

*Full Length Research Paper*

## Social media browsing and consumer behaviour: Exploring the youth market

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Accepted 16 April, 2013

Despite the growing usage of social media, little evidence exists of academic research which explores the potential of social media as a marketing and communication tool by South African marketers. This paper reports the results of an exploratory study which examined the influence of social media on the purchasing behaviour of youth, by surveying a convenience sample of 150 students at a large university in South Africa. It became evident that the respondents (youths) are fairly computer literate and thus have access to social media platforms, which invariably increases their potential as customers. These youth are also increasingly turning away from traditional advertising media and actively seeking out social media platforms, and make frequent purchases using information obtained from social media platforms because they regard it as being sufficient for decision-making, reliable, convenient, and results in less time wastage. The findings could be considered by marketers targeting the youth market when developing their marketing and communication strategies.

**Key words:** Social media, youth market, consumer behaviour, social media browsing, marketing communication.

### INTRODUCTION

Social media which represents the 'online' technologies and practices that individuals make use of to share opinions, insights, experiences and perspectives with each other, affects how marketers connect and communicate with consumers and, influence their purchasing decisions. According to Kumara (2008:2), social media which takes on various forms including social networks, wikis, blogs, micro-blogs, vlogs, podcasts and content communities, is contributing to an important shift from a traditional, objective, rational and institutional perspective to a subjective, emotive, personalized and human perspective.

Over the past few years, social media has witnessed tremendous growth and recognition and has been

revolutionized with technology to become part of the mainstream culture, society and business (Odden, 2008), and it (social media) is a pervasive and vital part of how individuals communicate, stay in touch, keep on top of new developments and connect with the world around them (Boyd and Ellison, 2007). A study conducted by Universal McCANN (2009) among active Internet users between the age group of 16 to 54 years in 38 countries, in an effort to measure consumer usage, attitudes and interest of social media platforms, revealed the following: over 394 million people watch video clips "online; 346 million people read blogs/weblogs, 321 million people read personal blogs/weblogs and 307 million people visit a friends social network page. In addition, 303 million

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people share a video clip, 272 million people manage a profile on a social network, 248 million people upload photos, 216 million people download a video podcast, 184 million people start their own blog/weblog, and 183 million people upload a video clip (Universal McCANN, 2009).

According to Strategy Analytics Report (2008), social media users will exceed one billion by 2012. In addition, research carried out by Universal McCANN (2009), revealed that, 25% of South Africa's active Internet users have uploaded videos on social media platforms, 2 million have had an encounter with at least one social website and, 2.8 million South Africans are users of Facebook, the social networking site.

Social media has given birth to a whole new interactive platform on the Internet, creating the opportunity to interact with consumers and exchange product and shopping messages, serving as an ideal marketing and communication tool and sales driver. According to Social Media Marketing Industry Statistics (2008), social media is set to change the way in which many marketers conduct business as consumer recommendations and ratings over social media platforms have become one of the most credible forms of advertising. In a global survey of 700 marketers, Wildfire App (Mershon, 2012) discovered that nearly all marketers find value from social media and that 75% of marketers planned to increase their media spending in 2012. The top benefits highlighted by these marketers are increased brand awareness and ability to engage in dialogue directly with their customers. In the 2011 social media marketing industry report, it is reflected that 88% of marketers reported increased exposure to be the number one benefit of social media marketing. Awareness networks found in their state of social media marketing study that 70% of businesses planned to expand their social media presence in 2012, while half of the marketers intended to improve their social media management practises and tools. Thus, social networking sites are becoming the number one platform for information creation and sharing, since it is estimated that there are almost 272 million social networking users worldwide, and 307 million individuals visit a friend's social network page (McCANN, 2008).

## BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

Social media is rapidly developing and increasingly assuming a significant role in the lives of consumers, especially the youth, who comprise young consumers aged between 18 to 24 years (MiMi.hu Company, 2000). Since the youth are growing up in a world of 'new' and rapidly changing technologies, they are more likely to make use of the new media in their daily activities (Carenzio, 2008). Over the past decade, marketers have been actively targeting the youth market, since this market is a demographically and economically more

attractive and rewarding market (MiMi.hu Company, 2000). In South Africa, for example, it is reported that young consumers between the ages of 8 to 22 years have an estimated spending power of R95.3 billion and make up approximately 50% of the total population (Lange, 2010). In line with their efforts to penetrate this market, marketers have had to constantly create new ways of communicating with the youth through innovative means such as social media. Furthermore, the youth market is a lucrative market to target as young people demonstrate keen interest in new products and are willing to experiment with different brands over social media platforms (Lange, 2010).

Despite the enormous marketing potential, growing usage and widespread progression of social media, it is apparent that South African marketers have not fully capitalized on this opportunity and are hesitant to using social media as a medium for influencing purchasing behaviour and conducting marketing (Universal McCANN, 2009; Levitt, 2010). Furthermore, limited research has been conducted in the area of social media specifically focusing on youth marketing, especially in South Africa. In light of the aforementioned, this exploratory research was conducted to ascertain:

- the usage patterns and, reasons why the youth purchase products and services using information obtained on social media platforms,
- the potential value of social media as a promotional tool for targeting the youth, and
- the influence of social media on youth purchasing behaviour.

An investigation into the impact of social media browsing on consumer behaviour of the youth is essential as it will afford South African marketers the opportunity to recognize the potential strength of social media as a tool for prompting and influencing the purchasing decision-making process and behaviour among consumers. In addition, this study will allow those South African marketers who do have a social media presence the opportunity to optimise on their social media presence.

## Social media and consumer behaviour

Marketers across the globe are recognizing the importance of understanding consumer behaviour as a key element in ensuring success (Sheth and Mittal, 2004). As consumers are moving away from traditional media to new media platforms such as social media, they have become more demanding, more time driven, more information and content intensive and highly individualistic (Sheth and Mittal, 2004). This demanding and changing nature of consumer preferences and tastes have created significant changes in consumer purchasing and decision making as social media platforms facilitate purchase transactions, information seeking and decision making

(Raaij, 1998 cited in Ivanauskas, 2009). Constantinides and Fountain (2008 cited in Ivanauskas, 2009) asserted that consumer preferences and decisions are fundamentally formed and based on inputs provided by parties beyond the power of 'online' marketers such as friends and family using social media platforms, thus, users of social media platforms have the ability to exercise great influence over other consumer purchasing patterns and behaviour without having any direct contact with them.

Freshman Consulting (2010) reported that user generated content is supporting a new kind of trust and, enhancing the credibility of content amongst social media users. Other research (Illumine Marketing and Media, 2010) has also revealed that 80% of 'online' users trust the judgments and opinions of a friend or social contact more than any other source on the web. In addition, it was ascertained that 50% of consumers read other consumer reviews when shopping 'online', whilst 16% have been influenced by this on-line information when making purchases (Copyright Company, 2008).

The massive growth in user generated content 'online', is attributed largely to the emergence of social media, which has resulted in an informational power shift from marketers to consumers, as consumers are now producing and consuming information as they wish (Ritzer and Jurgenson, 2010). For instance, writing blogs have increased from 28 to 44%, creating a social network page has shown an increase from 27.3 to 57.5% and uploading a video clip has increased from 10 to 42% which has produced hundreds of millions of content creators (McCANN, 2008). These developments combined with the declining costs of computing and broadband have thus enabled a global revolution in consumer publishing which has become a new standard of social media (Treadaway and Smith, 2010). This poses several challenges for marketers as they currently have less control and authority over what information is produced and consumed. With this growth in user generated content 'online' it is believed that 'prosumption' will increase, which as opposed to earlier forms of capitalism, involves both production and consumption (Ritzer and Jurgenson, 2010). According to Humphreys and Grayson (2008, as cited by Ritz and Jurgenson, 2010), the idea behind 'prosumption' is to afford 'prosumers' autonomy rather than impose control. Thus prosumption supports marketers adopting a stand back approach where there is less involvement with 'prosumers', as 'prosumers' produce and consume content accordingly. According to Thrift (2005) social media platforms demonstrate the increasingly active role that consumers on these networks are expected to take within these social media platforms. Consumers on these social media platforms are thus responsible for producing commodities that other users are drawn into, such as profiles on Facebook or status updates on Twitter. Hence marketers of brands no longer hold the same type of control over how they communicated as they once did (Stileman, 2009).

Currently, through social media platforms the brand sends out a message and, from this point onwards it is up to consumers which brand messages they hope to share and edit and make a part of their 'online' discussions and conversations (Stileman, 2009). Thus, the market is relatively driven by consumer preferences and recommendations, and as a result all brands and products are exposed to higher levels of consumer inspection prior to purchase, influencing the decision-making process of consumers. Hence, it is this ability of consumers to communicate and share information with many individuals 'online' that represents the biggest opportunity that exists for marketers of goods and services. Kumara (2008) suggested that since social media is about providing space for consumers to influence each other during the purchasing process, the objective of any marketer should be to encourage consumers to positively influence each other, which can be achieved by the alignment of a marketer into a network of multiple voices.

Bhargava (2010) asserts that many consumers, especially the youth, view social media as providing them with a platform for socializing and entertainment, as opposed to a platform for marketing. Thus youth consumers are drawn to these social media platforms primarily because it serves as a platform for entertainment and socialization, as opposed to traditional media where a 'push' strategy is adopted by marketers. For marketers, this has created several opportunities in that they need to employ marketing activities around social media platforms which can provide value and benefit to consumers, acting as a 'pull' factor. For example, according to a Rave Review for Social Navigation, in 2008, 76% of consumers were more likely to shop on a retailer's website versus their competitor's website, if it offered social navigation (ECR News Network Inc., 2011).

From the brief discussion earlier, it can be noted that social media has brought about several changes in consumer behaviour, especially among the youth, since it has inter-alia, afforded them (consumers) the opportunity to more actively engage with marketers of brands and products online, thus empowering them. However, on the opposite end, an opportunity exists for marketers to explore the possibilities that exist within the medium of social networks for positioning products and brands and influencing consumer behaviour.

Since it became evident from the brief literature review, that there is little reported research on the South African youth market with respect to the influence of social media on their consumer behaviour, this paper will serve to contribute, albeit in an exploratory manner, to narrowing this gap in the literature.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Sampling procedure and sample size

Due to the exploratory nature of this study and, bearing in mind the factors outlined by Sekaran (2003) with regard to the sample size, a

convenience sample size of 150 respondents was deemed adequate. The sampling frame used comprised all students between the ages of 18 to 24 studying at two large campuses of the University of KwaZulu-Natal (KZN), in South Africa. The sample consisted of male and female respondents and represented the four major race groups of KZN, namely, African, Indian, Coloured and White.

#### **Date collection**

A structured and specifically designed questionnaire was administered in the month of September 2011 to 150 students (youth) in 18 to 24 year age group. The questionnaires were administered at two media studies tutorial classes, in the computer LANs and in the university coffee shop. Respondents were randomly selected, and screened only for age to ensure that they were eligible to participate based on our definition of the youth. Five questionnaires were omitted from the analysis since they were spoilt.

#### **Questionnaire design**

The questionnaire consisted of 24 questions which were divided into five sections. A screening question which required the respondents to state whether they actively sought product and company information from social media platforms was posed, to ensure that the respondents are representative of the defined target population. In cases where the response was in the negative, the interview was terminated and another participant selected.

Section A of the questionnaire consisted of two questions which sought to obtain biographic information. Section B consisted of three questions which pertained to a respondent's social media usage. Section C comprised of 37 questions on a Five-point Likert Scale ranging from 1 'strongly agree' to 5 'strongly disagree'. The first four questions attempted to ascertain the respondents' perceptions of the potential of social media as a promotional tool, eleven questions were on why respondents' made purchases using information obtained through social media platforms and, the remaining 22 questions sought to understand the influence of social media on the purchasing behaviour of the respondents. Section D consisted of 11 questions which attempted to gain insight into the purchasing behaviour of respondents on social media platforms and the reasons thereof. Section E consisted of four questions and sought to gain an understanding of how social media browsing leads to purchasing by respondents, and the impact of social media browsing on the purchasing behaviour of respondents.

#### **Data analysis**

The data was analysed quantitatively using the SPSS software using frequency distribution and cross tabulations, chi-square test and cluster analysis.

### **EMPIRICAL FINDINGS**

Although 150 interviews were conducted, 5 were spoilt and thus only 145 questionnaires were usable. Of the 145 respondents, 70 (47%) were male and 75 (50%) were female respondents. An overwhelming majority (92%) of the respondents indicated that they used social media platforms to search for information and advice on products, which information directly influenced their

purchasing behaviour. Furthermore, the vast majority (78%) of the respondents also indicated that social media platforms directly influenced their purchasing behaviour. This finding is supported by Kim (2008) who stated that 50% of consumers read other reviews when shopping, and 16% have been influenced by other reviews when making a purchase. Moreover, Sheth and Mittal (2004) reported that modern-day consumers highly value pre-purchase assistance and actively search for information on social media platforms, which then directly impacts on their purchasing behaviour.

Furthermore, 74% of the respondents indicated that purchases by friends through social media platforms also influenced their own 'online' purchasing behaviour. This is supported by researchers such as Kotler (1965) and Constantines and Fountain (2008) who stated that the consumption of products, brands and services 'online' to a large extent serves as a means for consumers to build and develop self-images which allow them to enhance popularity or likeness amongst friends, family and contacts on the social media platforms.

It was also ascertained that 73% of the respondents' indicated that their purchasing behaviour was influenced by referrals from friends who also use social media platforms. This is supported by Meyer (2003) who argued that the rationale behind trusting a referral from a friend as opposed to a marketer is that friends are real people with real experiences and have no hidden agenda's as opposed to marketers who want to generate sales. In addition, according to an Annual Global Opinion Leaders study 'trust in a person like me' tripled from 20 to 68% from 2004 to 2006 (Universal McCANN: 2008). For marketers, the aforementioned findings imply that factors such as brand and product choice and purchase decisions are influenced by groups on social media platforms and, hence an understanding of the dynamics of these groups will be beneficial to marketers.

#### **Youth social media usage**

It became evident that all of the respondents made use of social networks 97% of the time; 122 made use of blogs 81% of the time), 120 made use of vlogs 80% of the time, 114 made use of content communities 76% of the time, 103 made use of wiki's 69% of the time, and 96 made use of podcasts 64% of the time). The aforementioned findings confirm what is stated in the literature, inter-alia (Boyd and Ellison, 2007), since the popularity of social media is being fuelled by the popularity of social networks which has attracted billions of users around the world and, there are social networks that exist with user bases larger than the population of certain countries (HC Company, 2009). In addition, according to Rabaney (2010) social media usage has surpassed five million users in South Africa and is growing continuously.

All the respondents indicated that they make use of social networks 97% of the time, and over 62% of

**Table 1.** Credibility of information provided by social media platforms.

Social media platform	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative percentage
Social Networks	128	85.3	88.3
Blogs	97	64.7	66.9
Content Communities	97	64.7	66.9
Vlogs	96	64.0	66.2
Wiki's	71	47.3	49.0
Podcasts	35	23.3	24.1

respondents spent over 21 h on social media platforms in the past week. This growing usage also indicates that social media platforms present a rich interactive platform for marketers to capitalize on as a marketing and communication tool in order to influence the purchasing behaviour of youth consumers.

It became evident that overall, the vast majority (95%) of the respondents indicated that they make most purchasing decisions based on information obtained on social media platforms because it is reliable. This is consistent with what Mabry (2008) suggested, namely, that consumers make purchases using information obtained on social media platforms because it is honest, transparent and up to date information. In addition, research conducted by Copyright Company (2008) revealed that 66 per cent of consumers agreed that information on social media platforms are valuable, credible and could influence their product/brand perceptions and purchasing behaviour.

Other reasons why the youth (respondents) purchased using information obtained on social media platforms included: less time wastage, convenience and sufficient shopping information. The aforementioned reasons are consistent with, inter-alia, the findings of Treadaway and Smith (2010), and Razorfish (2008). Given that the respondents are university students with busy study schedules, but access social media platforms frequently, it seems reasonable to assume that they (youth) value a low buying 'effort', convenience, reliable information, and shorter interactions, thus making social media an ideal marketing communication tool to target them. In addition, since it became apparent that the respondents are fairly computer literate individuals who have daily and unlimited access to the internet at the university, they can easily access social media platforms in order to search for information, which increases the potential of these youth as buyers over social media platforms.

#### **Reasons why the youth purchase using information obtained on social media platforms**

Table 1 shows that the majority (85.3%) of respondents assert that social networks provide them with the most reliable shopping information, followed by information from blogs, content communities, vlogs, wiki's and

podcasts. The aforementioned finding is supported by Mabry (2008) who stated that consumers utilized social media predominantly for insight and research as it provided them with honest, transparent and up to date information. In addition, Hoffman et al. (1995) asserted that the popularity of the World Wide Web as a commercial medium is due to its ability to facilitate global sharing of information and resources.

It is also evident from Table 1 that podcasts were not regarded as very reliable sources of shopping information, possibly because podcasts are a fairly new social media platform and hence consumers still need to familiarise themselves with it. In support of the aforementioned finding, Hudson (2011)' research also indicated that podcasts have received the least amount of attention from consumers around the world and is not as popular as other social media platforms.

The respondents were also asked to rate on a 5-point Likert scale, the reasons for using information obtained on social media platforms to make purchases, ranging from 1 'strongly agree' to 5 'strongly disagree'. Table 2 reflects a collapsing of the categories 'agree' and 'strongly agree', and it appears that young consumers such as university students despite their demanding academic lifestyles, frequently access social media platforms for information on products and brands, since it is less time consuming, convenient, reliable and sufficient to make a decision. This is supported by Razorfish (2008) who asserted that with the time shifting, proliferation of communication channels, permanent connectivity and information overload, consumers are moving towards shorter micro-interactions on social media platforms.

#### **The influence of social media browsing on youth purchasing behaviour**

The vast majority (80%) of the respondents indicated that social media browsing influenced their purchasing behaviour, with 43% indicating that they had purchased items through social media over eight times, 23% purchased items between five to eight times, 10% purchased items between two to four times and, only 4% indicated having purchased once. The aforementioned finding is supported by research conducted by Universal McCANN (2009) who also reported that social media

**Table 2.** Reasons for using information obtained through social media platforms (N=145).

Reason	Agree frequency	Agree percentage
Social media information is more reliable than traditional advertising	61	42
There is no difficulty in obtaining information on products on social media platforms	98	68
I am able to obtain valuable information on products on social media platforms	94	65
With respect to product/brand information, social media is more reliable than salespeople	81	56
I am satisfied with the amount of information on products/brands I can obtain from social media platforms	93	74
Information on social media platforms are the new electronic word of mouth	97	67

browsing influences the purchasing behaviour of consumers.

### Youth social media platform usage patterns

It was ascertained that the respondents are spending a much time on social media platforms, since a large proportion (62%) spent over 21 h in the past month. The vast majority (97%) of respondents made use of social networks, 81% used blogs and, 80% used vlogs. Lower, yet high, usage patterns were determined with regard to content communities, wiki's and podcasts, which accounted for 76, 69 and 64% usage respectively. The aforementioned findings support the view of Boyd and Ellison (2007) who argued that the popularity of social media is being fuelled by the popularity of social networks which has attracted billions of users around the world. Other research such as that conducted by HC Company (2009) also claims that social networks exist with user bases larger than the population of certain countries. According to Rabaney (2010), social media usage has surpassed five million users in South Africa and is growing continuously.

### Potential value of social media as a promotion tool for targeting the youth

Cluster analysis was undertaken to identify and classify segments within the generic youth market and. Table 3 reflects the 24 items which the respondents were asked to rate on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 'strongly agree' to 5 'strongly disagree.'

The response to the items reflected in Table 3 was used to group (cluster) the respondents according to the factors that positively influenced the potential value of social media as a promotional tool for targeting the youth, using the K-Means clustering. This procedure resulted in the items being grouped into two clusters, the first cluster comprising 123 respondents, and the second cluster

comprised only 22 respondents. Table 4 reflects the centroids or mean values for each cluster. Cluster 1 has mean values predominantly ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 2 (agree). Hence, cluster 1 which constitutes the vast majority (85%) of the respondents comprises a market segment of consumers who value social media as a promotional tool because it provides them with pleasure, convenience, anonymity, affordability, value, reliable information, sufficient information, ease in accessing this information, discussion and conversation around products and brands, a variety and wider selection of products and empowerment and encouragement to engage in purchasing behaviour through social media platforms.

Cluster 2 has mean values < 2 for variables 7 (electronic word of mouth), 8 (encourages purchasing activity), 9 (engage in purchase activity), 10 (advertisement), 12 (pleasure), 13 (convenience), 14 (anonymous), 19 (discussion and conversation), 20 (empowered), 22 (favourably), 23 (value for money) and 24 (variety). Cluster 2 also has mean values of 2 (agree) for variables 1 (responsive), 2 (reliable), 3 (salespeople), 4 (no difficulty), 5 (valuable information), 6 (satisfied), 11 (like), 15 (admire), 18 (chance) and 21 (cheapest). Cluster 2 has only two mean values of 3 (neutral) for variables 16 (exceed my budget) and 17 (compulsive shopper).

Cluster 2 comprising the minority (15%) of the respondents has predominantly mean values of 3 (neutral) and 5 (strongly disagree), thus representing an insignificant segment of youth consumers who are sceptical and unconvinced about the potential of social media as a promotional tool.

Based on cluster 1 which implies the importance respondents place upon social media as a promotional tool, it can be concluded that there is significant potential for social media as a promotional tool. This is supported by previous research, inter-alia, Stelzner (2009), and Kichatov and Mihajlovski (2010). In addition, according to Forrester Research, social media marketing will beat e-mail, search marketing, display advertising and mobile marketing, thus demonstrating the potential of social

**Table 3.** Factors that positively influenced the potential value of social media as a promotional tool for targeting the youth market.

S/N	Factor
1.	Consumers are more responsive to messages delivered through social media compared to traditional media
2.	Social media information is more reliable than traditional advertising
3.	With respect to brand information, social media information is more reliable than that obtained from salespeople
4.	There is no difficulty in obtaining information on brands and products on social media platforms
5.	I am able to obtain valuable information on products and brands on social media platforms
6.	I am satisfied with the amount of information on brands and products I can attain on social media platforms
7.	Information on social media platforms are the new electronic word of mouth marketing
8.	Social media browsing encourages purchasing activity
9.	Social media browsing has encouraged me to engage in purchasing activity
10.	I have purchased products or brands after viewing its advertisement on social media platforms
11.	I am the first to make purchases of products advertised on social media platforms as compared to my friends
12.	I like to purchase new brands advertised on social media platforms before others do
13.	Purchasing through social media platforms gives me a lot of pleasure
14.	Purchasing through social media platforms are convenient
15.	Purchasing 'online' allows me to remain anonymous
16.	I admire people who purchase expensive items through social media platforms
17.	I have made purchases through social media platforms that have exceeded my budget
18.	I am a compulsive shopper on social media platforms
19.	I like to take a chance and purchase items through social media platforms
20.	Brands and companies encourage me to engage in discussion and conversation on social media platforms
21.	Brands and companies on social media platforms have empowered me to engage in commercial activity
22.	Social media platforms provide me with the cheapest brands
23.	After having seen brand on my favourite social media website, I tend to view the brand more favourably
24.	Purchasing on social media platforms offer me a variety of products/items

media as a promotional tool (Tozian, 2009 cited in Kichatov and Mihajlovski, 2010).

## Conclusions

From this exploratory study, it became evident that the youth, actively seek out social media platforms daily and spend several hours on these platforms, exposing themselves to greater influence and persuasion by marketers. However, due to the unique characteristics of social media, inter-alia, its search capabilities and ability to "congregate" consumers and archive their views, marketers using social media platforms need to do so differently from traditional media. Most importantly, they need to familiarize themselves with how these social media platforms function, as social etiquette has now crossed over into social media and there are now standards with regards to the types of behaviour that are acceptable on these platforms.

It became evident that South African marketers cannot afford to overlook or 'downplay' the value of social media, since it has become a preferred means of direct communication with youth consumers which significantly influences their purchasing behaviour. The constantly developing media landscape and changing consumer

behaviour presents new challenges and opportunities for marketers. The growing popularity and usage of social media platforms have forced marketers to re-evaluate their marketing strategies in order to remain prevalent amongst the youth. The youth in particular, actively seek social media platforms daily and, spend hours on these platforms, exposing themselves to greater influence and persuasion by marketers.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Marketers also need to adopt a 'stand back' approach and participate less with 'prosumers' as the rationale behind prosumption is to afford prosumers, who are producing and consuming greater freedom rather than imposing control over them. However, although marketers might not possess the same type of control as they did in the past where traditional communication media was used, the potential for influencing purchasing behaviour still predominantly lies in the hands of marketers. However, marketers need to learn how to act and respond to consumers on their (consumers') terms, when using social media platforms and social media platforms need to provide consumers with productive resources through which they can engage, connect and

**Table 4.** Factors influencing social media as a promotion tool for targeting the youth.

S/N	Factor	Cluster	
		1	2
1.	Responsive	2	2
2.	Reliable	2	3
3.	Salespeople	2	3
4.	No difficulty	2	2
5.	Valuable information	2	2
6.	Satisfied	2	2
7.	Electronic word-of-mouth marketing	1	2
8.	Encourages purchasing activity	1	2
9.	Engage in purchasing activity	1	3
10.	Advertisement	1	4
11.	Like	2	4
12.	Pleasure	1	3
13.	Convenient	1	3
14.	Anonymous	1	3
15.	Admire	2	3
16.	Exceed my budget	3	5
17.	Compulsive shopper	3	5
18.	Chance	2	4
19.	Discussion and conversation	1	3
20.	Empowered	1	3
21.	Cheapest	2	3
22.	Favourably	1	3
23.	Value for money	1	3
24.	Variety	1	3

interact with marketers.

In addition, leveraging social media platforms requires marketers to be more transparent, honest, interactive, relevant, and engaging in sustained and continuous efforts, guiding and contributing to the co-creation of user generated content, since consumers are actively turning to different social media platforms to search for product and other information. Marketers are advised to explore the possibility of electronic word of mouth marketing as it remains both a threat and opportunity for them in the social media environment. Electronic word of mouth marketing on social media platforms captures 'up-to-date' information posted by users which could include their positive or negative experiences with a product or brand. Furthermore, marketers should explore how different groups or communities can impact consumer behaviour on social media platforms. Celebrities such as Oprah Winfrey, Salman Khan and Kim Kardashian, use Twitter, Facebook and various other social media platforms on a daily basis to interact and communicate with fans and, also promote or endorse products and brands. Marketers should take note of the impact that celebrities have on purchasing decisions, generating awareness, exposure and positioning of products and brands over social media

platforms.

Furthermore, marketers need to explore and exploit the potential of social media platforms to attract and retain users on these platforms through customer relationship management, and by focusing on features and characteristics of social media that enhance the relationship between consumers and marketers. However, given the rapid growth of social media as a marketing communication tool, consumers are increasingly faced with advertising clutter 'online'. This poses a serious challenge for marketers trying to use social media platforms to generate exposure, attention and awareness to their products and brands. In addition, very often, on social media platforms users are mostly attracted to advertising efforts of their favourite or popular products and brands and, those recommended by friends. To ensure that a marketer's advertising efforts are noticed by users on social media platforms, the advertising messages should be constructed carefully and differently. For example, this should be interactive, engaging, and participatory and ensure that it does not invade the privacy of social media users.

In order to remain relevant amongst users of social media, marketers need to update content on a regular

and timely basis and also ascertain the importance of messages delivered in real time on social media platforms and, the consequences this has on the usage patterns and the purchasing behaviour of consumers using social media platforms.

## LIMITATIONS

Being exploratory in nature, this study has its limitations in terms of the results being generalizable, due to the sample (university students) and its size. Nevertheless, the initial results could be used as reason for a more extensive study.

This study confirmed the relationship between social media browsing and consumer purchasing behaviour, however it did not indicate the nature and strength of the relationship, which could be explored in subsequent studies.

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