

Social media and youthsourcing

 By [Bradley Maseko](#)

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While addressing the Marketing Industry Network in the UK this year in early March, advertising guru Steve Henry, founder of HHCL and most recently creative director of TBWA in the UK, voiced his concern over advertising being based on what he called a disruptive model which he fears may not be sustainable in the new age of social media.

He went on to say that "advertising in it's current form persists because clients are obsessed with the concept of a captive audience of people passively waiting to see their ads, but these audiences are disappearing". As a new platform for communication, social media has been seen as a threat to traditional methods of communication and the solution to this has been identified as a greater need for a fusion between creating personalised experiences for your target market, and using social media to support the traditional methods.

This sentiment is shared by Steve Henry, who also believes the solution to this is: **ENGAGEMENT**.

Youthsourcing

This form of engagement in the youth market is what we call youthsourcing, a concept in which advertising agencies, media houses and brands work closely with the youth, hence tapping into their collective intelligence and enabling open innovation. From designing ad campaigns to new product ideas and R&D problems, the idea is to work with an active and passionate audience, work together with your target market to identify and solve complex problems and let them contribute with the most relevant and youthful ideas. It's a shift from the idea of brands and ad agencies taking the youth into consideration during the idea/concept generation phase only, to actually having them play a more active role in which they are in the driving seat and have a more prominent role in the creative and strategic processes. Working closely with youth agencies that specialise in this field and work directly with the youth thus ensures that interested parties always have insight into this market and can easily engage with the youth through the likes of immersion experiences, youth panels, the traditional focus groups and ethnographic methods.

Advertising agencies

Applying this concept in advertising allows the youth to have an active role in the designing of ad campaigns, resulting in original ideas that will be able to tap directly into the emotions of their peers. Ad agencies can therefore take advantage of youthsourcing for idea generation, coming directly from the source, creative concepts and even allowing the youth to work on the copy, as they know the best tone and language to use when addressing their peers. With most marketing and advertising messages being ignored, since the youth now pay more attention to themselves and their peers, the idea is to find a way in which to get them involved, and once you get them involved let them work for you through spreading the message and creating that much needed buzz through the different social media platforms.

Media houses

Media usage and habits are very important in terms of effectively communicating with the youth, once the insights have been obtained, or the product developed it's important that these are exposed to the youth through the right media and also at the right time. Working with the youth to discover media platforms being used and media preferences across the different age groups, makes it easier to know the different platforms to send messages through and which platforms to use to target specific age groups. Through youthsourcing, you not only gain insight into the different media platforms that are that are being utilized but you also get your target market to drive traffic towards specific media platforms in anticipation of a campaign or product. In this way you also create followers.

Brands

It has been said that some of the best products have resulted not from the in house R&D but rather from working with the people for whom the products are being designed. New product development/refreshing already existing products should involve the youth from the start till the finish. Working with the youth during the concept testing phase enables you to establish a relationship in which they feel recognised, and the possible results of this could be some form of loyalty to your brand and positive encouragement for their peers to give it a try, peer recommendation especially through social networking sites often leads to short open discussions with great interesting insights. It's clear that it's no longer about the product or service, but rather about what the product or service does for the youth and how it lets them be significant among their peers.

Social media activism

A new wave of activism has emerged as a result of the different social media platforms available today, social media activism is a form of activism in which your target market will speak against/share negative information and share negative feedback about your brand or message. It is therefore important to have them on your side by continuously engaging with them, through youthsourcing you can create loyal advocates who will drive the message or concept to the right people in the right tone. The youth are very opinionated and always have something to say about your brand or message, the idea is to maintain dialogue and in this way be ready to address the unsatisfied before they share this with their peers. This form of activism has lead to a greater call for interaction with the youth to hear what they have to say in a bid to avoid potential backlash on the web.

The video below shows the impact the social media has on marketing and traditional methods of advertising, and this further shows why youthsourcing has become increasingly important in the age of social media.

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