten companies uses Mxit in their promotional mix, which, therefore, provides a potential profitable opportunity since there is much less clutter in comparison to Facebook where over 90% of marketers use this SNS. Furthermore, Mxit is an effective interactive tool to reach a young target market positioned in the middle to lower to LSMs (Wronski & Goldstruck, 2013:18,115). Several factors have been disclosed as being important in influencing affective responses via SNS and/or SNA, namely consumer engagement (Hollebeek et al., 2014:156-161), brand interaction (Labrecque, 2014:138-139) and creative advertisements (Wang & Sun, 2010:342). Marketers can stimulate consumer engagement and become interactive with their brands via multiple communication channels such as branded chat rooms, branded broadcast messages and brand apps, which are available on Mxit. Furthermore, Mxit provides a monthly brand index that displays the top forty brands in terms of the number of subscribers and position, which provides feedback to marketers regarding the effectiveness of their marketing communication efforts via this digital conduit.

Mxit users with less experience displayed favourable affective responses when compared to experienced Mxit users. Hence, marketers should ensure that they constantly interact with users and supply accurate brand data that will result in engagement among both new and older Mxit subscribers via downloads, competitions, games, broadcast posts, competitions, apps and many other marketing communication mechanisms. Mxit users who spend a longer time on this SNS exhibited higher positive affective responses. Accordingly, marketers should keep young consumers entertained and logged on for longer by utilising the abovementioned promotions platforms and altering brand messages on a regular basis, as Gen Y tend to ignore uninteresting, dated and immaterial brand communications (Jothi, Neelamalar & Prasad, 2011:240-241). However, the branded messages should be succinct and to the point, as Gen Y tend to skim content owing to years of computer and mobile device usage, and will not read long and tedious communiqué (Wilson, 2007:35-40).

Marketers should also understand that although Gen Y shares many homogenous traits, it would be dangerous to assume that there is no variance within this cohort (Kennedy et al., 2008:108-109), as was found to be true in terms of age and population group in this inquiry. Madahi and Sukati (2012:153-154) also determined that intention-to-purchase was greater among the younger Gen Y consumers and that ethnic orientation differed among various population groups, which made them a potentially lucrative target market. The buying power of this cohort is predicted to grow rapidly as students enter the job market and older young adults climb the corporate ladder. It is estimated that Gen Y will constitute three-quarters of the workforce by the end of the next decade (McDonald, 2014). Marketers should take into account that young Gen Y are brand savvy and are able to quickly distinguish between brands that are not entertaining and do not provide sufficient

and/or relevant information so that they can make informed consumer purchase decisions. As mentioned, several other inquires also determined that the Black population group was more likely to be influenced by and favourably disposed to online marketing communications; encompasses nearly seven out of ten Internet users; and has the largest buying power in SA (De Lanerolle, 2012:8-9; Grier & Deshpande, 2001:220; Shavitt et al., 1998:7-22). A number of Black South Africans are introduced to SNS via Mxit, and consequently are more readily influenced by marketing communications on this digital platform; therefore, they constitute a profitable market for judicious marketers.

LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER INVESTIGATION

A number of different forms of Mxit marketing communications are available to marketers, but were examined universally, whereas divergent findings may emanate from a separate analysis. Two levels of the hierarchy response models were considered, but other levels such as awareness, knowledge, intention-to-purchase and purchase, also warrant further academic attention. A single SNS was included in the study, although other major social mediums, namely Facebook, Google+, YouTube and Twitter should also be surveyed. A cross-section of the research population was analysed via the survey, but a longitudinal design would yield a more extensive representation of the perceptions towards Mxit marketing communications over a longer time frame. Further inquiry should also include other generations, namely Baby Boomers and Google Generation, who may have differing perceptions towards Mxit marketing communications and other SNA. This research could be duplicated by other developing and developed nations to establish if similar or divergent attitudes towards SNA are prevalent, thereby providing a more complete understanding of their perceptions.

CONCLUSION

The onset of the twenty-first century has witnessed the exponential proliferation of online brand marketing communications delivered via social media, especially among Gen Y, which has significantly affected a number of consumer behaviour elements such as attitudes, awareness, information, liking, opinions, purchase behaviour and post-evaluation. However, many organisations still fail to realise the full potential value of social media in their integrated marketing communication efforts, especially in terms of the interactive nature of this online conduit. Marketers now have an opportunity to promote their brands via personalised marketing communications, develop interactive relationships and apply demographic specific content to their desired target market via the rapidly and ever-expanded online system of SNS (Shabnam, Choudhury & Alam, 2013:1). A noteworthy addition was made to the advancement of attitudinal and hierarchy response model theory in terms of the effect of Mxit marketing communications among Gen Y in SA. Particular usage characteristics such as length of usage and log-on duration also affected liking and/or preference hierarchy responses, as well as the specific population group (a demographic variable) owing to Mxit marketing communications. There is a growing realisation that the number of young people that are buying products online is greatly increasing; hence marketing communications have become an important tool for companies to use when promoting their products and services via SNS (Manomayankul, 2012:83). Hence, this research is important to academics and marketers, and since it not only adds to the application of cohort and attitude theories in the context of Gen Y, it also affords the improved prospect of forecasting the indecisive Gen Y's future consumer buying behaviour.

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