

**ADDRESSING NATIONAL ISSUES THROUGH
COMMUNICATION CAMPAIGNS: REFLECTIONS ON
*LOVELIFE AND PROUDLY SOUTH AFRICAN***

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ABSTRACT

This article considers how communication campaigns are addressing two critical issues in South African communities in order to bring about positive change. LoveLife and Proudly South African are perhaps the most publicised national campaigns in the land and they employ very different strategies in communicating messages. LoveLife is aimed at teenagers and takes on a very trendy and provocative approach with its publicity. Proudly South African on the other hand is aimed at reaching the South African public at large and takes the approach of building personal partnerships in the various sectors of industry and community. It is suggested that if any national communication campaign is to be successful, then thorough research on the issues and targeted publics need to be conducted.

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INTRODUCTION

South Africans have shown a massive propensity to work through what at times seemed insurmountable problems. The ability to negotiate rather than descend into more violence has earned world recognition, with leaders regularly assisting in finding solutions to global problems.

However, within South Africa there still remain many social and economic disparities in the distribution of resources that have made our country hold world records in crime, unemployment and health related issues such as HIV-Aids.

This article looks at how communication campaigns, namely *LoveLife* and *Proudly South African*, are taking on the challenge to address top national issues in South Africa. *Proudly South African* is a campaign to promote locally made products and services and thus reduce the unemployment figure. *LoveLife* is the largest anti-Aids campaign in the country.

We cannot compare the two campaigns in terms of their successes and failures as they fall into two very different categories. The reason for choosing these specific campaigns however is that they are perhaps the most publicised national campaigns in South Africa.

Both campaigns employ very different strategies in communicating its messages. *LoveLife* is aimed at teenagers and takes on a very trendy and provocative approach with its publicity. *Proudly South African* on the other hand is aimed at reaching the South African public at large and takes the approach of building personal partnerships in the various sectors of industry and community.

One of the striking differences however between the two campaigns is that *LoveLife* creates media messages to suite its own identity while *Proudly South African* tailors its messages to suit its publics and partners.

COMMUNICATION CAMPAIGN STRATEGY

A campaign as defined by Angelopulo (1996) generally has a specified time period and can run in cycles. It is normally an activity that is planned, co-ordinated, addresses an issue, solves a problem or corrects a situation.

The RAISE formula is usually, albeit sometimes unknowingly, used in most campaigns. This involves the stages of Research, Adaptation, Implementation, Strategy and Evaluation. It is becoming increasingly

important that the first stage, research, be as fully engaged in as possible if a communication campaign is to reach its intended audience and succeed. According to the Institute for Public Relations and Communication Management (PRISA) "...market research clarifies not only the issue itself, but also its scope, the perceptions attached to it by various publics and the ways in which a public relations and communication management practitioner might manage it correctly" (Brochure 2003).

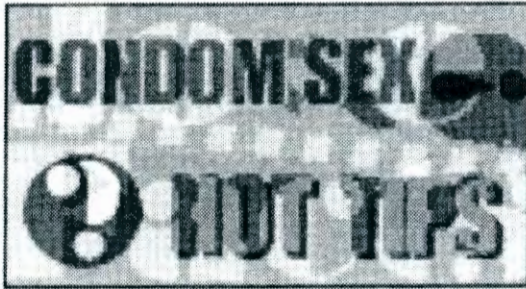
The starting-point of the article lies with the fact that if any national communication campaign is to be successful, then research around the issue, scope and perceptions must be undertaken in addition to the needs and interests of its intended audience. The aim of a national campaign is to bring about a change in the perception and then the action and behaviour of the public for the improvement of life. In a development context like in the case of South Africa, it is absolutely essential to understand the frames of reference of the intended receivers of messages. It is this knowledge that must be used when creating messages for them in order for them to fully understand what the message is about and how it can positively affect their lives. One must never assume that the existing behaviour of people in a developing context can be understood by their surface behaviour. Look for the underlying meanings behind patterns of behaviour if the intention is to change behavioural patterns.

According to Snyman (2002:43) the role of the receiver needs to be discovered first and research must come to see how a message comes to manifest itself in the consciousness of the user. Adding to this Fish (1980: 10) states: "...it is interpretive communities, rather the text or the reader, that produce meanings...Interpretive communities are made up of those who share interpretive strategies...These strategies exist prior to the act of reading and therefore determine the shape of what is read.

Researchers of communication campaigns have recently found that the best way to devise a concept lies in participative research techniques in order to understand the "interpretations" that Fish (above) discusses. Reception theory argues that all sectors of society have different needs and in order to fully serve these needs, communication practitioners need to engage directly with the intended audiences through active participative engagement such as focus group discussions. In addition researchers need to test their

messages with local people before sending messages to production. According to Snyman (2002: 47) “participation in the creation of development messages in essence ensures that the interpretative strategies of the receiver and communicator overlap...”

LOVELIFE



Source: LoveLife Website

According to the International Crisis Group (Report 2001) it is currently estimated that over 36 million individuals are infected with HIV, a figure that is projected to grow to 100 million by 2005. It is also estimated that in Sub-Saharan Africa, where the epidemic has hit the hardest, one in four adults will be killed by HIV/Aids. As it is coming to be understood, this is no longer a public health crisis, but a national security crisis or a national emergency. HIV/Aids is profoundly destabilising in several important ways. When prevalent in epidemic proportions it can destroy, like war, the fundamental elements of a nation – individuals, families, economic and social institutions, police and military forces.

LoveLife is the most highly funded anti-Aids communication campaign in South Africa with an annual budget of R200 million. The campaign consists of print publications *thethaNathi* and *S'camto Print*, television programmes *Groundbreakers* and *LoveLife Games*, peer education *Groundbreakers*, Y-Centres and Adolescent-friendly clinics as well as a series of billboards across the country. *LoveLife* hopes to reduce the infection rate of HIV-Aids by 50% in five years among young people between the ages of 12 and 17.

The campaign addresses the influences on adolescent sexual behaviour such as peer pressure, incorrect information and coercion. The content of the publications as well as the peer counselling and training are very valuable and making a positive impact on many young people. The contradiction in this campaign however lies in the visual advertising.

The largest part of the visual communication campaign involves billboard advertising. There are 2060 billboards posted mainly in and around national highways and in commercial centres. The same visual messages can be seen on 60 water towers in rural areas and on 850 taxis (LoveLife website 2003:1). The billboards portray provocative images usually of a sexual nature and has provoked a lot of negative public response. *LoveLife's* CEO, David Harrisson, believes that the controversial billboards are meant to provoke discussion about safe sexual behaviour (Delate 2003:35). Many feel that this kind of advertising just promotes more irresponsible sexual activity and promiscuity and does not in actual fact change behaviour.

The campaign has also been severely criticised for carrying not only contradictory but also vague messages by Aids activists and organisations such as National People Living with Aids (NAPWA). Many religious groups, including the African Christian Democratic Party, believe that such a campaign just promotes sexual activity outside marriage. Archbishop Desmond Tutu has however stated that the campaign was very realistic considering that the youth today was more sexually active than ever before.

The visual messages also make no clear connection with the services which the campaign provides. When a team of journalists from *Fair Lady* magazine approached teenagers in Sebokeng and asked them to respond to various *LoveLife* messages, they appeared to be confused and did not understand what the messages were about (Delate 2003:34). One picture on the cover of *thethaNathi* entitled "Like a Virgin" portrays a teenager wearing a chastity belt and is meant to promote sexual abstinence.

In an interview with *Fair Lady* journalists, one of the respondents at a youth meeting just outside Pretoria stated that the average teenager did not understand what this meant and actually promoted the exact opposite type of behaviour that was intended.

In such cases, the targeted publics have attributed different meanings to the *LoveLife* messages than was intended by the creators of the

messages and in some cases the receivers did not understand the messages at all. Apparently then, there are very big interpretation gaps between the senders of the message and the receivers. In a development context, especially where behavioural change is being sought, communication has to be tailor-made to suite the context of the receivers.

In a classic one-way communication model, like in this case demonstrated by *LoveLife's* visual publicity, there is no way of telling how the receiver is affected by the message.

LoveLife advertisements are devised by their own media team and is then tested on a target market and sent to the Y-Centres. There have been many criticisms launched around the types of messages that get out to the public. The advertisements are used for all sectors of the South African public and they are all in English, even though South Africa has eleven official languages and huge distinctions in meanings between urban, suburban, township and rural life. English is in actual fact only the fourth most spoken language in South Africa.

In another campaign involving emerging farming communities in South Africa, focus groups were held to discuss the effects of printed educational information. It was found that there is the impression amongst these communities (where the spread of HIV-Aids is rife) that English is regarded only as a status symbol and not really understood or used in daily life (Snyman 2002:56).

Sister Johean Hendricks of the Manenberg Day Hospital in Cape Town states that the hospital relies heavily on the word-of-mouth means for communicating messages and information to the public that they service as a result of very low literacy levels and no televisions sets amongst most patients. The Manenberg Day Hospital is still relatively close, within 30 km to the urban centre of Cape Town and there exists high levels of print and media illiteracy. If this is indeed the case, then the visual messages in the form of billboard advertising in areas removed from city centres, may serve very little purpose or contradictory purposes.

It may appear that the designers of the publicity campaign may not actually be in tune with the mindsets and behaviour patterns of young South Africans. Tim Modise, a member of *LoveLife's* advisory board, even admits that the messages may not be culturally and religiously sensitive to all South Africans. NAPWA states that the biggest mistake

LoveLife has made it to use the same messages across the whole country.

LoveLife has used the Hypodermic Needle approach in its communication to the public. This is where messages are devised by a team of media specialists and then relayed to an audience with the premise being that the audience, regardless of their contexts and identities, will be active consumers of the messages. Communication scientists may even claim that the *LoveLife* advertisements have taken the top-down approach to development communication as opposed to the more democratic participatory communication model where communities are investigated at grassroots level to ascertain their needs and existing knowledge.

LoveLife has a budget larger than even some of the very big brand products in South Africa. The total media budget for the year is around R76 million, not including the recently received \$68 million from the Global Fund for Aids. *LoveLife* has also managed to build partnerships with the South African government, Vodacom, Spoornet and SAA among others.

LoveLife has reached many young South Africans in a very positive way, but at the same time they have also communicated in contradictory ways. In a developing context like South Africa where the Aids epidemic is a very serious threat to our national security, large communication campaigns cannot afford to send out incorrect perceptions about the virus.

In addition, the South African government has not responded to the HIV-Aids issue proactively. In a recent article in the Cape Times, President Thabo Mbeki acknowledged that the government had failed to communicate its messages on the Aids pandemic successfully. In his strongest message yet on the pandemic, Mbeki indicated that he was prepared to do more to provide leadership on the issue (Battersby 2002:1).

HIV-Aids must be communicated carefully with the proper background research on the virus and the targeted audiences, as it is not just a matter of life and death for a few thousand individuals but it threatens the functioning of an entire nation. Actual communities of people need to be reached in a way that they can understand. This must be done in earnest.

PROUDLY SOUTH AFRICAN

Source: Proudly South African Website

The *Proudly South African* campaign is another national communication initiative tackling the issue of unemployment and economic growth. The campaign was launched in October 2001 with the aim of creating more jobs in the South African-owned manufacturing and service sectors. This would be done through encouraging the public to buy South African-made quality products and thus establishing a good reputation for South African-made products locally and abroad.

Prior to the launch of this national campaign, the Cape Town branch of an international consultancy was awarded the tender to conduct the research into the viability of such a campaign. 92% of consumers said that they would buy locally made products bearing a stamp of world-class quality over other imported products.

South Africans favour supporting South African-made products and services even if they are slightly higher priced than other goods in the same categories - if it proves to be of a better quality. This is a positive indication. If the South African-made product has a reputation of being of an excellent quality, then it certainly has room for competition locally and also internationally.

One of the important aims of the campaign is that there should be at least one South African-made and *Proudly South African* accredited product or service for every type of transaction made. By 31 March 2002 more than 124 companies were listed as members of the *Proudly South African* campaign. The membership fee stands at 0,1% of profits made by companies. Amongst numerous other places, the logo

can now be seen on fishing trawlers in the harbours, on grocery products in supermarkets as well as on many South African-made television programmers and CDs. The criteria that a company has to fulfil in order use the *Proudly South African* logo are:

- At least 50% of production and labour must be locally incurred and there must be a substantial transformation of the product.
- The product or service must prove to be of a very good standard.
- The company must employ fair labour practice.
- The company must prove it maintains sound environmental standards. (Annual Report 2002: 17).

Stage one of the campaign saw the organisation going on a membership drive. This was followed by a consumer teaser campaign where the public was introduced to *Proudly South Africa* followed by the product teaser campaign.

The campaign also continuously takes advice from a board of non-remunerated members representing labour, government, business and non-governmental community organisations. The input and partnerships with sectors were found to be crucial to the success of the campaign. *Proudly South African* has therefore positioned itself so that it has readily available communication channels to each target sector of society with the added advantage of having readily available constructive input from members about the needs and concerns of these sectors. This will also affect the outcomes of *Proudly South African* messages. In other words, the *Proudly South African* communication campaign can tailor-make the type of communication they have with their targeted publics.

Proudly South African has got the backing of big national founder sponsors such as Old Mutual, South African Airways and Eskom. They are currently receiving many more sponsors in cash and kind through continuous marketing of the brand. *Proudly South African* is continuously recruiting new companies as they come to see the benefits of joining such an organisation and as consumers are showing more positive awareness of goods and services that bear the *Proudly South African* logo.

The Chairperson and other members are actively involved in taking the message of the campaign to numerous groups, communities and clubs. The campaign uses word-of-mouth advertising and campaigning to a large extent.

Proudly South African is also embarking on a training project (through their alliance with COSATU which represents families of almost half the South African population) where more than 10 000 shop stewards will be trained to run awareness programmes and become a big part of the campaign. School visits is also a feature of the marketing campaign as it has been found that parents are largely influenced by their children's choices when shopping.

Proudly South African has and is creating partnerships in the various sectors of the South African community. There has been no negative publicity reported from the public or the receivers of the campaign.

Tim Modise (Annual Report 2003:4), Chairman of the *Proudly South African* campaign, states that the campaign is more than just "buying South African". It is also about pride in nation building and discovering common purposes. This is why fair labour practices are an important criteria that must be met before a product can bear the *Proudly South African* logo. Modise goes on to say: "Our focus on quality can be seen in the context of encouraging companies to become globally competitive. Sound environmental practices feed into the international quest for sustainable development; whilst local content means local investment, and confidence in the economy, leading to economic growth".

Built into the communication strategy is the sense of ownership that all stakeholders come to experience as a result of having communication tailor-made to suite their needs. What the campaign is doing, in actual fact, is creating a sense of pride about being South African and discovering common purposes through all sectors of society.

CONCLUSION

A communication strategy should ideally incorporate various research methods that will ensure that all objectives, both short and long term, are achieved accordingly. Ongoing participatory research techniques are perhaps the best way to learn of the informational and education levels of targeted groups in the different regions. In addition to this, the different sectors of South African society and industry also need to be targeted for input that will come to affect the communication output strategy for the various sectors of the public.

The *Proudly South African* campaign thus far has been successful, because it has focused on the benefits of organising stakeholder

relations as an integral part of its research. Communication is designed around the type of inputs made by stakeholders and this comes to affect the outcomes. Partners or stakeholders are also given ownership of the final outcomes. It is therefore possible for consumers and companies to feel a sense of pride in celebrating comradeship about something that is "Proudly South African".

LoveLife and *Proudly South African* have taken two very different approaches to communicating their messages. Based on their research *LoveLife* has devised communication to address the youth of South Africa in a very generic way, drawing on the general experiences of what teenagers deem "current" and "trendy". *Proudly South African* has, on the other hand, tailor-made their communication actions to reach the various sectors of the South African public in a very personal way by researching each of their needs and aspirations.

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