

Socially Fit for Purpose - Marketing and Social Media Platforms in Namibia

Southern Africa boasts the highest number of mobile subscriptions across the world, but for 'old school communications'; not as much internet or social media usage. With a population size of 2,61 million, Namibia has 2,75 million mobile subscriptions of which only a third of these subscribers use the internet (31% penetration versus Southern Africa's 51%), and of which 92% are prepaid connections.

In context, Namibia still ranks low in the number of internet users (31% versus a 57% global average), and mobile social media users (26% versus 42%) – although Namibia's annual digital growth is most visible in the number of mobile social media users (8,8% per annum growth), just 1,2% behind the global average. The trajectory seems on par with a wishful state of digital growth, but we are definitely seeing 'the unreached' in the background.

In terms of your marketing audience; only a quarter (26%) of Namibians actively use their social media profiles (versus 38% social media penetration in Southern Africa).

Consider that Namibia's 'digital audience' is 88% literate, and resembles a 72% 'readiness' on the global mobile connectivity index and that 81% of this audience has an account with a financial institution. Also, 15% has a credit card, 43% has a mobile money account, and a humble 18% embraces online shopping.

Also in agreement with global statistics, Namibians love Facebook – but how effective is this platform as a marketing tool? With a total advertising audience of 630k on Facebook (monthly active users), 230k on Instagram, 46k on Twitter, and 200k on LinkedIn – how do corporate ad-spend influence consumer behaviour? On a quarterly basis, Namibian statistics show that the total growth in advertising audience is most prevalent on platforms such as Instagram (+4,5%), and twitter (+9,5%). Facebook on the other hand, indicates that only about 35% of the users are adults above 13+ that can be reached with adverts. There is no significant growth in quarter on quarter advertising reach on Facebook for Namibia.

Of the 35% targeted audience on Facebook, it is significant to know that these individuals only like on average one Facebook page in their lifetime (so I guess a small percentage of us like the heck out of a lot, and many only like themselves, lol). Accidental narcissism much; but that's OK. This audience also on average only likes about 9 posts a month, makes about 4 comments, and shares one post. You're lucky if these 220k individuals click on 6 adverts each per month. How many adverts do corporates run on average? The answer is a lot. Is it reasonable to deduce that the engagement scores are frequently below target, although trending posts compete for 'top attention' (mostly short videos, or images)?

Further perspective; Instagram has a marketing platform of about 30k users (13% of 230k users), whilst Twitter would provide you with a target audience of about 12k users (2,6% of 46k users) which is less than LinkedIn's 26k (13% of 200k users). Your ad-audience on Twitter and LinkedIn is mostly male (71% and 58% respectively), whereas on Instagram and Facebook mostly female (52% and 51% respectively).

I believe that traditional (echoed in their tradigital footprints) media still play a tremendous role in influencing public perception, and consumer attitude. There is a range of information sources in Namibia including five daily newspapers, at least seven weeklies, about 30 radio stations, a state television broadcaster and several private stations. A single media platform provides context (relevance) to stories, and the advertising market. Various media platforms echo similarity (in stories) or disconnect (agenda-setting). Sure, most coverage relates to

politics and economics - but your target audience still shares their copy or becomes an influencer via word of mouth (readership and circulation still estimated at 70%+ reach on average for traditional media outlets in Namibia).

What the digital statistics have shown us, is that accessing information is still difficult for citizens based in rural areas, unless this information is made available on the radio (hence the importance of tracking news stories across all stations towards best monitoring perceived and dominant public perceptions towards all communicating protagonists). Radio provides approximately 97.5% coverage across Namibia, however NBC notes that their radio stations reach 78% of the country. 'At Independence in 1990, Namibia had only one TV station and one radio station. The airwaves have definitely opened up since then and there is much diversity amongst the commercial and community radio stations'.

To a large extent, print media 'still writes the story' across various platforms (radio, tv, digital). It provides the platform for personalised approach to engagement; your voice / your face / both. It's the necessary repetition (and evolution) of institutional (economic, political, social) messages that shape the agenda. The volumes of these messages determine what is above the awareness threshold, and what is deemed most relevant in context of the democracy, and national developmental goals.

Recorded for traditional media outlets (as captured in the Afrobarometer 2018 report); "across all media, and in the fiscal year 2017/2018, the Namibian advertising market amounted to 7.1 million USD (104 million NAD). That's dollar spent on ad-space, not public relations campaigns. Public communications (free of charge) provide smaller brands with an authentic opportunity to compete with the best. Your sponsorship-bill will be less (roughly 1% or 2% of profits if you're modest), but your voice could be loud.

Still lingering on ad-spend, the report also notes that "government is still the biggest advertiser in the country and has used this power to punish the media that are too negative towards its policies". Regardless; during recession – media felt it and dealt it by printing less, and diversifying content and platform. Corporates felt the pressure more than ever; to monitor, benchmark, communicate transparently, and to report to the executives and board.

In agreement with the digital statistics we've reviewed, the Afrobarometer report also mentions that both citizens and journalists are increasingly making use of new media – including platforms such as WhatsApp and other social media – to openly express their views. These citizens/journalists make up a significant part of Namibia's active internet and social media users, again the story-drivers or engagers.

How do we bake this cake then? Our ingredients will not all be in one basket. The age old ROI-challenge (returns on investment) remains a unique puzzle – and arguments rest on quality more than on quantity (identifying and complying with various key performance indicators, and not just calculated monetary 'returns'). We are pushed towards engagement scores, more than to 'likes' and 'views'. And as always, there is a big difference between paid and non-paid for messages – and their unique influence on any entity's public reputation. We cannot measure non-paid for messages (public relations) as if paid for (advertising space). In measuring impact; it's never an either-or-game, but rather a question of congruence and consistency. The icing on this cake would be diversity; not in just ad-spend (target markets) but also on reputation drivers that shape the voices and perceptions towards brand. Big data and good statistics guide us on a very clear path – but remember that the figures still only point you to people, and you have to talk and walk with people in order to turn heads (and overheads).

At the end; take into consideration that some messages are exactly meant for the male executives on LinkedIn, and that some of those messages must partake in educational mainstream media campaigns towards really engaging your stakeholder with your vision. We might be spending less money on social media campaigns (attractive resolution to budgets), but see it as a '10% addendum' to your total advertising basket only. Still plan for marketing communications across traditional and tradigital media outlets. There are various facets of a brand that must become a part of all communications - balanced across paid and non-paid media platforms. We're not always in control of the share of voice, but if you have clear targets and campaigns born from ongoing market research; your data and statistics will clearly answer your questions and continue to guide your path ahead.

Yours in print, digital and paper, and heart

Natasja

Some highlights from the past few days;

17/09/2019

- BBC News reports that oil prices ended nearly 15% higher on Monday, with Brent benchmark setting its biggest jump in about 30 years. The rise came after two attacks on Saudi Arabian facilities on Saturday knocked out about 5% of global supply. The strike, which the US blames on Iran, has sparked fears of increased risk to energy supplies in the region. However, the prices remain below the Brent's 12-month high of \$86.29 a barrel seen last October, when Texas Intermediate also climbed to more than \$76 a barrel.
- New Era reports that All People's Party (APP) Secretary General, Vincent Kanyetu has called on the Namibian nation to guard against ethnicity ahead of the national elections slated for November this year. The Secretary General stated that the political campaigns preceding the elections should not be used to divide people's and pleased for the nation to embrace the "One Namibia, One Nation" spirit.

18/09/2019

- Namibian Sun reports that Cosmar, the proponent of a 250-megawatt power station, says the government is moving at snail's pace in getting the project off the ground. The oil company owned by Russian billionaire, Rashid Sadarov, is in talks with the Ministry of Energy over its plan to build an oil refinery and power station in Namibia. The planned investment, which Cosmar wanted to complete by 2024, is expected to set the company back US\$1.5 billion (N\$21.7 billion). The refinery was planned for the coastal town, Walvis Bay.
- NBC News reports that the price surge follows a weekend attack on oil facilities in Saudi Arabia that halted nearly half of the country's oil production, which is 5% of the global daily oil supply. This has caused oil price to increase by nearly 20%. The Acting chief Economist of the Ministry of Mines and Energy, Abednego Ekandjo says that Namibians might feel the impact of spike in fuel oil pump prices next month.
- Namibian Sun reports that the Swapo Party Youth League (SPYL) has called the Minister of Environment, Pohamba Shifeta not to allow marine phosphate mining in Namibia because it would endanger marine resources. The Swapo Party Youth League (SPYL) spokesperson, Gerson Dumeni stated that phosphate mining has the potential of damaging the country's precious marine ecosystem and rob the future generation of a viable and reliable fishing sector.

19/09/2019

- Namibian Sun reports that the Rally for Democracy and Progress (RDP) president, Mike Kavekatora demanded to know why it took aggrieved members three months to complain about his election as president. Some party members of RDP said last week have charged that Kavekatora's win was unconstitutional. The party's youth wing also accused Kavekatora and his 'cronies' of abusing power and violating the party's constitution.

20/09/2019

- Windhoek Observer reports that Saudi Arabia said that strikes on its oil infrastructure came from the "north" and were "unquestionably" sponsored by Iran, although the United Kingdom was still investigating where exactly they were launched from. Colonel Turki al-Malki stated that a total of 18 drones and seven missiles were launched, including what he called Iranian Delta Wing unnamed aerial vehicles (UAVs). However, Iran has denied any involvement and warned the United States it would retaliate immediately if they are targeted over the strikes.
- New Era reports that media practitioners told a visiting Southern African Development Community Electoral Advisory Council (Seac) delegation about their concerns over military presence on the streets considering recent fatal shootings of two civilians. As a standard practice, prior to the deployment of the Sadc Electoral Observation Mission (Seom) to any member state holding national elections, Seac conducts a pre-deployment goodwill mission to assess the country's level of readiness and preparedness to hold national elections.
- New Era reports that Germany has committed to provide N\$2 billion to Namibia for various joint projects. This includes N\$160 million for drought relief and increasing climate resilience. This commitment was made as an outcome of negotiations on development cooperation between the two governments held in Berlin, Germany. The German Embassy reported in a statement that, since the Namibian independence, Germany has supported the economic, social and ecological development of the country with about N\$19.2 billion.

23/09/2019

- Market Watch reports that since Cuban president, Miguel Diaz-Canel's announcement on 11 September that the country was facing fuel shortfall, widespread uncertainty and a degree of panic have gripped the nation. The Cuban president blamed the shortages on increasingly aggressive US sanctions against Cuba and its oil source all Venezuela. The fuel shortages are indicative of the country's currency crisis.
- Namibian Sun reports that the Electoral Commission of Namibia says the preparations for the November general elections are well on course and that no objections have been recorded during the inspection period for provisional voters' roll. The Electoral Commission of Namibia is currently busy with the execution of the automated fingerprint identification system (AFIS) to remove duplicate entries, as well as conducting manual adjudications and the removal of deceased persons from the register.
- The Namibian reports that President Hage Geingob will present Namibia's five-year climate change action plan today at the 74th United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in New York, United States of America. The article further reports that on the margins of the UNGA. President Geingob will hold bilateral meetings with several heads of state and leaders of multilateral institutions, including Kenya's president, president of the Marshall Islands and India's prime minister.