

Having a purpose and building trust with the youth builds brands

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In South Africa, people between the ages of 15 and 34 comprise 63.3% of the population. For advertisers, looking behind this statement of fact, the reality is that there is a potential market of about 20 million people waiting to buy services and products.



"What makes this market more dynamic", says Hadlay Mclean senior digital communications strategist at Yellowwood, "is that this group encompasses those approaching the end of their school years, entering tertiary education and, employment. By the time they enter their 30s, they are established members of society and firmly entrenched consumers of products and services."

"Traditionally, marketers approaching the youth market have steered towards the 'safe ground' typically stressing the fun aspects of life and believing that by doing so they are meeting market needs."

"But, as the insights in Yellowwood's cutting-edge 2022 Sunday Times GenNext Report reveal, there is another side to this socially aware audience that demands more substance and meaning. It is a generation that accepts very little at face value, interrogates claims and wishes to interact with the brands they favour."

Insights from the report revealed issues that are of importance in the minds of South African youth was the environment, trending political developments, the poor state of the national economy and rising youth unemployment. Not content to stand on the sidelines, youth take an ambivalent view of claims and promises made by brands. They require public, verifiable demonstrations that the institutions and brands they support are acting on social and environmental issues.

The path that GenNext Report points out says Mclean is that reaching this key market requires purpose-led advertising that aligns with the values of the youth market.

“Authenticity and emotional connections are what differentiates brands. Amplifying their purpose-driven approach through social media influences buying decisions and contributes to long-term brand-building.”

To have an impact on the youth market, findings in the 2022 Sunday Times GenNext Report reveal:

Committing and following through by proving action means more than just ads.

Brands that make a tangible difference create opportunities to engage and build resonance with young South Africans. Building trust means being truthful, serious, and consistent when tackling issues.

“An example of this is the Castle Lager ‘Bread of the Nation’ campaign in which the brewer addressed the social issue of hunger by using by-products from the beer production process to make bread. Although this was a once-off campaign, the brand reinforced its message by signing a three-year partnership with a feeding scheme to produce bread for their beneficiaries,” says Mclean.

Getting closer, engaging, and playing an active role in self-actualisation initiatives.

The 2022 GenNext report highlights the youth market’s shift towards a positive attitude and building self-esteem, self-actualisation, and an increasing sense of belonging.

“This move towards self-affirmation stood out in the research, mirroring the young market’s confidence in expressing themselves and putting forward their viewpoints. The GenNext report found that social media platforms are the largest enablers of self-expression,” says Mclean.

“For brands, the implications are that they need to assess youth as they are and create the engagements and experiences that help them realise their true place in life. Understanding what makes young South Africans tick means being able to strategise and lift a brand above the traditional clutter.”

A brand example in this space is the ‘LiL-Lets Talk’ campaign, which tackled the ordinarily taboo topic of menstruation and built a platform for women to talk about the challenges, stigma, and other discussion points around the topic.

“In summary”, says Mclean, “purpose-led advertising in the youth market must align with youth values and be authentic to form more emotional connections. As well as encourage young consumers to make purchasing decisions based on a brand’s values and social impact while promoting positive societal change by the brand to build long term loyalty.”

The GenNext Report reveals that the South African youth market is becoming increasingly influential, and their preferences and behaviours often shape market trends. Brands that establish themselves as purpose-driven early on and identify closely with this market are better positioned to adapt to evolving consumer expectations and market shifts, ensuring their relevance and success in the long run.

“As the youth market moves steadily through the ‘life phases’ that are part of this segment, it is also more likely that the relationship built with brands in their formative and student days will persevere well into their futures,” says Mclean.

Further details on the Sunday Times GenNext research and how to share its insights can be obtained from **Ntombi Mkhwanazi** at Ntombi.mkhwanazi@ywood.co.za.

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