

Power to the have-nots

 By [Wayne Naidoo](#)

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"Original, potent African solutions to African problems."

As conventional models of reaching consumers become radically undermined, initially by mobile, the very notion of what a consumer is will change. Before, we believed this was 'of products and services', now it is of new networks, ideas and alliances.

I've spent the last two years working across several African countries. What began as a simple money-transfer solution between individuals has now become a socio-economic revolution. Money can be lent to the previously unbanked, almost anywhere, in seconds. All cashless. All via mobile money. Millions upon millions of Africans can be uplifted, small businesses created, people employed. Almost nothing has been spent on advertising or media.

The meek are inheriting the earth.

The vocal audience

Once mute audiences are transforming into cutting-edge digital experts, co-authoring and fearlessly vocal. The world is their mall. They're also buying ideas. The hegemony of big brands using big media will fall away and their constituencies will begin to massively fragment.

Groups will form, break apart and reform. It's digital Darwinism. The digital divide is already a generational one. More people will be creating their own habitats, fed by news that interests them, people they like or admire, entertainment and information, which align with their own beliefs. Such personalised news may indeed constrict people's understanding of the world, rather than expand it. With so much selective information on hand, we'll choose and need to know less.

Recent clashes between the US police and the public suggest big powerful movements can swell into existence overnight. Issues, beliefs and value systems will be in contest, not just brands and corporations. Celebrity will be more potent than patriotism. The world will try to close down radical Islam's digital excesses.

Of course this has been fully anticipated, though the outcomes are uncertain.

Reputation matters

What is certain is the threat to that most valuable asset: reputation.

No longer concealed by the one-way-mirror of structured media, brands, businesses and the people which lead them will, for the first time, be subject to scrutiny and exposure. Whether Kim Jong-un ordered it, or it was the action of righteous, wounded patriots, or simply mischievous employees, a country with allegedly less than 2000 official URLs*, humiliated Sony and had the world's most powerful man spluttering.

Bigger than films, bigger than music, gaming's X-box and PlayStation were hacked and taken down. *Sommer mos.*

Against such arsenals, how well defended are brands neatly placed on their shop shelves, in their showrooms and banking halls? Change will occur instantly, news cycles will shrink to seconds, there will be no time for a management committee to assemble and deliberate. Something stronger, less transient, will need to offset this.

The role, reputation and actions of the CEO become increasingly critical. He and she is now vulnerable and accountable for every promise made by the business, every interface with once-loyal consumers. They need to get down 'n dirty. They may need to 'fess up. They'll need a bank of good deeds and good ideas from which to make withdrawals and new investments.

What they once sold they will now have to consider giving away. Packaging will not be the box in which the product comes in, but the total experience around it, the stories, the engagements, the rewards, and the values which inform them; what needs they actually feed.

Inactive corporate visions, generic mission statements will collapse under pressure. Who you are, what you stand for, your reason for being, will be the real test of your survival and success. 'Content' is not a strategy or an idea; it's not a substitute for relevance. It still needs to compel and engage. The ability to persuade remains paramount. The primacy of brands within these formats is, however, less certain.

African solutions

Original, potent African solutions to African problems. Already we are doing things with mobile that are precipitating tectonic change. Much more will follow. Africa is rising.

Hot new thinking delivering hard business results. We now have the chance to combine inventiveness and understanding with technology and measurement. We can learn what works, what's useful. We can innovate upon it. For the first time, engagement with the market will yield platforms and assets and true goodwill. It's no longer sitting in the cost column.

Top 2015 trends

- More oracles, more sound bites, fewer truths.
- More mergers and acquisitions, particularly in digital.
- Decoupling of long-term client-agency relationships.
- Agencies will seek to un-encumber themselves of staff and overheads.
- Greater ROI demanded by clients.
- The five-second ad.
- The victory of the 'vloggers'.
- Fewer and fewer will make more and more money.
- The foundation of low-cost supermarkets.
- Outsourcing of unique skills.
- Emergence of the effective, proactive, agile, accountable in-house agency, seamlessly knitted into the business.
- Unique Africa solutions born of new African networks.
- Platforms replacing media strategy as key means of delivery.
- Engagement, participation, customerisation, metrics and learning replacing advertising and promotion
- The super-premium for BEE talent.
- Powerfully re-engineered corporate PR capability.

- New administrations in South Africa, Africa, the US, the UK, will be accompanied by a new electorate, few of which will ever visit the ballot box.

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ABOUT WAYNE NAIDOO

Wayne Naidoo founded DUKE after leaving his CMO position at AFB (now JUMO), one of Africa's fastest growing consumer finance groups. Currently chairman of the ACA (Association of Communication and Advertising SA) and voted as 2019's runner up for 'Most Respected Agency Leader in Cape Town' by MarkLives. Former CEO of Lowe & Partners SA, former chairman of YPO (Young Presidents Organisation), previous chairman of the ACA and former director of the AAA School of Advertising.

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