Inaugural Address

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Profiling the
Generation Y cohort

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by

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Table of Contents

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ABSTRACT

Generational differences are relevant as they reflect differences in attitudes, values, ambitions and mind-sets between people. A generational cohort refers to the aggregate progeny of the preceding generation and parents of the next generation, born within a specified range of years, who go through the different stages of life together and whose values, attitudes and preferences are influenced by shared defining events and trends during their formative years that give rise to a generational consciousness and a process of social change. There are currently four identified generations in existence, namely the Silent generation (Silents), Baby Boomers (Boomers), Generation X (X-ers) and Generation Y. The Generation Y cohort is defined as individuals born between 1986 and 2005. The major force recognised to have shaped members of the Generation Y cohort is that they grew up in the connectivity of the digital age and in the era of global 24/7 television networks, which has provided them with instant exposure to global events and trends. The result of this has been a melding of cultures across the world, an ever-increasing global village effect and the emergence of a globalised Generation Y cohort. This inaugural lecture includes a discussion of the conceptualisation of generational theory and the emergence of an increasingly globalised Generation Y cohort, an outline of the factors that have shaped the Generation Y cohort and their consequent characteristics, with particular reference to the South African Generation Y cohort.

INTRODUCTION

The focus of this inaugural address is on profiling the characteristics of today's youth, namely the Generation Y cohort. This dissertate includes the conceptualisation of generational theory and the emergence of an increasingly globalised Generation Y cohort, the factors that have shaped the Generation Y cohort and their consequent characteristics, together with a discussion on the South African Generation Y cohort.

Ortega y Gasset (1961[1923]:15) proposed that a generation is "the most important conception in history....the pivot responsible for the movements of historical evolution". The term generational cohort encompasses two salient elements, namely a generation and a cohort (Markert, 2004:11).

The word 'generation' dates back to the Old Testament where, in the Book of Genesis, it refers to family history (Phillips, 1980:48). In the early fourteenth-century, it referred to a group of people born during the same time period and was based on the notion of descendants at the same phase in the line of descent and the old French word *generacion,* meaning progeny (Harper, 2016). In terms of this biological-genealogical viewpoint of the concept, a generation may then be defined as the period between birth and the time it takes to mature and have one's own progeny, so that one generation gives rise to the next generation at regular intervals (Schewe, Debevec, Diamond, Parment & Murphy, 2013:4). Strauss and Howe (1991:60) argue that it is more intuitive to view generations according to the phases of life, which they divided into 22 year phases – youth, rising adulthood, midlife and elderhood. Regardless of which definition is preferred, generational parameters are typically taken to be within a year or two of the 20 year mark (Markert, 2004:20; Schewe & Meredith, 2004:52; Strauss & Howe, 1991:60) but may range between 15 to 30 years (Mannheim, 1952 [1927]:278).

A 'cohort' originally was the term afforded to one of the 10 divisions of an ancient Roman military legion (COD, 2004:278). In terms of generational theory, a cohort refers to the aggregate of individuals born within a specified range of years who experience the same events, moods and trends at a similar stage of their lives (Schewe & Meredith, 2004:51; Strauss & Howe, 1991:48; Ryder, 1965:845). Those events, moods and trends that occur in their formative years are thought to have a profound influence on their frame of reference and consequent values and attitudes (Schewe & Meredith, 2004:51; Strauss & Howe, 1991:48), as well as on their preferences and consumer behaviour (Schewe & Meredith, 2004:52). The term cohort is in line with the move from describing a generation simply in biological terms to defining it in terms of a social creation of shared historical experiences (Scott, 2000:356). Taken together, a generational cohort refers to the aggregate progeny of the preceding generation and parents of the next generation, born within a specified

range of years, who go through the different stages of life together and whose values, attitudes and preferences are influenced by shared defining events and trends during their formative years that give rise to a generational consciousness and a process of social change.

According to the literature, there are currently four identified generations and one, as yet, unnamed generation in existence, namely the Silent generation (Silents), Baby Boomers (Boomers), Generation X (X-ers) and Generation Y (Strauss & Howe, 1991:36). Whilst there is a great deal of disagreement concerning the exact start and end dates of generational cohorts, most indicate that the Silents were born in the 1920s, the Boomers in the 1940s, the X-ers in the 1960s and members of Generation Y in the 1980s (Pew Research Center, 2014:9; Zemka, Raines & Filipczak, 2013: Chapter 1; Markert, 2004:21; Strauss & Howe, 1991:36).

The confusion concerning the start and end dates of generation cohorts stems from a disagreement as to the length of generational cohorts (Markert, 2004:12), which vary from as little as two years to as many as 10 years. This disagreement stems from the different theories as to what constitutes a true generation. Schewe and Meredith (2004:52) argue that the length of a generation cohort depends on the events that shape it. While attempting to apply biological-genealogical intervals as parameters marking the social changes brought about by historical events may seem speculative, it is a necessary evil for operationalizing the concept of generational cohorts. From a market segmentation perspective, Markert (2004:11) highlights that not having a precise definition of what constitutes a particular generational cohort is counterproductive and confusing. Indeed, in noting the potpourri of dates employed to define generational cohorts, Wolburg and Pokrywcznski (2001:35) indicate that this creates a challenge for marketers in terms of knowing the composition of these cohorts.

In an effort to address this problem, Markert (2004:21) defines generations in 20-year increments, which he subdivides into 10-year cohorts representing the early and later members of each generation, which coincides with what Strauss and Howe (1991:62) term as the first and last wave cohorts of a generation. Markert (2004:21) indicates that these cohorts may then be further subdivided into five-year groups,

which he names bihorts, in order to finer tune segmentation efforts. Table 1 outlines the generation cohort classification as proposed by Markert (2004).

Table 1: A generational cohort classification

Generations	Cohorts	Bihorts
Silents: 1926-1945	Early Silents: 1926-1935	Early-early Silents: 1926-1930
	Late Silents: 1936-1945	Late-early Silents: 1931-1935
		Early-late Silents: 1936-1940
		Late-late Silents:1941-1945
Boomers: 1946-1965	Early Boomers: 1946-1955	Early-early Boomers: 1946-1950
	Late Boomers: 1956-1965	Late-early Boomers: 1951-1955
		Early-late Boomers: 1956-1960
		Late-late Boomers:1961-1965
X-ers: 1966-1985	Early X-ers: 1966-1975	Early-early X-ers: 1966-1970
	Late X-ers: 1976-1985	Late-early X-ers: 1971-1975
		Early-late X-ers: 1976-1980
		Late-late X-ers:1981-1985
Gen Y: 1986-2005	Early Gen Y: 1986-1995	Early-early Gen Y: 1986-1990
	Late Gen Y: 1996-2005	Late-early Gen Y: 1991-1995
		Early-late Gen Y: 1996-2000
		Late-late Gen Y: 2001-2005

Source: Markert (2004:21)

This "periodisation" of generations put forward in Table 1 helps to encapsulate the unique challenges and opportunities associated with specific generational cohorts, thereby allowing for intergenerational comparisons (Eyerman & Turner, 1998:93) and facilitating market segmentation efforts (Schewe & Noble, 2000:133).

Despite the value of a generation cohort classification, it is important to acknowledge a certain degree of overlap between the generations outlined in Table 1. For example, Lancaster and Stillman (2002:36) refer to what coincides with Markert's (2004:21) late-late bihorts as cuspers; that is, individuals who stand at the cusp of two generations and who are old enough to relate to the values and attitudes of their own generation but young enough to embrace the spirit of the new generation.

CONCEPTUALISATION OF GENERATIONAL COHORT THEORY

Generational differences are relevant as they reflect differences in attitudes, values, ambitions and mind-sets between people (Zemke *et al.*, 2013: Chapter 1). The concept of generational cohorts as a way of explaining social change first began receiving attention in the 1800s in the writings of poets, philosophers and historians such as Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Auguste Comte, Wilhelm Dilthey and Wilhelm Pinder, with Comte being the first to study the influence of generations on social change systematically (Jaeger, 1985). Much of the contemporary interest in generational theory stems from the writings of the European sociologist Karl Mannheim (Eyerman & Turner, 1998:91; Spitzer, 1973:1354). Other influential contemporary writers on the topic include José Ortega y Gasset, Shmuel Noah Eisenstadt, Norman Ryder, Pierre Bourdieu, Ron Eyerman, Bryan Turner, William Strauss, Neil Howe and Charles Schewe.

In his seminal essay, titled *The Problem of Generations*, Mannheim (1952 [1927]:290, 298) theorised that generation location depends on the "biological rhythm of human life" and that individuals born with a common location in history will experience the same historical events and how they are influenced by and react to those events depends their phase of life, as well as their social (their position in the economic and power structure of a given society) and space location (the geographical region within which they reside). He emphasised that even though members of older generations experience the same historical events, it is only when those experiences occur in an individual's formative years that they contribute towards a generational consciousness, stating that "early impressions coalesce into a natural view of the world". This distinguishes between 'contemporaries', which refers to people who are alive at the same time and 'coevals', which refers to people who are of the same age (Ortega y Gasset, 1961 [1933]:15; Eyerman & Turner, 1998:93), and highlights the definitive effect of shared experiences during youth or the coming of age years of a particular generation (Wyn & Woodman, 2006:498; Ryder, 1965:849). These shared life experiences, together with the prevailing social trends encountered during the formative years help shape a generation's attitudes towards family, gender roles, the establishment, risk, culture, values, and the like (Strauss & Howe, 1991:48).

Youth is a distinctive social category, associated with social movements that coincide with periods of important historical changes (Eisendtadt, 2003:xiv, xvi). The coming of age years are marked by the melding of the norms and values passed on from the previous generation through socialisation with the need for liberation and the forging of a new and separate identity (Eisendtadt, 2003:xxx; Ortega y Gasset, 1961[1923]:16). The necessary preparatory and transitory nature of youth makes it a seed bed for rebellion and generational conflict that may take the form of revolutionary, confrontational and/or ideological social movements (Eisendtadt, 2003:xvi, xxxiii). Bourdieu (1993:101) views generational conflict as a clash over resources and power, stating that "just as the old have an interest in pushing young people back into youth, so the young have an interest in pushing the old into old age". Strauss and Howe (1997: Chapter 1; 1991:39) take the stance that generational changes are cyclical in that each new generation of youths attempts to correct or compensate for the perceived mistakes of the midlife generation in power at the time. Anecdotal evidence supports this stance. For example, in South Africa, Nzuzu (2016:21), the secretary-general of the ANC Youth League, recently commented that the youth have the solutions needed to improve their destiny yet they have to stand back and live with the decisions made by the old generation.

Shared experiences during the formative years give rise to a generational consciousness. Comte understood this generational consciousness as being "the unanimous adherence to certain fundamental notions" (quoted by Marias, 1968:88). Ortega y Gasset (1961[1923]:15, 19) referred to it as the typical characteristics, unique physiognomy and predetermined historical destiny that distinguish one generation from another. Strauss and Howe (1991:63) name it a generational peer personality and indicate that it is the collective attitudes the prototypical member of a generation holds towards family, gender roles, the establishment and the future. Zemke *et al.* (2013: Chapter 1) call it a unique generational cohort personality and Schwartz (1996:908), a social frame of memory rooted in the generational experience. Based on the writings of Bourdieu (1993:85, 86) and Schwartz (1996:908), Eyerman and Turner (1998:93) stress the cultural dimension of generational consciousness, referring to it as a shared "cultural field of emotions, attitudes, preferences and predispositions, and embodied practices of sport and leisure activities".

One of the criteria that Mannheim (1952 [1927]:289, 291) proposed for inclusion in a particular generational consciousness was social location, which he explained as "certain individuals' hold in the economic and power structure of a given society" and access to intellectual material. Higher education credentials enable upward social class mobility in that they typically correlate positively with access to higher income levels, social status, as well as professional occupations (Marginson, 2015; Wyn & Woodman, 2006:506). In this respect, university students represent a particular form of generational consciousness within the formative years of each generational cohort. The same sentiment applies in South Africa where, despite high levels of graduate unemployment (Skiti, 2016:6) a tertiary qualification still translates into a higher earning potential and upward social class mobility (Chetty & Knaus, 2016; Spaull, 2015). As the intellectual elite of their generational cohort, holders of tertiary qualifications are likely to manifest as opinion leaders and trendsetters amongst their peers within a given society (Bevan-Dye, 2012:34), and take a lead role in social movements and inducing social change (Eisendtadt, 2003:xii, xxxiii).

A key theme in the writings of most of those mentioned so far is the importance of what Mannheim (1952 [1927]:297) referred to as location in time or "the phenomenon of the stratification of experience" in demarcating generational cohorts. This refers to the influence of social trends and historical events on the creation of a generational consciousness. The historical events and social trends noted in the literature to have influenced members of generational cohorts during their formative years include traumatic events such as wars and disease, changes in economic conditions and/or political ideologies, technological advancements, social upheavals, music tastes (Zemke *et al.*, 2013: Chapter 1; Schewe & Noble, 2000:130), social movements, the media, popular culture and icons (Twenge, Campbell, Hoffman & Lance, 2010:1120), and child-rearing styles (Debevec, Schewe, Madden & Diamond, 2013:21). Holbrook and Schindler (1994:420) propose that people's nostalgia towards popular culture, including music, film stars and fashion during their formative years has the most profound influence on generational differences.

The first wave of the Silent generation grew up in the wake of the Great Depression, the atom bomb and World War II, while the second wave were raised amidst growing fears of communism, the start of the cold war, economic growth and the rise of the

middle class (Schewe & Meredith (2004:54). They were raised in traditional families where morality, discipline and obedience were emphasised (Kupperschmidt, 2000:67, 68). This was an age that saw scarcity, rationing and great uncertainty give way to greater prosperity and security. There was a strong sense of respect for authority and rules, a task-oriented culture, a high level of conformity and conservatism, with a tendency towards being frugal and risk-averse (Lehto, Jang, Achana & O'Leary, 2008:239).

Members of the Baby Boomer generation were the "indulged product of post-war optimism" (Howe & Strauss, 2007:4), who grew up in an age of economic and educational expansion (Edmunds & Turner, 2005:561; Kupperschmidt, 2000:68). The first wave of Boomers were idealists who initiated the hippie culture (Schewe & Noble, 2000:135) and championed social movements such as civil rights, Greenpeace and women's rights (Schewe & Meredith, 2004:54). The second wave came of age during the summer of love (1967), the moon landing (1969), Woodstock (1969) (Howe & Strauss, 2007:4), the oil crisis (1973) and the high inflation rates and recessionary climate of the mid-1970s (Schewe & Meredith, 2004:54). These individuals are characterised as being workaholics who value the status of career promotions, titles and corner offices, who spend rather than save (Kupperschmidt, 2000:68) and who indulge in conspicuous consumption (Codrington, 2008:7).

Raised by the workaholic Boomers, members of the Generation X cohort grew up in an era of alternative life styles, self-absorbed parents, failing marriages, where both parents worked, giving rise to the term 'latchkey children' (Kupperschmidt, 2000:69). They also witnessed the fall of communism (Codrington, 2008:8) and the dawn of the AIDS epidemic (Howe & Strauss, 2007:4). Having watched the Boomer generation suffer from burnout and the consequences of economic downsizing (Adams, 2000:27), X-ers are sceptical of institutions and demand a work-life balance (Codrington, 2008:8). They are characterised as being risk takers, resourceful and independent. They are resistant to authority and expect work to be fun (Kupperschmidt, 2000:69, 70). In addition, they dated cautiously and married later in life (Howe & Strauss, 2007:4).

While these global events influenced the formation of generational cohorts in South Africa, there were additional national events and trends at play. For example, the Silents witnessed the Great Depression cause wide spread unemployment and hasten the growth of the poor white segment (SAHO, 2011). The end of World War II brought about severe social and economic problems in the country, together with supply shortages (SAHO, 2016a). Furthermore, while South Africa fought on the side of the Allies in World War II, many felt more aligned with fascist Germany. These factors spawned the rise in the Afrikaans Nationalist movement and resulted in an increase in racial segregation policies (SAHO, 2011). This culminated in the rise to power of the ultra-conservative National Party, the introduction of apartheid and resulting resentment amongst Africans, Indians and Coloureds, the non-violent Defiance campaign (Byrnes, 1997:59) and the creation of the Freedom Charter (Mattes, 2011:3).

South African older Boomers came of age just after the Sharpville massacre of 1960, the militarisation of the PAC and ANC (SAHO, 2013a) and during the Rivonia trial of 1963 (Byrnes, 1997:277). This was a time of strict censorship in the form of the Publications and Entertainment Act 26 of 1963 (Mills, 2007:81) and the introduction of compulsory military conscription in 1967 for all white males aged between 17 and 65 years (SAHO, 2013b). The younger of this generational cohort came of age during the emergence of the Black Consciousness Movement, the Soweto uprising (SAHO, 2013a) and the introduction of television into South Africa in 1976, decades after the rest of the world (SAHO, 2015).

Older members of South Africa's Generation X cohort came of age during extreme political violence, a state of emergency (SAHO, 2013a), isolation from international sports and severe economic sanctions (SAHO, 2016b). These events paved the way for the end of apartheid and the country's first democratic elections in 1994 (SAHO, 2013a), during the age when the second wave of X-ers were in their formative years.

This suggests that while global events have a global effect in shaping generational cohorts, national events and trends influence the generational consciousness within particular countries. This space location was the third metric Mannheim (1952 [1927]:298) proposed for being part of a generational consciousness. However, the

major force recognised to have shaped members of the Generation Y cohort is that they grew up in the connectivity of the digital age and this, along with global 24/7 television networks, has created an increasingly global village effect. This means that we are seeing the emergence of global generational cohorts, with the Generation Y cohort leading the way (KPMG, 2015:19; Edmunds & Turner, 2005:559).

FACTORS THAT HAVE SHAPED THE GENERATION Y COHORT

The term 'Generation Y' first appeared in the editorial of an August 1993 issue of the Advertising Age (Raphelson, 2014). Other popular labels include the Millennials (Howe & Strauss, 1991:36), the Net Generation (Tapscott, 1999:6) and the Digital Natives (Prensky, 2001:1). These terms reflect that the first wave of this generational cohort came of age at the turn of the millennium and grew up with the connectivity afforded by the commercialisation of the Internet, followed closely by the widespread uptake of mobile telephony. Tapscott (2009:2) remarks that while connections were slow and the functionality of mobile phones was limited to phone calls, children rapidly overtook their parents in their ability to work with digital technologies – communicating, learning, working and playing in a very different fashion to previous generations.

The technological advancement from a static World Wide Web to the Web 2.0 facilitated greater collaboration, content sharing and interactivity, and the second wave of this cohort have access to sites such as micro-blogs, forums, wikis, social networking sites and social media sites (Allen, 2012:3), as well as Internet-enabled smartphones and, more recently, tablets and wearables (Martin, 2014). Furthermore, this generation has grown up having access to a global database of consumption-related information, ranging from online product reviews, to product comparison sites and even online product demonstration videos, making them the most informed consumers in history. The development of smartphone technologies also spurred the development of a plethora of mobile applications for games, shopping, banking, news, travel, calendars, education, health and fitness, social media, social networks and the like (Rajput, 2015), which can be used to communicate, entertain, inform and manage a range of tasks on the move and across geographical boundaries.

Global television news channels that report 24/7, such as CNN and Sky News, have allowed Generation Y individuals to witness wars, natural disasters and other newsworthy events live as they occur around the world. Global media have assailed them with reports on the threats of terrorist attacks, economic and social meltdowns, environmental catastrophes (Shaw & Fairhurst, 2008:373) and the dangers of a range of consumption behaviours, including the consumption of alcohol, tobacco and various types of food (King, 2009:89). In this regard, they are living during an era of the global rise in nanny state societies, whereby governments in many countries are increasingly intervening in the personal lifestyle choices of consumers (Wilkinson, 2016).

Coinciding with the move to increasingly nanny state societies, members of the Generation Y cohort are also viewed as being the most parented generation of all time, with many having been raised by so called 'helicopter parents', who micromanaged each aspect of their lives. Helicopter parents are characterised as being over protective, controlling and fully involved in their offspring's activities, and as using digital technologies to monitor all of their movements closely (Sebastien-Wiley, 2016). Whereas tertiary-aged students of previous generations were expected to be able to take care of themselves, there has been an increased presence of parents on university campus – virtually and physically – making decisions, seeking opportunities and generally problem solving for their adult children (Lythcott-Haims, 2015). Some of the worst examples of this over-protective parenting style include parents insinuating themselves into their adult child's first job interview or contacting university professors to negotiate grades and other matters on their behalf (Almendrala, 2015).

In today's connected world of convergent technologies, multi-media platforms and global television networks, many popular films and television series, typically generated in Westernised countries, gain a global following simultaneously, and celebrities, music and vogues that gain in popularity in one part of the world quickly trend across the globe.

For sport consumers, dedicated sport television channels and digital streaming services provide sport spectators real time access to national and international sport events, and continually updated information on sport results. Moreover, unlike previous generations, digital platforms allow today's spectator to comment on and share their thoughts interactively concerning these sport events and results. As such, this has not only changed the way in which professional sport is consumed but also the way in which spectators engage and connect with sport team brands.

Another significant trend is the increased popularity of reality television shows. These shows, many of which depict the lives of the uber-wealthy, make status consumption, materialism and the disclosure of personal, intimate details of one's life to the world appear normal. In this regard, they have been acculturated into a brand-conscious and media-saturated world, where they have been bombarded with marketing messages not only through traditional media but also across digital platforms (Wolburg & Pokrywczynski, 2001:37), which has resulted in global exposure to the consumer culture of Western societies (Cleveland, Laroche & Papadopoulos, 2009:118). This instant exposure to global events and trends translates into a melding of cultures across the world, the ever-increasing global village effect and the emergence of a globalised Generation Y cohort.

Other important events to have influenced members of the Generation Y cohort is that they lived through the boom to bust economic cycle of the 2000s (Pew Research Center, 2014:8), continued rate of high youth unemployment (International Labour Organisation, 2015:1) and in an increasingly knowledge-driven economy - all factors that make having a university qualification especially relevant (Pew Research Center, 2014:9). This has caused a surge in demand for tertiary education in both developed and developing countries (Nagdy & Roser, 2016). Unfortunately, this surge in demand for tertiary qualifications coincided with a sharp rise in tuition fees, a product of decreasing government subsidies and the expanding payrolls necessary to cope with rapidly rising student numbers, which has resulted in students increasingly relying on loans to fund their higher education (Schoen, 2015).

In South Africa, the Generation Y cohort was also the first generation to grow up in the post-apartheid era, with many becoming the first in their families to attend multi-

racial schools and being able to mix freely with peers from other races. Following the 1994 elections, Generation Y members across all racial groups have far more equal possibilities available to them in terms of education, career and wealth-creation opportunities than that which were afforded to previous generations.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE GENERATION Y COHORT

As history's first digitally connected generation (Taylor & Keeter, 2010:1), members of the Generation Y are comfortable with technology, technologically astute and use tools such as the Internet, smartphones and social media as a natural and integral part of their lives (Barton, Fromm & Egan, 2012:4). They are heavy users of social media, including social networking sites such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and Snapchat – sites that have allowed them to build and maintain significantly-sized friendship networks (Pew Research Center, 2014:48). Those that can afford it tend to own multiple devices, including laptops/PCs, smartphones, tablets, MP3 players and gaming systems, and often multitask online - seamlessly moving between mobile, computer, social and gaming platforms (Barton *et al.*, 2012:5). Unlike previous generations, they are also more likely to consume films, music and books via downloads rather than physical purchases (KPMG, 2015:16); something that has given rise to widespread electronic piracy.

Following the example set by reality television celebrities, they use mobile applications to document many aspects of their lives, information which they then typically share on their social networking sites (Appel, 2015). In addition, compared to previous generations, members of the Generation Y cohort are more likely to contribute to user-generated online content, using the Internet to air their thoughts, feelings and experiences, including consumption-related experiences (Barton *et al.*, 2012:5). As a generation, they have embraced multiple modes of self-expression and self-presentation, from creating several social networking site profiles, to getting tattoos and body piercings (Taylor & Keeter, 2010:1), and habitually posting selfies online (Pew Research Center, 2014:47). Often, they share a little too much of themselves online, something that makes them vulnerable to cyber bullying and may harm their future job prospects (Bevan-Dye & Akpojivi, 2015:2).

The influence of Western mass media and advertising, coupled with the very human inclination to want higher material living standards, has compelled consumers around the globe to copy the consumer culture of Western societies (Cleveland *et al.*, 2009:118). In the hedonistic global move towards a culture of retail therapy, as popularised through Western media, much of consumer behaviour is driven by the desire to acquire and consume branded goods that infer social status (Eastman, Goldsmith & Flynn, 1999:41) and this desire transgresses social class levels (O'Cass & McEwen, 2004:29). Findings from international studies suggest that members of the Generation Y cohort are more materialistic (Cleveland *et al.*, 2009:143) and more status-consumption oriented (Eastman & Liu, 2012:97) than members of the older generations. In addition, increased exposure and access to global brands (Park, Rabolt & Joon, 2008:244) has rendered today's youth notably less consumer ethnocentric than their older counterparts (Cleveland *et al.*, 2009:132).

Constant exposure to global events has also resulted in Generation Y individuals being more aware of social and environmental issues (Barton *et al.*, 2012:7). Several studies around the world indicate that members of the Generation Y cohort are environmentally aware and eco-conscious (Kanchanapibul, Lacka, Wang & Chan, 2014:530; Zsóka, Szerényi, Széchy & Kocsis, 2013:126; Barton *et al.*, 2012:7; Hill & Lee, 2012:478). In addition, there are indications that they are more likely to support those organisations that have sustainable programmes in place geared at helping people, communities and the environment (Smith, 2012:87). Moreover, rather than simply making one-off donations to charitable causes, Generation Y individuals are more likely than previous generations to incorporate causes into their daily lives by purchasing products and services from socially responsible organisations that support sustainable environmental practices (Barton *et al.*, 2012:7). The importance of this generational cohort's pro-environmental attitudes to the green movement is that they will influence the environmental attitudes and behaviours of future generations (Lee, 2009:87).

Owing to the boom to bust economic cycle of the 2000s and continued sluggish economic conditions, older Generation Y individuals, including university graduates, are experiencing difficulties finding full-time employment and those that do, are often the first to be laid off during company retrenchments (Taylor & Keeter, 2010:39). As

a result, members of this cohort are struggling to get onto the property ladder and many still live with their parents (KPMG, 2015:16) or have been forced to move back home to their parents after having lived on their own (Taylor & Keeter, 2010:40). The current economic trough also means that many adult Generation Y individuals are reliant on their parents and family for financial support (Almendrala, 2015; Taylor & Keeter, 2010:39).

The surge in demand for tertiary education, coupled with the sharp increase in the cost of a university education has spawned a significant increase in the level of student loan debt (Pew Research Center, 2014:8); a situation which is also evident in South Africa (Nkosi, 2015; Savides, Pillay & Eggington, 2015). The pressure of student debt has sparked student protests demanding free education across the globe (Pells, 2016; Mulhere, 2015; Scherman, Arriagada & Valenzuela, 2015:151; Davidson & Safi, 2014). Of course, there is nothing new about youth movements geared at enacting social change. However, what is new is that members of the Generation Y youth movements have access to social media, which allows them to better mobilise their forces (Scherman *et al.*, 2015:151). Even though today's youth face many economic challenges, they have a high level of self-esteem (Twenge & Cambell, 2008:864), are confident in themselves and are relatively satisfied with their lives overall (Taylor & Keeter, 2010:1, 23).

Spectator sports have been popular across the ages. However, global television networks and social media have exposed members of the Generation Y cohort to an array of sports, sport celebrities, sport teams and sport events from across the globe (Ramaswamy, 2009). Moreover, compared to previous generations, there is a marked difference in the way sport fans of this cohort consume spectator sports, with many consuming sport content through social media and online streaming channels on multiple digital devices, including mobile devices (Urban, 2016). Furthermore, they do not just want to be spectators. Rather, they demand more information and interactivity, and want to connect and share while consuming sport-related content (Wibberley, 2015). To this end, Wu, Tsai and Hung (2012:188) advise marketers of professional sport teams to engage with Generation Y fans actively on social media in order to develop and maintain team brand loyalty.

Despite having grown up in the anti-tobacco age and an age where the dangers of alcohol abuse are well publicised, evidence suggests that members of the Generation Y cohort are more likely to smoke cigarettes and binge drink than members of the older generations, and that this figure is even higher amongst university students (Nichter, 2015:2, 46). On the positive side, members of this cohort are also more likely to engage in physical exercise than other generations (Nielsen, 2014), which may mitigate some of the harmful effects of tobacco and alcohol use.

As consumers, members of the Generation Y cohort are highly sceptical of marketing messages and resistant to marketing efforts (Wolburg & Pokrywczynski, 2001:37), making them difficult to reach using traditional marketing techniques (KPMG, 2015:18; Gailewicz, 2014). They are more likely than previous generations to conduct online research from multiple sources before making a purchase (KPMG, 2015:16). Concerning consumption-related advice, they are more likely to perceive an expert as being a peer with first-hand experience rather than someone with professional credentials (Barton *et al.*, 2012:6), making online peer reviews ever more powerful (KPMG, 2015:18). They understand the power that digital technologies give them as consumers and readily share consumption-related opinions and experiences across platforms, thereby relying on each other to make informed purchase decisions (Gailewicz, 2014). They are more likely to support a brand that connects with them on social networking sites and brands that are successful in earning their loyalty are likely to be rewarded by them becoming powerful brand ambassadors using online word-of-mouth communication (KPMG, 2015:18; Gailewicz, 2014). Given the reach of social media, brand content that enhances the product or service and resonates with members of this generation is likely to spread fast and to be reinforced through other users' reviews (Gailewicz, 2014; Barton *et al.*, 2012:6). To this end, companies need to monitor online word-of-mouth communications about their brands closely (Barton *et al.*, 2012:6).

GENERATION Y IN SOUTH AFRICA

In 2015, members of the Generation Y cohort made up approximately 38 percent of South Africa's population of 54 956 920 (Statistics South Africa, 2015:9). An outline of the South African Generation Y cohort's demographics is given in Table 2.

Table 2: South African Generation Y population estimate statistics in 2015

	Generation Y population estimates	Percentage of Generation Y population (%)
Race		
Black African	17 533 344	84
Coloured	1 684 634	8
Indian/Asian	418 595	2
White	1 160 768	6
Gender		
Male	10 442 100	50.20
Female	10 355 241	49.80
Province		
Eastern Cape	2 842 646	14
Free State	1 091 682	5
Gauteng	4 419 313	21
KwaZulu-Natal	4 350 215	21
Limpopo	2 375 943	11
Mpumulanga	1 729 579	8
Northern Cape	334 161	2
North West	1 398 819	7
Western Cape	2 137 106	10

Total South African Population: 54 956 920

Total South African Generation Y population: 20 797 341

Source: Statistics South Africa (2015:9, 15)

As is evident from Table 2, there is a relatively equal split between male and female members of South Africa's Generation Y cohort. In terms of race, at 84 percent, black Africans constitute the largest portion of the country's Generation Y cohort and, arguably, the single most important market segment in the country. Most members of this cohort reside in the KwaZulu-Natal Province, followed by the Gauteng Province.

As is the case in other countries, the youth of South Africa face many challenges, not least of which is high unemployment, including high unemployment amongst university graduates, who carry the additional burden of significant levels of student debt (Skiti, 2016:6). Added to this and because of it, there is the on-going 'Fees Must Fall' campaign and general 'fallism' ideology, where students and universities alike face a period of disruption and unrest (Amato, 2016:6). Despite these problems, much like their international counterparts, Generation Y university students in South Africa report having high levels of self-esteem (Bevan-Dye, 2012:41) and subjective well-being (Bevan-Dye, 2016a).

Echoing the findings from international studies, a study in South Africa found that Generation Y university students are materialistic and do exhibit status consumption tendencies. However, in contrast to the youth in many other countries, they were also found to have a high level of consumer ethnocentrism towards local brands. Interestingly, even though there was a significant positive relationship between their level of materialism and status-consumption orientation, neither of these tendencies correlated significantly with their consumer ethnocentrism. This suggests that there is a gap in the South African market for developing and marketing national luxury status brands targeted at the Generation Y cohort (Bevan-Dye, Garnett & de Klerk, 2012:5585).

In keeping with their global counterparts, South African Generation Y university students perceive themselves to be knowledgeable about the environment, feel that they have a responsibility towards the environment and perceive that their individual efforts can make a significant difference towards bringing about environmental sustainability. In addition, their perceived environmental knowledge, responsibility and efficacy have a significant positive influence on their level of environmental concern – something that bodes well for the future sustainability of the South African

natural environment (Synodinos & Bevan-Dye, 2015:13, 15). Furthermore, their pro-environmental attitude, which is influenced by their perceived environmental knowledge and efficacy, together with subjective norms influences their purchase intensions towards environmentally friendly products positively. However, the effect of these purchase intentions on their actual purchase of environmentally friendly products is partially mediated by the perceived higher price and lower quality of such products in South Africa (Synodinos, 2014:169). This suggests that the Generation Y cohort will drive the demand for environmentally friendly products in South Africa but that companies need to focus on delivering improved value on such products.

In South Africa, sport spectatorship is a national passion and findings suggest that this passion is also evident amongst members of the country's Generation Y cohort (Mofokeng, 2012:70). However, despite having a strong sport domain involvement and strong sense of identification with and psychological commitment towards their favourite sport team (Mofokeng, Bevan-Dye & de Klerk, 2015:137), much like their international counterparts, they are less likely to attend games, preferring rather to watch such games on television or online (Mofokeng, 2012:70, 71). In line with international evidence, this suggests that marketers of professional spectator sport teams need to be vigilant in their use of digital platforms, particularly social networking sites to build and maintain relationships with members of this cohort in order to forge team brand loyalty.

Owing to spiralling health care costs, governments around the world, including in South Africa, are seeking ways of promoting healthier lifestyles such as encouraging participation in physical activity (Meyer & Bevan-Dye, 2014:156) and dissuading unhealthy consumption behaviours such as the use of tobacco products and excessive consumption of alcohol (Roets, Bevan-Dye & Viljoen, 2013:967), particularly amongst the youth. In South Africa, there are strict tobacco control measures in place and a proposal to increase alcohol control measures (Parry *et al.*, 2012:602), and these demarketing efforts appear to be having an effect, with one study reporting that Generation Y students have a positive attitude towards strategies aimed at discouraging tobacco and alcohol consumption (Roets *et al.*, 2013:972). Most of these university students also reported being non-smokers and consuming only moderate amounts of alcohol (Roets, 2013:58). Unfortunately, study

findings suggest that efforts at encouraging greater participation in physical activity amongst the country's Generation Y cohort have not been as successful (Meyer & Bevan-Dye, 2014:162; Dhurup & Garnett, 2011:93). Interestingly, these findings are in direct contrast to global findings.

In terms of this generational cohort's attitude towards advertising, contrary to international studies, findings in the South African context suggest that they have a favourable attitude towards advertising in general (Sharp, 2013:98). In addition, they view local celebrities as being trustworthy and credible product endorsers within marketing communication messages (Molelekeng, 2012:56, 57), with the role model status of such celebrities positively influencing their brand loyalty towards those endorsed products (Bevan-Dye, Dhurup & Surujlal, 2009:182). While their attitude towards receiving marketing messages via mobile telephony is relatively negative (Sharp, 2013:99), they have a favourable attitude towards advertisements on Facebook, indicating that such marketing messages are informative, entertaining and valuable (Dondolo, 2013:114). This supports the notion that brands can best engage with this market segment via social networking sites.

Across advanced, emerging and developing nations, the Generation Y cohort is reported to be more likely to be Internet and smartphone users, and to have a higher participation rate in social networking sites than older generations. In South Africa, only 42 percent of the population have access to the Internet and it is the better educated, higher income members belonging to the Generation Y cohort who dominate the country's online community. Furthermore, 81 percent of South Africa's online Generation Y individuals engage with social networking sites (Poushter, 2016:6, 11, 22). While Instagram and Twitter have experienced significant increases in their number of users in South Africa, with 13 million users Facebook remains the most popular social networking site amongst South Africans (World Wide Worx & Fuseware, 2016), with the largest percentage of global Facebook users aged below 29 years (Kemp, 2015).

South African Generation Y university students, who report having a strong emotional attachment to Facebook, spend between 31 and 60 minutes on average per day on the site and have, on average, 250 Facebook friends (Bevan-Dye, 2016a). They mainly use the site to communicate with friends and family, to find and connect with friends and as a platform for expressing their views and opinions (Bevan-Dye & Akpojivi, 2015:7). The primary social capital benefits they derive from Facebook include maintaining relationships, meeting new friends, finding old friends and social involvement (Bevan-Dye, 2012:42). In line with Reynold's (2007:385) assertion that friendship networks contribute to people's self-esteem and general well-being, South African Generation Y students' level of reported self-esteem was positively related to their number of Facebook friends (Bevan-Dye, 2012:42). Similarly, their level of emotional attachment to the site was found to be positively associated with their subjective well-being (Bevan-Dye, 2016a). In terms of their level of self-disclosure on Facebook, while they perceive that they do not disclose much in the way of personal information on the site, the information they do report sharing provides contradictory evidence. The inclusion of personal information, contact details, relationship status, interests and tastes, coupled with status updates and the uploading of selfies suggests that South African Generation Y students do leave themselves vulnerable to risks such as identity theft and privacy invasion (Bevan-Dye & Akpojivi, 2015:8).

From a marketing perspective, Generation Y individuals' propensity to share information, including consumption-related information is of particular interest. In South Africa, Generation Y students' primary motives for sharing links on Facebook include it being a convenient way of communicating with and sharing useful and newsworthy information with family and friends (Bevan-Dye, 2016b). However, while they engage in moderate product information-sharing behaviour on the Facebook, they rarely use the site to give or receive consumption-related word-of-mouth communication – something that is in stark contrast to findings in other countries.

This suggests that marketers in South Africa have been slow to take advantage of social networking sites to encourage the diffusion of positive word-of-mouth communication amongst members of this cohort (Bevan-Dye, 2015:11, 12). In this regard, there is a great deal of scope for improving the way in which marketers in

South Africa harness the potential of social media (Booysen, 2015:3) to target members of the county's Generation Y cohort. Successfully accomplishing this requires a more in-depth understanding of this cohort's cyber psychology, specifically their online consumer behaviour.

CONCLUSION

The theory of generational cohorts has attracted attention from a number of different disciplines, including sociology, psychology, the arts, political science, human resource management, consumer behaviour and marketing. In the fields of marketing and consumer behaviour, the theory presents as a valuable market segmentation tool in that it reflects significant psychographic differences between identifiable age categories, thereby allowing for more finely-tuned targeting of consumers in terms of their values, attitudes and preferences.

Of the generations alive today, members of the Generation Y cohort are, arguably, the most interesting. The manner in which they have embraced digital technologies to improve the way they work, play, transact, socialise, communicate and bring about social change will, no doubt, go down in history as a memorable event in the evolution of mankind. In addition, they are emerging as the first true global generational cohort as a result of the connectivity afforded by these digital tools. The sheer size of this cohort, both internationally and in South Africa, renders it an important current and future market segment. Marketers across industries are grappling with how best to engage with this technologically astute, globalised phenomenon who are very much aware and readily taking advantage of the shift in power from the organisation to them, the consumer. Developing strategies to appeal to and engage with members of this cohort necessitates a clear understanding of their consumer psychology, attitudes, values and social dynamics – the area of research that is the focus of the ProGenY niche research group.

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