

# MAJOR TRENDS IN A FUTURE SOUTH AFRICA AND SOME IMPLICATIONS FOR INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION IN MARKETING

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## ABSTRACT

It is now broadly accepted that long term shifts occur in the values that people hold which determine their behaviour. In the South African context this process is being accelerated by the clash between ideologies. It is argued that there is one megatrend in South Africa, namely Equality, which is leading to the development of parallel and reactionary sub-trends. In many respects South Africa is moving in the opposite direction to other developed countries, but it can not hide from certain global influences, in particular the gathering world-wide concern about Environmental Conservation. These deep-seated changes, which, for the most part, reflect a conflict between the freedom of the individual and a desire for uniformity, have considerable significance for communication and marketing.

## INTRODUCTION

South Africa is undergoing a revolution in its economic, political and social structure, which is effecting the lives of all its inhabitants.

Equality is emerging as the major driving force in our society. This megatrend will have a broad influence on the ways in which individuals and groups behave in the decade ahead. It will influence



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the development of other trends and even lead to the emergence of counter tendencies, as people endeavour to maintain their individuality and personal

freedoms in the face of the perceived threats posed by the surge towards uniformity.

An appreciation of the nature of these trends and the relationships between them, may help us to understand the extraordinary events that are taking place around us.

In many respects the developments occurring in South Africa have considerable similarities with events in Eastern Europe. Insights can also be gained from the driving forces that resulted in the French Revolution, which celebrated its 'bicentenaire' in 1989.

## **Equality**

'Equality' has wider meaning and implications than equal political rights at the ballot box. It includes access to fundamental societal resources such as: education, health, opportunity and wealth. 'Equality' equates to the cry for 'Égalité' two hundred years ago. In the words of Robespierre: "We desire an order of things where all base and cruel passions are enchained by the laws, all beneficent and generous feelings awakened by them; where ambition is the desire to deserve glory and to be useful to one's country; where distinctions arise only from equality itself; where the citizen is subject to the magistrate, the magistrate to the people, the people to justice; where the country secures the welfare of each individual, and each individual proudly enjoys the prosperity and glory of his country; where all minds are enlarged by the constant interchange of republican sentiments and by the need of earning the respect of a great people; where industry is an adornment to the liberty that ennobles it, and commerce is the source of public wealth, not simply of monstrous riches for a few families."

The drive for equality will have considerable significance for communication. Situations where people are shown in day to day life will downplay the superiority of one group, or person, over others.

Emerging from the megatrend 'Equality' are two further trends, 'Emancipation' which equates to 'Liberté' and 'Integration' which parallels 'Fraternité'.

## **Integration**

'Integration' is the inevitable and rational outcome of 'Equality', for if all people are equal, then there should be no artificial or social barriers to keep them apart.

In the camaraderie on the sports field, the jive amongst musicians, the team work in the office environment and the pizzazz of advertising, integration may appear to be taking place. But it is unlikely that intermarriage across ethnic and religious boundaries will occur to any great extent in an environment which has for centuries been driven by the ethos of separation. Integration behind closed doors is likely to be limited for years to come.

However, it can be expected that the public face of marketing will reflect a mixed society; and that extensive social interaction will be shown between groups who, up to now, have often been targeted as separate distinct entities.

## **Emancipation**

'Emancipation' involves not just race, but every difference that can be considered to discriminate between individuals: age, education, language, religion and sex. If we are all equal, then it can be argued that it is surely not possible for one person to be better

than another. Regardless of one's personal circumstances, and the norms and mores of the society of the past, and the present, the only logical conclusion is that "I am as good as anybody else. The restrictions which have held me in check are no more, and I am now free to do what others do. I also expect to be treated fairly, without discrimination".

It is probable that the traditional roles of men and women will continue to blur and that greater attention will be given to both older and younger consumers. The ageing of the white population, in line with demographic trends in many Western nations, and the growth of the significance of younger blacks, which is a feature of third world countries, will alert marketers to the importance of these two sectors. The impact of these changes is of significance for virtually all products, but in particular for finance, media, travel and tourism, retailing, as well as housing, consumer durables and perishables.

### **Social Sensitivity**

It is probable that 'Emancipation' will encourage 'Social Sensitivity' between people. It is also likely that there will be a greater interest in the customs of other groups. There will be less criticism of unusual forms of behaviour, dress and language; and people will tend to be more polite when dealing with others than has sometimes been the case in the past.

### **Consolidation**

The move to 'Equality' will be counteracted by 'Consolidation', as people endeavour to secure and protect what they regard as rightfully theirs. Mankind is not inclined to share - unless motivated by self-interest, or persuaded by powerful arguments, such as the

promise of immortality or physical violence. The human race would not have survived, if it had not aggressively established its authority and domain. In the South African environment those with privileged positions will desperately hang on to their advantage - or opt out under threat of confiscation and invasion and move elsewhere. Many - who can afford to - by virtue of their youth, skills and financial well-being, are already contemplating living overseas, or elsewhere in Africa.

'Consolidation' will not just be of material possessions, but also of relationships, which will be jealously guarded; of family, which will be protected against the risks of the undesirable and unknown; and of customs and beliefs, which will be retained with great vigour against the infiltration of the foreign.

The 'have nots' in our society are expecting, and have been promised, more. South Africa, in its recent past, has been singularly unsuccessful in creating wealth. It is improbable in our current economic circumstances, during a period of change and uncertainty, that we will suddenly find the key to a rapid improvement in living standards for the masses. Such a dramatic reversal of fortune will require decades of development, vast investment in higher education, an extensive relaxation of economic restrictions and a dedication to thrift and hard work - none of which are evident on a large scale at present.

The belief that wealth can be shared by the few to satisfy the many will quickly be found to be a myth, leading to anger amongst the 'have nots', who will seek short cuts to success.

### **Cultural Protectiveness**

Cultural Protectiveness will also become an area of key interest, as a means of

preserving identity. People will hang on to the past and try to maintain customs and traditions, as well as a body of knowledge related to history and the arts.

In the decade ahead, we are likely to see a fight for the preservation of Afrikaans as an official language. There will also be a vigorous attempt to rewrite the history books, so that the achievements, propaganda and verity of the past can be modified to suit the present.

Small market segments along cultural lines will emerge which will respond to specific appropriate appeals.

### **Materialism**

Behind the drive for 'Equality' is 'Materialism', and this more than any other aspect is what is fuelling the desire to dominate the political arena. The perception is, and who could doubt its regrettable truth, that the politicians in power are able to steer the good things in life in the direction of their supporters and themselves. The backers of the new political players are eagerly looking forward to the material rewards which they anticipate will inevitably follow a transference of authority - initially they would settle for equality, but later it is likely that superiority will be the desire.

There will opportunities both for high priced, prestige products, as well as less costly up-market brands, which will enhance the users' self-perception.

### **Entrepreneurship**

A feature of a materialistic society is the development of those with a hunger to succeed. In the future South Africa the emergence of 'Entrepreneurship' on a much more spectacular scale than hitherto is going to occur - unless those with leanings to outmoded, but still popular, Lenin-Marxist philosophies

hold sway. It is the entrepreneurs who create the wealth that is so badly needed. It is the entrepreneurs who have our admiration however much we may resent their success.

Pressure will inevitably be placed on financial institutions and Government agencies to provide risk capital to those who feel that they now have an opportunity to narrow the gap between the well-to-do and themselves.

It is probable that entrepreneurs, especially those who were previously regarded as being disadvantaged, will be given both encouragement and publicity, as they are the proof of the success of the new order.

### **Self Improvement**

'Self Improvement' is a feature of our society. But in the present environment this trend is directed at enhancing material well-being, rather than self-actualization, or cultural accomplishment.

Business education and quick courses to acquire skills, to learn how to make money on the stock exchange and improve material standards, will flourish, rather than those which encourage artistic pursuits and the finer use of leisure time.

### **Environmental Conservation**

The last of the ten South African trends is a global tendency which is rapidly developing in intensity. The realisation of the frightening implications of environmental degradation is dawning on those who, up till now, have looked no further than at the untidiness of their own backyard. Concern for the environment is being stimulated not only by world-wide publicity of the threat to planet Earth, and by sincere efforts of business people to reduce risk and im-

prove our natural heritage, but also by personal first hand experience of air, land and water pollution. South Africa is a major international culprit, and despite the pressures to provide all our people with a higher standard of living, even in some cases the wherewithal to stay alive, serious attention must be given to our environment to avoid a catastrophe of devastating proportions.

Given the rapid increases in population and urbanisation that are forecast, which go hand in hand with pollution, we will destroy irrevocably much of what today's generation has taken for granted - unless we are prepared to sacrifice a life-style that has become sacrosanct.

Environmental friendly products will increase, and the reluctance to spend more for a safer world will decline. Whilst there will be a measure of cynicism about the efficacy of these developments, the man in the street will become more demanding as the degradation of the world around us becomes more and more apparent.

## CONCLUSION

In many respects South Africa is mov-

ing in a different direction to the rest of the world. Many of the lessons which now appear obvious in other countries still have to be learnt at first hand by the 'new' South Africans. Ideologies die hard, and there is considerable reluctance to admit that beliefs on the left and right of the political spectrum are inappropriate for a modern state. His Excellence Comrade Vladimir Shubrin of the Central Committee of the USSR at the ANC Durban Conference held in July 1991, said "Our allies must have the right to make their own mistakes, but they should not have the right to repeat ours".

Unless we can break away from the uncompromising idealism that is gnawing away at our cultural heritage and economic enterprise, and instead encourage the freedom of the individual, rather than equality for 'the people', we will be doomed to mediocrity, poverty and ultimately insignificance on the world stage.

In the world of communication the truth will be gilded, the dreams will be fantasized and the consumer will be glamorized. Reality will be somewhat different.

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