

Bloggers disrupting the media industry in Tanzania

Ahead of 'The Best of Global Digital Marketing' conference in June, speaker Hafiz Juma commented that he doesn't believe advertising is about selling people things, especially in emerging markets.



Hafiz Juma

For Juma, the co-founder and chairman of AIM Group, the first new media agency based in Tanzania, advertising is a process of creating connections with people through stories they can relate to and hopefully elevating products beyond just objects of consumption.

His expertise is in digital and content and his clients range from large blue-chips to emerging SMEs; including Vodacom, SABMiller, PSI, Coke, DKT and many others. Juma will be sharing his expertise at [The Best of Global Digital Marketing conferences](#) in Johannesburg and Stellenbosch 7-9 June 2017. This is an edited interview with him ahead of the conference.

Q: Speaking of Tanzania in the era of digital marketing – is there anything that is very characteristic to your country?

A: Digital within advertising has been growing vertically in Tanzania for about five years now. Initially it was very social media driven because at that time (and to date) lot of the mobile operators had zero-rated access to Facebook and Twitter, hoping it would further spur data usage.

So social media was and is quite an instrumental component of the entire digital advertising ecosystem here. And because of that, content marketing has also really taken off in this market. Good example of this are some digitally native publishers that started off as basic blogs five years ago and today they've become some of the most reputable media news houses in the country.

These new publishers are well ahead of the game and this has totally disrupted the more traditional media conglomerates like print and TV companies which are now trying to play catch-up.

What is also quite unique in Tanzania is that we have a surprisingly big blogging culture. Even as early as five years ago when digital was still quite small, we had over 250 blogs in our market. If you look at our market now, we have many more blogs, so blogging is quite intense in this market.

Lots of the focus of these blogs is entertainment news, gossip and politics. That in itself is indicative of the type of content that tends to appeal in this market. We have huge demand for local and localised content – that is quite important and valuable in this market. Regarding language, about 80% of all communication and advertising is done in Swahili.

YouTube is also quite big here – a good indication is that in October 2016 we actually had more YouTube views in Tanzania than in Nigeria, which is massive given the population size of Nigeria. This was driven largely by these new publishers who have quite wide ecosystem – they're active on their blogs, on social channels and also on video.

Q: In different countries there are different standards and ethics when it comes to advertising in blogs and on YouTube. How does it work in Tanzania?

A: The standards here vary quite a bit. Already five years ago many blogs were trying to attract advertising and the model at that time was mostly selling ad placements for quite random price numbers, which depended on how people perceived the value of the space on their blogs or websites. It was not backed up by any data or audience numbers. A big effort on our part as an agency has been to change that level of thinking – to make sure that all publishers are much more data-driven, more driven by standard CPC and CPM models and demonstrating real value to advertisers. This has been a bit of a slow shift.

Speaking about YouTube and native advertising, it depends on the type of content the advertisers are trying to develop and push through the publishers. On YouTube people tend to use the combination of YouTube's own monetisation platform and implementing their own native ad formats in the videos.

Regarding marking the paid content, the publishers never really overtly or specifically mark it as editorial content, however it is usually quite obvious if the piece of content is actually an advertorial. You see this also very clearly with influencer marketing.

Influencer marketing has grown quite a bit in Tanzania over the past two years. But the problem is that it's not very well measured, it's not very well articulated what the ROI is, etc. And the type of content the influencers are pushing out on behalf of brands again seems very forced. It doesn't look organic and it doesn't use the typical voice of these influencers. So it almost seems to erode the brand equity for the advertisers. Also, there's not much brand loyalty – you might see one influencer promoting a product from a telco brand and the next day the same influencer is tweeting and promoting another product from a competing telco brand.

Q: Do the traditional publishers and TV stations feel competition from the bloggers and YouTubers?

A: Yes, I think they very much consider it as a threat and it's especially visible this year. Traditional publishers have been asleep at the wheel for a long time but this year we've started to see many of these organisations making statements about their focus on digital transformation and on becoming more relevant in the digital space.

We see them overtly competing with some of the bloggers and websites which they have traditionally ignored. And they are actually competing for the advertising dollars. In some cases the bloggers are getting much more in terms of advertising revenue than some of these traditional media houses.

It's also because the traditional marketing budgets have been shrinking over the past one and a half years and a lot more money is being pushed into digital. So we see many media organisations that have been around for 30-40 years now suddenly waking up and trying to transform their business quite rapidly. I think the next years are going to be very exciting because we will see how this all plays out.

Q: Are there any lessons that the other countries might learn from Tanzania's experience in terms of digital?

A: The one thing I would want to share as a learning is about the large multinational companies who tend to try to centralise their advertising and also media buying and media planning. We saw very quickly in Tanzania that this model doesn't work.

It is very essential and important that your content is contextual, localised and adapted to the market you're in. And also the role of media channels varies market by market. While there is a drive towards more efficiency with global companies and how they spend their advertising dollars, I would advise to resist the temptation of centralising too much, because of the potential risk that you end up not actually creating relevant communication for the markets that you're in.

And additionally, I would say that in the emerging markets, it is very important for agencies to lead the industry in terms of best practice. A lot of these local digital ecosystems have grown organically and of course lot of interesting things have happened there too, which is great because it drives innovation.

But at the same time it is very important to imply best practice and standards because large global companies are more likely to work with local partners that understand and can speak the global language in terms of standards, benchmarks and processes.

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>