A YOUTH LOST IN TRANSLATION

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INTRODUCTION: DON'T ASSUME YOU KNOW ME

While under-21s in South Africa have been dubbed the “born frees” because they have never lived under a system of legislated racial inequality, they certainly don’t feel free.

But, as the title of a recent South African Institute for Race Relations’ Born Free but Still in Chains . . . study points out: “The major difficulties faced by South African Born Frees are not that they lack political rights, but that they suffer from poor education and high unemployment,” says the study.

These may seem to be the concerns primarily of the poor and rural, but middle class youth are not immune from worry about the future either. The mood, opinions and priorities of this highly connected and very smart demographic are demanding that marketers rethink their strategies.

The youngest age group in the Generation Next study are “over-stimulated, highly brand conscious, and have a deep sense of ambition that is impressive, but arguably developing too early in their lives,” says Jason Levin, HDI Youth Marketeers managing director. “Their ambition tires them out and builds a culture of expectation. However, kids, as always, respond to colourful and energetic brands. But, what used to be suitable for their age, they now increasingly feel too old for.”

Levin says that this group are much like teens have always been – driven by emotions and hormones. “They still want to fit in, but this manifests in a different way because of social media and technology. They are the mobile generation and want gadgets, fashion and ‘status badges’. There is far less of a ‘schism’ between them and their parents than in the past because parents are more accommodating,” he says.

This group has a huge need for education, training and skills development, not least of all because they feel the education system hasn’t given them what they needed to accomplish what they want. This group worries about finding a job, far more than previous generations. Like the teens, they are happy living with their parents and they only leave home far later than previous generations. The outcome of this is that they have greater disposable income and are spending it on electronics and so-called luxuries rather than homes and cars.

This whitepaper is based on the findings of HDI Youth Marketeers’ research, predominantly its Sunday Times Generation Next Study that delves deep into what’s on the minds of South African youth.

The Generation Next Study tackles the South African youth in three age groups: kids (3 to 12); teens (13 to 18) and young adults (19 to 23).

In this paper we refer to Millennials and Generation Z. Millennials (aged 15 and older) are tech savvy digital natives.

Generation Z are aged 14 and younger. Their consciousness has been shaped in a post-recession, touchscreen world. Their transition into adulthood will be about ‘the internet of things’, where their world is digital and the distinction between their ‘online life’ and ‘real life’ is less distinct than ever before.


2The interview methodology began with face-to-face written questionnaires administered in six provinces on urban and peri-urban youth in January and February of 2015. The sample size exceeded 5 400 respondents, was evenly split between male and female, and included all race groups, weighted to be representative of the South African peri-urban and urban youth population.
South Africa’s contemporary youth have many anxieties and pressures that marketers need to be aware of when targeting them. The economic downturn, violent crime, environmental degradation and the country’s beleaguered education system all worry them.

In general, young South Africans are not feeling optimistic about the state of the country. While black youth see an improvement since their parents were young, even in this group only 27,9% said they were happy with the way the country was going. Only 8,6% of the young adults were optimistic.

Significantly, the Generation Next Study found that finding a job entered the top fears of young adults for the first time in the history of this study.

Youth happiness has dipped over the past few years. In 2010, 73,2% of respondents said they felt happy most of the time. However, that figure fell to 64,3% in 2013 and stood at 67,4% in 2015. This year, 7,7% said they get enough sleep.

While most young adults (with the exception of white youth, only 34,8% of whom agreed) believe they will have a brighter future than their parents did, they worry about success - defining it for themselves as well as achieving it. The Generation Next Study found that the most desirable career choice was ‘CEO’, with 11,9% choosing this. But the interviews conducted with the HDI Junior Board of Directors show that many want to define success and fulfillment for themselves, and not conform to perceived or traditional notions of success placed on them by parents, teachers and peers. They all insisted that they are their parents’ ‘investments’ and are therefore obliged to provide a ‘return on that investment’.

Across the board, from ages 8 to 23, the HDI Junior Board of Directors feel extreme pressure to be building this success from their early days at school. As one female, aged 17, says, “The biggest fear for me is not being successful. It gets to the point that you do everything you think you should be in order to be successful . . . As much as we are told we should be chasing what makes us happy, we are told 10 seconds later that we need to make the right decisions and do the right things to be successful. So, in the end you just overthink everything. It’s not just one little test that you could have done a little better on; this test will affect the prelim and the prelim will affect the average and that will affect your entry to university and that will affect your success . . . . It shouldn’t be like that!”

Even the youngest feel this pressure. “Failing in life makes me very paranoid. I want to do something in arts, but everyone tells me that I need to be an accountant or a banker. Then I think ‘I’d better be an accountant’ and this means that I will never get to chase my dreams.” [Male, 12, on HDI Junior Board of Directors]

And they aren’t necessarily optimistic about achieving success either. “Everyone wants to be a Patrice Motsepe – we want to be the big boss,” says one young man, aged 18. “We don’t know what it means to become a CEO, we have no idea. We just see their salaries when we open the Sunday Times and see what they earn and know we definitely want to be that guy. But we don’t know what it takes and what they do.”

“We all want to be the CEO because everyone listens to the boss because nobody listens to a child. So we are working towards being in a position where people listen to us.” [Male, 13]
This can involve considerable sacrifice by parents, who pay high fees for these schools, as well as by many children who travel more than an hour a day between home and school. The IRR study states: “This shows the cost and inconvenience to which African parents will put themselves to enable their children to escape dysfunctional schools. Rather than have their children commute, some middle class parents have bought houses in suburbs closer to suburban schools.”

Tracy Hackland, national head of programmes for Columba Leadership, says the youngsters she works with have a hunger to learn life skills that are just not being taught in schools. Columba Leadership offers values-based leadership programmes, working with schools around South Africa that serve disadvantaged youth. “Working with urban schools, I have seen so much disillusionment with government and government institutions. What comes out is frustration with the department of education and that it is not serving them,” says Hackland.

HDI Junior Board of Directors respondents said they felt ‘disrespected’ and ‘talked down to’ at school, and not encouraged to speak up. Even the kids studying at private schools complained that they felt they were there not to get a good education but merely to get the marks required for a university exemption.

Says Hackland: “The teaching style in schools is simply not working for these youngsters. The linear approach to lessons doesn’t work and doesn’t connect with them. They need to be taught interactively and not taught at. They say they feel bombarded.”

One female interviewee, 17, from the HDI Junior Board of Directors expressed skepticism in the education system’s ability to prepare students for the “real world”: “I am robbed of experience, I don’t even know how to change a tyre. The kid who was the top scholar at our school is now at university and he is a nobody. He’s not the guy who gets into the Students Representative Council; but at school he was the one you had to aspire to be.

“The education system needs to bridge the gaps. School needs to teach you how to think, but it doesn’t,” the 17-year-old says.

The Generation Next Study found a hunger among young people to learn practical business skills, which ranked highest as most desirable across all age brackets, and for both sexes, suggesting that even young children are thinking about how they are going to negotiate the job market.

Study skills, health and fitness and managing personal finance were also high on their desired skills. A large majority of children and teens said they want to study as soon as they leave school, instead of travelling or working.

It is clear the youth don’t want to be treated like performing monkeys, they want to interact and participate in their learning that can be practically useful in their future personal and work lives.
In employing Millennials and later Gen Zs, Levin says that employers need to realise they are not getting their old-school first time jobbers with the expected skills. They won’t work regular or long hours; they are not adept at spelling or playing by the rules. “Employers will get far better multi-taskers, great at research and processing information. They are innovative and have vast skills employers haven’t even considered,” says Levin.

Millennials don’t play by the rules but rather the logic behind the rules, according to Ray de Villiers, a TomorrowTodayGlobal consultant on the future world of work and expert on Millennials and Generation Z. “So, unless they get why any company policy is logically worthwhile, they won’t accept they are necessary. So, it is worth negotiating the rules that are NOT absolutely non-negotiable. It is worth massaging the way the company works as well as the individual to enable these formidable young people to enhance the organisation,” de Villiers says.

While Millennials see failure as devastating, Generation Z youth see it as merely a stepping stone in their careers, according to Dion Chang of Flux Trends at his ‘Generation Z – the real game changing generation’ presentation in August 2015. This he attributes to their gaming consciousness, in which they keep playing again and again to improve their scores.

These youngsters are not followers but innovators, hence the desire to be the boss and not to follow rules, according to Gordon Cook, education activist and co-founder and former school navigator for Vega School of Brand Leadership. “We need to revisit our world view of the age of executives and recognise that the largest companies in the world were started by youngsters: Apple, Google, Facebook and Microsoft.”

It may seem an antisocial hobby, but gamers don’t play on their own: they are connecting online and playing with a community. So, gamers are highly sociable, according to de Villiers.

Gaming has created a workforce with unique attributes, such as an uncanny ability to multitask, creatively solve problems and lead, he says. “Gaming enhances their brain flexibility and strategic mind and enables them to adapt to the context. It makes them very competitive and increases their ‘can do’ attitude.”

According to the Generation Next Study, as many as 78.3% of South African males under the age of 23 play console games a few times a month. A quarter of those play every day.

Computer games have had and will continue to have a huge impact on the social and work lives of both the Millennials and Generation Z.

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According to a 2010 Toronto University study, playing computer games develops the same mental agility as learning multiple languages.5

“‘They learn real skills through gaming and if they say they can do something that may seem beyond them, they most likely are able to because they have learnt to do it while gaming,” says de Villiers.

Employers, parents and marketers of earlier generations have to stop fearing the relationship the youth have with the digital world. It isn’t going away and so it is best to make an effort to understand and work with their mindset.


According to the Generation Next Study, as many as 78.3% of South African males under the age of 23 play console games a few times a month. A quarter of those play every day.
While young South Africans are totally different to their parents, they still place tremendous value in their relationship with them. So, although they are brand and image conscious, the youth prioritise their family, friends and religion over gadgets and digital games.

When asked what they can’t live without, parents scored higher than cellphones. Parents were also the main people young people turn to for help with coping with life (31.3% of respondents), followed by friends (21.2%) and teachers (19.7%).

One 18-year-old male, on the HDI Junior Board of Directors, says: “I thank God for everything on Sunday but every other day I thank my parents. I am very well aware of the fact that nothing would be the same without my parents. Whenever I pay for things, I am aware that it is not my money but it is my father and mother’s money.”
Marketers, like parents and employers, also need to take cognisance of the youth and their quirks and preferences. But why, you may ask? The answer is: Because this is a savvy, influential generation, with sheer numbers, decision-making power and tech know-how behind them. Any effective marketing is going to involve listening to their concerns, understanding where young people are coming from and what they are going through or face losing their attention and loyalty fast.

Considering a population as large, disparate and diverse as ’South African youth’ as a single demographic is of course of limited use for marketing with relevance and nuance, to echo ’Building Brands in a Rapidly Changing Market: lessons for South Africa’, which was an earlier Yellowwood Whitepaper. Nevertheless, the sheer volume of the youth market makes it a no-brainer that what they think, matters.

Spur has a stronghold in this market for being the ’coolest eat out place’ over the last few years, according to the Generation Next annual survey. In 2015, 23,63% of all three groups selected Spur in this category. Spur very clearly markets to the youth, says group marketing executive Sacha du Plessis, it sees young people as a way of broadening its customer base. “The youth market keeps our brand youthful and sustainable into the future.”

She says that while the youth is the future market for many brands, “they are undoubtedly key decision makers for family units”.

And when this market, particularly the youngest group, demand to go to Spur, it is probably because Spur has understood “kids love to play and have fun in an environment that is warm, welcoming and encourages a spirit of adventure”, says du Plessis. “They also love to eat delicious food and have the occasional treat. They and their parents look for safety and cleanliness.”

She says that Spur hasn’t really changed the way they relate to the youth over the years. “We have always tried to treat them with great respect to ensure their trip to Spur is memorable and fun. The advent of smart phones and other technological devices has allowed us to speak to the youth in a more customised manner, although the manner in which we relate to them is consistent.”

Globally, this is the largest market the world has ever seen, and Africa has most of the world’s young people. In South Africa, approximately half the population is 24 and under; in the UK by contrast, this figure is 20%.

As de Villiers says: “In Africa, while the Millennial and Generation Z wallet may be smaller from a high-volume perspective it is worth so much more than anywhere else. Their influence will be disproportionate to their spend.”

“A decade ago, we spoke about Millennials, when they were kids, as having an influence over R6 billion – today it is much, much more,” says de Villiers.

Direct youth spend in South Africa is R121,5 billion per annum. Teens account for most of that – R47,2 billion – according to the Generation Next Study.
“We need to care about Millennials and Generation Z because they influence the way their parents spend their money,” says de Villiers.

Marketers have long recognised the influence of kids over their parents’ purchasing decisions; the term ‘pester power’ was coined as long ago as the 1970s.

Perhaps the image of ‘pester power’ that leaps to mind is a small child screaming for an attractively marketed plastic toy in a supermarket aisle, but de Villiers says that this influence is lasting longer as economic pressures send young adults back to the nest.

“Millennials are also known as the boomerang generation – they leave home and go study and then go back to living with their parents. So, their impact on household purchases is not an anecdotal conversation – they actually live in the same house.”

The evolution of what we have come to know as ‘pester power’ is a gold mine for marketers, as young adults, still cocooning at home, have the money to spend on ‘living the good life’ far sooner than previous generations did.

Pick n Pay has slowly overtaken Woolworths as the ‘coolest grocery store’ across the board in the youth market, according to the Generation Next survey. In 2011, they had 21.4% to Woolworths’ 26.5%. In 2015, Pick n Pay had 22.6% to Woolworths’ 19.5% of the 25 and under youth market. In the latest survey in the first half of 2015, Pick n Pay’s appeal was strongest in the young adults sector and weakest in the kids group. But then the Stikeez campaign was launched and kids around the country demanded their parents buy their groceries at Pick n Pay or else . . .

While Pick n Pay was unable to put a figure to the success of the campaign, their corporate consultant, Jennifer Crocker, says: “The popularity of Stikeez has exceeded even Pick n Pay’s expectations.” It won Pick n Pay “tens of thousands of children fans”, she says.

At the tail end of the campaign in September 2015, she says: “One only has to look online to see how Stikeez have captured the imagination of South Africans and how many people are either engaging in swap groups or offering missing Stikeez on Gumtree.

“Saturdays became ‘Stikeez Day’ as collectors gathered at Pick n Pay stores around the country to trade with others. Some fans even started on their second or third collections – a sure sign that Stikeez looked set to become highly sought-after collectables. Stikeez have popped up all over the place – in offices, doctors’ consulting rooms and even on the bumpers and dashboards of cars.”

Crocker explains that Pick n Pay intends to please all its customers and it uses its Smart Shopper programme to track the customers’ wants, which varies across stores and provinces. “As a retailer with a food and GMD focus, we would expect young children to be less interested in us than the youth and adult market,” she says.

However, she maintains, Pick n Pay “takes every segment seriously and works hard to make sure their needs are catered for. Obviously the 25 and below category is a new generation of customers and we want them to shop with us.”
Generation Z are the first true digital natives, over what phones their parents bought. had either a ‘strong’ or at least ‘some influence’ on what type of cellphones they own, and 69% bundles to airtime. consumers, with most (62.1%) preferring data respondents using their phones to access the overtaken fixed internet access, with 66.8% of method of keeping in touch. Mobile has and phone conversations as the preferred Instant messaging beats face-to-face interaction with social media than on research related to their spend most time instant messaging and 82.3% have a cellphone and spend far more time on online downloading and playing games. Teens and phone conversations as the preferred instant messaging beats face-to-face interaction. “They are consummate consumers of ‘snack media’ on multiple screens.”

With new apps released all the time and transcendence of the norm, this is also a generation for which change is the only constant, he says. “They are device-driven and have huge expectations of things being done fast. “Gen Zs don’t wait for direction from adults. They don’t ask the questions, they just Google it and get it for themselves.”

While parents may worry that this generation is disconnected from ‘the real world’, Generation Z believe quite the opposite, in that they have close relationship with people around the globe. They do, however, feel disconnected and anxious when they don’t have data or internet connection.

The constant flow of information is not without its anxieties and there is little parents can do to prevent them seeing disturbing content, or content they may not be mature enough to adequately deal with, like porn. “Too late for that,” says Chang. “That horse has bolted. Adults need to learn to manage how the youth deal with it all.” This is a generation hungry for help interpreting what they see.

Chang says: “This generation doesn’t see the world as their oyster. In fact, they are so aware of Al Qaeda and ISIS, because the news is piped into their smartphones.

“They have seen their parents lose jobs. They see the world as violent and hard.”

De Villiers agrees: “Generation Z are still children, and so the cognitive processing of all this information is still fundamentally a childish process. They are very naïve kids. If you had thoughts of working out how to prevent them seeing disturbing stuff, forget it, it’s too late. Rather be a part of the processing resource. Help them to understand what they are finding.”

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The HDI Junior Board of Directors expressed an obsessive relationship with social media. While they relish the opportunities for the connection these platforms bring, they lamented that they have to constantly manage their online presence and image. “Twitter never sleeps, Tumblr never sleeps, nor does Facebook. So, you want your peers to see against the fact that potential employers may also be looking at their accounts. “Companies look at your Twitter account and they think: ‘Should I hire this guy, he just seems to party all the time?’ But the truth is I don’t post when I am studying . . . ” [Male, 20]

They expressed anxiety, too, about their reputations online, and balancing what they wanted their peers to see against the fact that potential employers may also be looking at their accounts. “Companies look at your Twitter account and they think: ‘Should I hire this guy, he just seems to party all the time?’ But the truth is I don’t post when I am studying . . . ” [Male, 20]

Brands need be aware of these anxieties when interacting with the youth on social media – intrinsically their domain. Marketers need to add value to the youth’s social image and not threaten their reputation.

However, it is not just the new media marketers need to be conscious of, the traditional media still has real relevance.

Marketers need to listen to young people, says de Villiers, because they are such a connected generation. “Our youth, like never before, has an extraordinary ability to communicate with one another, so their likes and dislikes spread like wildfire. Once this has affected your brand or reputation, it is very hard to claw back from that.”
“This is driven mostly by the commuter culture,” he says. “While overseas, television soapies are the domain of the 40-plus generation; in South Africa the youth are still watching.”

In 2008, the TV to internet split in the Generation Next Study was 84:16; in 2015, it is 54:46. Online has almost caught up with TV in popularity, yet TV still gives the most return on investment (ROI) – 40%, as opposed to 23.4% ROI for online adspend, according to Search Engine Journal, an online marketing site. However, TV has increased by only 0.1% since 2011, while advertising on the internet has increased substantially from 16.1% to 23.4%.

Worldwide, 94% of businesses use Facebook to engage with customers and 88% use Twitter. Most of the youngsters polled by HDI – 51% of kids, 63% of teens and 70% of young adults – engage with brands on social media. Kai, 23, said he liked this form of interaction because it’s easy to ‘like’ a page and find out about the brand.

However, interacting with brands is not what drives social media usage and brands should be careful of overt or intrusive advertising on these platforms. Keeping in touch, looking at photos and meeting new people ranked much, much higher than interacting with brands.

One 18-year-old male complained about Twitter ‘noise’: “What annoys me about brands? Unnecessary Twitter accounts. Some brands just don’t fit on Twitter – why are they there?”

There is a sense among brands that they have to be on social media, and certainly it can offer great benefits. But get it wrong and annoy young people and you stand to lose your share of their wallet.
Direct youth spend is huge. And nearly a quarter of young South Africans’ spending goes towards clothing, with education at 14% and games following at 9%. Affordability also influences their choices.

While some have part-time jobs, most youth (64%) get regular pocket money, with kids getting an average of R200 to R300 a month, teens R300 to R400 and young adults making around R900.

Most said they wanted to save for international travel and then to pay for student loans. Black youth were more likely to want to save for studying, while other race groups prioritised travel.

Most youth have a bank account, a quarter of all with FNB, which is also recognised as the youth market’s coolest banking brand in the Generation Next Study. This may be a testament to the bank’s finely-tuned, innovation-focused marketing strategy since the global financial crisis.

A very high percentage of young adults in South Africa – 95% – are loyal to their banking brand. Youth mostly pay with cash, with only 25% making mobile payments. In choosing a bank, saving money, convenience (ATM location), interest rates and good service were far more important than any other consideration. Advertising, sports sponsorship and promotions had far less impact on how they reportedly felt about their bank.

The youth are savvy about their money and they have spending power, but they are very conscious of how they spend it.

FNB has been the youth market’s most popular bank (according to the Generation Next Study) for the last three years, particularly among the kids and teens. FNB has not researched or targeted the youth market, but attracts young people with its innovative way of doing business and its early digital adoption. “We target the adults with the youth in mind,” says Fay Mfikwe, the head FNB marketing personal banking.

“We recognise the youth market as the future and they are extremely influential in households,” she says. “They influence spending decisions.”

“The youth choose banks because of what they are getting, not just rates, but added value, services and solutions,” says Mfikwe. “They are the first generation to embrace all the game-changing technology and this has had a huge impact on business and consumer behaviour.”

FNB tapped into this as it was the first bank to offer deals on smart devices and became top-sellers of Apple devices, among others. This drew a much younger clientele and youngsters told their parents about this deal and made sure they went to FNB to claim this deal, as well as the data packages and voice capability offerings.

“We also inadvertently draw the youth market by our creative and distinctive advertising, and the rewards and solutions we offer,” says Mfikwe. “We recognise that this generation tend to be pragmatic and want honest conversation and added value. Like the youth, FNB believes in ‘saying it like it is’, ‘telling customers how it benefits them’ and ‘don’t try too hard to sell it, but be true to what you stand for’,” says Mfikwe.

“We recognise that our customers’ time is precious, so we deliver their bank cards to wherever suits them. We don’t expect our clients to do anything when changing accounts, we do it all. We speak to their HR departments to have their pay cheques sent to their new FNB accounts. We have designed our bank specifically to suit clients and this appeals to the youth. They like that we know and understand who they are and what they want and we fit into their lives and not the other way around.”

As an employer, the youth are attracted to working at FNB because it encourages its staff to be innovative and find ways to think differently. “We handsomely reward our staff for coming up with innovative ideas we can use to enhance our offering. We are known as the most innovative bank. The owner-manager culture and entrepreneurial spirit is inherent in our bank. Young people recognise this and stay,” says Mfikwe.
The youth are also conscious about their health and fitness, this ranked highly across all groups as a desirable skill to learn. However, South African youth don’t particularly eat very well, enjoying the ease of takeaways and only 46% of young adults regularly eat three meals a day. Most kids and teens bring lunch from home to eat at school. Less than half (47%) of all youth said their school tuck shops offer healthy items, and 73% said they would like to see healthier food offered.

As a generation with a love of social media and gaming, they are fairly sedentary. Most kids (62.3%) said they participate in out-of-school sport more than once a week, but by the time they are young adults this had declined to 40.9%.

With the youth’s preference for eating out, the onus is on the marketers to be responsible in campaigning to the youth. In the long run, young people won’t thank brands who encourage bad habits.

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The youth want to be respected as people or they won’t enter your establishment. One youngster told me, “I took my father with me to buy a car and the salesperson addressed only my father. So, we left.”

A central theme in the Generation Next Study is that respect and genuine engagement are more important than ‘cool’. While young people engaged with brands on social media and were not necessarily averse to doing so, a positive face-to-face interaction won out. Family recommendation beat social media marketing by far. And good service was the most important factor in-store.

“Face-to-face is needed, it keeps you humane in a way. It helps you remember you’re human, your life is not behind a screen,” said Clinton, 22.

Seventy-three percent of kids, 80% of teens and 79% of young adults said “face-to-face engagement makes me talk about a brand”. An aggregate 92% said that good service makes them speak about a brand, followed by “makes you feel original and unique” (87.4%) and the “quality of the brand” (83.8%).

Adam, 12, said, “I prefer face-to-face because you can actually see the person talking to you. A real human being is talking to you.”

Family recommendation was the most important factor in attracting the youth to a brand, at 62%. TV adverts came in at 59%, ahead of friend recommendation at 56%. Social media was behind all these with 55%. What does not work is radio adverts, brand websites, product packaging and newspaper adverts.

Authenticity, integrity and quality are important to the youth. “Making false promises”, “bad service” and “trying too hard to be cool” all made it into the top five responses to how NOT to engage.

When asked what turns her off a brand, one 23-year-old female HDI Junior Board of Directors respondent said: “When brands try too hard. When they try too hard to be cool or their timing is sometimes off, they just irritate me. Be you, stay you. If I like you, I like you; if I don’t, someone else will . . .”

An 18-year-old male said, “When they try to be hip for kids. Problem is, it’s like they never actually had kids, they have just read about us in books and so they think ‘I guess they like bright colours, modern music and jumping around so I guess that we should just put that in the advert’”. They have decided what we want, but they clearly haven’t asked us.”

When it came to in-store engagement, the way respondents were received and treated by staff was vital to their experience. While “high-quality products” had the number one spot as an in-store connector, among the top five were “understanding staff”, “friendly staff” and “informed staff”.

One 16-year-old female said, “Bad customer service really gets on my nerves. At a restaurant, the waiter won’t come visit you enough because they see us just as kids. I have seen a waiter give a 16-year-old the kiddies menu!”

“Staff just ignore me. They don’t talk to me; they talk over me and talk to my mother about what kind of shoes I would like to wear. While I am standing right there in front of her!”

None of this is to suggest that young South Africans are not brand and image conscious. On the contrary, what marketers should be aware of, however, says Levin, is that brands must be seen to be adding value.

“Young people love brands and are willing to respond to them if they behave in a certain way. It is very possible to add value to a young person’s life rather than reduce it. Don’t try and take the last dollar from a two-dollar pocket; this is not smart and ultimately will not work in your favour.”

The Generation Next Study reflects some changes to what is considered cool, says Levin. BMW has been a multiple time winner of coolest cars and now they are at number two, upset by Mercedes-Benz, once considered a brand for rich old people. “Firstly, the G-Class is in every music video and popularised by reality TV. And the new A-Class is a huge leap in coolness over the old one,” says Levin. One popular example of the G-Class’s star power is its role in Chris Brown’s ‘Love More’ music video, featuring female rap artist Nicki Minaj.

Levin says there has been a huge growth in the interest in coffee. “In the past we didn’t even consider asking about it, but now the 16- to mid-20s are big into coffee and their favourite shop is Mugg&Bean, who have been at the top for the three years since we included this category.”

There is an emphasis on self-expression and individuality among young South Africans, which is reflected in the shift from denim to sportswear as cool.

“They are constantly treading the fine line between wanting to be individuals and different, and fitting in. They want to have an individual flavour,” says Levin.

Sportswear may have taken over because sneakers, as a vital part of the dress code, offer wider choice.

“Consider that if they were buying Levis, they would have a choice of about eight types, but now with trainers they have at least 400 options. So, while they are still conforming, they have a greater diversity of choice,” says Levin.

This is reflected in Nike’s dominance of this year’s study. “We have never had a brand win four categories – coolest fashion brand, overall coolest brand, coolest footwear brand and coolest brand slogan – until this year with Nike. There is a strong shift to sporting gear and a stronger showing of sports celebrities.”

Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo were the top coolest international celebrities, with Messi coolest among boys, Beyonce was coolest among girls.

What is important about this survey, however, is not so much what’s hot and what’s not. The important realisation that marketers should take from this survey, says Levin, is that marketing is no longer a monologue. “Youth want to interact and have a conversation. Millennials and Generation Z are more interested in brands that are adding value to and participating in their lives. Brands have to be responsible, have to have people’s interests at heart.”
WORLDS APART Q&A

To illustrate just how different the various generations are, Yellowwood did vox pops with South Africans of assorted age groups, providing insight into the diversity of opinions, priorities and perspectives.

1. WHAT IS THE LAST PIC YOU TOOK ON YOUR PHONE?

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>“A pic of my brother”</td>
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<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>“A pic of me”</td>
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<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>“A pic of myself and my friend chilling at an event”</td>
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<td>24</td>
<td>“The last pic I took was with a few friends, at a music event called Major League Gardens held at Innesfree Park”</td>
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<td>30</td>
<td>“Traffic at the robot”</td>
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<td>49</td>
<td>“My nephew’s ear”</td>
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<td>58</td>
<td>“My grandson’s picture”</td>
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<tr>
<td>65</td>
<td>“Beautiful B&amp;B in Durban”</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>“A pic of my brother”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>“A pic of me”</td>
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<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>“Nothing, lol!”</td>
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<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>“Just my phone. I generally keep my pockets empty – I keep all other ‘essentials’ in my laptop bag or man bag”</td>
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<td>30</td>
<td>“Chocolate, cards, hand sanitizer, phone”</td>
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<td>49</td>
<td>“My nephew’s ear”</td>
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<tr>
<td>58</td>
<td>“Money, lip gloss, facial tissues, hand cream, hand sanitizer, hair comb, bank cards”</td>
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<td>65</td>
<td>“Everything”</td>
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<td>“Woolworths [because it has everything]”</td>
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<tr>
<td>58</td>
<td>“Stuttafords, I love their dresses”</td>
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<td>65</td>
<td>“Woolworths”</td>
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<td>65</td>
<td>“Reggies”</td>
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2. WHAT IS IN YOUR POCKET OR PURSE RIGHT NOW?

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3. IF YOU WERE GIVEN AN UNLIMITED CASH VOUCHER THAT YOU COULD ONLY SPEND IN ONE STORE, WHICH STORE WOULD YOU PICK?

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</table>
4. IF YOUR HOUSE WAS ON FIRE, AND YOU HAD 30 SECONDS TO GET OUT, WHAT WOULD YOU TAKE WITH YOU?

SAMKELE (16 years old): “My phone”
SAMKELE (16 years old): “My phone”
OFENTSE (19 years old): “My cellphone”
TUMISANG (24 years old): “This assuming that the rest of my family is also given the opportunity to rescue themselves and their chosen items; I would probably take my clothes (and yes that does include shoes)”
BOKANG (30 years old): “My purse”
MOSES (49 years old): “Identity document”
PHINDI (58 years old): “My Bible”
SANDY (65 years old): “My phone and glasses”

5. WHAT ARE THE TOP THREE THINGS THAT YOU SPEND THE MOST OF YOUR MONEY ON?

SANDILE (9 years old): 1. Airtime 2. Lays 3. KFC hotwings
TUMISANG (24 years old): 1. Rent, I have recently moved out of home 2. Food 3. The lines are blurred between clothes (shoes included), transport and going out
BOKANG (30 years old): 1. School fees 2. Rent 3. Insurances

6. WHO IS YOUR FAVOURITE SUPER HERO?

SANDILE (9 years old): “Wolverine, his claws are so cool”
SAMKELE (16 years old): “Spiderman because I can relate to him in a real way”
OFENTSE (19 years old): “Batman, fascinated by his Batmobile”
TUMISANG (24 years old): “The Mask, does that count? It's not so much the hero behind the mask but rather the super powers one would acquire once they donned the mask”
BOKANG (30 years old): “Jesus”
MOSES (49 years old): “Nelson Mandela”
PHINDI (58 years old): “Jesus”
SANDY (65 years old): “Spiderman”
1. YOU ARE NOT AS SUPERIOR AS YOU THINK
The youth demand to be treated with respect. Don't assume a position of authority over them - respect and trust is earned amongst this segment regardless of a brand's 'perceived' credentials.

2. IGNORE PESTER POWER AT YOUR PERIL
The youth have a great deal of control over the family wallet, so interact, listen to and work with them to get their support.

3. PLAY ON THEIR PLAYGROUND
As the youth live in a digital world, marketers need to reach them on their turf. Don't fear the digital realm, but learn how to work within it to reach this audience.

4. DO GOOD AND WIN RESPECT
Ensure your brand is responsible and gives back to the community. Gain respect from the youth and it will work long term, rather than get one short sale and lose them in the long run.

5. LISTEN BEFORE YOU LEAP
Keeping up with the youth will require a consistent and conscious effort from marketers, as they are a dynamic generation that embraces change. Ignoring their point of view won’t change their perspective.

6. TALK WITH THEM NOT AT THEM
Don't nag and preach — engage in a two-way conversation with them, at their level in their language. The youth want to know that their opinions are being heard and considered.

7. YOU ARE YOU, BE TRUE
The youth can easily pick up on insincerity and forced messaging from marketers. Stop trying so hard to be cool in what you assume they want to see or hear. Rather do your homework and find out more about what they want. That way you will gain their respect and potentially their custom.

MARKETER’S CHECKLIST
- X ASK DON’T ASSUME
- X ENGAGE DON’T DICTATE
- X CHANNEL DON’T PUSH
- X KNOCK BEFORE ENTRY
- X ENCOURAGE TWO WAY DIALOGUE
- X BE SINCERE
- X DON’T TRY TOO HARD TO BE COOL
The youth of South Africa are true digital natives, growing up in a world where cellphones and internet access are taken for granted. But their experience is touched by their uncertainties in the economic and social environment driven by unprecedented access to information.

Vocal, diverse and connected, their opinions and tastes are ephemeral, which may seem confusing to Baby Boomer-generation marketers. But this is also a generation that appreciates being listened to. The research examined in this paper suggests that marketers who can genuinely and interactively engage with young people, especially outside of social media, are best positioned to take advantage of this demographic that commands R121,5 billion in direct spend alone.

Treat them with respect and you might just capture their hearts.

CONCLUSION

TREAT THEM WITH RESPECT AND YOU MIGHT JUST CAPTURE THEIR HEARTS.

REFERENCES

Sunday Times Generation Next Study consisting of face-to-face written questionnaires administered in six provinces. Age split: Kids (ages 8-13); Teens (ages 14-18); Young Adults (19-23); 5 433 for polling data; 4 327 for lifestyle data. Sample includes urban and peri-urban youth (rural excluded). 2015 data collection dates: January to February.


Interview with Jason Levin: HDI Youth Marketeers managing director in August 2015.

Interview with Tracy Hackland, national head of programmes for Columba Leadership. Columba offers values-based leadership programmes – works with schools around the country that serve disadvantaged youth. August 2015.

Interview with Ray de Villiers, consultant on future world of work and expert on Generation Y and Z. TomorrowTodayGlobal consultant. August 2015.

Interview with Gordon Cook, activist education and co-founder and former school navigator for Vega School of Brand Leadership. August 2015.

Interview with the following representatives of the HDI Junior Board of Directors: Kutlwano (12), Amani (12), Adam (12), Lihle (16), Rudo (16), Mtho (16), Dumi (20), Grace (23), and Antonio (18). August 2015.

Information gleaned from Dion Chang of Flux Trends SA’s “Generation Z – the real game changing generation” presentation at the Protea Fire and Ice Hotel in Melrose Arch on 11 August 2015.

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