

MARKETING TO YOUNG ADULTS IN THE CONTEXT OF A POSTMODERN SOCIETY

By

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Declaration

I declare that the Doctoral thesis, which I hereby submit for the degree PhD Marketing Management at the University of Pretoria, is my own work and has not previously been submitted by me for a degree at this or any other tertiary institution.

Amaleya Goneos-Malka

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I would like to thank my husband for his constant support that made every obstacle merely a stepping stone along this journey.

* * *

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Abstract

In today's society media is ubiquitous. Through its pervasiveness it plays an inextricable role in society, impacting on culture, economy, politics, education and communication. In a postmodern society technological advances have had a profound impact on the development of media, most notably digital media. The intention of this study was to establish whether, in the context of an assumed postmodern culture, young South African adults display behaviour that manifest the tenets of postmodernism in their reactions to contemporary marketing and/or marketing communication, as apparent through their attitudes towards retail shopping and brands, together with their attitudes towards and use of digital media. In this instance digital media is limited to social media and media accessible on mobile phones. The unique properties and interactive capabilities of digital media have altered the dynamics of communication and have given rise to new applications that were not previously possible. This poses challenges for organisations in terms of marketing communication practices with one of the problem areas being that marketers do not know:

- Whether young South African adults (Generation Y) exhibit postmodern behaviour, in the context of today's postmodern culture.
- How young South African adults (Generation Y) use digital media?
- How to leverage the unique properties of digital media in marketing communication efforts directed towards young South African adults (Generation Y)?

The main purpose of this research was to reflect on the applicability of modern marketing and/or marketing communication theories, in their current state, in the context of a postmodern society, with specific emphasis on the use of digital media. The secondary purpose of the research was to investigate the affect of postmodern variables on Generation Y and the perspective of this population towards digital media and its role in marketing communication. The study aimed to contribute to the theoretical body of knowledge as follows:

- To question the application of modern marketing and/or marketing communication theories in postmodern society. In so doing, it suggested that in any given era marketing theories should be representative of the target society, therefore

inferring the need to adjust existing theories and their application or formulate new ones that are representative of the specific era.

- To empirically determine whether Generation Y are exhibiting characteristics indicative of postmodern society.

Furthermore, the study added value from a practitioner perspective by contributing to new knowledge in the study of Generation Y and digital media. It is anticipated that an improved understanding of Generation Y's attitudes towards marketing and digital media will serve to improve knowledge of how Generation Y will react in the future as they mature and potentially provide an indication of forthcoming generations' attitudes towards marketing.

Nine research objectives emanating from the research problem were empirically tested through a cross-sectional quantitative exploratory descriptive survey research design. Items in the survey were developed on the basis of observable postmodern characteristics presented in the literature and in consultation with a panel of experts. The survey was distributed by email, which provided a web-based link to access the survey, to the sampling frame; a database comprising of 2,265 students, between the ages of 18-34, enrolled full-time with the department of Marketing and Communication Management (University of Pretoria) during 2011. Convenience sampling was used until a sufficient quantity of fully completed surveys had been collected; 333 usable questionnaires were obtained. The collected data received statistical treatment primarily through the application of exploratory factor analysis and multivariate analysis of co-variance.

The theoretical synthesis showed that characteristics of postmodernism are evident in society and affect marketing and/or marketing communication activities. The results of the empirical phase of the investigation demonstrated that respondents show postmodernism traits in their behaviour towards digital media and their reactions towards brands and marketing and/or marketing communication. The most dominant postmodern characteristics displayed by respondents were hyperreality, de-differentiation and fragmentation. Several factors were found to be statistically significant, which may be related to socio-economic conditions, behavioural patterns, and digital infrastructure. These were: ethnicity, cell phone usage, frequency of social media usage, cell phone plan,

average monthly Internet expenditure for cell phones, use of Internet bundles on cell phones, and the device used most often to access the Internet. Social media use was identified as an important behavioural outcome by respondents, and the most significant influencing factors related to the dependence that respondents placed on their cell phones and the need to fulfil certain activities only available in the social media space.

Finally a conceptual framework was proposed, which integrated theoretical and empirical findings. This framework suggested a broadening of certain roles within marketing and/or marketing communication, namely: consumers transforming to collaborators; communication transforming to interaction; and value exchange transforming to value-in-use.

It is anticipated that this study has added to the theoretical level of knowledge by indicating the need to readdress principles and theories of marketing and/or marketing communication in the context of a postmodern society and in particular the use of digital media. An outcome of the study was the proposition of a conceptual framework, which addressed a number of aspects in the transformation from modern to postmodern marketing. Furthermore, at the practitioner level the study has broadened understanding of Generation Y's behaviour towards digital media in the marketing and/or marketing communication context. Managerial recommendations were expressed on the basis of the theoretical and empirical findings.



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