

Brands need to relook the value of research

By  Percy Shangase

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The invisible enemy continues to do untold damage to the economy at large with the revised GDP growth to be in the negative territory, the business landscape is increasingly facing shifting goal posts, whilst the educational sector is literally in limbo.



Photo by [Adeolu Betu](#) on [Unsplash](#).

I can assert without hesitation that social distancing has had unintended consequences of brand distancing, and brand isolation to name a few, thus:

- Eroding brand recognition
- Brand choice
- Clouding brand messaging
- Clouding primary, secondary and tertiary target markets
- Causing an increase in brand switching

There is no doubt in my marketing mind that the sustained lockdown has brought about unprecedented confusion, lack of direction, and malfunctioning GPS in the navigation within the marketing space as the fear of the unknown intensifies. This is further compounded by the following factors which are hard to ignore:

- The unprecedented increase in unemployment (yet, strangely enough, America is experiencing some form of employment trajectory in the escalating face of the pandemic) – I know it is grossly unfair to compare South Africa and America.
- The ever-widening gap of the largely marginalised communities and societies (I am sure brands would kill just to get a glimpse of what is happening in their minds in real-time, yet the resources are not forthcoming to address this)
- There is a marked increase in the competition for the consumers' discretionary spend.
- Intense confusion in the consumer; headspace caused by the myriad of factors highlighted above.

I must say that it has never been so clear in my mind that brand/s that are not in sync or properly realigning themselves or evolving enough with the metamorphic changes shaping the business world are trapped in a time warp. I respectfully admit that re-alignment strategies would not yield tangible results and/or do justice to the brands in the long run if proper and effective research such as brand health/brand audit is meticulously carried out. In fact, no matter the elasticity of your

product/service/brand/industry, options remain a huge reality, and if not kept in check, they can cause huge damage.

It is my further assertion that bold decisions regarding the relook of the value of research be undertaken in order to remove ambiguity. This, based on my experience as a marketer, would go a long way in managing:

- Brand gapping
- Irrelevant messaging
- Eroding trust - brand loyalty and brand affinity
- Vanishing market share
- The flip-flop risk adjustment strategy that is telling to the marketing in the medium and long term.

For example, I have noted with keen interest that since the weekend announcements, companies were quick to venture to Social Media and proclaim “excited about being back” with complete disregard for the adjustments and juggling that the consumer has undergone. For these companies it will be “business as usual” – regrettably, I am sure that an experienced brand or marketing manager would agree with me when I say such mentality is flawed and would have adverse effects in the long run.

It will be equally interesting to see how digital transformation takes shape in months to come as marketing budgets are slashed. Consequently, there will be an unprecedented move towards BTL. There is also no doubt that as this trend gains traction and trajectory, information over-flow/over-load will become prevalent and consumer fatigue will take effect and more and more brand messaging will be lost in the sea of sameness causing more harm to the brand as companies take a gamble through short cuts.

As a marketing specialist myself, I have been quite privileged to enjoy exposure to research and it has become a strong feature in my offering because consumers have had to do a juggling act, undoubtedly this has a knock-on effect on the choice of brand/s they buy – which their psychographic profile will tend to skew towards brands that give the consumer more mileage than the next offering (based on a recent study).



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Stronger marketing tactics backed by effective, and relevant research that will inform the direction brands ought to take are more relevant now than they have ever been before.

As I conclude, it would be remiss of me not to prevail with brand custodians and marketing executives to ask this question:

“ *What is the cost of conducting research as opposed to not doing it and just hope things would go back to normal without the arsenal of real-life/time insights.* ”

Let us engage further on [e-mail](#). Looking forward to your insights and how we can take this discussion forward.

ABOUT PERCY SHANGASE

Percy Shangase is the 1st Black person to win the Prestigious Alan Paton Literary Award. He runs a Marketing and Research Consultancy, despite living with a disability - below knee amputation, however he drives and flies wherever is necessary. He has an insatiable appetite and passion for Marketing meshed with Research and has elaborate experience spanning over 20 years. However, he fails to fathom why Marketing/Research spend are always the 1st to get chopped when market conditions are not conducive.

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