

Are 'influencer fatigue' and distrust signalling a comeback for traditional advertising?

Issued by [Spark Media](#)

23 Mar 2022

Deemed unfashionable by some for the past decade, the tide may be turning for news brands as consumers begin to question the credibility of influencers and other non-traditional advertising platforms.



In an age of 'Tinder swindlers', 'Inventing Annas' and 'Fyre Festivals', it is increasingly important for marketers to adapt their game plan in line with the latest consumer media habits and preferences.

A rise in distrust by consumers might mean having to strike a balance between new and innovative advertng solutions and 'safe' or traditional advertising channels.

For many businesses, budgets previously allocated to traditional paid advertising that focused on brand awareness have shifted to new media platforms – and to sponsored partnerships with influencers in particular. The expected trade-off for companies and brands working with individuals to promote their products more organically is that they would build trust more effectively with a target audience.

But that is not always the case, says Introducing!SA digital media strategy manager Aqsa Qureshi. Introducing!SA is Caxton's multi-network marketing platform and content destination for brands and products.

Influencer influx

Qureshi says that global research shows consumers are not only worn down by the disingenuous ads posted often by influencers, but that there seems to be a great deal of mistrust of influencers.

"When it comes to social media marketing, the UM media agency's insights show that influencer marketing appears to be the least trusted form of marketing. This is in line with another survey by YouGov and Grey London," she says. "They attribute this to a lack of clarity and transparency; that things might not be all they seem when people are paid to place products in posts."

In 2018, Unilever, one of the world's largest advertisers, stopped working with social media influencers who buy followers, citing unethical practices that defeat the purposes of a business choosing influencer marketing.

This raised the questions of whether influencers are knowledgeable about the brands they promote and if they follow due diligence before aligning themselves to a brand. In the recent Hello Darlings holiday fiasco, influencers who were used by the 'travel agency' to promote the business were left with their reputations in tatters.

It is important for brands to remember that influencers can bring both positive and negative attention to a brand. "The behaviour of an influencer can directly cause negative impressions of an associated brand, and the risk exists that consumers will associate people with brands, which rarely happens with local media," Qureshi points out. There is a direct link between the credibility of both the advertiser and the advertising medium and the impact on the audience, she says. This is not to say that there is no space for new media and innovation. However, these days, research shows that consumers prefer non-disruptive advertising in 'safe' spaces. "Caxton provides a brand-safe environment with many measures in place to ensure that we are trustworthy and unbiased when it comes to marketers' needs."



TIPS FOR MARKETERS

Trust and innovation need to be balanced to match your desired brand personality, enhancing the belief that the 'medium is the message'.

- 1 Look beyond the online/offline divide because almost all media is now digital in some form.
- 2 Embrace the least intrusive digital formats; avoid heavy frequency in more 'irritating' environments.
- 3 Embrace global or national, but don't underestimate the relevance of local.
- 4 Combine 'safe' channels with ongoing innovation efforts.
- 5 Find 'like-minded' channels, platforms and partners.

Source: Kantar

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While marketers trust TV and online video the most, and consider podcasts and influencer content the most innovative formats, however consumers think differently: they trust newspaper ads and events and consider digital out-of-home the most innovative.

Although news brands are often viewed as 'low in the pecking order for brand building and sales effectiveness', research by UK marketing body Newsworks and research company Future Thinking shows that news brand readers are attentive to advertising and are more likely to take out key campaign messages.

So how do news brands strengthen campaigns and how do they help drive behavioural change?

Spark media marketing head Robyn Bishop explains: "The inclusion of news brands in campaigns contributed to higher awareness as news brands have high reach and readers are more attentive to advertising overall – second only to TV, while

print creates higher awareness than digital news brands.”

This means that news brand readers are more likely to absorb, understand and retain the campaign’s key messages.

Spark Media is Caxton Local Media’s national print sales division.

Bishop points out that, according to Newsworks and Future Thinking, news brands are particularly effective among non-customers and when it comes to closing the competitive gap, compared with other media. It has to be noted that key performance indicators increase as the number of different media used in the campaign increases. “If you are on a limited budget, a strong uplift in purchase intent still occurs when print news brands are one of two or three medium combinations,” Bishop notes.

Caxton Local Media has a long history of funding credible research to prove the readership of local print titles among purchase decision-makers and provide consumer insights to advertisers. The latest report of the group’s Roots survey (2019) shows that 65% of local papers are read every week. Roots is one of South Africa’s largest and longest-running consumer behaviour surveys. A new Roots report is expected later this year.

Bishop echoes the sentiments of digital strategy and eCommerce consultant Ludovic Martin, who thinks the weaknesses of print (no interaction, no digital output, passive reading, no spying) are its greatest strengths: “Print media is appreciated for its comfort, relevance and passive mode, especially regarding data privacy.”

Having said this, Caxton is not afraid to explore new territories.

Don’t get disenchanted with digital marketing

The digital advertising space has grown exponentially over the years and has become a lucrative avenue to advertise products and services.

This is due to its adaptability and ability to precisely target audiences. “Digital marketing affords advertisers the opportunity to precisely measure campaigns and even adjust advertising messages with ease,” says general manager at Hive Digital Media, Kristin Louw.

Of concern, however, is the ease with which advertising and content messaging can be executed online. It is possible for anyone with an internet connection to create a website and start offering services as an entrepreneur, often resulting in over-promising and under-delivering on campaigns.

However, working with a trusted and experienced digital agency will get you a solid marketing foundation. “This means exploring the most appropriate channels for the greatest return on investment,” says Louw.

“The formula for traditional versus digital spend will vary greatly from business to business, so it is important that you consult an established media house which can advise you accordingly. As members of the Interactive Advertising Bureau, we pride ourselves in offering credible, reliable media choices.”

As Caxton Local Media’s national digital sales division, Hive represents well-curated news publications with a diverse but defined audience – offering marketers new media channels on established news platforms.

“Hive has at its disposal trained journalists and language professionals who are well versed in the principles of commercially viable, sponsored and advertorial content. This means clients enjoy the highest ethical and moral standards, with particular attention paid to credibility of information sources and references when it comes to content on our platforms,” emphasises Louw.

News content and credibility

How journalists gather news and how information is disseminated have changed substantively over the past two decades. Reach and public engagement have increased tremendously, but so has the ease with which 'fake news', disinformation and scams are disseminated.

The way readers consume news or content is also constantly changing and segmenting, and great differentiation is needed within the media sphere to retain audiences.

"What is not changing is the demand for news or content you can trust," says Caxton Local Media digital editorial manager Aliche Bezuidenhout.

"Readers are becoming more visually and digitally literate, opinionated and woke, but they remain exploitable as algorithms advance and trends catch on. Through gatekeeping and credibility, established media houses are often a cut above the rest in terms of the content they publish online or offline."

In this regard, the Covid-19 pandemic emphasised the value of community newspapers. "We became a go-to place and a trusted source of information on the pandemic, turning Covid-19 questions into informative, easy-to-understand articles," Caxton Local Media's group editor Irma Green notes.

Caxton newspapers also play an integral watchdog role in the communities they serve. "Even in the digital era, the printed versions of our publications are highly respected due to the success they have in holding businesses and lower levels of government accountable," says Green.

Caxton is a member of the Press Council of South Africa and adheres to the Press Code, which not only guides the media's conduct, but offers members of the public a platform to seek recourse when Press Code transgressions occur.

Although Caxton print publications have a high advert-to-news ratio, the company's Roots research has shown that a considerable number of readers enjoy the adverts – most of which contain special offers from retailers.

Green sees a future for local media and believes that new media, if done right, will complement rather than compete with traditional media. "We have managed to create a symbiosis between our print and online versions to the advantage of readers and advertisers."

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Spark Media, a division of Caxton & CTP Publishers and Printers Ltd, is South Africa's largest print and digital media solutions sales company. It represents Caxton's 115 local newspapers and 58 local websites, providing location-targeted content for brands and ad agencies at scale in 120 economically-active communities. It also produces ROOTS, SA's leading urban, community-level quantitative survey that provides unequalled demographic and behavioural information on local consumers.

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