

Young South African Consumers' Conspicuous Consumption Patterns and their Status-Brand-Shopping Behaviour

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ABSTRACT Study employed quantitative survey to test the conspicuous consumption patterns of young South Africans. Paper borrows from consumer behaviour knowledge, essential for understanding consumption patterns. Study sought to uncover consumptive motives of young South Africans and investigated what drives shopping motives and conspicuous consumption patterns. Level of education, skills, policies, resources, social feed-back, values, beliefs, knowledge and attitude factors were analysed to establish if conspicuous consumption lifestyle is the new standard of achievement among young South Africans. Results provide strong support for the existence of status-consumption exhibiting bling lifestyle. Findings suggest that young South Africans buy popular brands that give them status among their peers. Consistent with existing findings, study found negative relationship between income dispersion and conspicuous consumption. Further, findings show evidence that income distribution has precisely nothing to do with the group's motives to spend on visible goods. Implications for future studies are also provided.

JEL Classification: M30, M31, M37, M38, M39

INTRODUCTION

The purchase of goods and services by individuals, households and governments is what commonly constitutes consumption. For individual consumers, the desire to consume is not always singly driven by utility needs, but rather sometimes by self-exhibition concerns that often supersede the need to obtain goods/services at lower prices (Gahlot et al. 2016). Such self-exhibition consumption patterns that include the acquisition of status-connoting goods is prevalent among young South Africans. As a result, research studies on conspicuous consumption have gained momentum (Jones et al. 2016; Eastman and Eastman 2011: 19). Historically, conspicuous consumption has been the providence of the wealthy elite (Mazzocco et al. 2012: 523), but research has shown conspicuous consumption to include different economic groups in recent years (Mkhwanazi 2011: 97). Interest on the subject of consumption rests on its uniqueness of having a non-monetary effect in the consumption decision.

Consumption does not only serve the purpose of satisfying direct needs but to display uniqueness and status. This type of consumption was named by Veblen (1899) conspicuous

consumption. Therefore conspicuous consumption is an economic behaviour of showy-spending where consumption is used to display the position of an individual in the society (Jones et al. 2016). Consumers can purchase certain goods in order to advertise their wealth or maintain a certain social and economic prestige.

Veblen (1899) argued that wealthy individuals often consume highly conspicuous commodities in order to advertise their wealth and a social rank (Vijayakumar and Brezinova 2012: 241). Individuals care about their social status and tend to consume in order to impress their neighbors, peers and co-workers and this has important economic consequences (MacDonald 2005: 873). Certain groups of shoppers are more interested in the pleasurable outcomes of shopping than others and certain store environments produce more pleasurable emotions which may relate to different purchasing behaviours (Tulipa et al. 2014: 158).

Research on the subject of consumer purchasing behaviour is plenty and has taken various dimensions. These dimensions include decision-making processes among the youth (Anic et al. 2012: 86) and status consumption (Nwankwo et al. 2014). Furthermore, there is a considerable recognition of research on status brands

(Youngseon and Yinlong 2014: 29) and conspicuous consumption (Vijayakumar and Brezinova 2012: 241). Notwithstanding a considerable recognition of the importance of consumers' social psychological environment, status consumption among young South Africans has been neglected primarily because of economic and psychological elements of the youths and their decision making processes.

Consumption habits of the young consumers is becoming significant in the market particularly because of the growing market size, the technology-market dynamics, the virtual market growth and the effects of psychological and demographic dimensions (Rouhani and Hanzakee 2012: 1057). Previous studies have made meaningful contributions in the research arena but a gap still remains on conspicuous consumption patterns and the purchase of status bands among young South Africans. This study therefore attempted to cover this gap.

Conspicuous Consumption Patterns

Continuously changing lifestyles, the need to become unique and the desire to maintain status, drive young consumers to make purchase decisions of status brands. Conspicuous consumption for young South Africans, results from their interactions with other members of society, where different social norms arise and guide their economic and social behaviour patterns (Jones et al. 2016). One of the significant social norms, which greatly influences the economic behaviour of the youths is their concern for status. Accordingly, a concern for status causes people to imitate other people with higher income in terms of their consumption behaviour.

Conspicuous consumption is defined by Mazzocco et al. (2012: 524) as individuals' purchases of products in an attempt to display the social status and wealth. Individuals enhance their status, through open consumption which communicates status to the society and people around them. Nwankwo et al. (2014) posits that conspicuous consumption is an individual's behaviour to display wealth through extensive leisure activities. In most cases, the rationale behind conspicuous consumption is to be noticed (Carbajal et al. 2015: 3).

The need for uniqueness is an individual level feature which provides one of the bases for conspicuous consumption. In most communi-

ties with individuals that display consumption-oriented behaviour, the acquisition of status-signaling commodities such as conspicuous clothing apparel or other conspicuous consumption goods, represents a legitimate path to higher social standing due to the ability of such products to communicate information about the owners' capability and status (Carbajal et al. 2015: 3; Veblen 1899).

In particular, the idea that young consumers can be encouraged to acquire certain product items, not because of any intrinsic functional value, but because of their capacity to signal status. Frequently, individuals within society can signal societal standing through consumption patterns. Nwankwo et al. (2014: 83) purports conspicuous consumption to be influenced by individual emulation of the social group in a higher hierarchy position. In some instances, conspicuous consumption arises from a status seeking motive where people may buy expensive products because of the feeling that the components and features are profoundly superior (Gahlot et al. 2016: 257). The following features are identified as some of the motives that cause conspicuous consumption.

The Veblen Effect

Since the classical study by Veblen (1899), scholars have become interested in the behaviour of a conspicuous consumer in the modern age where there is a saturation of brands. The Veblen effect refers to a situation where the consumption of goods increases because it bears a higher price, therefore increasing the status of those consuming it (Carbajal et al. 2015: 3). The economic characteristic is that the utility derived from consumption depends on the price paid for it (Han et al. 2013: 11) and therefore common in the market of luxury goods.

The Materialist Bandwagon Effect

This is a situation where people consume a product because others are also consuming the same product (Roychowdhury 2016: 39). Consumers purchase in order to conform to the people they wish to be associated with. The assumption here is that there is knowledge about each individual's consumption pattern and consumers are therefore assumed to obtain accu-

rate information of what others are purchasing (Jones et al. 2016).

The Snob Effect

A snob effect is the opposite direction of the bandwagon materialist effect. Snob effect represents a situation where consumers cease purchasing a good owing to the fact that others are also consuming the same product (Vigneron and Johnson 1999: 56). Individuals desire to be exclusive, belong to a certain class, differ and dissociate themselves from the common herd (Gahlot et al. 2016). This status-oriented behaviour is common occurrence in the consumption of expensive goods for public display where people want to be unique (Vipulkumar et al. 2013: 131). In this case, consumers could value a product less when more consumers own it.

Shopping Motives

In pursuit of defining and understanding what shopping motives are, Roychowdhury (2016: 43) explains shopping motives as the drivers of behaviour that bring consumers to the marketplace to satisfy their internal needs. Shopping motives can be divided into two, the utilitarian motives and the hedonic motives. Utilitarian motive is sometimes termed the traditional buying decision motive. It involves searching for a quality product and reasonable price. Utilitarian motives are composed of product-oriented and external and rational motives related to the product (Youngseon and Yinlong 2014: 23). On the other hand, hedonic (modern experiential) buying motives relate to emotional needs of persons for enjoyable and interesting shopping experiences (Jones et al. 2016). Hedonic consumption may involve emotional arousal taking place while consuming (Gahlot et al. 2016: 261). Physiological and psychological feelings play pivotal roles where an individual is deeply involved in experiencing consumption. Youngseon and Yinlong (2014: 19) propose six hedonic shopping motives, namely, adventure shopping, social shopping, gratification shopping idea shopping role shopping value shopping. The level of hedonism varies across products or brands. In several buying instances, emotional desires dominate the utilitarian motives (Vipulkumar et al. 2013: 131).

Status Brands

Status brands are understood to be products or services with unique attributes and special meanings inherent to consumers (Ballantyne et al. 2006: 339). The distinction between luxury and status goods has always been confusing (Hauck and Stanforth 2007: 179). Researchers often use status goods to replace luxury goods while some believe status and prestige are synonymous. According to Prasad (2014: 11295), it is important to bear in mind that apparel consumer's behaviour influences on the choice of apparel items is influenced by several attributes. These attributes may be real or deceptive, rational or emotional, tangible or invisible (Gahlot et al. 2016). Status brands usually possess higher perceived quality ascribed to them and their consumption and may be used for making an impression on others via their symbolism (Patsiaouras and Fitchett 2012: 157).

Young Consumers

Overall, culture is known to be the value framework that guides young individuals to behave in a certain manner. Shanhuyenhanzva et al. (2016: 8) describe young consumers as independent individuals that create their own rules of engagement and social behaviour. Young consumers have their own consumption patterns, motives, feelings and styles and are usually characterized by the feeling that status brands place them in a higher social class compared to other individuals (Wang and Griskevicius 2014: 839). Their spending patterns take varying traditional, cultural and social dimensions (Hasan et al. 2012: 144). Young consumers are believed to be able to influence the purchases and decision-making of others and Moore and Bowman (2006: 537) contend that family and peers are the two most important social forces acting on young consumers. However, the changing society, alongside the pervasiveness of new media technologies in the society has greatly influenced the nature of youth across time and cultures.

In a study by Joshi and Narwal (2015), young consumers' shopping habits and consumption patterns were regarded as being influenced or oriented by others around them rather than self-oriented. This is where consumption is not meant to satisfy a want but to gain recognition among

a certain social class (Hasan et al. 2012). Opinions and purchase decisions of others possess great value for young consumers. Therefore, in line with Moore and Bowman (2006: 537), belongingness and social pressure play critical roles in predicting consumption behaviours. These young consumers seem to be looking for approval from their role models. Also, prestige-seeking tendencies of young consumers have been found to be an influential variable on social benefit.

University students are among the young South Africans constituting a significant portion of total consumers in the South African market. This youth market segment is a portion of the youth population, a distinctive area of the South African population to study. Studies by Joshi and Narwal (2015) and Shanhuyenhanzva et al. (2016) both suggest that the youth market segment is one of the most promising market segments in the future, particularly in Africa because of the growth in market size. Some authors have indicated university students as modernised, pacesetters and early-adopters, playing a very significant role in society and in their long-run brand allegiances and effects on parental purchases (Wang and Griskevicius 2014: 835). Conspicuous consumption patterns of South African young consumers and the youth market in general remains an interesting research matter but it is not well-documented.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this study, authors employed a cross-sectional quantitative research design by way of a survey questionnaire in order to examine conspicuous consumption patterns of young South Africans. In developing the survey questionnaire, benefits were drawn from studies by Moschis (1981) on social motivation for consumption and Atik and Sahin (2011: 5331) on non-Western consumption culture.

Adding to that, Bearden et al.'s (2013: 19) handbook for researchers was studied and utilized before and during the preparation of the survey instrument. In order to develop questions regarding the price-prestige relationship (the Veblen effect), the price-sensitivity scale of Lichtenstein et al. (1993: 234) was utilized jointly with the Ward and Wackman's (1971: 415) pricing scale. A quantitative approach providing fair measurement precision and statistical power was

adopted throughout the survey process. This enabled the research findings to employ statistical manipulation that produced broadly representative data.

The purpose of our study was to investigate conspicuous consumption patterns of youths, 391 respondents from universities in South Africa's Gauteng Province were interviewed and 287 questionnaires were properly completed and usable. This gave a response rate of 73.4 percent which was deemed satisfactory in this study. Clothing apparel was selected as the product, which is thought to represent normal conspicuous consumption behaviour. This selection was based on the assumption that social visibility is high when wearing status brands and was in line with a study by Atik and Sahin (2011: 5330) who discovered showy spending among low income consumers. Roth (2014: 3) posited that social visibility is critical only when the public is aware of the showy behaviour and affects the peers.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In order to profile the sample and to illustrate the data and draw meaning to it, descriptive statistics, factor analysis, ANOVA, and multiple regression analysis are employed. Reported in Table 1 are the demographic characteristics of the sample in terms of gender, race, language, respondent highest level of education and their marital status.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of respondents (N=287)

<i>Item</i>		<i>Freq- uency</i>	<i>Perce- ntage</i>
<i>Gender</i>	Male	186	64.8
	Female	101	35.2
<i>Race</i>	Black African	175	61.0
	White	59	20.6
	Coloured	27	9.4
	Indian	19	6.6
	Other	7	2.4
<i>Home</i>	Indigenous Black	228	79.4
<i>Language</i>	Afrikaans	49	17.1
	English	10	3.5
<i>Education</i>	Grade 12	65	22.6
	National diploma	103	35.9
	University degree	86	30.0
	Postgraduate degree	33	11.5
<i>Marital Status</i>	Single	172	59.9
	Single parent	76	26.6
	Living with a partner	39	13.5

Source: Authors' compilation, survey data

Results indicate that 35.2 percent of respondents are female and 64.8 percent of the respondents are male. This reflective picture of the gender of respondents is quite a credible number, as it shows an expected common gender distribution at South African universities. The majority of the respondents, 61 percent were Black respondents, the most common home language was Indigenous Black with 79.4 percent with the least respondents reporting to be speaking English as home language at 3.5 percent. The highest reached academic qualification was a National Diploma 35.9 percent and the least was a post graduate degree 11.5 percent. The youths investigated in this study were mainly university students who were mostly single, 59.9 percent. Interestingly, the gender indicators seem to have some similarity with the Turkish society, where Acikalin et al. (2009) who reported 61 percent and 39 percent for male and female respectively.

The next step was to consider direct and indirect benefit criteria and analyse them, in terms of the youth's purchasing tendencies towards clothing apparel. Clothing apparel is assumed to exhibit both functional and exhibitionist properties of tangible goods (Wang and

Griskevicius 2014); the latter is under investigation in this study.

Table 2 shows the analysis of respondents' tendencies towards consuming goods was conducted by way of factor analysis of 14 conspicuous consumption behaviour variables in line with Acikalin et al. (2009). The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy score (0.849) and the Bartlett's test of sphericity score ($\chi^2=397.2$) imply adequacy of sample size and statistical significance of the factorial analysis (Acikalin et al. 2009; Mkwanazi 2011).

The variables were subjected to factorial analysis as presented in Table 3. It was no surprise that the results are interestingly similar to Acikalin et al. (2009), results that revealed three factors, which are named as Veblen prestige (VeP), snobby status (SSt), and materialist status (MSt). All the eigenvalues for these factors are over 1 and statistically satisfactory. To test the relationships, two analyses of variance (ANOVA) tests were performed.

Results of the analysis of variance (ANOVA) as illustrated in Table 3, showed that Veblen prestige (VeP) purchase is significant at 99 percent confidence level ($F=0.05$; $p=0.0000$). Both

Table 2: Factor analysis for conspicuous consumption

Variables/items	Components		
	Veblen prestige	Snobby status	Materialist status
Buying the most expensive brand of a product makes me feel classy	0.859		
I fancy the prestige that is accompanied with a high priced product	0.843		
Buying a high priced brand makes me feel good	0.801		
I bought the most expensive one of a product with the sole purpose that people will recognize it	0.667		
I sometimes hope in my head that some of the things I buy would affect other people	0.591		
Even for a relatively inexpensive product (range), it is impressive to choose the more expensive one	0.543		
Constantly searching for a low priced good makes other people consider you stingy	0.592		
I believe other people judge my personality by the type and brand of the goods that I use		0.581	
Buying a unique product implies a silent message		0.587	
When you buy a unique brand of a product, people will recognise it		0.579	
It is genuinely true that money can buy happiness			0.691
People judge one another by what they possess			0.573
I feel recognised because of what I possess			0.573
My greatest dream in life is to fit in my social class			0.549
Eigenvalues	4.936	2.193	1.2897
% of variance explained	32.531	13.281	7.219
Extraction method: Principal component analysis Rotation method: Varimax with Kaiser normalization Convergence: Rotation converged in 5 iterations			

Source: Authors' compilation, survey data (SPSS output)

Table 3: ANOVA-Veblen prestige, snobby status and materialist status

<i>Dimensions and Social strata (based on income)</i>		<i>(n)</i>	<i>Mean score</i>	<i>Standard deviation</i>	<i>F-statistic</i>	<i>Significance</i>
VeP	Low-income	67	1.97	0.707	0.05	0.000
	Intermediate	139	2.13	0.769		
	High-income	81	3.41	0.903		
Total SSt	Low-income	287	2.19	0.827	3.61	0.003
	Intermediate	91	2.18	0.679		
	High-income	117	2.63	0.728		
Total MSt	Low-income	79	3.77	0.747	3.63	0.003
	Intermediate	287	2.66	0.756		
	High-income	107	2.89	0.789		
Total	Low-income	113	2.76	0.658		
	Intermediate	67	2.19	0.746		
	High-income	287	2.89	0.793		

Where 'n' represents number of respondents per dimension, VeP is Veblen prestige, SSt is Snobby status and MSt is Materialist status

Source: Authors' compilation, extracted from survey data

the snobby status (SSt) and the materialist status (MSt) purchases were significant at 95 percent confidence level ($F=3.61$ and 3.63 respectively; $p=0.0031$ and 0.0033). The analyses results reveal that there is a statistically significant difference among young consumers' tendencies towards Veblen prestige (VeP) in consumption. The results also show that there are statistically significant differences observable for young consumers' tendencies towards snobby status (SSt) and materialist status (MSt) in consumption. These results are consistent with the previous study on Turkish youth consumption patterns (Acikalin et al. 2009).

The mean scores reported in Table 3 show that the youth from higher-income social strata generally attach more importance to conspicuous consumption relative to those from lower-income social strata. Previous studies by Acikalin et al. (2009) and Atik and Sahin (2011), also affirm that higher social strata are more prone to exhibit conspicuous consumption behaviour. There is, however, a statistically significant difference is observed among social strata for the materialist status criterion. The significant difference between income levels in terms of this criterion seems to be a result of the significantly different scores between the higher-income and the lower-income social strata (Acikalin et al. 2009). It is interesting that young South African consumers from lower-income social strata attach importance to exhibitionist characteristics of goods compared with those from higher-in-

come social strata. This resultant self-exhibition MSt consumption pattern contrasts the findings of various researchers (Gahlot et al. 2016: 257; Nwankwo et al. 2014; Mazzocco et al. 2012: 523); although Mkhwanazi (2011: 94) and Acikalin et al. (2009) hinted that it exists among different economic groups.

Table 4: Regression analysis

	β ($R^2 = 0.20$)	<i>Significance</i>
Constant	2.121	0.0000
Veblen prestige	0.407	0.0000
Snobby status	0.008	0.8701
Materialist status	0.096	0.0049
F	41.723	0.0000

Source: Authors' compilation, Survey data (SPSS output)

In order to test if conspicuous consumption could be explained in a linear format it was important to perform a multiple regression analysis. The statistical procedures employed in this study followed the manner of Vijayakumar and Brezinova (2012) as illustrated in the Table 4. The social benefit variable obtained after the factor analysis was considered as a dependent variable, which is an indicator for conspicuous consumption. Veblen prestige, snob and materialist tendencies of the sample were taken as explanatory variables in the analysis (Acikalin et al. 2009). It is clear from the results that the three factors explained a significant percentage of the variation in dependent variable, with R^2 ,

the coefficient of variation =0.20, $F=41.723$, ($p=0.0000$). Results of a regression analysis of independent variables on the dependent variable as illustrated in table show the following betas: $\beta_1=0.407$ ($p=0.0000$) for Veblen prestige, $\beta_2=0.008$ ($p=0.8701$) for snobby status and $\beta_3=0.096$ ($p=0.0049$) for materialist status. It is observable from the results that only snobby status, as an independent variable, had no statistical significant influence on the conspicuous consumption patterns.

In testing young South Africans' tendencies towards Veblen prestige, snobby status, and materialist effect in consumption, the regression results indicated statistically significant conspicuous consumption on Veblen prestige and materialist status tendencies, at 40.7 percent and 9.0 percent respectively. Surprisingly, the results were not significant on snobby status consumption. The current results confirm that prestige and materialist effects are significant in determining the consumption patterns (Acikalin et al. 2009) and that consumer decision making of young South Africans as influenced by their underlying social values. In contrast with other previous research which identifies only the leisure class as exhibiting conspicuous consumption behaviour (Eastman and Eastman 2011: 11; Veblen 1899), this study reveals that not only the leisure class display wealth through self-exhibitory consumption patterns, but the youth from all classes do engage in this kind of consumption at different degrees. This is also in agreement with the assertions of Acikalin et al. (2009). However, it should be born in mind that other factors, not included in this study, might be influential predictors of conspicuous consumption as well (Vijayakumar and Brezinova 2012: 243).

CONCLUSION

The aim of the study was to profile young South African consumers and investigate their shopping motives for conspicuous consumption patterns of status brands. In so doing, the study sought a deeper understanding of the reasons behind young consumers' conspicuous status seeking tendencies. Considering that conspicuous consumption can only appear in a social environment and the advantages do not depend only on the function, but other attributes of goods, it was crucial to stratify their social

status in terms of income and analyse within the scope of a university set-up.

The difference among income levels in terms of dimension of social strata reflects the conspicuous consumption behaviour in all the social classes, the high-income, the middle and the low-income levels. With regard to exhibition characteristics of the good, it is observed that young South Africans from all the social structures attach significance to prestige, snobby and materialistic consumption of status brands. Based on social strata, examination of differences in prestige, status, and materialist tendencies of the surveyed sample revealed that the less-affluent individuals (for example those from townships) are also inclined to conspicuous consumption.

Despite the recognition of consumption habits of the youth in today's competitive business environment, literature provides empirical evidence suggesting conspicuous consumption patterns among the elite. This study, nevertheless, was set to depart from this traditional theory in arguing that prestige consumption can be seen in all economic classes. Attempt was made to investigate this self-exhibition spending among young South Africans. In addition, the present study tests conspicuous spending and status brand purchase behaviour in an often most neglected research context – the South African setting.

Study analysed policies, resources, social feed-back, beliefs, knowledge and attitudes and established prevalent conspicuous consumption lifestyle among young South Africans. Results show a new standard of achievement among young South Africans, as being measured by conspicuous consumption and status brand purchase behaviour. Consequently, the findings of this empirical study provided fruitful new insights and implications to both academicians and practitioners across the globe. On the academic arena, this study significantly contributes to research on consumer behavioural trends by exploring conspicuous consumption among the youth in African. Specifically, the findings provide tentative support to the proposition that the exhibition consumption patterns of the youth should be acknowledged in contemporary business.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings in the study showed some effects such as the psychological and status affil-

iation as significant among the young South African consumers. This finding can be especially important for organizations, managers and marketers in determining their production and marketing strategies when targeting the youths as potential customers in South African. They also provide invaluable insights for marketing managers in South Africa and from other parts of the world to consider seriously consumption tendencies of young African consumers when targeting youth markets.

These findings not only comprise suggestions for practitioners but also extend to providing insights for academics who are interested in consumer behaviour as useful knowledge in developing firms' strategies. Furthermore, this study is a useful contribution to the conspicuous consumption literature by providing country-specific findings.

LIMITATIONS

Whereas this study makes considerable contributions to research knowledge and practice, it is limited in some ways. The data was gathered from university students, conceivably the availability of resources would have enabled data to be gathered from across the country. Second, future studies should consider extending this research to other non-western markets for results comparison. Further research could be extended to different age groups and professions, focusing on identifiable specific commodity types.

Finally, another limitation of the current study is that this study relied on young South Africans from one cultural region, the Gauteng Province of South Africa. Given that the tendency to seek and display luxury possessions and conspicuous consumption has persisted across history and diverse human cultures, the fundamental motive to guard and retain certain status within society is likely to lead youths across cultures to guard their consumption status using a variety of tactics, including materialistic possessions. Cultural considerations will, of course, play an important role in determining consumption patterns signalling the kinds of possessions that the young consumers would want to have, such as expensive branded footwear or expensive conspicuously coloured rare clothing apparel. Future research is poised to examine the cultural dimensions of the young consumers'

conspicuous consumption patterns, and how their lavish possessions and gifts are used as status material across cultures

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