

# The power of advertising is 65.0

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But it needs to be at least 70.0 in terms of a new model of overall attitudes to advertising incorporating advertising's role in society, its entertainment value, its information value, its irritation level, and its trust and credibility. The model suggests that advertising in South Africa could be more entertaining and less serious.

Young blacks in Soweto turned out to be those most positive about advertising whilst the media with the most trusted ads were DSTV, SABC TV and specialist magazines. These are some of the findings from two recent surveys conducted amongst 2 000 metro adults and by 880 people online by TNS Research Surveys in early September 2008 and released recently at **The Annual Ad Conference** hosted by advertising and marketing commentator Jeremy Maggs in Cape Town and Johannesburg.

The surveys were designed to establish general attitudes to advertising in South Africa and, in particular, who embraces and actively enjoys advertising, engaging with it, and talking about it - and who is cynical and negative about it, and why. The studies also looked at the most memorable strap lines and people's perceived "best ad" as well as which media are felt to be the most trustworthy.

## What constitutes the "best" advertising?

Interestingly, people tend to reject celebrities in ads in favour of ads that either reflect themselves or are reflective of society - but the biggest response was in respect of ads that are clever (77%) or humorous (76%), although 41% of the online sample said that they did not always understand some of the humour. Three-quarters say that ads often make them think.

Following on from this, two-thirds of people feel that advertising provides entertainment (and 58% feel that ads brighten their lives) whilst three-quarters love seeing or hearing new ads - good news for the industry - but two cautionaries emerge here: two-thirds feel that ads that are not well-made reflect badly on what is being advertised whilst a quarter feel that billboards make the environment look ugly. Countering this, almost a half of the online sample feel that billboards brighten the environment.

A critical component of ads in the electronic media is the music with eight out of ten people feeling that music can make a big difference. But four out of ten feel there is too much reference to sex in advertising.

This raises an important issue: these surveys are not about telling creative people how to make ads. But it does suggest that they should know who will be offended by what. Then - either avoid offending them or, if that is an inevitable consequence of a creative idea, then know about and be prepared for the fallout that results. The Nando's "double-breasted" ad is a case in point here: it generated huge word-of-mouth and talkability (priceless) with people (male and female) being equally (and strongly) divided as to its merits.

## Trust and information value

Almost everyone (80%) feels that it is important for brands to advertise themselves, so it seems that the advertising industry taken as a whole has a good future, but it may be that its face will change: 61% trust the opinions of family and friends more than they trust advertising and a quarter of the sample prefer the internet over conventional advertising for information about products and services. In a recent overseas study, 68% of people preferred the opinions of others, so it seems that South Africa is slightly more trusting of advertising - but only slightly. In addition, whilst two-thirds feel that advertising gives them the confidence to make the correct buying decisions and keeps them informed, a half do not trust quality and

performance claims: it is no longer good enough simply to claim to be “the best”, “the quickest”, with “the best service”. People in today's highly connected world look elsewhere for confirmation.

## **Ads in society**

People do feel that ads reflect the society we live in (75%) and a half talk about ads with others. Three-quarters of the online sample attribute many everyday sayings to advertising. A third feel that advertising often damages beliefs and values. Again, taking these findings together suggests that one should only offend “with intent”, expecting and being prepared for the fallout.

On a more positive note, three-quarters of people acknowledge that sponsorships help many sports to grow and develop. And people generally know that media costs would be higher without advertising. Of course there are always those who feel that advertising adds to the cost of things, but this is much lower than those who see its cost benefits in terms of media affordability. Nine out of ten people do acknowledge that advertising helps promote competition.

One in six people say they “hate” ads and almost 70% feel that there is too much advertising around these days. There is quite a strong feeling - six out of ten - that ads aimed at vulnerable people need regulation with 88% of the online sample saying that ads aimed at children specifically should be regulated. Half the metro sample and almost 90% of the online sample know that, if they find an ad offensive, there is an organisation to whom they can complain.

Over 80% of the online sample understand that brand logos are part of a brand's advertising. This raises the point that these need to be protected as valuable brand properties and not be vulnerable to easy copying (as an aside, in the presentation of the research findings, logos of brands mentioned (see later) were easy to lift off company websites...).

In general, the online sample was more advertising savvy (80% had heard of the Loeries, compared with only 23% of the metro sample) and more involved in advertising but also more critical of it - a third feel that the ad industry is not to be trusted but 55% say it is glamorous!

## **The bad**

Everyone has a pet hate! The most common complaints revolve around there being too many boring ads around (55%) as well ads being too repetitive. The too-frequent reference to sex has already been raised (though two-thirds of males in the online sample like to see pictures of pretty girls in ads!). Ads that are untrue, long, senseless and intrusive are some of the other main complaints - but results here are very idiosyncratic. Phrases such as “terms and conditions apply” or ads that had legal “small print” are disliked by 60% of the online sample, and “funny accents” irritate a third of people - but two thirds also do not like ads that use people who cannot speak the relevant language properly.

Although sponsorships are viewed in a generally positive light, half of the online sample finds the ads that come on the screen during sporting events to be irritating.

## **“Best” ads/devices at the moment**

And the winner is... Coca Cola at 11%. Then comes KFC at 9%, Vodacom at 7% and Nando's at 5%. Fast foods, as a category, dominates.

But when asked about the most memorable characters or devices, the Vodacom characters in general and the meerkat in particular were the only responses of any note. And creatives should note that six out of ten of the online sample really enjoy such characters. Maybe this is a missed opportunity for greater consistency of use of memory hooks?

## **So who loves and who hates advertising?**

Using these response patterns, we were able to score each person in our two surveys from zero (absolutely anti

advertising) to 100 (head over heels in love with advertising). A person needs to have a score higher than 70 to be considered positive towards advertising in general - and, hence the concern when the overall average for the 2 000 metro adults turned out to be 65.0 (and 61.1 for the online sample). This shows that the negatives slightly outweigh the positives on average. Having said that, we did find that 47% of the metro sample is positive towards advertising (19% extremely so), 17% are quite negative (6% extremely so - they will certainly speak up if they find an ad offensive) with 36% in the ambivalent to mildly negative box - these are people with some positive associations with advertising but also with some serious reservations.

The most positive people are black, younger, in Gauteng (especially Soweto), LSM 5 to 7, with a tendency towards Tswana and Sotho speakers. Conversely, the more negative groups skew towards whites (especially males) and Indians/Asians, older people, LSMs 9 and 10, those who have at least some university education and English speakers.

## How can we increase the Power figure from 65.0 to above 70?

Attitudes to advertising in general form part of a bigger model of how advertising works but the literature does show a link between these general attitudes towards advertising and how people react to individual ads. Whether an individual ad works is a function of these attitudes, as well as of people's current commitment to or engagement with what is being advertised and the ad's sheer executional effect. Hence, improving general attitudes to advertising can only be helpful.

The research shows that the most immediate effects will come if advertising is a little lighter, brighter and more entertaining and perhaps a little less information-intensive. It needs to give people confidence in their decisions, or tell them what's in, or make them think, or provide talkability or be clever. Marketers need to ask themselves what it is that their ad is likely to do with respect to these issues when they sign off on an ad.

Music and (appropriate) humour help considerably. Characters and devices add excellent memorability (but one needs staying power here). Sex and pretty girls should be used appropriately or cleverly, not just in and of themselves. Ugly billboards (though a good billboard can brighten up the environment), ads that might damage values and ads aimed at vulnerable groups, especially children, require a conscious evaluation of the potential fallout and a willingness to embrace it. Be edgy but be prepared. Sponsorships are generally perceived advantageously but ads that intrude during sports events incur displeasure.

Boring and repetitive ads are a no-no as are ads that people perceive simply to be badly made. Legalese is a turn-off and accents can irritate. Ads that simply shout out unsubstantiated claims are ads that people just don't trust any more. It is no longer 1976 when TV was new and ads were a source of authoritative knowledge. Advertising today is ubiquitous and people have become media savvy and so interconnected that it is easy to solicit more trusted opinions from others or from the internet.

Why would anyone make a boring ad? Why would anyone produce an ad that reflects badly on the brand because the ad is perceived to be badly made? Marketers need to ask themselves these questions when they sign off on an ad.

### **Technical note**

The metro study was conducted amongst a sample of 2 000 adults (1260 blacks, 385 whites, 240 coloureds and 115 Indians/Asians) in the seven major metropolitan areas and has a margin of error of under 2.5% for the results found for the total sample. The online study consisted of 880 adults (179 blacks, 551 whites, 67 coloureds and 115 Indians/Asians) using a web-based questionnaire on TNS Research Surveys' online access panel: it has a margin of error of under 4% for the results found for the total sample. The studies were conducted by TNS Research Surveys (Pty) Ltd as part of their ongoing research into current marketing, social and political issues and were funded by TNS Research Surveys. The original idea, as well as input into the design of the studies, came from marketing and advertising commentator Jeremy Maggs. The results form part of his publication ***The Annual***, published by Future Publishing (Pty) Ltd (Tel: 011 803 2040), Rivonia, Johannesburg. For more details on the surveys as well as a full technical report, please contact Neil Higgs on 011-778-7500 or 082-376-6312. [www.tnsresearchsurveys.co.za](http://www.tnsresearchsurveys.co.za)

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