

Brands not being effective when marketing to a youth economy worth over R111bn

While Getting N'ked on "Youth proofing your brand", at the IMC Conference, CEO of HDI Youth Consultancy, Bongani Chinkanda, unpacked his insights on the 'why and how'.



CEO of HDI Youth Consultancy, Bongani Chinkanda.

He said that with less than two months to go before South Africa's 2019 national elections, the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) has been at pains to convince young voters to take up the opportunity to vote on 8 May 2019. Chinkanda said that businesses and brands that market products and services to *36 million persons who are eligible to vote and are considered youth, like the IEC, just don't 'get' youth when it comes to marketing to them.



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Jessica Tennant 15 Mar 2019



Competing with youth culture

"Brands and campaigns often focus on an idea, product or service and not on the youth itself," continues Chinkanda.

“ To market to the youth you've got to immerse yourself in youth culture and then create products that are relevant. Organisations need to realise that they aren't just competing with another brand, they are competing with youth culture. ”

A case in point being the currency of defiance culture amongst youth in South Africa, from the 1976 Soweto uprising to #FeesMustFall of 2015-16 (and continuing), that has proven that elections are not essential to make an impact because concrete policy changes and implementation gains have been accelerated through revolt after the youth have challenged political authorities and government policies directly rather than through the ballot.

For the IEC, understanding this thread in culture is the first step to tailoring messaging that lives in this space and further impacts behavioural change – and for commercial brands, a step towards influencing purchase decisions. However, with

rapidly changing trends, finding the right balance between valuable, actionable information and youth-oriented content that resonates can be challenging.

“ Yet because of the size and buying power it presents, this market segment cannot be ignored, as they offer great significance to the sustainability of brands. With roughly half of South Africa’s population being under the age of 24 and the most recent annual spend for consumers aged 8-23 being estimated at around R111bn; it is against this backdrop that brands today are affording thoughtful consideration to the importance of understanding and connecting with this highly worthwhile consumer segment. ”

Brand porn The challenge is that, much like the IEC, marketers continue to treat the youth market as a homogenous group of sameness concentrated at the same music festivals, sporting tournaments and social and cultural hubs; where, what Chinkanda refers to as ‘brand porn’ takes place.

Chinkanda remarks, “Too many messages from brands trying to compete for the attention of the youth market in these spaces get lost in a cluttered environment where they don’t even stand a chance to resonate with their intended audience.” Whereas a more targeted approach is required when communicating with the country’s youth – which is considered to be between the ages of 8 and 23 years, and further split into Kids (8-13), Teens (14-18) and Young Adults (19-23). Essential to note, within South African organisations youth extends to the age of 35.

“Despite this being a diverse group of persons, it should be noted that there are several themes and qualities that are monolithic and extend across the various demographic and psychographic dimensions. As youth specialists, in the TBWA\ collective, HDI has an intrinsic understanding of how to assist brands to connect and stay connected to the biggest influences of the future, the youth.

To give organisations a larger share of the future, the consultancy sheds light on these shared characteristics, by examining the main trends shaping South African youth culture today. We achieve this through finding a greater purpose for brands, ensuring that they remain consistent and authentic, and by remaining hungry and curious, as well as by locating your brand within youth culture,” concludes Chinkanda.

For brands, businesses and organisations like the IEC, long term survival is becoming more aligned with the ability to be agile and to resonate with the youth market. This capability is increasingly about the role of technology within a business; the culture needed to achieve the change; and the ability to mirror and tap into the culture of your target audience.