

Are you a believer?

 By [Kate Niemöller](#)

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A lust for clicks, and follows, shares and likes - and even votes in politics - has sullied our judgement and contorted our perspectives. It is concerning is that the popularity of “alternative facts” born out of this, is gaining momentum.

A key indicator in the plummeting global trust deficit is information. Without it, we're virtually impotent, but the minute that it's produced by the wrong hands the consequences could be catastrophic.

Our post-truth era demands that we disseminate information responsibly.



Samra2017: Fact-phobia vs credible data

Leigh Andrews 18 May 2017



And this was certainly something I hoped to bring home during my presentation at the recent Southern African Marketing Research Association (Samra) Conference 2017.

Fact-checking and striving for accuracy in communications seem elementary, but this exercise, and the resolve to do so are sorely lacking – ubiquitously. As a research professional, I totally grasp the gravity of interrogating information that we allow to filter into our reports and deliverables, not to mention what goes into our psyches, lexicons, and most importantly, our reality. And this merely scratches the surface when it comes to putting out authentic information.

The Samra conference gave the attendees an opportunity to congregate and interact as professionals with fresh ideas and new perspectives. We explored the changes in market research, and how to expedite that change for the better. I particularly like that the conference encourages collaborative and innovative thinking, and grows the community of providers and users of market research. This includes economic research, business research, social research, political research and even opinion polling.

As research professionals, there's nothing stopping us from questioning the content that passes our desks, or even barring it from being disseminated.



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In our field, many of us are focused on producing and sharing content quickly, affordably and in volume for a number of media, including social platforms. A consequence of this constant and growing pressure on professionals to produce new material in volume is that – whether intentional or not – inaccurate and poor quality content is shared to millions of consumers. These consumers are generally none the wiser. Although the pressure of the online content environment demands that we produce material at higher volumes than before, producing quality should always trump producing quantity. We can achieve this through internal company mechanisms that include committed editorial oversight and quality standards. Of course, true collaboration here is key.

Stronger partnerships and interaction between consultants and researchers are what we need to resolve some of these challenges, and to explore new opportunities. With the market becoming more and more democratised, it makes sense that the research industry adopts knowledge sharing and collaboration with different industries, even traditional competitors.

Attending, and speaking at, the Samra Conference was a real value add for me. If I had to pick a favourite presenter, it'd have to be Jack Hlongwane, or Rishal Hurbans. Jack is a senior research executive at Kantar TNS SA. He shared fascinating insights about a field I knew very little about: the informal economy (a.k.a. informal traditional trade). According to Jack it's brimming with opportunities. Rishal, on the other hand spoke about the opportunities becoming realisable through Artificial Intelligence and its development. As he is a solutions architect and software engineer, his views were fresh and inspiring.

These presentations were truly interesting, as they open one's eyes to new avenues and methodologies into which research may expand. South Africa's informal traders are entrepreneurs and innovators in their own right, and it is vital for our economy to support them and to help them grow. Jack believes the informal economy needs structure, and his aim is to conduct some quantitative research in order to measure the growth potential resident in this field.

Jack's perspectives on the informal economy, and more traditionally and uniquely African approaches to data collection prove that we are in a position to not only expand our own field, but help so many people in the process. Similarly, Rishal explained the incredible ways that Artificial Intelligence, quite contrary from replacing human jobs, can help us to empower people and economies.

Other notable mention should be granted to best newcomer award winners, Natalie Botha and Saiesh Ajudhiya, who discussed the innovations possible when we understand the hidden emotions in consumers' reactions to adverts. They used facial recognition technology to future-proof adverts by understanding non-verbal responses expressed by consumers, and their insights were truly fascinating.

The audience's response to my presentation included critical views, which I welcomed. This was an indication that there is

an appetite for engagement on the topic of producing credible, authentic information. And I look forward to future opportunities to speak at this significant event.

So, the next time you gear up to write an article or produce a report, think about the recipients and how they will be affected. Let's cultivate believers of the truth, and minds critical and courageous enough to figure out what that is.

ABOUT KATE NIEMÖLLER

Kate Niemöller is a researcher at IQ Business, specialising in secondary research and linguistic quality assurance. Though the saying goes that a jack-of-all-trades is a master of none, Kate's varied interests have diversified her skillset...

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