

Hello Africa! Tell me how you're doin'!



By [Marthinus Van Loggerenberg](#)

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Many multinational brands approach Africa with a near-desperate bright-eyed eagerness, trying to get to grips with her intricate market dynamics.

For most, brand-building success is still a hit-and-miss exercise. As Africa oozes with diversity, you have your wits about you if you are going to craft a viable brand communication strategy.

On archetype models

A number of one-size-fits-all customer segmentation exercises or archetype models for 'the African market' appear to be the go-to approach adopted by quite a few marketers. Some models go as far as to apply a simple three-tiered segmentation approach, purely based on GDP. This could be dangerous territory if market-specific context is not thoroughly considered.

Let's apply this thinking to a financial institution trying to crack the African market, for instance. Why would someone take the money from under their mattress and save it in a bank? Some motivators from Cameroun follow. One, to save for your wedding - here, the man pays for his wedding, not his parents or those of the bride. Two, to purchase your house - the perception is that, regardless of your academic or business success, regardless of your region or culture, you will be deemed a failure if you don't own your own home. Three, saving to send your child or grandchild to study abroad - this is a priority, not just aspirational.

Here's another question: Who should you target to instil a savings culture? Ghana and Nigeria, for instance, sport a higher hierarchical structure; so if one wants to create an influencer strategy, community mentors would be the target. In countries like Cameroun and Tanzania, a flatter hierarchical structure is at play, which may demand another set of dynamics, such as targeting community carers, for instance.

On word-of-mouth, community and storytelling

We know that word-of-mouth still reigns king because it targets igniters in a variety of real-world networks. However, so few global brands can create a solid communication plan around this. Basic rule of thumb says that roadshows and activation programmes in Africa are still the tried and tested way to exercise an amplified word-of-mouth campaign. But if these are the basics - what are the possibilities, especially given the rise in social media due to an ever exploding smart phone penetration in Africa.

The first thing that any marketer will tell you is that community in Africa is important. More and more developing nations see their achievers marginalising the community they have grown up in and defer from 'ploughing back' to make way for their individual aspirations. Reality is also that the concept of community quickly gets put on the backburner once one becomes an urbanite. Consider that to be a universal phenomenon.

We also know storytelling works well as it is inherent to African culture. Yet again, the question can be asked: is storytelling so unique to Africa? Branded content is exploding all over the world. Africa or not: so many brands still deny themselves the opportunity to resonate with their intended target audience due to a lack of a well-structured brand narrative.

On localising brand communication

Now a touchy subject. Countries like South Africa seem to be a key destination to shoot commercials for other African countries, followed by an influx of complaints in its ill attempt to mimic the real thing. A toothpaste commercial for the Nigerian market depicting a fake [danfo bus](#) forgot that South Africa's steering wheels sit on the right when those in Nigeria are on the other side. But the brand claimed it 'really loves Naija' (Nigeria). We know that patriotism sells, especially in Nigeria. However, overeager attempts to 'get in' based on superficial market insights usually come across as desperate and contrived.

Does it really bother you when you know that you are looking at a local voice-over version of an international toothpaste brand, for instance? Context permits. Perhaps multinational brands should not try so hard to localise their brand communication? Reality is: some brands simply cannot afford to make an individualised ad for each and every country they do business in. But if you do - make sure you are entirely authentic in your attempt.

Targeting the more empowered woman



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We know that women's rights are being increasingly recognised in a number of African countries. Marketers target this consumer segment with a sense of determined intent, but do we really know what speaks to her heart? What her ambitions and fears are in relation to her quest to self-actualisation? Or the complications around inter-dynamics related to an increased decision-making power in the household?

One thing though; we should not disregard the decision-making power women in Africa have had in the past regarding everyday household purchases and making financial decisions, sometimes even heading up the household's finances. Some major multinational banks have reported that close to half of their clientele are women and the contribution percentage increases considerably for microfinance institutions. The latter is due to an exponential increase of woman-entrepreneurs in Africa; something to consider especially when bringing FMCGs into an African market. How are you going

to empower her against the backdrop of her country or even region's socio-cultural dynamics?

Tap into universal truths

Crafting a sound consumer behaviour model becomes more complex than ever anticipated. Tap into a universal truth and take it from there. Don't necessarily assume that you know what you are doing. In an African context, you most likely don't.

Sometimes it's perfectly okay to follow logic without relying on African marketing myths or blindly copy-and-pasting archetype models or fearing inertia because of its vast diversity. There is most likely a simpler solution than you think. Just get in, keep your wits about you and do your research without any assumptions. And most important of all? Consider that there isn't something like "the African market".

ABOUT MARTHINUS VAN LOGGERENBERG

Marthinus van Loggerenberg is the Senior Strategic Planner at FCB Cape Town. He obtained an MBA Cum Laude at the University of Stellenbosch Business School and is in the final phase of his PhD on brand strategy. He is also a published academic and writer. Prior employers include Musica and the Vega School of Brand Leadership, among others. He specialises in brand narrative, branded entertainment, word-of-mouth marketing, trend forecasting and leadership development.

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