

SA youth lifestyle and culture

 By [Bradley Maseko](#)

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From personal brand differentiation, spending and media behaviour, to the trend of visual domination, 2015 will be an impactful year for the youth of South Africa.

The following is a list of 10 youth trends identified from the [2015 Youth Psyche Report](#) by Branded Youth conducted in December and early-January 2015 in a bid to understand youth lifestyle and culture in South Africa. These trends relate to young people aged 18 - 34: LSM 7+: both urban and township youth:

1. Personal brand differentiation

Young people have a need to constantly set themselves apart. This is resulting in the increased number of youth who now seek to define themselves through either their lifestyle or dress sense. Now more than ever, the youth have become more image-conscious and therefore more attentive and selective to information being shared over their social media platforms, as this contributes immensely to their personal brand building.

Note: Social media platforms are no longer being used to post random information or reposts from peers, but rather specially selected information that contributes to the overall image of the individual. 2015 will see an amplified shift from using social media as a platform to connect and share with peers and family, to a platform to market personal brands and increase personal brand equity.

2. Fear of being irrelevant (FOBI)

More than just the fear of missing out, there now exists a greater fear within the youth culture and that is the fear of being irrelevant. With so much information readily available everywhere, young people often ask inappropriate information sources for updates and are likely to use this inaccurate information to contribute to the discussions both online and offline.

Note: In a bid to be relevant, young people often enter discussions or comment on topics without fully understanding the merits of the subjects. This trend will continue in 2015, and as a result there will be a notable increase of unreliable information being shared through either word of mouth or over social networking platforms. It will therefore be important for individuals and brands to verify information before sharing.

3. Spending behaviour

With personal social media accounts being more effective than paid advertising, social media has played a huge role in how the youth spend and save. A lot of youth have been exposed by their peers to different types of holiday resorts, both local and abroad, as well as different types of restaurants and hotspots. There is an increased need to want to set themselves apart by doing stuff that most of their peers are not doing. This has led to young people trying out new things, but also bearing in mind those good experiences are costly, which has contributed to the need to save.

Note: There's the occasional reckless spending that is associated with young people, but more young people tend to want to save up so as to afford similar experiences as their peers. The spending behaviour in 2015 will be influenced by the experiences being shared on social media and how these spark the need for other young people to want to do the same, but doing the same entails saving and spending responsibly. In 2015, spending by youth will shift to focus on increasing their social currency.

4. Socio-economic interest

This all started with a larger number of (first time) youth voters in the 2014 elections, in a country with high illiteracy and unemployment levels, especially in the youth market. Young people have come to the realisation that whatever is discussed by those they voted into power has a direct impact on their future. They have now chosen to engage in both online and offline discussions about socio-economic issues they otherwise would have previously chosen to ignore.

Note: There has been a major change in the political scene, with parliament, for example, now becoming an interesting topic for young people, the youth are now more interested in how parliament is run, what is discussed and how these proceedings affect the country and ultimately their future. 2015 will see an increase in young people watching shows that deal with current affairs as well as an increased interest in parliamentary affairs.

5. Media habits

The rise of social media was watched cautiously by those in traditional media with great fears of an adverse effect; however, this has not been the case. Most shows have over the past two years had their highest ratings ever and most of this has been attributed to the social media hype around them. Most young people are now tuning in to watch what their peers are watching and talking about on their social media platforms.

Note: In 2015 there is going to be a continued rise in the number of people driven to tune into traditional media platforms such as radio and television, based on what's trending or being discussed on social media. On the local scene, *Muvhango* is a great example of a show that has benefited greatly from the social media pull. After the demise of *Generations*, most young people admitted to crossing over to *Muvhango* after noticing it trending continuously on social media, as they were eager to be part of the discussion and hence started to actively watch it.

6. Visual domination

The best way to explain the visual vs written content war is to simplify it. Young people don't like to read unnecessarily, as written content is often seen as time consuming. The beauty of platforms such as Instagram, which has now become the favourite with most young people is that it allows them to showcase themselves, what they like doing, who they do it with and where they do it. It allows the youth to showcase their lifestyle in the highly competitive world where everyone is competing with the next person.

Note: Instagram now has 300 million monthly users, picking up 100 million since March 2014. The photo- and video-sharing app has surpassed Twitter's official user count of 284 million. The same manner in which Twitter became more active than Facebook amongst the youth market, is the manner in which Instagram is becoming more active than Twitter. 2015 will see a further rise in visual content being shared amongst the youth and this will be aided by the fact that Facebook is also shifting to video due to increased demand.

7. E-commerce

Young South Africans are now becoming comfortable with transacting online, previously they chose to buy goods and make payments in person. The main issue being that of security; there has always been the issue with putting credit card information and personal information online that most young people have reservations about given the level of online crime in the country. However, the different payment systems and banks have been working to ensure people of the safety of transacting online and are now gaining trust with the youth market.

Note: With TFG bringing some of its brands such as Sportscene online, following the success Mr Price has had in this arena and coupled with international brands such as H&M choosing to enter the South African market online, e-commerce is certainly growing in South Africa. 2015 will also see Kalahari.com being folded into Takealot.com to create a massive one stop online experience for consumers. Notably, South African internet usage grew to at least 48.9% of SA's 50 million population having internet in 2013. A figure which without doubt increased in 2014 and will be a contributing factor to e-commerce flourishing in 2015, especially amongst the youth market.

8. Retail

The influx of international clothing retailers has meant that young people now have a wide variety to choose from. More than just that, it has meant that they change their spending behaviour with regards to clothing, since most retailers that offer accounts are local retailers and the international retailers have cash options only. The quality of the international retailers is also considered by most youth to be a higher grade yet almost evenly priced with local retailers.

Note: With Edgars bringing in a variety of top international brands in-house, and international brands such as Cotton On, SuperDry and Zara providing the quality and style that the young people have always wanted, young people now have more options of choosing exactly what they want according to their pockets. 2015 will see a continued increase in the support for international brands by the youth market. As long as the pricing strategy remains similar to that of local retailers young people will continue to grow their support for international brands.

9. Reality TV

The idea of the youth knowing that they have some influence on the results of a show, or perhaps knowing that their comments and words of encouragement can motivate the participants, has led to a large number of young people taking great interest in reality shows. This interest is not only limited to watching but also voting and taking to social media to encourage their peers to do the same.

Note: There was a lot of support for the underdogs in 2014 reality shows, and the fact that most of them excelled has kept most young people eagerly waiting for the 2015 instalments of the different reality shows. From the tuck shop owner who won *Big Brother South Africa* and the former street kid who won *Idols SA*, to the domestic worker who was the runner up in *Masterchef SA*. There is a greater need by young people to support the underdog in reality shows as their success also inspires them. Reality shows like *Idols SA* and *Big Brother* are thus set to have more youth viewers and voters for 2015.

10. Music

South Africa is rich in culture, taking not only from the local culture but from all the other African nationalities that have relocated to the country; however until recently the youth have been somewhat conservative with regards to their uptake of music from other nations instead choosing the 'Proudly South African' route and mostly supporting local talent.

Note: While it's beneficial for local artists to spread their wings and venture into the huge West African market, it's also encouraging when the collaborations are well accepted by the youth locally. 2015 will see more young people opening up to West African music, and subsequently more collaborations between South African and West African artists. With top South African musicians such as Mafikizolo and Cassper Nyovest having successfully worked with top West African artists such as Davido and Ice Prince, this has led to more collaborations of this kind being expected by the youth for 2015.

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