

Consumers demand communication with local nuance

By [Sarah Dexter](#)

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One of the most noticeable trends in our industry around the world is that from November through to end January the next year, everyone becomes a trend expert! I find this highly unusual, given the violently turbulent times in which we find ourselves.



Sarah Dexter

Given the madness of the world, I feel unqualified to be able to predict what may impact us going forward. But perhaps I can offer up some observations I have made during my recent trips in Angola, Zambia, Mozambique, Kenya and Nigeria, that may be of interest.

- **Gender equality** is most definitely improving. It still has a long way to go but in many places I'm hearing a much stronger, more confident female voice and opinion coming through. And not only do these women have more to say, about more things, they are also asking to be considered as a multi-faceted person ... not just as "mom". However, there is a fine line to be navigated between being progressive, being respectful of culture and being relevant.
- As with anyone around the world, the people we talk to in Africa are **increasingly informed** (and misinformed) about a whole host of things, including health and diet. This is being driven by word of mouth (both IRL and via Facebook) as well as being able to search for info on your mobile phone. The watch out here for brands is not just to add to the tsunami of "content pollution", but to create really useful, interesting and distinctive assets.
- And of course, all our countries are still **very young** in terms of the demographic age breakdown so the uptake of technology (and particularly smartphones) is phenomenal.

- There's also the increasing **formalisation of the retail space**: either through bricks and mortar developments (vs "bend over bazaars") or online and the uptake of e-commerce in certain markets.

Given that many of the trends we see in Africa are what's manifesting in other countries, it's unsurprising to see the continued convergence in basic wants and needs (albeit driven by different circumstances).

However, consumers are increasingly demanding communication that pays attention to specific local nuances, such as hairstyles, types of food being eaten (and the manner in which it's consumed), cultural observances and patterns, etc. So despite many clients' best efforts to export communication to as many countries as possible so as to protect their bottom lines, I suspect that we will see a continued rise in the support and strength of true local brands.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sarah Dexter is Managing Partner of MullenLowe South Africa.

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