

Standardising African research

By [Celia Cowper](#)

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Having spent three days in Mauritius last month at the Pan African Media Research Organisation (PAMRO) conference, I am more convinced than ever that marketers venturing into Africa need to rely heavily on dependable media agencies to deliver tactful insights into available media options.

Africa is clearly a hot topic as the conference attracted delegates from as far afield as England and the United States, and it was not just the idyllic tropical setting that lured them.

The main topic for discussion was PAMRO's mission to gather valid data from the various African countries for use by potential and existing advertisers, and there appears to be hope that they will make positive inroads in the not too distant future. For instance, South African based Telmar, is working day and night to assemble the research from countries where it exists, into a format that is easily accessible for South African marketers.

The biggest problem in Africa is that each country appears to have a different method of defining their 'target markets', with the result that PAMRO is trying to get each country to adopt the LSM 1-10 system as a basis for their research. Currently only two countries are working towards standardisation and PAMRO is still faced with the challenge of changing methodology in countries like Zimbabwe, which is dealing with a different realm of constant change.

Advertising agencies and media owners usually fund research in Africa, and particularly when a media owner is not seen in a favourable light, the research is often dubbed as being biased. Another serious issue is that media owners and agencies cannot afford to do annual research, so it is only conducted every two to four years. The third problem is that the rural areas are ignored in the research sampling, although they account for 40 – 50% of the average populations.

Another topic of discussion was the research methodology ie face-to-face, or the diary system. Face-to face interviews are very expensive, tend to see interviewees over claiming and run the risk of inaccurate recallability. On the other hand, the diary system is restricted to literate people, has been known to lead to changes in audience habits and may not necessarily reflect actual viewing. There is also a high drop out rate in the diary system. As both research practices also have many positive attributes, consensus has not yet been reached.

PAMRO still has a long way to go but I do believe it is moving in the right direction, albeit slowly. In the mean time, marketers must weigh up to enormous potential against the risks and proceed with caution. It still boils down to 'gut feel' and using reliable and trustworthy sources on the ground to deliver tactful insights about the countries in which they operate.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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