FIFA fever and the youth

By Jason Levin

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As the recession subsides into the euphoria of 2010, what trends will we see play out among South Africa's sharpest critics - the youth? The 2010 FIFA World Cup will take centre stage, but that stage will be shared with service demands, tech saturation and ad aversion. How can brands aiming to impress under-23s live up to these evolving expectations?

1. FIFA fever: all eyes on us:

The 2010 FIFA World Cup is not just about soccer for young South Africans. It also represents the chance to elevate our country onto the global stage. As one 16-year-old anticipates: "It will thrust our country into first-class status". The trend gained enormous momentum in 2009, with young South Africa touting it as the number one reason they're most optimistic about living here.

Hosting the 2010 FIFA World Cup looks set to bring an unprecedented resurgence of national pride across all age-groups, especially those under 25. This is amplified by things such as the work the Department of Education, with corporate partners like Coca-Cola, is doing in schools under the banner of 'My 2010 School Adventure'.

2. Brand ingredients:

In recent years we've tracked the shift in the youth interaction with marcomms from brand presence to brand experience - where the expectation from brands extends beyond packaging plus an ad. In 2010, this trend continues to thrive in the youthspace.

In this evolving consumer terrain, the role of brands is about being facilitators of an experience - and their product/service will ultimately provide consumers with the ingredients to create their own.

This year the Pick n Pay School Club has partnered with nine brands to conceptualise and create curriculum-aligned educational material that will be freely distributed to over 1.5 million learners and 70 000 educators across the country. In this way, brands are able to enrich the learning process of young South Africans and have a powerful (and relevant) impact in the lives of the future generation.

3. Servicesphere:

Last year we reported on the trend Human Touch: the need for real human contact in a digitally connected world. In 2010, we see an extension of this into the service and retail industry. Young people are increasingly demanding of service providers.

The *Sunday Times* Generation Next 2009 study identified that good service is far more important than a vibey store, and even the stock it carries. In upcoming months, we expect human touch to gain more clout as a valuable asset in the servicephere. And retailers who acknowledge this by taking the right measures to train and recruit their employees are in a stronger position to win over young consumers.

4. 'Cause you mean it:

Yes, you've heard it all before: young South Africans have grown up in a society faced with real issues such as

HIV/Aids, crime and poverty. However, in a post-recession economy - we see people the world over becoming more cynical towards how brands react to the challenges facing society, and brands' integrity is at stake.

Higher end consumers - particularly young ones - are more tuned in to whether a brand's green agenda is for real or for profit. Brands that jump onboard for one good cause day a year will increasingly be measured against others that are committed 365 days a year.

5. 'There's an app for that':

Apple's iPhone has done more than redefine mobile communication but it has catapulted the consumer into a new realm of control where they have access to an infinite amount of tips to entertain, improve and educate themselves at their fingertips. From mobile calorie-counters to locating public toilets, there's even an app which promises to turn your phone into a mobile Nintendo Wii.

At the start of 2010, Apple announced that more than three billion apps have been downloaded from its App Store by iPhone and iPod touch users worldwide. The fact that by far the majority of young South Africans are not iPhone owners hasn't eclipsed them from joining this global trend and a handful of local companies, such as Mibli with Microsoft OneApp, have launched their own independent app offerings. But, make no mistake, in the youthspace this isn't just a game to see who can collect the most apps; it's about getting equipped with tools for success.

6. Vitamin C2C:

Young urbanites might love a good TV ad, and laugh out loud at a radio ad - but nothing is more persuasive to them than a recommendation from their peers. This trend - of consumer-to-consumer marketing - has been on the brew for some time already, but in 2010 local brands will need to amplify their youth strategies.

In the post-recession economy, brand and corporate cynicism are on the rise, and if brands aren't relevant, interactive and discursive - young people will ditch them for brands that are. Cell C campaigns offer the most affordable deals to impress its customers, but word on the street amongst savvy teens is that being cheap is sometimes too cheap.

"We avoid Cell C because it gives [our peers] the impression that we're cheap... but maybe we'll get a Cell C simcard to use only when we go on MXit," says Thuso, 16.

7. Edgy steady:

Edgy steady is a resounding mantra for youth brands in 2010. It calls on companies to be innovative in creating irresistible opportunities for young minds to sample, engage and consume brands.

And while thinking out of the box is mandatory, there is a limit - young people expect the brand to remain true to its core brand offering - its true persona. If a brand deviates from what young people think it should do and tries too hard to impress them, they'll 'drop it and mock it'.

So, the best approach to working this trend is to ask young people in the know before you roll-out what you reckon is an edgy big idea.

8. TAC Generation: tracking, alerting and checking:

Enter Google, Facebook, Twitter, MySpace and seemingly infinite other social networking sites (SNS). What happens next? Well, in the connected market, the appetite for TAC (tracking, alerting and checking) becomes insatiable.

The tools to do so are at their fingertips, and they give young consumers a new level of control which is just what they want. We're moving towards a society where 20-somethings will spend more time checking their online profiles than they do investing in homemaking to impress peers.

However, in South Africa, where less than 50% of young people say they have access to the Internet, the trend will emerge more slowly and in higher LSM households first.

9. KISS:

Yes, young consumers want to feel in charge and they want to take control of their own experience. But there are clear limits too. When it comes to entering competitions, teens and young adults are not looking for an adventure obstacle course - they want simple low-effort mechanics, so KISS (keep it simple, stupid).

Smart brands recognise that many young consumers want to steer clear of the anxiety imposed onto them by choice overload - so they'll stick to the brands that they trust and provide them with brand-true simplicity and no-nonsense surprises.

10. Open Happiness:

Taking cues for the world's biggest brand's latest slogan, in 2010 we will see a growing consumer consciousness geared towards achieving happiness. It will ultimately become a potent by-product of marketing strategies looking to engage coming-of-age consumers.

The *Sunday Times* Generation Next 2009 study revealed that happiness was polled in second position on young adults' birthday wish list - making it more significant to them than a party or a car. Discerning young minds know that you can't buy happiness and they're not going to be misled by transient marketing attempts to offer them instant happiness. Brands that provide a channel to their own personal growth and happiness are going to have more appeal than brands that don't.

Capitalising on the 2010 FIFA World Cup spirit, MTN has generated massive hype around a word to describe the vibe: Ayoba! MTN has brought Ayoba back and it's quickly re-entered young urbanites' vocabulary to express more than their 2010 excitement but has become synonymous with any feel-good experience.

ABOUT JASON LEVIN

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