

# Advertising and Covid-19

 By [Sibusiso Sitole](#)

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It is undeniable that the ongoing global pandemic has affected the advertising industry. It has upended the industry's current and future advertising campaign plans and prompted creatives to re-evaluate their strategies to better suit the changing landscape.



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Generally, the advertising industry has a rule of thumb that ad spend follows any rise or fall in Gross Domestic Product (GDP). True to its form, over the past decade the ad market has grown immensely alongside a rising global GDP as stated by the World Economic Forum (WEF). This year, however, the pandemic caused a considerable drop in advertising spend resulting in the industry experiencing a brutal contraction of nearly \$50 billion. As a result, advertisers have had to rethink their campaigns, budgets, messaging, and the platforms they utilise.

Here are my thoughts on the top trends for 2021:

## **Increase focus on digital**

With consumers spending significantly more time at home, brands are allocating their spend towards platforms and formats that reflect changing consumer behaviour. This year, we saw a shift from traditional media formats to a greater focus on digital media with consumers spending more time at home and online.

This year, we also witnessed an explosion in e-commerce, streaming services, telemedicine, and video conferencing and these contributed to the acceleration of digital transformation across the globe, achieving what previously could have taken a decade, in a few months. This digital momentum shows no sign of slowing down as the demand for it increases. Once a novelty, digital advertising has truly taken over and growing consumer expectations are driving the industry towards a new era.

## **A shift in consumer behaviours**

After months of isolation, Covid-19 has changed the way people live, shop, and engage with brands. Consumers have

become reliant on online experiences presenting an opportunity for brands to be more aware of what consumers are doing, thinking, and planning and customise their experiences. As advertisers, we have an opportunity to use the change in consumer behaviour to reinvent our content to match their evolving needs.

Currently, there is a huge demand for content and this trend will continue well into 2021. Easy-to-watch easy-to-make short videos have taken the world by storm with platforms such as Instagram Reels and TikTok growing their popularity. And their growing popularity is not showing any signs of slowing down.

## **Purposeful brands taking a stance**

Traditionally, brands used to draw a line in the sand on issues they would and would not discuss. In 2020, this practice changed. Politics and racial issues took centre stage and brands did not shy away from taking a stance on issues affecting their consumers.

With the death of George Floyd, the rise of Black Lives Matter being at the forefront of societal issues this year, brands decided to become more involved, standing up against racial injustices and showcasing their values. Some brands showed empathy and acknowledged issues faced by their consumers, creating a shift in our industry and how it functions. A recent study by market research company Kantar shows that consumers now expect brands to take an active role in social conversations and are increasingly putting them under pressure to voice their stance.

## **Inter-agency collaboration will continue to rise**

In today's marketplace, organizations in advertising are recognising the importance of collaborating with other agencies to achieve a common goal. Collaboration not only ensures that the end-client receives the best service but also creates an environment that combines different areas of expertise and fosters innovation.

Whether it is a PR firm working with a digital creative firm or an advertising agency with a PR firm, it is fast becoming commonplace to leverage each other's strengths to improve the perception and positioning of a brand. When agencies align in terms of goals and desired outcomes, they can find work creatively to benefit the client and ultimately advance their reach, performance, and influence.

## **ABOUT SIBUSISO SITOLE**

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