

What will the youth get up to?

 By [Jason Levin](#)

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The traditional media terrain is shifting completely in the Age of the Prosumer. Marketers have a big role to play when it comes to investing in the wellbeing of young South Africa, especially in 2009.



X-ray specs: the traditional media terrain shifts completely in the Age of the Prosumer. Teens and young adults consider themselves more than just consumers and they want their chance to produce content and involve themselves in the brand more than ever before. Cadbury P.S's interactive campaign 'Holla Yo Luv' invited youths to SMS their own Valentine's message to their loved ones - with the chance of it being displayed for all to see on a number of billboards across the country.



Of course, not every interactive campaign is a guaranteed success - the youth's decision to get involved depends on whether the potential brand experience is exciting and relevant to them, otherwise they won't bother getting involved in it at all. After all, the youth have been consuming media their entire lives and have developed advanced filtering and interrogation systems that hone in on what the brand is really about.

2. **Brandholism:** when it comes to engaging and exciting young South Africa, companies can no longer limit their brands to a specific product category or service. Traditional vertical categories are not important to young urbanites who expect their most beloved brands to cater to their entire lifestyle and provide them with experiences that go beyond the product itself - Coca Cola has led the way in extending youth offerings way beyond that of a cold drink by investing in online media, concerts and community projects.

The youth readily compare brands across categories (cellphones with fashion with trainers), so companies need to understand how their brands perform in a general, rather than specific context. And it's this thinking that makes youth less inclined to open a bank account. Why? Because banks don't measure up to cellphone providers which offer a free DVD player amongst other high-tech gadgets when you sign up for a contract.

3. **Human touch:** for the last decade, cellphones and other high-tech gadgets have reshaped the way the urban youth connect. It is not surprising that their dependency on tech gadgets to connect with each other has largely alienated them from the intimacy of real human contact.

In the *Sunday Times* Generation Next 2008 study, face-to-face took the lead as the preferred method of communication between friends and this trend will strengthen in 2009 as the youth demand more human contact and interaction. For example, young adults are increasingly using Facebook as a proactive medium to organise dinner parties and 'real life' get-togethers instead of just 'Facebooking' each other as a way of staying in touch. [*You should see how they use Twitter - assistant editor*]

4. **AdLand:** city kids have grown up in a world cluttered with advertising messages and they know that marketers are hankering for their attention, and they are often, but not always, willing to give it. They understand control and how to make 'ad choices'.

In 2009, we see children as young as six, becoming more and more territorial around which parts of their lives they open to advertising and which they do not. Advertisers will need to work within these boundaries and understand where to draw the line and where to back off.

Social networking is one such area. Facebook, MySpace and MXit already have a monopoly and the youth are not looking to expand their loyalty to other sites, particularly ones developed by brands. The cellphone is also considered for-friends-not-advertisers turf, generally.

5. **FBI:** the quest for knowledge is no longer an arena assigned to nerds but rather an arena where youth vie for attention as they use their knowhow as a powerful tool to leverage social standing and build peer cred. Urban teens, particularly, have a wide range of networking tools at their disposal with which to analyse and document their lives and their world, and so they have become fascinated with the workings of everyone and everything: Google rocks!
6. **Cheap:** recession-hit South African homes will see teens and young adults becoming more 'careful' when it comes to selecting their brands of choice, particularly when it comes to clothes and fashion. Ultra cheap t-shirts from Ackermans are readily paired off with expensive Guess jeans as a way of making an affordable compromise.

Young adults are becoming more mindful about researching and comparing the prices of products online to make sure they find out where to get the best bargains and deals. Fortunately, the upside of hard times is that teens are showing signs of becoming more resourceful and entrepreneurial in an effort to subsidise their own spending needs.

7. **Fstr >>:** slowing down isn't on the youth agenda - even on holiday. 'Hyper-tasking' takes over from multi-tasking as urban youths cram ever-more into the already bursting days. In order to sustain this lifestyle, they are readily consuming more vitamins and energy-boosting products.

But as a result, we also see an upturn in anxiety levels and the pressure to succeed is felt by children as young as six years old because of the high expectations for they have set for themselves to succeed.

8. **Get physical:** locally, in order to comply with the new ASA-scribed Industry Code regarding the advertising of foodstuffs and beverages to children, brands have to look at new ways to get 12-year-olds and under to embrace physical exercise. The fast food industry has already put plans in motion that will see their brand characters endorsing exercise rather than hamburgers. Teens and young adults are also making more discerning choices around health and healthy products as they slowly move towards a more active lifestyle.
9. **Fear factor:** most tweens (8-12 year olds) in our country are growing up with a significantly heightened consciousness of safety and security. The *Sunday Times* Generation Next Study 2008 reported that 88.7% of urban kids fear contracting HIV/Aids and 81.8% of them are scared of being raped. These fears are felt by teens and young adults as well and extend to being hi-jacked, having a smash/grab incident and having crime affecting their families.

The accumulation of all these fears makes South African children highly anxious. And it makes the considerable optimism and excitement they express about hosting the 2010 World Cup even more important as both a nation-building and self-development exercise. All youth, but especially tweens (8 - 12-year-olds) are waiting, and need, to see the greatness that we can, as a country, create. Marketers have a big role to play when it comes to investing in the wellbeing of young South Africa.

ABOUT JASON LEVIN

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