

South Africa: A Different Sort of Marketing Mix

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THE future of South Africa depends largely on the extent to which blacks and whites have common aspirations, goals and values. This paper, which is largely based on over a decade of research on social change amongst urban blacks and whites, outlines the roots of the prevailing value system; and highlights similarities and differences between the races. Some comparisons are made with Western societies where comparable research is being conducted.

1. Introduction

This paper is based on a longitudinal study of social change amongst blacks and whites in South Africa. Pilot work was started on a project titled Sociomonitor in 1974, using methodology developed by Cofremca, a French research house. Social trends were identified, measuring instruments developed and extensively pilot tested using sophisticated multi-variate statistical procedures. In 1976, the first full scale project was done covering 1 200 literate urban black adults and 1 200 urban whites. The work has been repeated regularly since and the latest data is based on 1 500 urban blacks interviewed in 1985 and 1 500 urban whites interviewed in 1984.

Similar surveys are now being done in 18 countries around the world and South Africa has been one of the pioneers and innovators in this type of research.

This paper addresses the question: What are the aspirations, goals and values of urban blacks and whites?



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This is the key question facing marketers, planners and politicians today. If there are sufficient similarities between the two races, then we can begin to plan around the premise of one community. If, however, there are marked differences, then these will have to be recognised and taken into account.

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2. Rural roots

South Africa's fundamental values originate from its agricultural heritage. The traditional tenets that persist today, are identical to the protestant ethics that characterised the philosophy of America's founding fathers: respect for authority, loyalty and patriotism, caution and conservatism, belief in the family, support for the church and rejection of profligacy. This approach to life is on the decline, but is still to be found, with the older generation and those who are less well-off. It is stronger in families where the children have left home, and amongst Afrikaans and Zulu speakers.

A major manifestation of the destruction of this conservative outlook has been the decline in savings, and the growth of hire purchase commitments, amongst people whose goals were previously tempered by caution.

3. Outer directed values

South Africa has become an industrial nation. The Johannesburg, Reef complex is one of the greatest concentrations of heavy and light industry in the world. Our coastal cities: Durban, Cape Town, East London and Port Elizabeth, all enjoy a measure of prosperity based on the expansion of international and local business. Social values based on production are significantly different from those derived from rural roots. Materialism becomes a motivation. Conspicuous consumption and the overt ownership and usage of branded goods develops. People look outward, they become highly conscious of their environment. They are aware of the impression they create and are concerned about how others perceive them. There is a tendency to give inadequate thought for the future, and an undercurrent of aggression, which can erupt into violence. Status and personal image are important; in particular, there is a need to be treated with respect, both at home and in the work place.

Though these aspirations and drives are common to many urban blacks and whites, especially young people who are less well-off and have incomplete education, there is a fundamental difference between the two races. Many whites who are outward looking have a respect for authority and tradition, a viewpoint not generally shared by outward blacks.

4. Inner directed values

There is also a set of inward looking values, which in some respect are common to both blacks and whites.

In Western societies inward direction is a bi-product of affluence and the welfare state. The independence from the need to make a living can lead to a loss of interest in the outside world. The person begins to look inwards towards him or herself. Rewards are gained from how one feels, and what one is intrinsically. The emphasis is on self-development and self-improvement, at work and play. Amongst whites in South Africa these aspirations are particularly strong with well-educated, well-off Afrikaans and English women. The focus is on health and creativity — a life of experience through the senses.

Blacks who are strong on self-development are predominantly male, in line with the higher incidence of males in urban areas. They are the elite of the black community, with good education and higher incomes. However, despite their relative affluence, judged by their own standards, they are not nearly so fortunate as whites who have similar aspirations. The urban black who is working hard to improve his, or her, position in life is highly concerned with materialism. There is not sufficient financial security to permit an entirely inner directed life style. Both blacks and whites with these values are looking for a meaningful job, but for the whites there is less concern about whether it is well paid.

Both are concerned with physical health, but for whites it is to feel good, for blacks it is to be able to keep the job that facilitates a desirable lifestyle. Both, however, believe in racial harmony and reject violence as a way of solving problems. Violence is the resort of the have nots who have little to lose.

5. Values of change

There is another set of values, that characterise a small but increasing proportion of our urban population, which revolve around antagonism to the existing structure. Adherents of both races decay religion, are antagonistic to big business, and have an open mind as regards interpersonal relationships. It is here, however, that there is the greatest division between the

racism. Whites who take an anti-stance to authority and the status quo come mainly from wealthy homes. Their behaviour is often reckless and socially dangerous, but they are early adopters; the first to try out new ideas. They can afford the risks of being wrong or caught out. Their attitudes to equality of the sexes and people of other racial groups are liberal, even radical — males, under 35's and English speakers predominate.

Blacks who hold these values come from a cross-section of the community. They do not have the financial freedom to release their aggression in innovative purchases or free-living behaviour. Theirs is a dreary lot, a struggle for the basics of survival; a poverty trap, with little chance of escape.

In 1976 many young blacks and whites, mainly with good education, were aggressively against law and order and established norms. In subsequent years many young blacks managed to find steady jobs and adopted more conciliatory attitudes. White youth has also drifted away from such extreme views and is often caught up with the drive for possessions and materialism or with pleasure-seeking and excitement. Steady jobs are now becoming scarcer, and a long recession is resulting in a growing pool of young unemployed, who feel that they have a justifiable cause against society; which is given encouragement from many diverse outside forces.

6. The relevance of education

It is perhaps not surprising, given the heterogeneity of our population, to find that there are considerable differences in the aspirations of urban blacks and whites. It is interesting to note that, if one had to isolate the aspect which had most influence over how people behave, it would be education. Blacks and whites, Afrikaans and English, of high education have similar values and are eager to live in harmony. Those with lower educational standards also share a common outward looking stance, but find little else in common.

7. What are the implications for the future?

It is probable that the decline in protestant ethics will continue. This has the widest implications for South Africa, which are already being

felt today. No longer will the basic appeals of family, "volk", tribe, church and country have such a strong pull. Self-sacrifice for the benefit of others will become a poorly regarded motivation. Putting off today's pleasures for greater rewards in the hereafter will lose attractiveness. Just as saving for tomorrow, because your money will buy you more, is no longer believable, in a market of high inflation and punitive taxation on interest. The very cement that holds people together, through respect for law and order and community values, is being replaced with a measure of self interest and indulgence.

A further prediction is the growth of both inner and outer directedness.

Despite temporary economic set-backs, the great natural wealth of South Africa and the initiative of its entrepreneurs are almost inevitably going to lead to improvements of living standards for both blacks and whites. Inner directedness thrives on prosperity. It will stimulate the growth of leisure industries, especially those centred on home and garden; intellect and sensuousness; health, fitness and the outdoors. It will lead to an increasing degree of specialisation in products and media. It will provide the impetus for sophisticated communication networks between home, neighbour, workplace, retail outlet and advertiser. It will result in a further polarisation between members of the family.

In contrast we will also see the development of an outer directed lifestyle based on worldly goods. Materialism is a hard mistress to satisfy, as it feeds on itself. This approach to life will be most evident amongst young males, especially blacks who will have greater physical and social mobility. There will be an even greater diversification of products; and brands will become aggressively distinctive. Credit rather than cash will continue as the vehicle for acquisition.

Finally, what about the rebels? In every country, community, or concern there is an old guard and a new; a clash between the forces of change and those of stability. In South Africa, it is unlikely that such conflict will disappear. What is probable is that the decline in traditional values will lead to a less extreme opposition. There will still be cries for greater equality, especially from the well-to-do. There will be continued antagonism against the large and

well established. There will be those who demonstrate their discontent through unruly behaviour. But possibly, most significant of all, will be the growth of the risk takers. That small

fearless body of sensation and success seekers whose actions can leave a trail of destruction, or lead to the development of great enterprises. It is in their hands that the future lies.

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