The young and the techno-savvy: South Africa's young adults revealed

Issued by Ipsos

4 Nov 2008

South Africa's young, techno-savvy adults have set the record straight in a study conducted by global market research company, Synovate.

Synovate's 2008 Young Adults Revealed survey tapped into the minds of 12,000 young people between the ages of 18 - 24, in 26 countries across the globe. In South Africa 420 techno-savvy, young adults told us what makes them tick and debunked many false perceptions about this market.

Education is a must

Whether it is the harsh reality of the cost-of-living or genuine ambition, today's young adults are not sitting around waiting for everything to be handed to them on a platter. Rather, for almost two-thirds of them, the thought that is most likely to keep them awake at night is the concern about establishing themselves in a good career.

Many acknowledge education as the key to this success - and expect to put in the hard yards with education anticipated to continue right through to the age of 26. In fact, almost three-quarters rated their education as a very important factor in their lives at this stage - only family relationships trumped education.

TOP JOBS WANTED!

- IT / Software development – 15%
- Accounting / Finance – 10%
- Engineering – 5%
- Human Resources – 5%

And what's tops internationally?

- IT
- Accounting / Finance
- Engineering

But what do today's young adults have to sacrifice in their bid to prepare for tomorrow?

No Empty Nests here

What percentage of 18 to 24 year olds would you guess still live at home?

Gone are the days when schooling signalled a time to spread your wings. Security, financial factors, and just those home comforts - today's young adults appear to be in no rush to leave the nest. Of those in the 18 to 24 year old category, almost half (47%) still live at home. Obviously this affects their spending patterns - marketers may not be able to lure them with the price of tea bags, but the electronics they so love may be just the way to spend that allowance or salary…

Me Me Me!!!

In line with their preoccupation with career and education, a large proportion of this group have decided to delay both relationships and raising a family. A substantial 82% either consider themselves single, or have a partner but are not living together. Similarly, 84% are child-free - after all, establishing a career or completing an education is a lot more complicated when raising a child.

Fun and Games... and technology

Busy lifestyles - so how many hours of television do those in this group watch on a week day?

So if mum and dad are taking care of the living arrangements, and there's no ‘other half' or children making demands on their time, how is this group spending that free time? Balancing all their hard work generally sees South Africa's young and techno-savvy turning to just that - technology! Sadly, this sees the vast majority of recreational time spent indoors - exercise is clearly not a top priority. A mere eight percent indicated playing sport or taking exercise as one of their favourite three activities. Preferred activities include watching TV, listening to music and spending time with partners, family and friends.

An interesting finding was that young adults are unlikely to feel compelled to watch a television programme when it is scheduled. Technology has seen them grow up in an era when they can manipulate their entertainment preferences - pre-recording and on-demand are unlikely to see this group tied down to a TV schedule. But the amount of television watched is still high - over half are likely to watch between three and six hours each weekday. Even more concerning is that, on the weekends, twenty percent of young adults fill much of their day with television (over seven hours daily).

Another product of the times we live in is the ‘need' for instant communication. Eighty-eight percent (88%) of the South African young adults own a mobile phone, although usage for most is restricted primarily to calls and SMS. Use of their phone as a music source is quite common as well, but photos and internet surfing are not functions that are used on a regular basis.

Escape through music?

Where do you think young adults hear new music most often?

While they may know a lot about mobile phones, there is another topic where they consider themselves to be even more knowledgeable - music. An overwhelming 94% had spent some of their leisure time listening to music in the previous week and over half felt their knowledge and interest in the subject was above average. The internet is starting to make its mark as a source of music, but over half of music bought by this group was still from shops.

In terms of players, stereos still outnumber iPods/MP3 players (69% to 54%) but the gap is narrowing and for many, it is likely that their iPods and docking stations will simply replace the stereo altogether. But evolutions of this nature take time - this group may be techno savvy but only a small proportion are early adopters. The majority prefer to wait until others test new products, thereby reducing the risk to themselves.

It is through the radio where this group are most likely to hear new music (41%) - only twenty percent cite friends or partners as their main source of new music. Given that 59% listen to a minimum of 3 hours of radio daily during the week, that is surely a powerful tool for getting messages through to that group.

Social networking

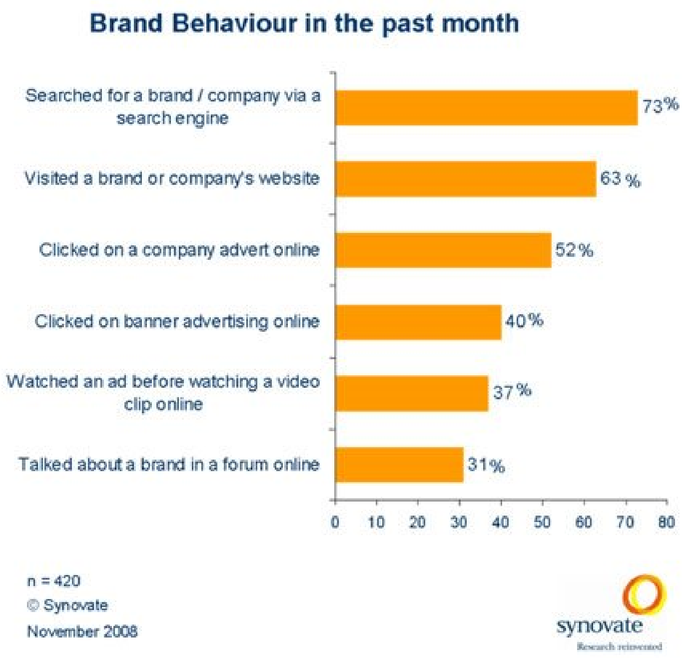
While SA may lag behind some of the more technologically advanced countries, fixed line broadband is rapidly expanding from a rare luxury into almost run-of-the-mill - 38% of this group own or have access at home. Despite this, the amount of time spent online may be a surprise to some. Sixty percent of young adults typically spend less than ten hours a week online (excluding work/study time) - the image of youth hunched over a chatroom website for hours on end may in fact be a rarity, not the norm.

Email actually still outranks social networking platforms - a whopping 90% had communicated via email in the past month. But Facebook can't be discounted either, with the platform being the most popular of the social networking sites (used by 59%) - used mainly to keep in touch with friends, as opposed to a way of meeting new people.

Brand Conscious or Brand Puppets?

It comes as no surprise that today's young adults are very brand aware. Not only are their choices and aspirations directed by labels, but they chat about brands, read about brands and write about brands online.

Probably unsurprisingly, it was clothing brands that young adults were most likely to associate with. The prize for coolest, most credible brand went to Nike. Four more clothing brands made it into the top ten brands list, as well as a motor manufacturer and a beverage. The remainder of the top 10 brands were technology brands - although it was interesting to see that the ‘best brands' included a mix of mainstream big brands and the more niche-type brands. Market dominance is clearly not the only criteria used to select brands, but nor does it eliminate the brand from the cool brands list.



Would you be able to identify the motor vehicle brand in the top ten? Peugeot, BMW or perhaps Mini? And would you rate Microsoft or Apple as one of their top brands? Not easy, and this is what makes a marketer's task so complex. Some other interesting facts about this group which affect their purchase behaviour include:

- 65% of this group have personally gone out of their way to reduce their electricity usage
- 56% are into recycling
- Only 32% feel its okay for a brand to just create great products - they have to support good causes and contribute to society to gain the support of almost two-thirds of this group
- 49% would reject toiletries and cosmetics tested on animals

- 15% have gone as far as joining a lobby group to tackle the effects of climate change - three points above the international average

Few generations of young adults can boast to face such a changed world compared to what their parents faced at that age, and there is no doubt this is having a profound impact on the way that the group behaves in the market.

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