

## **Youth, Youth Culture and Socialisation in the Present Technological Era in a Rural Village of Limpopo Province, South Africa**

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**ABSTRACT** Young people are seen to be adopting and practicing peculiar norms that are contradictory to those of their societies. These unique modes of youth expression lead to the stereotyping of the young people and ultimately their marginalisation. This paper aimed at exploring how youth culture contributes to the socialisation of youth at Phiphidi village in the Limpopo Province, South Africa. 40 people participated in this quantitative descriptive survey. A purposive sampling technique was used to choose the respondents located at two popular *youth hangouts*. Data was collected through self-administered questionnaires. The findings revealed that the respondents belonged to some form of a group in their community, which were either formal or informal. The respondents' peers played a role in shaping personalities as they were kept abreast with the latest trends, be it information, music or fashion. The use of technology was primary for this group and it was used to establish and maintain relationships, to explore the latest trends and to discuss school issues to an extent. This paper implies youth culture has a role to play in the socialisation of the youth.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Youth is a stage of transition in preparation to adulthood, which then requires that the young person finds a niche in society, often through tweaking the social norms. This process of standing out from the general populace is known as youth culture, a distinct way of life that enhances the youth transition to adulthood and helps them to deal with the uncertainties of modernisation (Thomson and Holland 2004; Brakem 2013). Youth culture is a function of the cultural, economic, political, social and technological changes that occur across generations and leads to the disappearance of values and rules associated with traditional socialisation; leading to the youth being caught in an ethical and cultural vacuum (Holzhausen 2007; Toks 2015). This ethical and cultural vacuum represents the pre-figurative society, within which the socialisation process is neither hierarchical nor linear. The changes in the socialisation process mean that the older generation is no longer the repository

of knowledge as technological advancements; a forte for the youth renders their knowledge obsolete.

This situation blurs intergenerational relationships, roles and leads to confusion and distortion of norms as the youth become responsible for their own socialisation process because of their competency to adapt and interact with the technological changes (Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) 2007; Grusec and Hasting 2015). Furthermore, external forces such as capitalism, the introduction of formal institutions and urbanisation have presented the family with divergent and conflicting values, thus impinging upon the family's efficacy to socialise the youth but also redefining the developmental tasks of the youth raising the prominence of peer group socialisation, since these are people they spend most of their waking lives with, from an early age (Bucholtz 2002; Toks 2015). The above background information reveals that the traditional socialisation institutions are either under stress or have breakdown, it is there-

for the purpose of this study to establish youth cultures as an alternative to the socialisation process.

### Overview of Youth Culture

“Youth culture is a continuum of youth centered, multi- media forms and ideas that cut across sound, sartorial, visual and textual cultures to reveal complex and shifting identities” (Austin 2013; Toks 2015). It describes the common and overlapping dimensions of personal and collective identity formation that is different from the social institutions within the environment. Thus youth culture prescribes values, rules and morals for its affiliates, as it is a departure from what the adults believe in and practise (Selikon et al. 2002; Bucholtz 2002). As previously highlighted, youth culture is a product of social change and marketers have joined in the bandwagon by capitalising on it. Globally, especially in stable economies marketers’ perceive the youth as autonomous consumers whose consumption habits are the same. In order to concretise these consumption patterns marketers use the media to drive youth consumption patterns and highlight their exclusive category. This exclusivity is reflected in the use of concepts such as “teenagers”, “kid adults” and “middle youth” to refer to youth (DESA 2007).

In South Africa, historic-political factors related to colonialism, apartheid and democracy have been instrumental in shaping youth culture (Selikon et al. 2002). In 1948, the National Party (NP), a political party whose intent was to subjugate the African masses came to power and created the necessary conditions for youth cultures to be prominent (Christie and Collins 1982; Grusec and Hasting 2015). This government disrupted and dislocated family life through urbanisation and migrant labour, leading to the destruction of the extended family system, which deprived the youth of a sense of belonging and identity, thus peers, the media and entertainment became instrumental in the emergence of new youth identities. Without the requisite support of their families, the youth felt alienated and isolated particularly because forced removals put them and their families in unfamiliar environments. Therefore, these youth joined groups, as these offered them the opportunities to prepare for adulthood in terms of exploring their self-expression, sexuality and belonging (Glaser 1998;

Austin 2013). Moreover, the massification of education, which put together large numbers of young people in the same space with minimal adult supervision, became an ideal setting for the development of youth identity and culture as whatever activities they conduct are scheduled and performed in a group (Long 2007; Clydesdale 2008).

### METHODOLOGY

The researchers employed a quantitative descriptive research approach, in order to describe how youth culture at Phiphidi village serves as an agent of socialisation in the present digital era. This chosen design was best suited for the paper because it adequately addressed the issues under investigation. The population of the paper was female and male youth between the ages of 20 and 37, found at the popular *youth hangouts* in the village. The reason for opting for these social spaces is that youth culture is highly associated with leisure time, wherein youth are not confined to adult supervision and influence (Holzhausen 2007). A purposive sampling technique was used to select 40 participants in total, with each study site recording 20 respondents (Welman and Kruger 2001). The instrument was designed to solicit information pertaining to socio-demographic characteristics (age, gender, marital status, educational level etc), cultural and recreational social networks etc. Microsoft Excel was used to analyze the data. Data were also summarized using descriptive statistics and presented in percentages and frequency tables. Participation in this paper was voluntary and all participants were requested to give informed consent before the study was conducted. Finally, all participants were assured of confidentiality of their responses and anonymity of their identities.

### RESULTS

Table 1 indicates that forty participants took part in the study, with females accounting for 70 percent and males 30 percent. These participants were between 20 and 37 years, with those between 20 and 25 in the majority, 87.5 percent, 75 percent were enrolled for tertiary education while the remainder had a secondary school qualification; of these respondents, 95 percent were single. In terms of religious affiliation, whilst

an overwhelming majority (85%) were Christians, 10percent reported that they practice African traditionalists.

**Table 1: Demographics**

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Category</i>	<i>N (%)</i>
<i>Sex</i>	Male	12 (30)
	Female	28 (70)
	Total	40 (100)
<i>Age</i>	20 – 25	35 (87.50)
	26 – 31	4 (10)
	32 – 37	1 (2.5)
	Total	40 (100)
<i>Education Level</i>	Tertiary	30 (75)
	Secondary	10 (25)
	Total	40 (100)
<i>Marital Status</i>	Single	38 (95)
	Married	2 (5)
	Total	40 (100)
<i>Religious Affiliation</i>	Christianity	34 (85)
	African tradition	4 (10)
	Muslim	1 (2.5)
	Islam	1 (2.5)
Total	40(100)	

Table 2 indicates the summarized the various sub-cultures youth affiliated. The study found that youth at Phiphidi village belong to various sub-cultures, namely church groups (37.5%), political parties (37.5%), gangs (17.5%) and youth club (7.5%).

**Table 2: Youth subcultures**

<i>Youth subcultures</i>	<i>Number (n)</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
Church	15	37.5
Political party	15	37.5
Gang	7	17.5
Youth club	3	7.5
Total	40	100

The drivers of youth culture are depicted in Table 3. Greater proportion (18.9%) of the re-

**Table 3: Drivers of youth culture**

<i>Drivers of youth culture</i>	<i>Number (n)</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
Fashion	7	18.9
Language	7	18.9
Sport	7	18.9
Youth clubs	6	16.2
Idling ‘park- shop’	4	10.8
Music	3	8.1
Body art	3	8.1
Total	37	100

spondents indicated fashion, language and sports as the drivers of youth culture; 16.2 percent , 10.8 percent and 8.1 percent identified youth clubs, idling and music respectively as their drivers.

**Table 4: Agents of youth culture**

<i>Agents of youth culture</i>	<i>Number (n)</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
Friends	10	25
Television (T.V)	8	20
Radio	7	17.5
Newspaper	6	15
School	5	12.5
Magazine	4	10
Total	40	100

The factors that influence youth culture are presented in Table 4. Twenty-five percent of the respondents reported being influenced by friends, 20% by television and 17.5% by radio. The least influence was exerted by schools (12.5%).

**Table 5: Social network subscription**

<i>Social networks</i>	<i>Number (n)</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
MXit	15	37.5
My Space	10	25
Skype	6	7.5
Facebook	5	12.5
Pulse	3	7.5
Mig33	1	2.5
Total	40	100

Table 5 indicates that all the respondents reported having various social network accounts. This ranged from the highest MXit (37.5%), MySpace (25%), Facebook (12.5%) to the least Mig33 (2.5%) in subscription.

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Total	40	100

Regularity of on-line chats and the subject matter are depicted in Table 6. Of the respondents who had online friends, most (42.5%) chatted with them on daily basis followed by, three times per week (20%). Subject matter mostly revolves around fashion (32.4%), followed by relationships (21.6%) and gossip (18.9%).

**Table 6: On line friendships and regularity of chats**

	Number (n)	Percentage (%)
<i>Social Networks</i>		
Daily	17	42.5
Once a week	5	12.5
Twice a week	5	12.5
Three times a week	8	20
None	5	12.5
Total	40	100
<i>Subject Matter of Chats</i>		
Fashion	12	32.4
Relationships	8	21.6
Latest gossip	7	18.9
Music	6	16.2
School	4	10.8
Total	37	100

Regarding the perceived disadvantages of youth culture Table 7 indicates that, 32.5 percent reported that it leads to deviant behavior followed by non-constructive leisure time use (22.5%) and peer pressure (20%).

**Table 7: Disadvantages of youth culture**

Disadvantages of youth culture	Number (n)	Percentage (%)
Deviant behavior	13	32.5
Death, terminal disease	7	17.5
Non-constructive leisure time use <sup>9</sup>	9	22.5
Peer pressure	8	20
Absconding (home/ school)	3	7.5
Total	40	100

Table 8 illustrates the benefits of youth culture as reported by the respondents. Whilst 35

**Table 8: Benefits of youth culture**

Benefits of youth culture	Number (n)	Percentage (%)
Education, talent development	14	35
Self-confidence, leadership	11	27.5
Belonging, diversity learning	9	22.5
Social skills	6	15
Total	40	100

percent of the respondents indicated that education and talent development was a benefit that could emanate from youth culture, 27.5 percent reported that it could yield self-confidence and leadership. Among the benefits social skill (15%) was the least cited.

## DISCUSSION

Youth culture is a means of expression and as such the young people used language, fashion and sports to express and identify themselves. This not only helps young people to sharpen their communication skills but it also promotes self-identity, establishes relations with others and it is a base for collective social activity (Bobbermein et al. 2005; Brakem 2013). The study found that youth at Phiphidi village belong to various sub-cultures, namely church groups (37.5%), political parties (37.5%), gangs (17.5%) and youth club (7.5%). With majority of the sub-cultures being on the positive side, this implies that youth were contributing positively to their communities, through participation in the formation they are part of. Consequently, the social identity theory posits that people belonging to a particular group will adhere to its norms and their behaviour will be shaped accordingly (Richter et al. 2006; Toks 2015). Therefore it cannot be denied that these youth are influenced positively by their peers and the institutions they belong to.

About one in five (18.9%) respondents mentioned fashion, language, and sports as the main drivers of youth culture. It is important to note that these drivers serve to distinguish and uplift an individual's social status while at the same time help keep the youth off the streets, idling. Ironically in this study, music and body art were not so popular among the participants. This might be due to the fact that the respondents did not see the importance of music as a vehicle for driving youth culture. Language is key in any culture. According to Bobbermein et al. (2005), youth cultures often have new forms of language that distinguish them from the rest of society and adults in particular. This not only helps young people to sharpen their communication skills but it also promotes self-identity, establishes relations with others and it is a base for collective social activity. This unique language is often a conglomeration of various elements, including those from marginal argots.

Although youth cultures are different, the expressions that the youth use have the potential to become a common lingua franca, thus making young people producers of not only their own culture. Apart from language, fashion is an essential driver of youth culture as it was revealed in the study. Fashion helps young people to be “cool”, look good and most importantly to attract the opposite sex (Holzhausen 2007; Toks 2015). Clothes, hairstyles and accessories are group-specific, thus cementing identity, a sense of belonging and to some extent self-esteem especially when such clothes are branded as these represents something distinct; style, social status, state of being, lifestyle and being in touch (Grusec and Hasting 2015). It cannot be denied that music is a form of expression that is an integral part of youth culture. Music affords the youth to express their emotions be they negative or positive, in a socially acceptable manner. Music provides the youth with an opportunity to express their individuality, mistrust for mainstream authority and an outlet for emotions (Evans 2010).

It cannot be denied that for youth cultures to take root there needs to be modalities to drive such, as such the media was the main avenue which helped the youth to be current. A study conducted at a rural area in the Mpumalanga province of South African revealed that youth spend on average two to three hours on passive activities such as watching television (Micklefield et al. 2014). This is in addition to consulting their friends and siblings, as advisors on the current trends. Young people have greater access to media, interactivity and diversity, though at different levels. It must be noted that the youth subject ICT content to interpretative schema or its quality before adopting it (DESA 2007). Therefore this has potential to shape their identity and self-worth. However in order for these to take root, marketers use celebrities to depict the latest trends in order to influence the youth to follow these. But most importantly, the consumer products such as clothing brands, cars and alcohol that the celebrities market, reflect youth as a stage to be (Capros et al. 2008).

In this study one in four (25%) of the respondents reported being influenced by friends, 20 percent by television and 17.5 percent by radio. The least influence was exerted by schools (12.5%). Apart from the mainstream media; the youth rely on social networks to exchange ideas

and to learn what is happening in their world. It is therefore not surprising that the majority of these young people had social network accounts. MXit was the most popular as this application does not require a sophisticated cellphone to use it and it is also cheap and since this study was done in a rural area, MXit popularity is apparent. The popularity of MXit might be attributed to the cost associated with chatting, as it is less than 2 cents which is a lot cheaper than conventional short messages (Chigona et al. 2009). Another reason associated with the desirability of MXit is that it is instant as messages are responded to immediately and it can be used anywhere, as it is discreet, unlike voice calls (Mizuko 2001). Unlike other applications which not only require a WAP (Wireless Application Protocol) enabled phone but also access to data bundles, which are still expensive to the majority of the population, despite the reduced prices. With access to MXit, the youth are able to communicate with their friends and form new relationships within their private spaces, out of the prying eyes of especially their parents. Therefore, these young people were in constant contact with their friends as the majority communicated at least on a weekly basis with their friends. A study conducted by Reid and Reid (2004) indicated that social networks are not only a platform for maintaining relationships, but for meeting other young people and honing in on social skills. Social interaction technologies create and maintain relationships, which are more likely to be long lasting (Chigona et al. 2009; Lemish and Cohen 2005). Most importantly, since communication over the social networks is text based, it was found that the majority of the texters tended to edit or rewrite their text, thus ensuring self-preservation, although they regarded their text messages to elicit surprise on the part of their family members should they read their texts (Reid and Reid 2004). Social networks are beneficial for the youth with low self-esteem as they are provided with a buffer against rejection and social awkwardness that is prevalent in face to face interaction.

The study found that about a third of the participants' content of their conversation mostly revolves around fashion followed by relationships (21.6%) and gossip (18.9%). Although these subject matters may seem trivial, to the youth they are crucial as they promote relevance, currency and promote belonging within their

environment. The social networking environment offers young people a pool of resources within, which they can tap into particularly when needing advice on pertinent life issues. Therefore, it can be concluded that decisions made are well thought out as they have been solicited from diverse sources. The study further revealed that issues about the school were not prominent; this can be attributed to the fact that this media is perceived as a tool for establishing and maintaining relations. However it might be assumed that these are subsumed in the youth's daily chats as the school is the physical environment within which they meet and concretise their relations. Supporting the above assertion is that only 18 percent of the adult population in America had downloaded an e- book reader (Galland 2003).

Thirty-five percent of the respondents in this study indicated that education and talent development was a benefit that could emanate from youth culture. Other benefits reported were self-confidence and leadership. Although youth cultures are necessary for youth transition to adulthood, some young people tend to be attracted to its negative traits, particularly when such are conducted in cyber-space. The negativity associated with youth culture is that the information that the youth access is often uncensored thus increasing risks that they are exposed to (Capros et al. 2008). In addition social networks offer them an array of opportunities for interaction and self-improvement.

### CONCLUSION

The study has revealed that youth culture despite its associated negativities play an important role in the globalised, highly technological and consumer-driven society. First of all, it offers youth an opportunity not only of independence and a sense of self; attributes associated with maturity, but also inculcates a feeling of belonging, appreciation of diversity, creativity and innovation. Furthermore, the youth who interact with their peers, not only gain social skills but are better informed since they have multiple access to information.

Secondly, youth cultures are desirable as they not only afford youth opportunities to experience freedom without the authority and control of adults but offer the socially inept a safe place to interact with others. Within this space

the youth are able to develop, assume and question roles, thus fostering an assumption of adult roles. Despite the generally held belief that youth cultures are negative, this is rather unfounded as culture is dynamic and each and every generation will be different. These differences are due to socio-political changes that are driven by globalisation.

Thirdly, the study revealed that youth culture is a lifestyle choice and not a descriptor for what young people do. This illustrates that youth is a capitalistic conception used by marketers to define them.

Lastly, youth culture just like mainstream culture has both benefits and costs, which if not moderated can have dire consequences for the youth. Therefore, in order to empower youth, they ought to be informed about both aspects in order to promote self-determination.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of the above, the following recommendations are made:

- ♦ There needs to be concerted efforts on the part of those in authority to understand that youth culture cannot be purely condemned as purely negative, since it represents a move away from the norm. By so doing the youth would not be too detached and isolated from society as they would see that they are accepted and allowed to carve a niche for themselves. Most importantly, this will encourage openness on the part of the youth, who often than not need guidance from the adults.
- ♦ In addition, since the youth are engrossed in the world of social media, this presents an opportunity for frank discussions about their issues, as this platform affords them the necessary anonymity and privacy. Therefore, these are sites for education, mentorship and influences, which if properly harnessed will capitalise on the youth strengths.

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