



THE RISE OF A CONSCIOUS AUDIENCE

By **Tokiso Molefe**, Social Media Manager at Penquin

IN 2016 - WHY ARE BRANDS STILL MAKING RACIST, SEXIST, HOMOPHOBIC AND CULTURAL APPROPRIATION BLUNDERS. UNFORTUNATELY, IF YOU ARE NOT CHECKING FOR THE "ISMS" IN-HOUSE THE AUDIENCE YOU PUT IT OUT TO IS NOT SHY TO CALL YOU OUT. IT IS TIME TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE CONSCIOUS AUDIENCE.

I have seen a tweet that referred to our current generation as the "LOL" generation. Basically meaning that there is no depth in their thinking, which suggests that they just react to whatever is on their timeline at that moment. At face value the reactive observations have some truth to them but engagement trends also show that there is a lot of depth.

Yes, we can't all be conscious with the aim to rise-up for a purpose. Some people go through life just wanting to live and get to the next day and social media is a reflection of this as well. I also believe that for every three people chasing Pokémon - there are two people speaking up against sexism, racism, human trafficking and other human causes.

Social media marketing has transcended from just being seen as a tool to reduce the cost of communication and reach a wider audience to a platform that brings social issues and identity ties to the forefront of online conversations. Social media itself is also outgrowing the "influencer marketing" phase where twelebs were the IT people to follow and everything they shared was gold.

In the past couple of years post the Arab Spring era - we are seeing social media being a place where activists of all kinds breathe life into their on-the-ground campaigns. This has meant that brands are being

challenged daily for broadcasting content that goes against this conscious thought.

A great example of the strength of the conscious audience is when the weekly newspaper Mail & Guardian had to apologise for posting a tweet that was seen by their audience as fuelling the HIV-related stigma. The editor was initially defensive but later decided to issue an apology. This shows that "it is not just Twitter".

In 2015/2016 #FeesMustFall brought the issue of higher education fees to the forefront of daily conversation. No longer just a student issue - the whole country witnessed students from different universities coming together demanding access to education for all. This has led to the Fees Commissions being established to look into the feasibility of free higher education and training in South Africa.

Some are quick to say: "some people are always looking for something to get angry about". I've also noted people posting, "what are we angry about today".

These might seem like light jabs but the reality is that brands should ask themselves:

- Is this idea inclusive of all races?
- Could this be seen as sexist?
- Are we fuelling the lazy stereotype train?

This could save you and the brand you serve from always being defensive, with a tarnished brand image - depending on how quickly you handle it..

SOCIAL MEDIA FOR BUSINESS

When all is said and done, brands using social media as a marketing platform aim to increase their bottom line. All the other elements such as brand love, brand loyalty, fast customer response and increase in engagement are elements that serve the greater goal.

With a rise in the conscious audience, social media campaigns will dare creatives, copywriters and strategists to really dig deep into the data, analyse the market much better and create concepts that get people talking, excited and ultimately influence sales.

Business will slowly shift from the excitement of "trending" over the weekend to asking, "did sales increase during this period".

This is not to encourage "buy now" more than it is about creating compelling stories online that are well thought, informative, entertaining and sensitive to various markets. It is looking at the end product and believing the best work and ideas were infused, that it speaks to the market and will either add to the conversations or start a new one.

The social media landscape now demands that creatives be creative. [#smlr2017]

Tokiso Molefe is an all-round communication professional, a digital strategist, content development manager and a media trainer and who works at Penquin as a social media manager.

About Penquin

We are a results-driven, full-service advertising agency in the business of delivering results to South Africa's best companies since 2000. As a fully integrated marketing agency, we maintain a high standard across all platforms and areas in which we operate, and strive to deliver effective campaigns and excellent results for our clients.

*Waverley Office Park
125 Corlett Drive
Bramley, Johannesburg
South Africa
TELEPHONE: +27-11-879-1900
EMAIL: info@penquin.co.za*