

The way you speak counts

A study on class mobility among South African youth for the International Marketing Council (IMC) of South Africa by Kuper Research has thrown up some surprising results, such as accents count for more than peoples' roles during the struggle.

Jos Kuper, of Kuper Research, believes that the survey confirms that class mobility is a reality as for most people life has changed for the better. Young people in particular feel that they can aspire to move up in the world, that opportunity beckons.

Yvonne Johnston, CEO of the IMC, says that the research shows a buoyant and confident people who rightly expect that life is constantly improving for them. It also underlines what other studies have found, namely that the rising black middle class is now driving the consumer side of the economy.

"For today's youth, it shows that democracy has brought better prospects and that hopes for a brighter future are at their highest levels," she says.

Better off than previous generations

Based on FutureFact information, it is clear that young South Africans are convinced that they are better off than their parents were - and that they believe their children will be even better off than they are now. As South Africa celebrates Youth Day, this underpins the hopes of the younger generation for an even better future.

More than half of those asked felt that their standard of living is much or somewhat higher than that of their parents. Only 9% felt they were much worse off. In the LSM group 3-4 only 39% felt better off but this rises to 51% for LSM 5-6, 58% for LSM 7-8 and 59% for LSM 9-10.

And looking at the future, almost two-thirds of parents feel that their children will have a better standard of living when they are the same age as the parents are now. Only 9% believe they will be worse off.

Better standard of living

This indicates a belief that they as parents are providing their children with a better standard of living than they themselves had. This is true even in the lower LSM groups with 64% in LSM 3-4 agreeing with this.

When it comes to self-classifications in regard to their perceived class, these vary across the LSM groups. Two-thirds in LSM 3-4 thought they were working class. In LSM 5-6, there was an almost equal split between those who consider themselves to be working class (42%) and those who see themselves as middle class (41%). Fifty percent of those in LSM

9-10 reckon they are middle-class while 32% think they are upper middle class. Only 5% classify themselves as upper class.

Four determinants

Strong inter-generational mobility is evident. Certainly the younger generation feels that while their parents might have been working class, they themselves have progressed to middle class.

But how does one know what class you belong to? According to the survey, South Africans indicate that the top four determinants of someone's class, standing or prestige are:

- The area where you live (41%)
- Your position at work (39%)
- The car you drive (35%)
- Your home and how it is furnished (29%)
- There are differences among the various LSM groups. Thus, where children go to school is important in LSM 3-4 while car and home do it for LSM 5-6.

For those in the age group 16-19 years, the car you drive is important as is your accent or the way you speak. For all groups, one's role in the struggle is of least importance. FutureFact shows clearly that South African society has moved from socio-political drivers to a more socio-economically driven context.

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