

New social media such as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, i-report and Google are just some of the channels that have popped up in the recent past. While they are not traditionally what one may call media houses, they are in competition with media houses for consumer eyeballs and attention. The best thing about these brands is that they are actually consumer driven. The question is: Will New Media brands edge out traditional media and traditional marketing techniques? This was the point of discussion at Brandscape's 14th BRANDforum held recently at Palacina where a group of professionals converged to share their views on the emergence of the new media.

Al Kags, programme officer at the Kenya ICT Board predicted the ease with which TV programs will be watched and recorded. "What excites me most is nothing we know as cutting edge will be so in a year's time. It will be easy to watch and record TV programs from anywhere in a year's time. Brand managers will be able to put up TV ads and essentially be global. These media allow people to talk about issues on real time. Facebook is becoming a personal branding tool as well as a place where people can showcase their views." People want different and interesting content. Moses Kemibaro, Business Development Director at Dotsavvy intimated that a connected lifestyle is emerging. "All my social channels are interconnected. When I blog, it automatically updates my Facebook, Twitter and Linked In. I talk to everyone with one push of a button."

Citizen journalism is also emerging thanks to tech savvy gadgets. One example given was the footage of the actual Molo fire tragedy that was aired on the news two days after the incident. The video was taken using a simple phone. Many people find out information on Facebook before watching or listening to the news through friends' updates as was the case with the Nakumatt fire.

Many traditional brands globally are struggling and the question of how brands can maintain relevance in the onslaught of this transition was raised. One view given was that social networks are about the social environment and in this environment the brand has to live within that community. The brand has to be relevant, participative and not assume that it has the leadership it had on the other media. In this environment, the individual has power to sway opinion about the brand and brands must seek this opinion.

The question of the relevance of traditional websites was addressed by Moses Kemibaro who was of the opinion that they are still relevant in the traditional sense. "We are having what we call social extension. On any page in that website you can email it, blog or facebook it. You can therefore make a corporate website social by adding widgets." Brands can also participate in social media by creating social profiles in media like Facebook and Linked In and have people share their views. Targeting is simple for these media. For example, an advertisement can be placed such that it can only be seen by people registered as Kenyan and only at certain times of the day."

The Marketing Angle

Joram Mwinamo, Director of Wylde International, a training and consulting company noted the role of new media in creating authentic brands. "Social networks mean that people own the brand and this forces the brands to be authentic. In the new media, people don't care what the marketing manager has to say. People simply add updates talking of a bad or good experience with a certain brand, essentially speaking to the hundreds of people in their network. Yet brand and marketing managers have not discovered what these new media mean for their brands."

So how do you put products like OMO or Toyota get out there so that people can talk about them? The participants agreed that the problem with brands is that they want to communicate within their brand's rules instead of being conversational. Yet on these media you have to adjust your language and tone, otherwise people will not be interested. Benda Kithaka, Marketing

Manager at Toyota EA pointed out that marketing is working on Facebook. "I have gone on holiday through Facebook because Safari companies are targeting specific people for trips around the country. "

Auto brands are a good example in the utilization of social media. On Facebook, Jeep has thousands of fans who put up pictures and tell stories of their cars. Coke faced a situation where a coke profile created on Facebook by two fans became more popular than the official coke page. The idea is to put out a platform and see what people say. What people say is what your brand is.

However, with such exposure, what is to be made of negative feedback? The group agreed that it is important to have negative feedback to help the company improve its product or service. The marketing manager has an opportunity to apologize, explain and even market the brand further. Joram Mwinamo noted that it's time marketing managers experimented with these media. "Peter Marangi could be a Facebook page and give advice on it. They need to take a leap." Tom Sitati, Executive Director at Interbrand Sampson EA pointed out that the problem with marketing is that it is not measured and needs a credible measurement system.

Established companies are reluctant to use new media yet barrier to entry is low, cost of execution is low, the channels are available and there are case studies and models. Yet the same companies want to reach a new entrant in the job market who wants to buy a car or is looking for an insurance scheme. That person can be found on these networks. Traditional advertising has a role in keeping a brand top of mind but people generally buy what their friends buy rather than what they see in advertisements.

WILL NEW MEDIA BRANDS EDGE OUT TRADITIONAL MEDIA?

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Different messages may be used to target different audiences via different media so long as those communications are aligned to meet a common brand goal. Each communication medium can now be looked at independently (how well it is working) and as part of the whole (how it is contributing to campaign resonance). Social media is authentic and provides genuine brand ambassadors. We need to see more Kenyan brands on the social media.

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