Free-Time Management amongst Generation Y Students

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Abstract

The increased amount and importance of free time is widely acknowledged in the literature, yet there appears to be a lack of research into free-time management. This article reports on a study undertaken to determine how Generation Y students manage the use of their free time. In order to address this shortfall in the literature, an empirical study, based on previous theoretical discussions regarding free-time management, was conducted to analyse how free time is managed, by the students. The Generation Y cohort, defined as individuals born between 1986 and 2005, accounted for 38 percent of the South African population in 2013. A quantitative research approach was employed, whereby a structured, self-administered questionnaire was used to gather data on the perceptions towards free-time management from a sample of 400 Generation Y students across three South African public registered higher education institutions' campuses situated in the Gauteng province, South Africa. Based on an empirical investigation of the perceptions of Generation Y students, the findings of the study provide important insights into this cohort's management of free time. The findings of this study reveal that students do engage in free-time management. Universities and educators can play an important role in providing leisure education by supporting and encouraging students to better plan and manage the use of their free time.

Keywords: Time management, free-time management, Generation Y students, South Africa

1. Introduction

The concept of time has significant importance in human life, especially in modern society where, although people have free time, they still often feel hurried and rushed (Wang & Kao, 2006). As such, individuals constantly have to evaluate how they spend their free time away from work and personal responsibilities (Pepe & Bozkurt, 2010). Free time, also known as leisure time, is highly valued (Zarotis, Katsagolis & Mitrotasios, 2007) and is becoming increasingly more important in people's lives, due to greater longevity and shorter working hours as a result of the changed values in modern nations. Therefore, the way in which free time is spent has become a critical issue in modern society. Although it is preferable for people to use their free time in a healthy and constructive manner, often a lack of planning results in free time being wasted or used to engage in negative behaviour (Wang & Kao, 2006).

Whilst there are many studies that have been conducted on the importance and benefits of time management (Britton & Tesser, 1991; MacCann, Fogarty & Roberts, 2012; Nadinloyi, Hajloo, Garamaleki & Sadeghi, 2013), it is only in recent years that this interest in time management has expanded to include the concept of free-time management. Free-time management studies include the free time motivation (Baldwin & Caldwell, 2003; Caldwell, Baldwin, Walls & Smith, 2004), the time pressure between discretionary and free time (Goodin, Rice, Bittman & Saunders, 2005), the factors affecting free-time behaviour (Zarotis et al., 2007), the relationship between free-time management and quality of life (Wang & Kao, 2006) and the relationship between free-time management and boredom (Wang, Wu, Wu & Huan, 2012). In South Africa, studies of free-time use and experiences were conducted by Møller (1992), Kaufman, Clark, Manzini and May (2002), and Palen, Caldwell, Smith, Gileeson and Patrick (2011) - all of which focused on the South African youth. Despite the contributions made by these studies in explaining free-time use amongst the South Africans youth, none of these studies examined the management of free time.

In South Africa, today's youth, known as the Generation Y cohort, make up a significant portion of the population (Statistics South Africa, 2013). Those Generation Y members pursuing a tertiary qualification are of particular importance

to the future of the county given that graduates have a higher future earning potential, are more likely to hold future management positions and tend to have a higher social standing within society, which often results in them acting as role models to their peers (Bevan-Dye, 2012). Their ability to plan and manage their free time effectively may have important implications to their own well-being, as well as to the future well-being of society.

This study sought to determine the extent to which South African Generation Y students plan and manage their free time.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Free time and free-time management

Free time is the discretionary time remaining after meeting work responsibilities, household duties and other necessary daily activities (Goodin et al., 2005). During this free time, a person has a choice as to how they spend their time, whether it be to rest, engage in social interactions, engage in leisure pursuits or simply indulge in self-reflection (Chatzitheochari & Arber, 2012). Free time most often involves the participation in some activity, either alone or with someone at some location (Säfvenbom & Samdahl, 1998). Owing to free time providing opportunity for pleasure, happiness and selfexpression, how an individual utilises this time affects their lives as a whole (Wang & Kao, 2006).

The literature identifies several benefits associated with engaging in leisure pursuits. Some of the widely acknowledged benefits include that it fosters individual development, particularly amongst the youth, it encourages community involvement, allows people to experiment with different roles in social situations, encourages the development of interests and provides people with the opportunity to socialise with others (Säfvenborn & Samdahl, 1998; Mahoney & Stattin, 2000; Wang & Kao, 2006). Larsen, McGraw and Cacioppo (2001) state that leisure activities enhance individual growth and development and represent an important part of life, particularly for the youth. Caldwell et al. (2004) opine that engaging in leisure activities facilitates the development of self-identity amongst the youth in that it provides a safe and relaxed environment for the type of learning that influences life decisions, thereby contributing to the successful transition into adulthood. Furthermore, leisure pursuits are thought to lead to greater life satisfaction and well-being (Säfvenbom & Samdahl, 1998; Wang & Kao, 2006). Such pursuits are also associated with greater family well-being, as well as improved health in that they aid in reducing stress through social support and the development of coping mechanisms (Iso-Ahola & Mannell, 2004; Aaker, Rudd & Mogilner, 2011). Dworkin, Larson and Hansen (2003) add that engaging in leisure activities provides opportunities for the development of friendships and relationships, which enhances a young person's development because it helps build his/her social capital. Moreover, the people encountered during leisure activities may serve as role models for success and good citizenship (Hansen, Larson & Dworkin, 2003).

Of course, in the context of free time, there is also the risk that participation in certain leisure activities may lead to antisocial and risky behaviours, such as criminality, substance abuse, delinquency (Mohoney, 2000; Palen et al., 2011), binge eating (Vanderlinden, Grave, Vandereycken & Noorduin, 2001) and lower levels of optimism and self-esteem, which are detrimental to development and have both immediate and future implications (Hunter & Csikszentmihalyi, 2003). Smith and Caldwell (1989) indicate that, typically, youth who experience anxiety in their free time are more likely to engage in such risky behaviour. According to Palen et al. (2011), whilst the activities individuals engage in during their free time may potentially positively influence their development and health, a failure to manage free time effectively may have negative consequences stemming from feelings of boredom, which may result in social problems and various forms of delinguency. This suggests that the effective planning and management of free time is essential to reaping the benefits associated with positive leisure pursuits and avoiding the risks associated with feelings of boredom that may be a consequence of unstructured free time. Despite the benefits of planning and managing free time, Wang et al. (2012) indicate that many people still fail to recognise the importance of using their free time in positive ways.

Time management affects every aspect of an individual's life, including their work, family, social and private life (Venter, 2006). Managing time effectively necessitates setting goals and priorities, planning, and using techniques to save time (Nadinloyi et al., 2013). Time management refers to performing certain goal-directed activities in order to achieve an effective use of time in order to facilitate productivity and alleviate stress (Claessens, Van Eerde, Rutte & Roe, 2007). Time management is a form of self-management, and necessitates making the right decisions at the right time in order to achieve success. More time cannot be created; therefore, one's choices and approach to activities must be managed instead (Erdem & Gözel, 2013).

The concept of free-time management was first developed by Wang and Kao (2006), who proposed that effective free-time management comprises the five factors of goal setting and evaluating, technique, values, scheduling and immediate response. Goal setting and evaluating refer to an individual's ability to plan and prioritise goals and tasks to be

completed during free time. Technique refers to the ability to organise free time and to collect relevant information prior to free time. Values indicate the perception of free time as being valuable and happy. Scheduling and immediate response refers to an individual's ability to reschedule free time should they not be able to implement their original plan.

2.2 Generation Y

According to Kupperschmidt (2000), a generational cohort is an identifiable group that not only shares birth years but also significant life events that influence perceptions attitudes and behaviour. As a result of these shared experiences, generational cohorts develop mutual world-views, values, attitudes and perceptions, referred to as generational characteristics, which influence their needs and wants.

The Generation Y cohort includes those individuals born between 1986 and 2005 (Markert, 2004), which in 2014, puts them at 10 to 29 years of age. Members of this cohort are the most recent demographic group to have entered higher education and the world of work (Shaw & Fairhurst, 2008). In 2013, the South African population were estimated at 52 981 991, of which an approximated 38 percent formed part of the Generation Y cohort (Statistics South Africa, 2013). Various researchers agree that Generation Y members are significantly different from other generations (Crumpacker & Crumpacker, 2007; Shaw & Fairhurst, 2008; Cogin, 2012; Westerman & Yamamura, 2007). Compared to other generations, Generation Y members have a low tolerance for boredom, dislike menial and repetitive work, are technologically literate (Eisner, 2005), technology dependant, and view multitasking as the norm (Crumpacker & Crumpacker, 2007). Although many members of this cohort are well educated, they lack communication and problem-solving skills (Crumpacker & Crumpacker, 2007). These factors in combination suggest that Generation Y members entering the higher education environment require structure both in the classroom and outside (Shaw & Fairhurst, 2008).

In comparison to working people who have limited free time (Zarotis et al., 2007), tertiary students typically have a great deal of free time available, as well as their newly found autonomy to decide what to do during their free time (Wang et al., 2012). Schiano, Elliott and Bellotti (2007) add that Generation Y members have a great deal more leisure opportunities from which to choose than any previous generation. Caldwell et al. (2004) opine that students experience an increased degree of freedom, and that the time they spend at higher education institutions (HEIs) is often associated with role and identity experimentation, and self-managed free time leisure pursuits. Generally, this is the first time in their lives that they are able to choose how to spend their free time without parental interference and, as such, provides a good indication of their free-time management capabilities.

3. Methodology

This study adopted a quantitative approach to determine the extent to which Generation Y students plan and manage their free time.

3.1 Sample

For the purpose of this study, the target population was defined as full-time Generation Y students, aged between 18-24 years, enrolled at South African registered public HEIs. The sampling frame selected comprised a list of the 25 registered South African public HEIs, as listed by Higher Education in South Africa (HESA, 2013). From this sampling frame, judgement sampling was applied to narrow the sampling frame to three HEI campuses located in the Gauteng province of South Africa – one from a traditional university, one from a comprehensive university and one from a university of technology. The reasons for selecting the Gauteng province included its geographical location and the fact that the majority of students enrolled in public higher education are enrolled in this province (DOE, 2009). A non-probability convenience sample of 400 full-time undergraduate students was used in this study.

3.2 Measurement instrument and data collection procedures

A self-administered questionnaire was used to collect the required data. The questionnaire included a scale developed by Wang and Kao (2006) that was designed to measure Generation Y students' perceived free-time management. The scale included 17 items divided into the four constructs, namely *goal setting and evaluating* (6 items), *values* (3 items), *immediate response* (3 items) and *technique* (5 items). Responses were measured on a six-point Likert scale, where 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = slightly disagree, 4 = slightly agree, 5 = agree and 6 = strongly agree. Questions pertaining to the participants' demographical information were included. A cover letter that outlined the purpose of the

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study and provided assurance of the confidentiality of the data provided, including the name of the HEI where the participant was registered was attached to the questionnaire.

In order to establish the reliability the questionnaire, it was piloted on a convenience sample of 40 Generation Y students located on a campus not included in the final study. The scale returned a Cronbach Alpha value of 0.805, which exceeds the suggested Cronbach alpha level of 0.600 (Malhotra, 2010). The inter-item correlation value for the entire scale was 0.195. The four constructs inter-item correlation values ranged between 0.164 and 0.327, which is within the recommended range of 0.15 to 0.50 (Clark & Watson, 1995). The questionnaire was then administered to the identified sample.

Lecturers at each of the three HEIs were contacted and asked if they would allow the questionnaire to be distributed to their students. Once permission was gained, the questionnaire was distributed to those students during lectures. The students were informed that participation was strictly on a voluntary basis.

4. Results

4.1 Sample characteristics

Of the 400 questionnaires distributed, 326 questionnaires were returned completed, which translates into a response rate of 82 percent. The majority of the participants indicated being 19 years of age, followed by those who indicated being 20 years of age and 21 years of age. Concerning the province of origin, the sample included participants from eight of the country's nine provinces, with the majority indicated being from the Gauteng province, followed by those indicated that they were from the Free State and Limpopo provinces. The sample included a greater number of female than male participants. The demographic information of the sample's participants is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Sample description

Age	Percent n (%)	Gender	Percent n (%)	Province of origin	Percent n (%)	Institution	Percent n (%)
18	38 (12)	Male	156 (48)	Eastern Cape	7 (2)	HEI A	146 (45)
19	90 (28)	Female	170 (52)	Free State	36 (11)	HEI B	117 (36)
20	80 (25)			Gauteng	196 (60)	HEI C	63 (19)
21	60 (18)			KwaZulu-Natal	11 (3)		
22	32 (9)			Limpopo	37 (11)		
23	19 (6)			Mpumalanga	21 (7)		
24	7 (2)			Northern Cape	3 (1)		
				North-West	15 (5)		

4.2 Principal component analysis (PCA)

Confirmatory factor analysis, using principle component analysis (PCA), was used to determine the factor structure of the scale. The appropriateness of the data for factor analysis was determined by employing the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity (Bartlett, 1954) and Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy (Kaiser, 1974). The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy (Kaiser, 1974). The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) for the study was 0.824, which exceeded the minimum suggested value of 0.600 for a good factor analysis (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). The Bartlett's Test of Sphericity, which was significant (x^2 =1495.23; *df* = 136; *p*<0.000), provided additional evidence that the data were suitable for factor analysis. Using a minimum eigenvalue of 1, the principal component factor analysis with varimax rotation, extracted a four-factor solution, which accounted for 54.12 percent of the total variance. The items loaded as expected according to the literature. The rotated factor matrix, eigenvalues and percentage of the total variance explained by each factor are reflected in Table 2.

Table 2: Free-time management

Factor and variable descriptions	1	2	3	4
Factor 1: Goal setting and evaluating (α =0.757)				
Makes list of things to do in free time	.514			
Set goals for free time	.659			
Set priorities for free time	.675			
Uses free time constructively	.669			
Remember planned things to do in free time	.638			
Evaluates free-time use	.585			
Factor 2: Values (α =0.754)				
Free time is meaningful		.759		
Free time is enjoyable		.820		
Free time is important		.742		
Factor 3: Immediate response (a =0.625)				
Has alternative plans			.726	
Has plans for use of extra free time			.715	
Adjust ways of using free time			.618	
Factor 4: Technique (a =0.713)				
Collect related information on how to spend free time				.524
Organise activities for free time				.659
Avoid interruptions during free time				.687
Organises free time daily or weekly				.739
Specifically allocates leisure time				.571
Eigenvalue	4.501	2.347	1.243	1.109
% of variance explained	26.474	13.803	7.313	6.525
Cumulative %	26.474	40.277	47.590	54.115
Extraction method: Principal Component Analysis				
Rotation method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalisation				

4.3 Reliability and validity

In the main survey, the overall reliability of the free-time management scale was 0.818, as measured by coefficient alpha, exceeding the recommended level of 0.600 (Malhotra, 2010). The reliability of the four constructs ranged between 0.625 and 0.757, with all factors satisfying the benchmark level of 0.600. The Cronbach coefficients for each construct are shown in Table 2. With regard to content validity, the entire scale, as well as the four constructs within the scale, all scored average inter-item correlation values within the recommended range, which suggest convergent and discriminant validity (lacobucci & Churchill, 2010).

4.4 Independent one sample t-test

Means above 3 were computed for all four factors. In order to determine whether these computed means are significant, an independent one-sample t-test was performed, where the expected mean was set at > 3 (that is, in the agreement area of the scale) and the significance level at the conventional 0.05 level. A p-value of p<0.05 was recorded for all four factors, indicating each to be statistically significant. This infers that Generation Y students perceive themselves as constructively managing their free time. Table 3 shows the calculated means, standard deviations, standard errors, t-values and p-values.

Factor	Mean	Standard deviation	Standard error	t-values	P-values
Goal setting & evaluating	3.864	0.924	0.05118	16.882	0.000*
Values	4.986	0.984	0.05451	36.427	0.000*
Immediate response	4.379	0.909	0.05034	27.398	0.000*
Technique	3.733	0.973	0.05390	13.602	0.000*

Table 3: Free-time management of Gene	eration Y students
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An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare the free-time management mean scores of males and

females. There was no significant difference in scores for males and females, suggesting that gender does not seem to have any bearing on perceptions of free-time management. The results are reported on in Table 4.

Table 4: Gender differences on free-time management perception	ns
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		Male		Female		
Factor	Mean N=156	Standard Deviation	Mean N=170	Standard deviation	t-values	P-values
Goal setting & evaluating	3.814	0.934	3.910	0.915	-0.934	0.351
Values	4.942	1.038	5.026	0.933	-0.758	0.449
Immediate response	4.370	0.887	4.389	0.931	-0.184	0.854
Technique	3.727	1.020	3.739	0.931	-0.110	0.912

* Statistically significant at p < 0.05

5. Discussion

This study investigated Generation Y students' free-time management in terms of goal setting and evaluation, values, immediate response and technique. In order to evaluate the structural integrity of the scale, principle component analysis using varimax rotation was applied.

The first factor, pertaining to *goal setting and evaluating*, accounted for 26.47 percent of the variance in item scores with an eigenvalue of 4.501. The six items that loaded on this factor is indicative of the importance of planning and evaluating in free-time management. Students agreed that although they use their free time constructively and set goals for their free time, the item with the highest loading within this factor, implying most perceived usage is setting priorities for their free time.

The second factor, *values*, accounted for 13.80 percent of the variance, with an eigenvalue of 2.35. Three items, relating to free time being meaningful, enjoyable and important, loaded on this factor. The item with the highest loading within this factor, indicating most agreement, is that students find their free time to be enjoyable.

The third factor, pertaining to items relating to *immediate response*, accounted for 7.31 percent of the variance, with an eigenvalue of 1.243 percent. Three items, relating to altering free time plans and having alternative plans when extra free time is available, loaded on this factor. The item, having alternative plans, had the highest loading within this factor.

The last factor, pertaining to items relating to *technique*, accounted for 6.52 percent of the variance, with an eigenvalue of 1.109 percent. The five items that loaded on this factor reflect the various items pertaining to organising free time and collecting relevant information in advance. Students agreed that although they avoid interruptions and organise activities during their free time, they mainly engage in organising their free time daily or weekly.

Amongst these four free-time management factors, the highest mean score was recorded on *values*, indicating that the students view their free time as worthy and important in their lives. *Immediate response*, obtained the second highest mean score, indicating that students perceive themselves as having the ability to make other arrangements for their free time when their original plans could not be put into practice. Among these factors, *technique* obtained the lowest mean score, suggesting that students are the least engaged in organising their free time effectively.

6. Conclusion

Universities and educators can play an important role in providing leisure education by supporting and encouraging students to better plan and manage the use of their free time. Courses in free-time management could be provided. Lifelong leisure skills with the aim of increasing positive free time use can be integrated in curricula development on the use of free time. Universities can provide leisure-time facilities and opportunities for students in order to help them plan and manage their free time constructively. By enhancing students free-time management opportunities, they may gain important experiences that enhance their individual development.

This study offers insight into Generation Y students' perceptions of their free-time management, but certain limitations should be noted. Although the sample included students from different departments, years of study, province of origin and three different universities, it was a convenience sample. As such, caution should be exercised in generalising the findings to the target population. Owing to students using free time in various ways and for different types of leisure activities, further researched concerning leisure activities opportunities and participation would be valuable.

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