The influence of Mxit advertising on purchase intentions and purchase amid Generation Y

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Abstract

Generation Y is the first high-tech generation and is completely dependent on mobile devices and social media to complete various daily tasks, since these individuals have grown up in an epoch of rapid technological innovation and development. Social media's escalation in popularity has been noticed by organisations who desire to find new ways to reach young online communities. Mxit is a social network site in South Africa that allows marketing managers to communicate with consumers via a number of marketing communication options.

A steady flow of literature has emerged on social media as a marketing communication tool over the past five years, primarily from first-world countries, academic research has not kept pace within South Africa. Hence, the primary objective of this investigation was to establish Generation Y's purchase intentions and purchase sentiment towards Mxit advertising.

A survey method was utilised to collect 1 228 self-administered questionnaires from Generation Y respondents. Mxit advertising was confirmed to have relatively positive behavioural responses and several demographic and usage variables also had a significant effect. This study has added to the relatively small pool of data to assist academics and practitioners to understand the influence of Mxit advertising on South Africa's youth.

Key phrases

behavioural attitudes, Generation Y, hierarchy response models, Mxit advertising, purchase, purchase intentions, social media, social network sites

1.   INTRODUCTION

The exponential growth of social network sites (SNS) has been nothing short of astounding, altering both the functionality and purpose of the Internet. Social media platforms attract billions of users, many of whom incorporate these websites into their daily lives and organisation practices (Gensler, Völckner, Liu-Thompkins & Wiertz 2013:242-243; Laroche, Habibi & Richard 2013:76). With rapid development in technology, advertising has changed significantly over the past couple of decades, from the monologue of traditional media to

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social media where consumers are now in control of the media communication (Curran, Graham & Temple 2011:26).

Online advertising income is forecasted to grow at over 25% per annum in South Africa (SA), which is over double the average growth for Europe and nearly double in comparison to the global average. Online advertising is anticipated to generate income of nearly R4 billion, and consumers are estimated to spend nearly R60 billion online in 2017, with a major portion coming from mobile (Wilson 2013:Internet).

As more marketing managers assimilate social network advertising (SNA) into their promotional strategies, the need to investigate the perceptions and attitudes towards marketing communications on social media becomes apparent, especially in terms of the 18 to 30-year-old demographic (known as Generation Y), whose fickleness and aversion to all forms of advertising can increasingly make them an elusive target, but SNA can be a highly successful platform of engagement (Taylor, Lewin & Strutton 2011:258). Mxit is one of the largest social media advertising platforms in SA (Wronski & Goldstruck 2013:114), but there is a lack of inquiry, which researches the effectiveness of this marketing communication conduit.

2. PROBLEM STATEMENT AND OBJECTIVES

The appropriateness of the traditional advertising theories to assess online advertising has been an area of interest to academics and advertising scholars since the arrival of digital advertising (Yoo, Kim & Stout 2010:49). Hierarchy responses models have received extensive attention as a detailed explanation of how advertising works and hence, is a base for measuring advertising effectiveness (Barry 1987:251-295; O'Guinn, Allen & Semenik 2009:269-270; Weilbacher 2001:19-26).

These models propose that consumers pass through consecutive phases – awareness and knowledge (cognitive stage); liking and preference (affective stage); and purchase intention and purchase (behavioural stage) – in response to marketing communications. Organisations first aim to satisfy their consumers' lower level attitudinal cognitive stages of the hierarchy response process via their marketing communications and offerings and then progress to the fulfil affective stages, with the entire process culminating in positive behavioural responses that result in favourable purchase intentions and ultimately climax with purchase (Belch & Belch 2015:158-159; Schiffman & Kanuk 2004:256-259).

The development of the hierarchy response levels was based on traditional advertising, although this research investigates if behavioural attitudinal responses are favourably

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influenced by advertising on an SNS, namely Mxit. Hence, this investigation is important for the development of attitudinal theory, as well as for the many companies in SA that have spent large percentages of their budgets on SNA and need to verify the tangible influence of their targeted prospects' purchase intentions and purchase.

Accordingly, this present study attempted to assess the effect of Mxit advertising within the framework of the hierarchy response models in terms of behavioural responses, on Generation Y's attitudes in SA.

Consumers' attitudes and perceptions of various forms of Internet advertising have received extensive inquiry. Baltas (2003:505-513) considered the determinants of Internet advertising effectiveness; Burns and Lutz (2006:53-63) investigated the function formats of consumer responses to online advertising; Campbell, Pitt, Parent and Berthon (2011:87-102) examined consumer conversations around Web 2.0 advertising; Cho and Cheon (2004:89-97) explored why people avoid advertising on the internet; Rosenkrans (2009:18-31) analysed the creativeness and effectiveness of online interactive rich media advertising; and Yaveroglu and Donthu (2008:31-43) evaluated advertising repetition and placement issues in online environments.

SNA has also received widespread academic attention of late. Bolton, Parasuraman, Hoefnagels, Migchels, Kabadayi, Gruber, Loureiro and Solnet (2013:245-267) sought to understand Generation Y and their use of social media; Hansson, Wrangmo and Søilen (2013:112-126) explored optimal ways for companies to use Facebook as a marketing channel; Kim, Sun and Young (2013:108-125) investigated the influence of consumer value-based factors on attitude-behavioural intention in social commerce; Kodjamanis and Angelopoulos (2013:53-58) analysed the consumer perception and attitude towards advertising on social networking sites; Labrecque (2014:134-148) examined consumer-brand relationships in social media environments; Laroche *et al.* (2013:76-82) considered how brand loyalty was affected by social media; and McCarthy, Rowley, Ashworth and Pioch (2014:43-75) reflected on managing brands' presence through social media.

There are no studies that investigate the effects of SNA in terms of the recognised hierarchy response theoretical framework in SA. Furthermore, several international inquiries in developed nations have produced conflicting results in terms of behavioural attitudes as a result of SNA. Haigh, Brubaker and Whiteside (2013:62-65) and Ruane and Wallace (2013:321-327) established that SNA yielded a favourable behavioural response, whereas Bannister, Kiefer and Nellums (2013:14-16) and Persaud (2013:42-45) found a predominantly indifferent or negative behavioural response.

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Therefore, the **first research objective** is to ascertain if Mxit advertising has an effect on purchase intentions and purchase among Generation Y in SA.

A majority of users access Mxit via mobile phones, log on multiple times a day and spend nearly 2 hours using this conduit every day (Mxit 2014a:Internet). There is a dearth of research, both locally and internationally, as to whether these various usage variables and others have an influence on SNA efficiency. Organisations would be interested in establishing which usage factors result in the most effective advertising, since this will assist in the targeting of consumers with the highest purchase potential. Furthermore, usage characteristics research would make a valuable contribution to the social media attitude notional framework. Hence, **the second research objective** was to determine if usage elements had an influence on Generation Y's purchase intentions and purchase as a result of advertising on Mxit.

A limited number of inquiries have considered the influence of demographic variables on social media advertising. Shambare, Rugimbana and Sithole (2011:579-584) revealed that different demographical profiles, in terms of gender and education, had an impact on social media usage, but did not take advertising into consideration. De Lanerolle (2012:18) also established that various demographic factors such as age, income, population group and education, affected Internet and social media usage variables, but also did not consider advertising via this platform. Accordingly, the **third research objective** was to examine if demographic variables had an impact on Generation Y's purchase intentions and purchase sentiment attributable to Mxit advertising.

Therefore, in summary, the research objectives of this inquiry are as follows:

- To examine the influence of Generation Y's purchase intentions and purchase sentiments towards Mxit advertising.

- To establish if online usage elements affect Generation Y's purchase intentions and purchase perceptions towards Mxit advertising.

- To ascertain whether Generation Y's demographic variables have an effect on purchase intentions and purchase sentiments towards Mxit advertising.

3.   LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1   Overview of Mxit

Mxit was founded in SA in 2005 and is still one of the main mobile social media conduits with almost 5 million active users in Africa (Wronski & Goldstruck 2014). The social medium offers

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a low cost text based communication app that allows users to exchange text, pictures and compressed sound clips, as well as interact with brands, education and community platforms. The app is downloaded to the user's cell phone free of charge, with text messages being able to be sent and received by using both mobile devices and computers. Mxit is accessible on over 8 000 types of tablets, cell phones, smartphones, handsets and other mobile devices. Mxit has its own e-commerce platform, consequently the Mxit app, which is known as Tradepost, and informs users about the latest competitions, downloads (music, news, movie information), chat rooms and other happenings.

Downloads, chat rooms and other services are paid for by using Moola, which is Mxit's legal tender, which is deducted from the subscribers airtime (MXit 2014a:Internet; Wronski & Goldstruck 2013:113-118). Mxit has a number of marketing communication tools, namely brand apps, splash screens/interstitials, broadcasts messages, banner advertisements and sponsorships, which can be used to reach organisations' desired target audiences (Mxit 2014b:Internet).

This SNS also allows organisations to construct and manage their own apps, communities and games. Some of the top apps on Mxit include: Tradepost, (with over 3.21 million subscribers), followed by Gallery (3.19 million) and Tradepostzaen (3.09 million), which also make for potentially good advertising platforms owing to the high volumes of traffic (Wronski & Goldstruck 2013:119). Furthermore, Mxit primarily reached the lower LSMs, while 92% of subscribers are 13 to 35 years old, making it a feasible online interactive platform to target Generation Y (MXit 2014a:Internet).

A number of studies have investigated Mxit from an educational perspective or provided an outline of why this SNS was utilised so widely, especially amongst Generation Y. Butgereit, Leonard, Le Roux, Rama, De Sousa and Naidoo (2010) examined how games could be used to promote learning and to improve skills in science and mathematics via Mxit. Kaufman (2011:5) explored the learning experiences of learners in Grade 12 as a result of support that they received from peers via Mxit.

Kahn (2013) highlighted the evolution of Mxit from a simple instant messaging channel into an integrated multimedia platform that also serves as an education mechanism, financial service association and community support conduit. There have not been any academic inquiries, which establish Generation Y's attitudes towards Mxit advertising, in spite of the extensive use of this platform as a promotional tool and the large young target audience.

3.2   Generation Y cohort notions

Interactive digital development has grown at an extraordinary pace over the last decade; consequently, Generation Y (born 1982 to 1994) has experienced the proliferation of online digital innovations since the beginning, and, accordingly, these have been integrated into every aspect of their regular lives (Bakewell & Mitchell 2003:95; Howe & Strauss 2000:4-13).

Furthermore, digital divergence drives worldwide homogeneity among global population within Generation Y, resulting in a universal cohort who allegedly exhibits similar behaviour and attitudes (Moore 2012:436; Wessels & Steenkamp 2009:1040). Though, Generation Y has largely not formulated long-lasting patterns of consumer behaviour, they tend to spend liberally, but have limited means since a larger proportion are seeking employment; employed in entry-level jobs; and/or still studying. Several investigations revealed that Generation Y consumers do not buy products online to the same degree as the older cohorts (Henrie & Taylor 2009:71-82; Moore 2012:436-444).

However, Generation Y is predicted to be the largest cohort compared to any of the previous generations and will have more spending power than ever before as they climb the corporate ladder and successfully operate their own businesses (McDonald 2014:Internet; Saunders 2014:Internet). Therefore, it is important to gain a more comprehensive understanding of this cohort's sentiments towards SNA, as this is a generation that should not be marginalised by organisations.

3.3   Attitude theory development

Hamidizadeh, Yazdani, Tabriz and Latifi (2012:131) disclosed that for organisations to plan effectively, the consumers' attitudinal responses to SNS advertising should be investigated in order to utilise their capabilities efficiently. Social media does not only reshape social life, but also affects the consumer behaviour of its users, hence, marketing managers need to not only understand how SNS operate as independent productive social spaces, but also need to understand consumer attitudes for marketing communications on these apps (Kruger & Painter 2011:48-49).

Ma and Liu (2010:47) revealed that appropriate online advertising would improve the behavioural response of consumer behaviour. Hudson and Thal (2013:156-160) disclosed that brands did not interact effectively with consumers via social media. The research suggested that organisations should focus on an array of consumer decision stages instead of cognitive and behavioural responses. Kodjamanis and Angelopoulos (2013) determined that SNA advertising had little impact on purchasing intentions and purchase. Hennig-Thurau, Hofacker and Bloching (2013:239) agreed that attempts to execute purchase via

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SNS had not been effective. Conversely, Albert and Hersinta (2013:119-132) established that consumers who had positive experiences when shopping on SNS, led to favourable behavioural tendencies. Labrecque (2014:139) established positive behavioural (intention-to-purchase) attitudes in terms of brand interaction on SNS. Tan, Kwek and Li (2013:88-98) found a generally favourable affiliation between general attitudes towards SNA among students, and positive associations with purchase intentions and SNA effectiveness.

Hence, there have been several inquiries (Albert & Hersinta 2013:119-132; Gensler 2013:242-256; Hennig-Thurau *et al.* 2013:237-241; Hudson & Thal 2013:156-160; Mir 2013:265-288; Schivinski & D browski 2013:1-20; Tan *et al.* 2013:88-98; Wang, Yu & Wei 2012:198-208), which investigated advertising on SNS in terms of behavioural responses, but, which produced conflicting results. Furthermore, several studies (Hadija, Barnes & Hair 2012:29; Hutter, Hautz, Dennhardt & Füller 2013:342-351; Kodjamanis & Angelopoulos 2013; Labrecque 2014:134-148; Persaud 2013:43-44; Powers, Advincula, Austin, Graiko & Snyder 2012:479-489) occurred in Europe and the United States; only students were used as a sample in many instances; small samples were employed; and in isolated cases, examined usage and demographic variables of SNA.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 Sampling

Generation Y is well known for its inclination to be heavy consumers of online digital media, particularly social media, which provides a potentially efficient platform for marketing communications (Bolton *et al.* 2013:247; Eberhardt 2007:18-26; Goodstein 2008:42; Shambare *et al.* 2012:581; Symphony 2013:Internet; Wronski & Goldstruck 2013:47).

Furthermore, several inquiries identified students as the primary users of social media (Bannister *et al.* 2013:5-6; Duggan & Brenner 2013:2; Kim *et al.* 2013:114; Yang 2012:53), while other investigations utilised students as respondents to examine social media advertising and/or attitudes (Adkins 2009:41; Hassan, Fatima, Akram, Abbas & Hasnain 2013:319; Kodjamanis & Angelopoulos 2013:53; Mir 2013:273; Persaud 2013:36; Tan *et al.* 2013:94).

However, a majority of this cohort are in their formative years and are yet to pass through a number of life stages and consumption cycles. Therefore, as proposed by Bolton *et al.* (2013:256-259), it was important to select a more complete continuum of Generation Y. Multi-stage sampling was utilised whereby a number of phases are employed to establish the sample frame and draw the sample (Cooper & Schindler 2006:453; Gupta 2010:206).

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The first step divided SA geographically and the Western Cape was designated as the data collection geographic site with 11.25% of the SA population residing in this province (Statistics SA 2012:25). The second step divided and selected certain townships and suburbs, and urban and rural communities in the Western Cape. The third step identified specific companies, universities, colleges, sports clubs, religious and other community groups.

Finally, once permission was received from the organisations, participants were systematically chosen and voluntarily requested to participate in the inquiry. Hence, the unemployed (nearly a third of Generation Y) do not work (Statistics SA 2012:61) and employed young adults, in addition to students, were surveyed to realise a more comprehensive sample of Mxit users in this cohort, as recommended by Jordaan, Ehlers & Grove (2011:16).

4.2   Research instrument development and collection of data

The research instrument comprised of three sections in the form of a questionnaire.

Firstly, five usage characteristics (access, number of years of usage, log on frequency, hours of usage per log on, and frequency of profile update) of Mxit users were determined by means of multiple-choice questions.

Secondly, two constructs were formed by modifying scale items from Putrevu and Lord (1994:83), Taylor and Hunter (2002:473-474), and Wu, Wei and Chen (2008:226-227) for purchase intentions; and Martinez-Lopez, Luna and Martinez (2005:333-334), Patwardhan and Ramaprasad (2005:12-13), and Hamidizadeh *et al.* (2012:146-149) for purchase. Each construct included nine items consisting of 5-point Likert-scale statements, which ranged from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5). Therefore, a high mean score was indicative of a high level of purchase intentions and purchase (collectively representing Mxit advertising behavioural attitudinal responses), while the opposite was true.

Thirdly, the demographic variables (gender, age and ethnic group) were requested. A pre-test of fifty respondents was utilised to detect and rectify potential problematic elements in the questionnaire such as refine the construct item and multiple-choice questions to ensure that they were reliable, and to ensure that provision was made for all response choices (Barker 2003:327-328; Unrau, Gabor & Grinnell 2007:179).

Final adaptations were completed to validate the constructs before the commencement of the survey. The large quantity of data that was required for this investigation was collected via a self-administered structured questionnaire.

Twelve fieldworkers were trained by the researcher and surveyed members of the Generation Y cohort over a two month period. The questionnaires were then checked in terms of completeness, edited, coded, captured and analysed via SPSS (version 22).

5.   DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The sample included 1 228 members of the Generation Y cohort in the Western Cape. As expected, Mxit was accessed by a majority of participants (73.4%) via mobile devices; nearly 63% logged on to Mxit on a daily basis; spent one to three (78.4%) hours per log on; and two-thirds updated their profile a minimum of once a week.

The survey included a majority of females (57.3%); and the ethnic groups fundamentally reflected the Western Cape's ethnicity (Statistics SA 2012:21). The demographics of the sample also portrayed Mxit's typical audience profile (Mxit 2014a:Internet).

Tables 1 and 2 provide a comprehensive overview of the usage characteristics and demographics of Generation Y's respondents that utilise Mxit based on the sample in this study.

TABLE 1:   Mxit usage characteristics

Mxit usage characteristics	n	%
Access		
Mobile device	901	73.4
PC	45	3.6
Mobile device and PC	282	23.0
Length of usage		
1 year	160	13.0
2 years	246	20.0
3 years	275	22.4
4 years	228	18.6
5 years	319	26.0
Log on frequency		
Daily	771	62.8
2 - 4 a week	280	22.8
Once a week	116	9.4
2 - 4 a month	28	2.3
Once a month	33	2.7
Log on duration		
1 hour	355	28.9
2 hours	350	28.5

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Mxit usage characteristics	n	%
3 hours	258	21.0
4 hours	119	9.7
5 hours	146	11.9
Profile update incidence		
Daily	360	29.3
2 - 4 a week	228	18.6
Once a week	227	18.5
2 - 4 a month	145	11.8
Once a month	268	21.8

Source: Calculated from survey results

TABLE 2:   Mxit demographics

Demographics	n	%
Gender		
Male	524	42.7
Female	704	57.3
Age		
18 - 20	655	53.3
21 - 24	465	37.9
25 - 30	108	8.8
Ethnic group		
White	90	7.3
Black	683	55.6
Coloured	412	33.6
Indian/Asian	43	3.5

Source: Calculated from survey results

As mentioned in the methodology section, the participants' purchase intentions and
purchase sentiment towards Mxit advertising was calculated by means of nine-item scales
for each of the hierarchy response levels (Tables 3 and 4). Likert scale statements that are
negatively phrased are essential to minimise response bias, but it is imperative that these
statements' scores are reversed; otherwise it would have a negative influence on the
Cronbach's value.

A third of the statements in each of the nine item scales were reversed via SPSS before
Cronbach's was determined for each scale of the hierarchy response model (Field
2009:675-677). Cronbach's was 0.833 for Mxit's advertising purchase intentions scale

(Table 3) and 0.774 for the Mxit advertising purchase scale (Table 4), thereby exhibiting acceptable internal reliability.

This indicates that participants tended to "agree" that Mxit advertising resulted in purchase intentions and purchase. A non-parametric one-sample bi-nominal standardised test was also employed to ascertain whether there was a significant difference in terms of the individual construct items.

TABLE 3:   Mxit advertising purchase intentions scale (means, standard deviations and one-sample bi-nominal standardised test)

Purchase intentions scale items	Mean	SD	P	Test statistic
I will buy products that are advertised on Mxit in the near future (PI1)	3.09	1.334	.019	2.342
I desire to buy products that are promoted on Mxit (PI2)	3.08	1.341	.153	1.430
Advertisements on Mxit do not increase purchase intent of featured brands (PI3)*	3.24	1.350	.001	7.831
Advertisements on Mxit have a positive influence on my purchase decisions (PI4)	2.97	1.128	.600	0.524
I would buy the products that are advertised on Mxit if I had the money (PI5)	3.15	1.213	.001	6.013
I do not intend to acquire products that are promoted on Mxit (PI6)*	3.27	1.275	.001	7.355
I am likely to buy some of the products that are promoted on Mxit (PI7)	3.01	1.064	.112	1.588
I plan to purchase the products that are advertised on Mxit (PI8)	2.96	1.106	.840	0.202
Advertisements on Mxit have a negative influence on buying decisions (PI9)*	3.36	1.140	.001	9.896

* Negatively phrased statement scores were recoded

Source: Calculated from survey results

TABLE 4:   Mxit advertising purchase scale (means, standard deviations and one-sample bi-nominal standardised test)

Purchase scale items	Mean	SD	P	Test statistic
Advertisements on Mxit make me less loyal to brands (P10)*	3.64	1.228	.001	16.904
I buy products that are advertised on Mxit (P11)	2.78	1.329	.001	6.898
I use many of the products that are promoted on Mxit (P12)	2.83	1.346	.001	5.081
I do not purchase products that are featured on Mxit (P13)*	3.50	1.193	.001	13.340

Purchase scale items	Mean	SD	P	Test statistic
Advertisements on Mxit affect my purchase behaviour positively (P14)	2.76	1.191	.001	5.148
Advertisements on Mxit help make me loyal to the promoted products (P15)	2.83	1.209	.001	4.634
Advertisements on Mxit affect my purchase behaviour negatively (P16)*	3.50	1.042	.001	15.256
I purchase products that are promoted on Mxit (P17)	2.71	1.117	.001	7.649
Advertisements on Mxit affect my buying actions positively (P18)	2.85	1.103	.001	4.123

* Negatively phrased statement scores were recoded

Source: Calculated from survey results

The test revealed that there was a significant difference at $p < 0.001$ for all nine of the purchase construct items, and that there was a significant difference at $p < 0.001$ and $p < 0.05$ for five of the purchase intentions scale items. Pearson correlation coefficient analysis showed a positive relationship collectively among the purchase intentions and purchase constructs (Tables 5 and 6).

TABLE 5: Pearson's correlation coefficient results for the Mxit advertising purchase intentions scale

PI scale items	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
PI (1)	1								
PI (2)	.733**	1							
PI (3)*	.298**	.288**	1						
PI (4)	.765**	.602**	.273**	1					
PI (5)	.607**	.819**	.247**	.639**	1				
PI (6)*	.333**	.291**	.683**	.268**	.295**	1			
PI (7)	.750**	.597**	.278**	.784**	.632**	.295**	1		
PI (8)	.584**	.773**	.237**	.548**	.756**	.275**	.592**	1	
PI (9)*	.324**	.232**	.653**	.332**	.291**	.750**	.302**	.158**	1

* Negatively phrased statement scores were recoded

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

Source: Calculated from survey results

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TABLE 6: **Pearson's correlation coefficient results for the Mxit advertising purchase scale**

P scale items	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
P (10)*	1								
P (11)	0.747**	1							
P (12)	0.264**	0.201**	1						
P (13)*	.0717**	0.522**	0.175**	1					
P (14)	0.622**	0.811**	0.221**	0.584**	1				
P (15)	0.337**	0.265**	0.728**	0.248**	0.267**	1			
P (16)*	0.723**	0.529**	0.225**	0.739**	0.524**	0.277**	1		
P (17)	0.550**	0.728**	0.197**	0.486**	0.730**	0.224**	0.609**	1	
P (18)	0.320**	0.240**	0.733**	0.253**	0.276**	0.795**	0.253**	0.170**	1

* Negatively phrased statement scores were recoded

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

Source: Calculated from survey results

Wald's Chi-square established if the observed frequencies were significantly different in comparison to the projected frequencies via a Generalised Linear Model (GLM) analysis of variance (ANOVA) (Urdan 2010:162). Bonferroni correction pair-wise comparisons post hoc tests were utilised on the estimated marginal means that allowed the comparison between the predictor (Mxit usage and demographic variables) and dependent variables (purchase intentions and purchase), consequently establishing where there were significant differences between these variables (Hinton, Brownlow, McMurray & Cozens 2004:156). The varying number of observations for the predictor variable results were "normalised" through the use of the GLM ANOVA.

Larger standard errors are attributable to a lower number of observations, for example, there was a much greater number of participants aged 18 - 20 compared to the 25 - 30 years group (van Schalkwyk 2012:3). Tables 7 and 8 display the influence of usage and demographics variables on Mxit advertising purchase intentions and purchase with regards to Wald's Chi-Square tests, which were founded on the Bonferroni correction pairwise post hoc test among the estimated marginal means.

The Wald's Chi-square test verified that there was a significant difference at $p < 0.001$ for purchase intentions (M = 3.12, SD = 0.799) because of Mxit advertising. No significant differences were found for access, log on frequency and profile update incidence, neither for

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any of the demographic factors (gender, age and ethnic group), whereas *Bonferroni correction* pairwise comparisons of estimated marginal means disclosed a significant difference for the following variables:

TABLE 7: **Influence of usage and demographics variables on Mxit advertising purchase intentions**

Independent variables	Type III		
	Wald's Chi-square	df	p
Access	2.976	2	0.226
Length of usage	23.702	4	0.000*
Log on frequency	6.801	4	0.147
Log on duration	15.379	4	0.004**
Profile update incidence	0.804	4	0.938
Gender	0.112	1	0.738
Age	2.799	2	0.247
Ethnic group	7.747	3	0.052

* 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

Source: Developed by author from survey data

- *Length of usage* (p < 0.001): Respondents who had used Mxit for 2 years (M = 3.17, SE = 0.082) and 3 years (M = 3.05, SE = 0.078) exhibited higher purchase intention levels than those who had used the SNS conduit for 5 years (M = 2.84, SE = 0.079); and

- *Log on duration* (p < 0.05): Respondents who logged on for 2 hours (M = 3.06, SE = 0.075) displayed greater purchase intentions tendencies compared to those who logged on for   1 hour (M = 2.85, SE = 0.074).

The Wald's Chi-Square test confirmed that there was a significant difference at p < 0.001 for purchase (M = 3.04, SD = 0.716), which was attributable to Mxit advertising. No significant differences were realised on account of access, log on frequency, duration of log on, gender and race; however, *Bonferroni correction* pairwise comparisons of estimated marginal means proved a significant difference amongst the following variables:

- *Length of usage* (p < 0.001): Respondents who had utilised Mxit for 2 years (M = 3.19, SE = 0.074) showed greater purchase levels compared to those who had used Mxit for 5 years (M = 2.98, SE = 0.071); and

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▪ *Age* (p < 0.05): Mxit users who were aged 25 - 30 years (M = 3.18, SE = 0.084) displayed higher purchase tendencies than those aged 18 - 20 years (M = 2.95, SE = 0.061).

TABLE 8:   Influence of usage and demographics variables on Mxit advertising purchase

Independent variables	Type III		
	Wald's Chi-Square	df	p
Access	0.643	2	0.725
Length of usage	18.299	4	0.001**
Log on frequency	8.081	4	0.089
Log on duration	3.599	4	0.463
Profile update incidence	2.776	4	0.596
Gender	0.027	1	0.870
Age	11.677	2	0.003*
Ethnic group	5.976	3	0.113

* 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

Source: Developed by author from survey data

6.   DISCUSSION AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1   Behavioural attitudes towards Mxit advertising

Advertising on Mxit had a positive influence on behavioural responses among Generation Y, which supports the first research objective and the hierarchy response models, be it at a low margin. Additionally, this study is in consensus with several other recent inquiries (Hutter *et al.* 2013:342-351; Labrecque 2014:134-148; Persaud 2013:43-44; Powers *et al.* 2012:479-489; Schivinski & D browski 2013:1-20; Tan *et al.* 2013:88-98; Wang *et al.* 2012:198-208) in developed countries, therefore, attesting that analogous behavioural responses exist among emerging and first-world nations.

Schivinski and D browski (2013:14) established that organisations' SNS communications caused positive behavioural responses in terms of attitudes towards the brand, which influenced consumer buying decisions. Wang *et al.* (2012:204-205) revealed that consumer socialisation via peer communication affected purchasing decisions directly and product attitude was positively related with intention-to-purchase. Persaud (2013:43-44) established

that higher levels of interactivity on SNS were more positively correlated to intention-to-purchase and favourable attitudes towards the brand. Vision Critical conducted a survey among nearly 6 000 respondents and established that two out of five individuals purchased items as a result of disseminating information on a SNS (Seave 2013:Internet).

Therefore, managers should encourage greater interaction and information sharing among Generation Y through the multitude of interactive platforms that Mxit offers, especially via brand apps. Mir (2013:282) revealed that a positive attitude towards SNA favourably effects consumers advertising clicking behaviour and, consequently, has an impact on their online purchasing behaviour. Powers *et al*. (2012:480) disclosed that consumers were continually contemplating possible purchases and assessing the different brands on offer, known as "passive" shopping.

Subsequently, from time to time, information and/or advice would come to consumers spontaneously that was needed to make a purchase. The study also reported that one in five consumers believed social media was important in their final purchase decision. Ramnarain and Govender (2013:1888) found that over 90% of Generation Y use social media channels to search for information, which has a significant influence on their purchasing decision. Nearly eight out of ten disclosed that SNS had a direct impact on their buying activities.

Madahi and Sukati (2012:153-154) agreed that consumers are influenced by advertising, social media, articles, peer recommendations and many other factors that provide a significant amount of information, which positively influenced purchase intentions. Therefore, it is imperative that marketing managers provide up-to-date and regular information via their marketing communications on Mxit and other SNS.

Conversely, Hadija *et al*. (2012:29) state that only one out of twenty consumers had bought a brand owing to SNA, but this was a qualitative study that comprised of twenty Generation Y respondents. Hennig-Thurau *et al*. (2013:239-240) report that attempts to execute social commerce on leading SNS had not been effective, but noted that the consumers' worth to an organisation should not only be limited to the purchase of their products. Hadija *et al*. (2012:29) indicate that only one out of twenty consumers had bought a brand advertised on SNS. The main factors that led consumers to buy were good celebrity endorsements and recommendations. Gensler *et al*. (2013:250) concurred that managers should also consider the influence that SNS may have on social connections and purchases based on their endorsements of the brands. There are a number of apt celebrities from a multitude of genres to choose from in SA, which marketing managers could employ to provide information and endorse their brands.

Finally, organisations could stimulate interaction, disseminate up-to-date information and encourage peer recommendations, as proposed by the abovementioned studies, by adopting several of the advertising channels available on Mxit. These include brand apps, sponsorships, interstitials, banner advertisements and broadcasts messages, which can be used to reach the Generation Y via some of the high traffic apps traffic on Mxit such as Tradepost and Gallery (Mxit 2014b:Internet; Wronski & Goldstruck 2013:119). Accordingly, this investigation provides significant information, not only with regards to the advancement of hierarchy response theory and academic discourse, but also for the large number of managers that have spent or plan to spend noteworthy percentages of their marketing communications budgets on SNS such as Mxit.

6.2   Usage elements' influence on purchase intentions and purchase

Particular usage elements had a favourable effect on Generation Y's purchase intentions and purchase as a result of exposure to Mxit advertising, thereby fulfilling the second research objective. Length of usage was found to have an impact on both intention-to-purchase and purchase, with young adults who had used Mxit for a short length of time, displaying more favourable behavioural responses to Mxit advertising. This is a logical postulation, since inexperienced consumers would be more susceptible to marketing communications.

The extent of consumer experience for other online platforms has also been assessed by several other studies, which confirmed that experience levels had an impact on purchase decisions (Hoffman, Kalsbeek & Novak 1996:36-46; Martinez-Lopez *et al.* 2005:322-323; Novak, Hoffman & Yung 2000:22-42). Cox (2010:25) also revealed that Internet users with less usage experience have increased positive attitudes towards online advertising than those with more experience.

Hutter *et al.* (2013:347) established that consumer's engagement with an organisation's SNS page had a favourable impact on the consumer's intention-to-purchase. Therefore, marketing managers should continually provide current information and promote interaction with experienced Mxit users via chat rooms, games, downloads, and change their advertising frequently so that they do not become bored with brands. Generation Y respondents who spent a longer period (2 hours) logged on to Mxit resulted in higher purchase intentions than those who spent an hour or less. This is also a reasonable observation, as this would allow a greater quantity of time to engage with brand marketing communications.

Bridges, Briesch and Shu (2009:29) established that the longer an advertisement is present on a consumer's SNS page, the more likely it will result in purchase behaviour. McMahan, Hovland and McMillan (2009:70) also asserted that users who have spent more time on the website were increasingly likely to have higher purchase intentions owing to online advertising. Wronski and Goldstruck (2014:Internet) reported that Mxit users were the most engaged in SA spending nearly 2 hours a day on this interactive mobile platform.

Managers can utilise competitions, brand apps, broadcast posts, branded games and many other promotional tools, which are available on Mxit to keep young consumers on the platform longer, which should increase behavioural responses. Therefore, there are several discernable variances within Generation Y, which astute marketing managers can take advantage of to increase purchase intentions and purchase sentiment, thereby encouraging positive behavioural responses from this cohort in SA.

6.3   Demographic variables impact on behavioural responses

Demographic variables had little impact on Generation Y's behavioural responses to advertising on Mxit. Gender and ethnic groups were confirmed to have no effect on purchase intentions and purchase perceptions attributable to Mxit advertising, while only age was proved to influence purchase. Older Mxit users maintained more favourable sentiments to purchase than the younger members of this cohort, which is again an acceptable notion.

A greater proportion of the older users are employed, whereas younger users would mostly be students or unemployed and, therefore, have less disposable income. Sobel (2010:24) found that young consumers' interest varied in purchasing via SNS. However, SNS may not appear to be the most effective tool to encourage young consumers to buy online, with only one in five being favourably disposed towards SNS to make a purchase online.

Moore (2012:441) also established that Generation Y does not purchase products online to the same degree as Generation X in spite of their prolific use of interactive technology to engage with retailers and brands. Generation Y demonstrated a much higher amalgamation of interactive media in all facets, with the exception of purchasing online. Furthermore, the younger Generation Y members are still in their formative years in terms of enduring consumption tendencies, however, they are inclined to spend generously when they have money, but tend to have restricted resources.

The older Generation Y cohort members border Generation X in terms of their age, which would explain their more positive perceptions towards purchase as a consequence of Mxit advertising. Generation Y spending power is expected to grow exponentially in the near

future, so marketing managers and brands should establish and maintain relationships now via the numerous interactive marketing commination conduits that are offered by Mxit so that they will benefit from this potentially lucrative phenomenon.

7.   LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE INQUIRY DIRECTION

Mxit has various advertising platforms that were collectively analysed, whereas future investigations could examine them separately to establish if they resulted in different outcomes. A number of other large SNS such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and LinkedIn also warrant inquiry in SA, as does the other two attitude levels, namely cognitive and affective responses.

Future research could also take other cohorts such as Generation X and Z into consideration. The survey design can only make observations for a given point in time; therefore, a longitudinal method would result in a more comprehensive series of results. A quantitative design was employed by providing statistical valid findings, but qualitative data would deliver a deeper understanding of Generation Y's behavioural responses.

Researchers in other countries could replicate this study to establish if there was a significant difference between the results in comparison to SA, thereby realising a broader and more encompassing understanding of SNA.

8.   CONCLUSION

Social media conduits should not merely be another new promotion element to implement simply because others are using it, but are essential for brand engagement, behavioural responses and the enhancement of brand images in the current interactive marketing communication climate.

The empirical findings determined that Mxit advertising resulted in a favourable influence on purchase intent and purchase among Generation Y, thereby the first research objective was fulfilled. Two usage elements, namely usage length and period of time spent, had an effect on Generation Y's behavioural responses, therefore the second research objective was partly satisfied. Different age groups also had an effect on Generation Y's behavioural responses, with older members of the cohort exhibiting more positive perceptions to purchase, thus the third research objective was also partially attained.

These considerations are important for the enduring success in social media marketing communications, since not only does the research add to the cohort, SNA and attitude construct development, but it also provides tangible proof that the large sums of money

spent by marketing managers on Mxit and other SNS have a meaningful behavioural effect on their young target market.

Furthermore, organisations can use social media elements as a means to collect information to stay abreast of consumers' attitudes and perceptions of the organisation and its brands. It is important to remain active and maintain a presence on SNS, but managers should recognise that SNS are a practical marketing communication tool, which, if implemented effectively, can yield favourable commercial benefits (Hutter *et al.* 2013:347).

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