

AVE and the consumers turning against you - how do you measure the 'damage'?

South African consumers, business people and politicians are standing in disbelief as two major South African business brands count the costs of underestimating the plight of the consumer last year.

Contrary to popular personalities like Julius Malema and Steve Hofmeyr, who have both had their fair share of negative publicity but whose popularity seems largely unaffected, Tonya Khoury of media intelligence provider, ROi Africa, believes one can attempt only to predict what the effect of the Cell C billboard, Chester Missing on Steve Hofmeyr and the Woolworths boycotts will be in 2015

The Woolworths boycott case has been reported on extensively in print, online, radio, television and social media. Social media for the Woolworths boycott accounts for 85% of the media attention.

If one removes social media from the equation, online news accounted for 42% of the press and broadcast a massive 40% for the Boycott Woolworths Campaign over the past month. The biggest peak was on 19 November and can be attributed to the shareholders supporting the boycott and the endorsement by Cosatu.



Tonya Khoury

Measuring the effect

"This sounds very impressive," says Khoury, "but the pressing issue at hand is how do we measure the real effect the publicity had on the brand image? This is an issue that has been widely contested in global PR circles, but no definite conclusion has ever been reached. One thing that authoritative bodies like PRISA (the Public Relations Institute) agree on is that the traditional measurement using advertising value equivalent (AVE) might not be the most effective way in measuring media publicity," she says.

Due to a lack of a definite alternative, the majority of public relations practitioners use the Advertising Value Equivalent (AVE) measurement method regardless of its lack of support by the authorities. This measure compares the cost of a paid advertisement with the same amount of space or airtime of an unpaid publicity item. Says Khoury: "Ironically, the 'value' of AVE is widely recognised as unreliable and invalid but many people still use it. It's because they need to attribute a rand value to media coverage."

With diminishing advertising prices and hard earned content, AVE has often resulted in exaggerations due with the use of multiplier factors based on prominence, image impact, prestige of the media channel and other criteria.

This aside though, markets have become increasingly unsure about how to add a rand value to the successful minimisation of negative publicity or bad news. "One cannot say that the fact that a clever PR strategy kept a brand out of the negative media spotlight is worthless in rand terms," Khoury says.

"My stance on AVE: [it is rubbish!](#) It also does not take into consideration the monitoring of social media, which is an issue in itself. Social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, Pinterest, etc. are overflowing with new users that interact with and follow brand profiles. Just think what the Oscar Pistorius Trial would have been without Twitter! There are so many more reasons why AVE is absolutely pointless, let's take some examples from the case studies we've been doing:

The *Sunday Times* published an article about Woolworths titled "*Humble Pie for 'arrogant' Woolies.*" The article appeared on page 9 of the main body of the publication in black and white, resulting in an AVE of just under R80k - is it true to say that R80k is the level of damage the article made to Woolworths? Is it true to say that if Woolworths had managed to keep this article out of the press it was worth an extra R80k in advertising toward Woolworths? What exactly does R80k for the

article mean? Nothing!

The social media has been the primary vehicle for #boycottwoolworths, as there is no accurate measurement in terms of Rands for Twitter. Are we as a market saying that the hashtag campaign was worth no money at all? I believe Woolworths would beg to differ."

Changing the perception

ROi Africa believes that each medium needs its own best measure and a host of other metrics that can ascertain the success or failure of your PR.

Khoury adds, "Changing the public relations industry's perception is more than a tough task and for that reason [ROi Africa](#) still offers AVE, and actually we offer rands and cents measurement on all media including social. We do, however, hope that the market will move to global measurement over time. We are using Source Rank, Moz Rank, Target Sections, Circulations, traffic and so much more than AVE to measure thus giving the brand a more accurate view of what the actual publicity value truly was."

Oscar Wilde said "The only thing worse than being talked about is not being talked about" and in some instances that is true. There is also positive bottom line value in some negative press. "Julius Malema is one controversial figure in the media space and he draws on negative qualities like fierce temperaments, controversial statements and much more and it works. Media loves Juju, that's a fact. At ROi Africa we have often seen our charts and analytics painted EFF Red because of clever and largely negative PR."

But how would you measure your PR? And that of your brand? This is a question we need to find an answer to, especially if the consumers turn against you or your brand. Not everybody is a Juju or a Steve Hofmeyr!

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