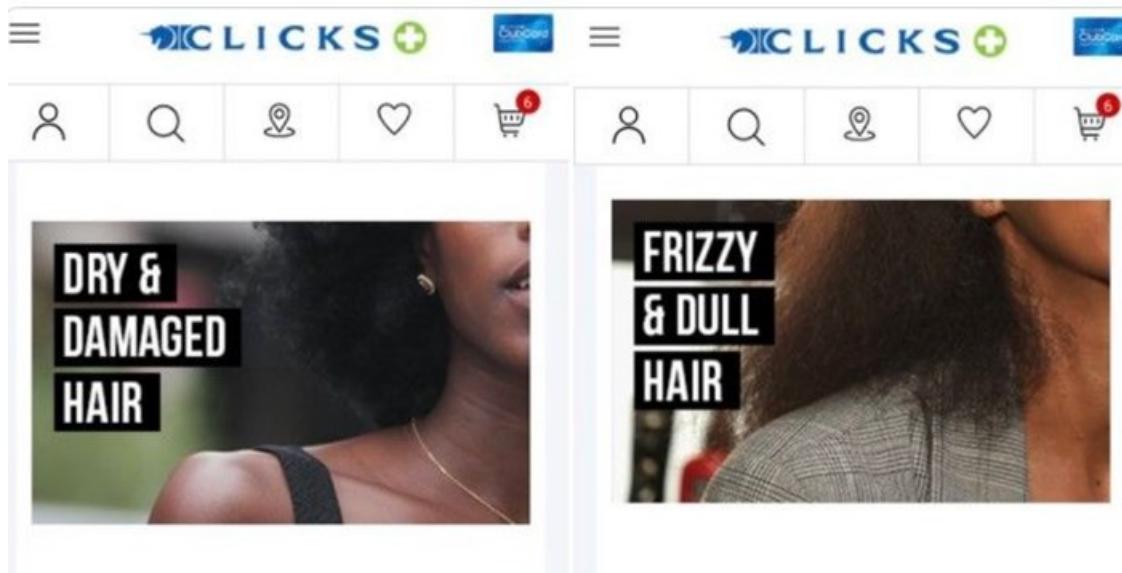


How conducting solid research could have prevented the Clicks fiasco

 By [Percy Shangase](#)

7 Sep 2020

I feel vindicated. Hardly a week after *Bizcommunity* afforded me an opportunity to vent the significance of research in the post-Covid-19 era, my mind went into a frenzy when the Clicks fiasco hit the headlines in the mainstream media and trending on all social media platforms.



Screengrab from the Clicks website.



Racist Clicks haircare campaign leads to backlash and picketing

7 Sep 2020



I have done caskets of research within the South African and SADC context regarding natural black hair and the following insights still ring in my ears:

- If you do not have anything positive to say about a black woman's hair don't!
- A black woman's hair is the crown and jewel of their presence and physique/identity.
- I learnt that you will bear the brunt and pay the highest price if you are condescending towards their hair.

As I indicated in my previous article, I am a seasoned marketer who is equally a custodian and an advocate for research in the market space in which we operate. I even argued that marketing and research spend are the first to get the chop when market conditions are not as conducive. With the matter at hand, it would seem that a lot of education needs to be done to educate even the most experienced creative minds in the industry (in fairness to them, deadlines make them prone to mistake).



Brands need to relook the value of research

Percy Shangase 2 Sep 2020



Long term erosion of brand affinity and reputational damage

I had to do some thinking and went back as far as Marketing 101 as the other title would be perceived as rubbing salt to a wound that is not healing. What really amazed me about this fiasco is that at least 6 people had actually come into contact with the artwork and the copy of the advert (are we saying no one really picked this up and took issue with it or at the very least make inquiries about it?) before it was even sent for approval. It had to be the client that approved the work and it is the very client that is saying a full investigating is to be undertaken. If you asked me, just a sincere apology would do because saying an investigation is to be undertaken, you are raising expectations which in all honesty cannot be met.

On the one hand, one would easily argue ignorance and on the other, one would argue that research would have bombed the idea, thus the creative team would have had to test more than one concepts to prevent the current catastrophe and possible long term erosion of brand affinity and reputational damage. The repercussions that Clicks is currently undergoing are as a result of not conducting ad-testing, exercising due diligence and at the very least understanding their markets.

In the past while, not knowing and understanding one's own target market and how to reach them proved costly for a number of brands who went for the creative kill without thinking about the cultural pushbacks they would endure. Some of the brands include, but not limited to:

- Iwisa Maize Meal ad – reduced the lobola negotiation to a 5kg of mieliemeal and they were chastised by the black consumers for being insensitive to their cultural practices. This advert was banned on television (no prior research was presented to back it up).
- Med Lemon ad – depicting people queuing outside waiting to see a traditional healer who turned out to be using Med lemon, the black community were incensed with belittling and making Inyangas out to be liars and cheaters (that portrayed lack of understanding of the black market)
- These are some of the many adverts that were banned for being culturally insensitive (H&M – the kid who was wearing a hoody written “The coolest monkey in the jungle” caused such an uproar that some of the stores were looted as a consequence).



H&M removes 'black boy' ad after racism accusation

9 Jan 2018



I have personally sat in meetings where I was made to be the spokesperson for Black people and I refused and always said if you are not sure, spend 200K researching this in order to be sure. My heart really goes out to black guys who sit in these meetings where concepts are discussed and their opinions are sought much to the detriment of the brand.

Why ad-testing is needed

The sad reality though is that this would not be the end of it, I know of some clients who do this deliberately at their own peril with the hope that it would create much-needed PR about the brand – in this case, bad PR and lots of damage control and a lot of reflection to be done by the client with respect to their partnership with the creative agency is much to get you thinking. There is a reason why research is needed and why ad testing is needed:

- Know your customers
- Know their demographic profile.
- Understand their psychographic profile.
- What are their cultural beliefs and touchpoints?
- Know where they live do not assume? Know where and how they spend their time?
- Know how they consume media i.e. ATL/BTL

Always bear this in mind – the fundamental reason for testing adverts is that you will never accurately know your how your target market is going to respond to a headline advert like that of Clicks in this instance. I once attended a Unilever Institute Presentation that brought us Black Diamonds, one of the presenters was a white guy he projected a slide of the picture taken in the Eastern Cape of women at the back of the bakkie and dared call it “A South African taxi” – I took issue with the shortsighted assertion for half an hour and I walked out feeling sorry for paying R2,800 to listen to such misinformed presentation.

The point I am making here is this, get in touch with me – get a book by Muzi Kuzwayo entitled *Marketing through Mud and Dust* and read it religiously and you will come across a section where he argues and I quote:

“If you want us black people to be interested in your brand/product/service – you must first be interested in us, in our do’s and don’ts and most importantly our sensitives.”

This I believe would save a lot of companies’ face, and money if you realise the significance of research. The belief that if you go with a well-established research house will set you back a couple of millions compared to empowering people who could do that at half the cost and give you added value and insight to your research.

I look forward to engaging with you. Email me by clicking [here](#).

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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