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## **Generation Y Consumers in Turkey:**

### **Are They Really Social Media Nerds or Pretend To Be?**

#### Abstract

Generation Y or young adults generally 18-32 years old, who grew up in the Information Age, have been dubbed the 'Net Generation.' But, while these "digital natives" may be savvier with their gadgets and more keen on new uses of technology, their elders in Generation X, the Baby Boomers and older generations tend to dominate internet use in other areas (Jones,Fox, 2009:2).

Generation Y is regarded as an emerging, wealthy market of potential customers that exert a different pattern of consumer behavior than other generation (Wolburg,Pokrywczynshi, 2001:40). Marketing practitioners are therefore seeking to reach this generation. Generation Y is a public that marketing practitioners need to understand now, because it is so large and will, thus, have a powerful influence as its members grow through life stages. When considering the statistics about Y Generation population in Turkey, that's an important data, that % 35 of Turkey population consists of this generation (TUIK, 2010).

This paper addresses Generation Y consumers in İstanbul, Turkey and describes the ways in how they use new communication technology. Also, this study purposes to find out user preferences of new media, social networking usage and media consumption. For this survey research questions are below:

RQ1: What are the usage rates of social media among members of Generation Y?

RQ2: Does social networking usage depend on gender?

RQ3: Which factors affect the preference of Generation Y in online shopping?

RQ4: What are the attitudes of Generation Y towards social media consumption?

RQ5: Which new media tools do Generation Y use and for what purpose?

A survey will be conducted with consumers aged 18 – 32 located in İstanbul. A snowball sampling plan will be utilized. This study expects to understand the habits of Generation Y consumers about usage of new communication technology. By doing so, a greater comprehension of young consumers' choices in social media and their habits will be revealed. It can be expected that this reference point will be helpful for marketing practitioners in Turkey to target and communicate with Generation Y consumers more effectively.

## **1. Introduction**

Generation Y consumers consist of 18-32 years of young people and regarded to have a different pattern of consumer behavior than other generation segments. As a result, majority of researches were conducted on Generation Y consumers to understand their consumption habits much more clearly.

Generation Y makes up almost 35% of the Turkish population, while Generation Y's predecessor population. Consequently, they can impact the workplace, marketplace, and society. One distinguishing hallmark of this age cohort is the degree to which digital user-generated sources such as social media including Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, Wikipedia, texting, YouTube, blogs, and e-mail have become integrated into their lifestyle (Sago, 2010:7). According to a research conducted in 2009, acceleration in social media usage in Turkey is much higher comparing to Europe (Sosyal Ağ Siteleri, 2010). Also it is specified in the same research that Turkey is the seventh country in terms of user numbers among European countries. Based on this research, generation Y in Turkey can be regarded as heavy users of social media as both producers and consumers of the information. According to research by the U.S. Census Bureau, International Programs Centre, by the year 2025, Turkey will have the highest rate of young population among European and surrounding countries such as Cyprus, Ireland, Lithuania, Russia, UK, Croatia, Norway, France, Denmark, Holland, Hungary, Sweden, Greece, Germany, Switzerland, Spain and Italy (Minchington, 2010: 2). Therefore, the sheer size of Generation Y in Turkey makes this segment a desirable target of marketing practitioners.

Keeping the assumption of increasing use of social media in Turkey in view, the present study focuses on generation Y consumers in Turkey and their social media usage habits. Also this paper aims to examine Generation Y's attitudes toward social media consumption and try to provide a greater understanding about how generation Y use social media and for what purpose. That information will lead brands to attract and engage generation Y consumers more effectively in Turkey. It is very important to understand the consumer segment aged between 18 and 32 in terms of social networking usage and social media consumption. This research is hoped to be valuable tool for developing better understanding of Generation Y consumers and will be helpful to develop marketing strategies.

## 2. Generation Y in Turkey

Traditionally, a generation has been defined as 'the average interval of time between the birth of parents and the birth of their offspring. According to Scott and Marshall (2005), a generation is a form of age group consisting of those members of a society who were born at approximately the same time. Since World War II an idea of generation impact on social change has emerged. They're affected by music trends, explores, new interests and wars.

Despite some variations in the way the literature names these generations and classifies start and end dates, there is general descriptive consensus among academics and practitioners regarding these generations. It is important to consider macro environment changes and social developments while classifying and explaining generations in Turkey. Generations can be seen clearly on Figure 1 comparable with in USA (Reklamcılar Derneği, 2007: 1).

<b><u>Silent Generation</u></b> (1925-1945)	<b><u>Baby Boomers</u></b> (1945-1964)	<b><u>Generation X</u></b> (Baby Busters) (1965-1976)	<b><u>Generation Y</u></b> (Millennials) (1977-1996)
<p><b>World</b></p> <p>World War II Economic Depression Invention of Television</p> <p><b>Turkey</b></p> <p>Republican Period</p>	<p><b>World</b></p> <p>Human Rights Movements Golden Age of Radio</p> <p><b>Turkey</b></p> <p>Military Intervention Multiparty System</p>	<p><b>World</b></p> <p>Petroleum Crisis 68 Generation</p> <p><b>Turkey</b></p> <p>Political Right-Left Disputes</p>	<p><b>World</b></p> <p>Gulf Crises 9-11 Working Hours Internet; I-Pod PlayStation; Mobile Phone</p> <p><b>Turkey</b></p> <p>Terror Economic Growth and Downturn</p>

**Figure 1: Generations**

Generation Y makes up almost 35 % of the Turkey population which has a quite different pattern from that of their ancestors.

This generation has been reared in a consumption-driven society (Noble,Haytko,Phillips, 2009:617) and have specific wants and needs as consumers. Cohort generations are argued to share a common and distinct social character shaped by their experiences through time (Schewe,Noble,2000:138). As Morton stated, the major differences of Generation Y consumers are, they tend to be well educated, internet savvy, and eager to shop (2002:47). Generation Y sometimes is also referred to Peter Pan Generation – those who do not want to grow up and stay home longer than their parents or grandparents did (Levickaite,2010:173).

Contento Research Institute conducted a webnographic research (2011:35) with 331 Generation Y young adults in Turkey. According to the results Generation Y separates into four segmentations such as individualistic, success-oriented, idealistic and family-oriented.

According to Walker (1996), Generation Y is often viewed as the first global consumer segment due to their exposure to worldwide communications via the internet. As a result of technological innovations, they are more involved into communication tools such as social media. Social media also allows Generation Y consumers to access information very easily and provide a virtual network place where they can enjoy expressing their opinions, exchange opinions, disseminate and control messages anywhere anytime. According to a study, social networks and relationships with other humans are universal human needs, critical to the psychological well-being of humans, which are very well addressed by Internet social networks by providing tools for users to define and redefine themselves, to satisfy the need for autonomy, recognition and achievement as well as the need for affiliation and belonging (Magedanz, Simoes et al, 2009:53). So, it is easy to understand that Generation Y consumers which have been dubbed “Net Generation (Jones, Fox, 2009:12) have become social and context aware. Saatchi and Saatchi (1999) found that digital media have given Generation Y unprecedented means to connect with each other and the world; allowing this generation to explore more the importance and power of knowledge.

According to the research conducted by TUIK (2011); usage of internet by age groups in Turkey last three months are stated in below:

Year	Age					
	16-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-74
2007	50.4	32.3	23.8	14.8	4.8	1.4
2008	54.8	41.4	29.3	19.4	6.9	1.6
2009	59.4	45.1	30.2	18.6	6.2	2.0
2010	62.9	50.6	34.7	22.4	7.8	2.7

**Figure 2:** Usage of Internet (%)

Results shown in Figure 2 suggest that 16-24 age groups which also include Generation Y’s, exhibited greater internet usage characteristics.

Generation Y’s have been brought up in an era where shopping is not regarded as a simple act of purchasing (Bakewell, Mitchell, 2003:95). The proliferation of products choice enabled Generation Y’s to develop a different shopping style compared with previous generations.

Generation Y consumers, generally prefer brands with an identity based on values with which they can identify and through which they can express their individuality (Azuma,2002:23). Individuality and uniqueness are the basic needs for that generation and they make brand choices to fulfill those kinds of needs.

## **2.1 Generation Marketing**

Researchers have examined the possible effects of generational differences in attitudes and behaviors' of consumers (Strutton,Taylor,Thompson et al,2011:560). To improve the effectiveness of targeted campaigns, marketing practitioners have to view that distinctiveness of generations. Demographers, market analysts and researchers also have realized that Generation Y will likely play a significant role in their marketing and advertising in the twenty first century (Cui,Tren,Sullivan,Matiru et al, 2003:311). It is well-known that marketing practitioners have developed generational marketing programs for each generational cohort since members of each generation have distinctive communication characteristics and behaviors (Dickey,Lewis,2010:191). Once marketers try to connect with Generation Y consumers, traditional media tools won't be able to work. Besides, more innovative communication environments such as social media and social networking are necessary for marketers. The primary benefit of social networking is that it satisfies some consumers' need for a sense of community (Dickey, Lewis,Siemens,2008:95). According to the Frazier's research, social networks such as Facebook and Twitter are revolutionizing the way companies' market products (Frazier,2010:22).

Generation Y has never experienced life without computers, so social media comes as second nature to them. Generation Y is increasingly exposed to social media such as YouTube or reality TV, which makes them very responsive to Internet campaigns (Meletopoulos,Reischl, 2009:15). According to online marketing expert Kelly Mooney (O'Donnell,2006:3), "Generation Y is the most influential generation for retailers because it is bigger than the baby boomer generation and its members have spending power and strong opinions at an early age." (Carter et al,2008:64). Different from other generations before, in particular Generation X, Generation Y tends to be more positive about advertisement as long as it is relevant, entertaining and cool, and as long as they have a say in what is advertised and the company's level of social responsibility (Meletopoulos,Reischl, 2009: 21).

The rise of new media, instant communication technologies, social networking has changed the classical meaning and understanding of communication, working and socializing habits. Computer and Internet technology made a huge impact on Generation Y, computer gaming,

flash mobbing, Internet dating became a self-expression form re-warding classical forms and perception of socializing (Levickaite,2010:173). Accompanied by that evolution, there has been an increasing interest in the new generation of web-based technologies, tools and services offered by social media. Especially among generation Y, social media where people generate or edit information has become a central theme.

Generation Y, who is called a “*connected generation*” gets in touch almost every time through social media.

Social media are the means of communication enhanced by the anytime, anywhere benefits of the Web and mobile technologies, built around online communities and based on interdependent relationships and cooperation (Spiller,Tuten,Carpenter,2011:76). Unlike the one-way production and transfer of news, information, and entertainment from main media outlets via the mass media, social media allows anybody to become a producer of such content, and deliver it through interactive communication in the form of a pyramid, based on relationships (Hun,2010:112). Part of the new generation of Web 2.0 applications, social media is a catch phrase that describes technology that facilitates interactive information, user created content and collaboration (Elefant,2011:4).

Social media is extremely popular especially among the young adults (under 40 years) who have actually grown up with the new communication technologies that are also progressively very intuitive and user-friendly which in turn increases their popularity (Phan,2011: 81). In this sense, members of Generation Y are significant users of social media as well as other generations. One distinguishing hallmark of this age cohort is the degree to which digital user-generated sources such as social media including Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, Wikipedia, texting, YouTube, blogs, and email have become integrated into their lifestyle (Sago,2010:7). They also use social media to procure information about entertainment, travel and hobbies, shopping and have fun by surfing and chatting.

Just as social media is considered Web 2.0 technology because users can customize their experience by creating profiles and content, smart grid and demand response could be termed Wires 2.0, because they allow customers to control and personalize their electric usage (Elefant,2011:11). When social media was thought from a population point of view, statistics would be considerably remarkable. If Facebook were to be a country, it would be the third largest, after China and India. (Ang,2011:31).

According to Contento Research Institute webnographic research (2011:35), conducted with 331 Generation Y young adults in Turkey, there are five major trends that Generation Y members adopted. Social media usage is one of the leading trends as well as healthy life,

trueness-sincerity-transparence, being rush and open to new experiences. This research also suggested that social media tools such as facebook and twitter have been using frequently by that generation.

According to Hun (2010:113), there are four reasons that can explain the wide popularity of social media;

(1) *Social media provides a “window” that satisfies users’ desire to express themselves.*

Social networks such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube are effective tools for individuals to share and generate any contents. By this way, they’re able to reveal themselves and be recognized.

(2) *Users can obtain the latest news on anything they want to know.*

Information based on a “timeline” offered on Twitter has more meaning to them because it is not from a newspaper or from the Internet, but from someone they know.

(3) *Users can see how the people they are interested in are doing, satisfying their desire to “peep.”*

Users desire to find out what other people want to say and what they are doing. To follow on Twitter, to add on Facebook, to use RSS on blog, users are able to peep in an easier way.

(4) *People can escape from their daily routines.*

Sometimes people may prefer to escape from their own life and routines. By using social media, they can bring change to their monotone lifetime.

Stafford and Gonier found that information, communication, and socializing are main gratifications for people when using the Internet (2004:108). However shopping and chatting got low scores among respondents.

The result of this upbringing is that Generation Y’s are more critical and cynical and generally difficult to wow. As ‘stimulus junkies’ they have a shorter attention span and an irrepressible need for instant gratification. If they have an idea, they will immediately want to execute it. Their parents have served them hand and foot, and that is what they will expect in life, work and relationships too (Bergh,Behrer,2011:7).

Although features of generations differ from culture to culture, new communication technologies especially social media occupies a huge place in Generation Y. This fact, reveals a generation who is seeker, questioner and selective.

### 3. Research Model

This research was aimed to find out Generation Y consumers' habits of new media using in Turkey. A survey instrument was developed in order to measure Generation Y's demographics, frequency and objectives of their new media usage, social media tools which they mostly prefer to communicate, their attitudes toward online shopping and their social media consumption. The survey questions included three latent construct. The first construct was concerned with new media usage, second construct was about social media usage and the last construct was about purchasing over internet. Design of survey questions was made with the corporation of students who belongs to Generation Y. Data was collected using paper and pencil survey among students. For each statement, they were asked to indicate their agreement/disagreement along a 5 Likert Scale with the verbal anchors.

A snowball sampling technique was employed in order to encourage participants to enlist the assistance of their peers in completing the questionnaire. There were not inducements for participation. The sample size comprised a total of 607 participants with respect to gender (48.4% female, 51.6% male) and age (range 18-30 years, M=22 years) who live in İstanbul's Asian side. 61.8% of the participants is university students.

### 4. Findings

Data was input and analyzed in SPSS 17.0. In order to assess the reliability and validity of this measurement model, reliability analysis (IRA) were performed. IRA is used to evaluate and improve the reliability of scales, testing whether questionnaires display internal consistency reliability and whether the items are indicators of the underlying theoretical constructs that they are meant to probe (Beneke,Stevens,Versfeld et al.,2010:89). For proposition measured by Likert Scale reliability analysis was found 0.776. Figure 3 contains the Cronbach's Alpha score for each construct in the survey.

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha
New Media Usage	0.868
Social Media Usage	0.941
Purchasing Over Internet	0.746

**Figure 3:** Cronbach's Alpha Score of the Survey

According to the results of the survey, it is found that most of the participants live a long time in İstanbul (65.2%). The other cities they live a long time mostly are Bursa (4.6%), Ankara (2.1%) and İzmir (2.0%). So, it is clear that most of the participants live in metropolitan cities. This is questioned to determine participants' access to communication technologies.

More than half of the participants (61.8%) are undergraduate students and do not earn money on their own. Although most of the participants are students and have no work, their personal spending per month is approximately 1000TL. ( $\approx$ 406 €). It's high and remarkable even if İstanbul is an expensive city. Also only 7.6 % of the participants is found to be married.

Figure 4 shows participants' time spending on Internet in a week. According to those results, 33.4 % of participants spend more than 20 hours on internet in a week and this is followed by 5-9 hours (26.9%).

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Half – 1 Hour	13	2,1
1-2 Hours	27	4,4
3-4 Hours	63	10,4
5-9 Hours	163	<b>26,9</b>
10-15 Hours	67	11,0
16-20 Hours	71	11,7
More than 20 Hours	203	<b>33,4</b>
Total	607	100,0

**Figure 4:** Time spent in Internet per Week

#### 4.1 Research Questions

**RQ1:** *What are the usage rates of social media among members of Generation Y?*

Results shown in Figure 5 suggest that Facebook (45.9%), Twitter (41.4%) and MSN (41.4%) are the social media tools mostly used by Generation Y consumers more than five times in a day. Also YouTube (36.7%) is one of the most used social sites daily. It is obtained from results that Blogs and Flickr have been used weekly. Participants are rarely use social media tools such as Yonja, Myspace, Hi5, Bebo, Netlog and Xuqa.

	Facebook		Twitter		Msn		Blogs		YouTube		Flickr	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
More than 5 times a day	243	45,9	106	41,4	106	41,4	48	19,2	138	26,8	12	25,0
Daily	215	40,6	79	30,9	79	30,9	57	22,8	189	36,7	4	8,3
Weekly	53	10,0	47	18,4	47	18,4	83	33,2	144	28,0	13	27,1
Monthly	13	2,5	17	6,6	17	6,6	37	14,8	34	6,6	9	18,8
Few times in a year	5	0,9	7	2,7	7	2,7	25	10,0	10	1,9	10	20,8
N	529	100,0	256	100,0	256	100,0	250	100,0	515	100,0	48	100,0

**Figure 5:** The Usage Rates of Widely Used Social Media Tools among Generation Y.

**RQ2:** Does Social Networking Usage Depend On Gender?

There was no significant difference between groups in terms of gender using social media.

	Facebook	Twitter	MSN	Blog	YouTube
Female	43,5	21,1	42,5	19,4	42,3
Male	43,7	21,1	44,8	21,7	42,5
N	87,1	42,2	87,3	41,2	84,8

**Figure 6:** Social Networking Usage per Gender.

Usage of Hi5, Bebo and Netlog is more slightly among male participants than females.

But also there is significant difference between genders in spending time on internet. Males tended to spend more time in internet than females per week.

Participants occasionally purchase over internet. They prefer mostly to buy food, ticket and vacation.

**RQ3:** Which factors affect the preference of Generation Y in online shopping?

Participants prefer online shopping because they find it convenient (M=2,3), fast (M=2,9) and divergent (M=3,5). Also home delivery services (M=3,9) and low prices (M=3,7) enable them to purchase over internet.

**RQ4: What are the attitudes of Generation Y towards social media consumption?**

Participants think that social media makes life easier (M=3,7) and there is no way without that virtual environment. They told they commercials on social media affects positively (M=3) their shopping habits compared to traditional commercials such as TV, Radio Billboard and E-mail commercials. However they suggest that social media affects personal relations in a negative way. According to participants, people can lie easily in virtual environments. So they find social media insecure to communicate and get to know people. But they specify that internet and social media usage is a very basic activity in their life. They feel strange without connection.

**RQ5: Which new media tools do Generation Y use and for what purpose?**

Participants mostly use laptop, PC and also smartphone for entertainment, research, chat, shopping, online banking, and agenda tracking, preparing homework and online betting.

	Smart Phone	Palm	iPad	Smart TV	Game Console	PC	Laptop	Netbook
Entertainment	121	11	29	43	74	264	393	35
Research	75	20	8	13	13	243	392	46
Chat	188	11	12	14	9	206	366	40
Shopping	43	9	7	9	3	157	291	29
Online Banking	68	7	10	6	12	145	249	24
Agenda Tracking	86	14	17	44	2	210	359	34
Preparing Homework	14	10	10	4	6	225	371	32
Online Betting	22	4	8	6	4	104	172	14

**Figure 7:** New Media Tools Used Mostly by Generation Y (number of participants)

## 5. Discussion

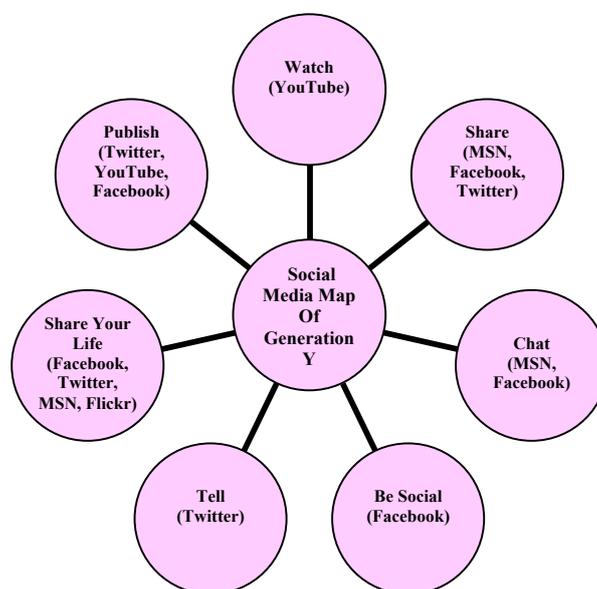
Generation Y is a generation which grew up with the computer as an appliance and mastered its use for many aspects, particularly communication. Today, Generation Y is complained about a great deal, including remarks about casual dress sense and disrespect of elders, echoing similar grievances made of Generation X when they were the same age. Generation Y was brought up with very protective and open parents and teachers who taught them that they could do no wrong and that they could achieve (and were entitled to) anything. They were always kept busy, engaging in multiple extra-curricular activities as after school classes responded to the increase in both parents working (Straker,Mellar,2010:2).

Generation Y prefers social media, social networking and virtual communities compared to other generations such as X and Baby Boomers. In order to successfully make connection with Generation Y, it is crucial to first understand their habits about social media using, web site behaviors and frequency of engaging different online activities such as online shopping. In consumer generated media environment, it is necessary to have distinctive communication characteristics for marketing practitioners. When social media efforts need to be targeted to specific audiences such as Generation Y, all information about this generations usage of social media will be relevant and meaningful.

35% of Turkey population consists of Generation Y and according to the survey results 33,4% of participants spends their more than 20 hours a week being online. Social networking such as Facebook, Twitter and MSN are mostly used as the main channel of online communication among this generation. Those data suggests that Generation Y can be considered to be a connected generation in Turkey.

Although no difference found between groups in terms of gender using social media, males spend more time on internet and use Hi5, Bebo and Netlog more frequently compared to females. However females use blogs more often than males. So, males and females have different choices and expectations of social media. While, females like to share their personal feelings and thoughts in a virtual environment, males prefer to make connections and develop relationship through social networks.

In the social media map of Generation Y, there can be seen the most preferred social media tools by participants in order to watch, share, chat, be social, tell, share life and publish (Figure 8).



**Figure 8:** Social Media Map of Generation Y

It is important to recognize that many participants also use the Internet for the purpose of learning about new products and doing online shopping. Participants prefer online shopping because of convenience, quickness and divergence. They usually buy food, ticket and vacation. It is comfortable to buy from Internet however; they don't make online shopping for all their needs. It is conceivable that they are skeptical about their security on Internet. Furthermore they may want to see or touch the product. Online commercials affect their shopping habits positively compared to traditional commercials. It is harder than ever to reach today's consumers but it may be easy and impressing to communicate more personal through social media. Although participants are very addictive to social networks, they think that virtual environment is not a safe place. They find social media insecure to communicate and get to know people.

It is obviously noticed that majority of the participants use tools such as laptop, PC and smartphone for entertainment, research, chat, shopping, online banking, agenda tracking, preparing homework and online betting. They prefer to use smartphone for chatting and entertainment. As a connected generation, it is clear to think that they would like to connect to web not only via PC or laptop, but also via their personal mobile phones. Smartphones offer people a unique experience and enable to be online anytime and anywhere. It can be said that Generation Y is willing to use those kinds of new communication technologies.

Generation Y are well aware of online world. They have control over social media and even generate content as a heavy user. So, social media presents marketing practitioners with a tool which they can be utilize consumer generated media and develop more personal and interactive relationships with Generation Y.

In conclusion, this is an experimental study that attempts to examine the perceptions, awareness and use of social media by members of Generation Y and it is believed to be useful for marketing practitioners who tend to target Generation Y in Turkey. Members of Generation Y, growing up with the Internet and personal computing technology make them called "digital natives". In terms of technology proficiency, it is acceptable that they're savvy users in comparison with other generations. Spending most of the time at social networking, a "Computer Nerd Generation Y" also can be named social media nerd who lives and breathes social media. Their addiction to social media has been extending beyond the computer and they're able to be connected anytime through mobile phones. Social media will continue quite likely being a considerable part of their life and marketing practitioners will be able to have access Generation Y by that channel.

## **6. Limitations and Future Research**

There are some limitations to this research that future research can address. Future research needs to determine if these results can be replicated with a national random sample. Also this study tries to draw a general picture about Generation Y's social media usage. For future research, social media usage in marketing practices needs more research in terms of consumer behavior, perspective, lifestyle, and new technology adaption. It is also important to determine Generation Y population's attitudes toward social media tools, their opinions and behavioral intentions about promotion tools on social networking and credibility of virtual environment. By the help of that information, marketing practitioners will be able to be relevant and specific to their needs, wants, likes and interests.

## **7. Managerial Implications**

The market has apprehended the importance of social media for Generation Y and has continued its' researches in this field. Generation Y in Turkey is also considered to becoming social media nerd. Nevermore the expectations of Generation Z who was born in an environment surrounded by social media will be higher and as a consumer they will force the market harder than their predecessor.

As a managerial implication, it is recommended to start taking into account Turkey's market studies already. This study will be able to lead marketers how to integrate social media into their companies. Social media provides fast and easy way to be up to date with new products and promotions. Delivering real time information to the right person is one of the advantages in using social media over traditional media. Marketers should know to catch consumers' attention by the help of social media. As a result, if marketers finally tune their strategies to address the needs of this emerging segment, this will increase the likelihood of success.

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