

Marketing to the modern family: Getting real about their realities

 By [Mike dos Santos](#)

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As societies worldwide continue to evolve and adapt to changing norms, circumstances and values, the traditional family landscape is shifting at a pace never seen before in history. In line with this shift, savvy marketers are growing increasingly cognisant of the impact of new family dynamics on their business and communication activities.

In order to understand how best we can leverage and tap into the new realities of the "Modern Family", it is important to answer the following question: What are the key trends defining families (and parenting) today? Let's start by examining four of the most important macro trends in marketing to the modern family:

Trend 1: The growing challenge of "time poverty"

The increasingly demanding nature of contemporary living is resulting in a number of changes in terms of how mothers define their multiple roles within their family units. These include changes in the traditional mother-child relationship, as well as more realistic ideas in terms of what it means to be a mother in today's world - beyond the clichés and stereotypes of previous generations - given the multiple challenges that moms face in terms of negotiating their personal, professional and familial identities.



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Oreo, in conjunction with Plunge Research, recently undertook a qualitative market study (titled "The Oreo Study"), to assess the effect of modern lifestyles and realities on the well-being of South African families. Among the key findings of the study was the fact that parents, on the whole, do not feel that they spend enough quality time with their children. In addition, the time spent with their kids is frequently becoming more digitally-mediated.

Trend 2: A shift from "supermom" to "real mom"

Linked to the previous trend, modern mothers are increasingly rejecting the "supermom" myth of the 1980's and 1990's. Amidst an emerging global concept of the "new wellness revolution" (which includes physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, social and financial dimensions), we are also seeing a redefinition of the concept of motherhood, with today's moms coming to realise that balancing and negotiating all aspects of their lives means a certain degree of honesty about their personal limitations.

Going forward, mothers will continue to understand the difference between being a perfect mom and being a good mom - the latter being paired with a growing awareness by these mothers of the "real me". A recent global study by McCann corroborates this trend, illustrating the fact that mothers are becoming less afraid to show their true selves to their family and to the world. According to the study, 71% of moms say they would prefer that their children "know the real me, even if that means showing them the mistakes I make." Gone are the days of the perfect homemaker! As life gets more complicated (and as societal expectations change), the moms of the future will continue to recognise that it is not only impossible to do it all, but not desirable either.

At the same time, moms are allowing their own needs to take greater priority. While mothers have traditionally been valued for selflessness and putting their families' needs ahead of their own, we are starting to see a growing school of thought (and substantial dialogue within the media) around the importance of moms making their own health, well-being and happiness a priority. Whereas the old paradigm was defined by the notion that a happy, healthy family equals a happy mom, the modern family paradigm posits the idea that a happy, healthy mom (and woman) equals a happy family. Modern moms are clearly recognising the importance of putting on their own oxygen masks first!

Trend 3: Changing father-child dynamics

On the flipside, we also need to be aware of the shifts taking place in contemporary fatherhood and especially in terms of the father-child relationship. On the one hand, the aforementioned Oreo Study pointed to a worrying trend among South African moms that the bond between father and child is lessening over time, mostly due to time constraints and other issues such as single fatherhood and the related reality of the "weekend dad".

However, we are also seeing a substantial amount of role reversal within the modern family context. This includes a trend towards more collaborative parenting styles, as well as a rise in the number of fathers stepping into more traditional "mothering" roles, with an ever-increasing number of women becoming primary (or equal) breadwinners within their families. In addition, we are also witnessing an emergent global trend towards the "stay-at-home dad" - who often faces his own set of unique challenges as a caregiver in more traditionally patriarchal societies.

Trend 4: The demise of the traditional nuclear family

Over and above the issues facing traditional families, we are also witnessing monumental changes globally in terms of how people define the word "family". South Africa's family landscape serves as proof of this trend locally, with our most recent census indicating that only about a third of the country's 15 million households qualify as "traditional" families, with a mom, dad and kid/s.

At the same time, we need to be mindful of the high divorce rate in the country. Recent statistics indicate that over 50% of all marriages in South Africa end in divorce, with the incidence rising year on year. Coupled with this, we have also seen a dramatic increase in the incidence of single parent households, primarily led by single mothers (who make up around 40% of all mothers in the country), but also a notable rise in the number of households led by single fathers acting as key caregivers to their children.

Going forward, the term "family" will continue to take on new and varied meanings. For instance, more and more same-sex couples (both globally and locally) are becoming parents and defining their own family units - with significant opportunities and implications for marketers wishing to tap into this lucrative demographic segment.

ABOUT MIKE DOS SANTOS

Michael graduated with B.A. Honours in Marketing Communication (cum laude) and started his career as a marketing and research assistant before moving into Strategic Planning at Grey Johannesburg. With a keen attention to detail and experience across the marketing communication spectrum, Michael continues to be inspired by the dynamic world of brands and branding. Mike now works as a Strategic Director at Shift Joe Public.

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