

Marketing to the next generation



By [Jessica Tennant](#)

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The Sunday Times Youth Marketing Conference, which took place on Friday, 10 June, opened with a keynote by Jason Levin, MD of HDI Youth Marketeers, providing an overview of the 12th Sunday Times Generation Next survey.

This annual study is conducted by HDI in six provinces (including three inland and three coastal regions) across the country, against both poor and wealthy respondents comprising a sample of kids, teens and young adults, aged 8-23, half male, half female, and a race split that matches the South African urban demographic.

It identifies South Africa's favourite brands and how they've won over the country's youth, where youth spend is going and what their favoured and less preferred brand approaches are.

In the context of numerous State of the Nation discussions, Levin takes some of the findings of [Gen Next](#) and matches them to futurologist Clem Sunter's five South African forecast flags. "Clem's view is that trends and future forecasting is basically a mug's game because you're not Nostradamus, and the best we can do is rather than trying to predict the future, is find some indicators that are going to help us understand on a case by case basis, because we all have different needs of what we have to understand in the future."

The 'flags', as he calls them, help us predict for our particular circumstance or industry, whether they're red or green, and to understand the implications. Here, Levin looks at the youth implications of these flags. Why? Because we live on the youngest continent in the world! "Uganda is the youngest country on the continent and in fact in the world, but even in South Africa we have a halfway split between 25-and-under and adults."

Direct youth spend in SA alone amounts to R134.5bn annually, of which kids account for R35.4bn, teens R48.7bn and young adults R50.1bn.

1. Premier League Nation

"This flag," says Levin, "is all about what the rest of the world thinks of us as a sovereign state and there's lots of doom and gloom around this."

Explaining what this means, he says, "There's a league table in Switzerland which ranges from 1 to 16, called the Premier League of Nations, and if you fall off that you're no longer in the Premier League." We've been in the mid-30s for a number of years and currently we're sitting in the mid-50s, so we're getting very borderline, he says, but also "we're quite a dichotomous nation and it's really hard to get a suss of this stuff as a holistic, homogenous society, because we're not."

We're sitting right now in the middle of the golden heart of Sandton where 5kms down the road from us is a completely different reality. Sandton ain't South Africa! We have the highest Gini coefficient in the world and the highest income disparity – literally we're no. 1 now for income disparity in the world, which is scary and challenging stuff, especially for the youth."



Image via [Facebook](#)

Levin notes that although respondents range from R5,000 a month household income homes right up to kids from Dainfern, aspirations are not that different. Everyone wants to be successful and have cool stuff. Evidently, the top three high-tech gadgets are PlayStation, iPhone and Xbox, and the clothing brands are no less aspirational with Nike, Adidas and Guess.

Is SA at risk of being a failed state? "We're not doing well in terms of our ratings, current unemployment record, commodity prices, and the corruption index has dropped quite severely in the last couple of years."

This of course affects what young people want and fear.

Top of their wish list is money. "We're still in a conspicuous consumption market – flash and cash is where it's at." Contrasting to that and next on the list is time with family, three is more energy and four is a strong desire for self-development, skills and talents.

Fears are just crazy, he says. Their biggest fears are losing their parents, being in a car accident, failing their exams and being raped.

In terms of their mood index, most of the time they feel happy about their life (65%), but only 39% are inspired at school/varsity. Levin believes that education is one of the biggest challenges in South Africa. "It's probably the biggest flip switch for the first and all five SA flags in terms of our future," he says.

2. Quality of infrastructure

Twenty-two years into democracy and we've made good progress, believes Levin. "In terms of making clean water, electricity and housing available to people, though, we're not on target, and when we look at the learner landscape, we're particularly not on target. 10% of SA schools have no water supply. 14% have no access to electricity and a huge problem is libraries and dysfunctional toilets, and as a result only 21% of young people say they're happy with the direction that the country is going."

But even more true of youth than other parts of society is that there are pockets of excellence that can turn this around...

3. Pockets of excellence

What we do have going for us are huge scores in corporate compliance, a world-class banking sector that saved us from the financial crisis in 2008, 2009 and 2010, and even some incredibly talented celebs that are doing us proud, like Trevor Noah, Chad le Clos, Clasper, AKA and Black Coffee.

We also have an amazing shopping experience, with malls like Gateway and Sandton City, which of course is an important part of youth culture.

4. Leadership

This is one where we really owe a favour to young people, says Levin. “There are so many of these hackney clichés, overused stuff about youth being the leaders of tomorrow. Unfortunately the more you say it the less it resonates, but it couldn’t be more true.

“There are some issues in terms of the stratification where old and young sit in response to things like infrastructure problems, etc. There’s a huge amount of rallying around the provinces of the EFF, whereas there’s a huge age-related problem in the DA support base where 69% of their voters are over 35, only 22% if you look at the EFF and 46% – a much more balanced age profile for the ANC.”

Dad (25%) talks to them about politics and world issues, followed by their teacher (18%), friends (14%) and Mom (13%).

People having the biggest world impact, is firstly, Nelson Mandela (his legacy) and on the opposite side of the spectrum is Jacob Zuma. Between them are movie and TV celebs, parents, religion, and Obama and other world leaders.

5. Changing nature of work (and the workplace)

The coolest job for the sixth year in a row is to be ‘the boss’ or CEO. Then it’s a mix of power and glamour professions such as doctors/surgeons, engineers, soccer players or lawyers.

Their desired skills are therefore business management/executive skills (followed by health and fitness, creativity, etc.).

No shortage of ambition here, but unfortunately the local working landscape doesn’t match these aspirations. If you look at semi-skilled and low-skilled occupations, 75% of people employed in SA are nothing like this desired list – they’re factory workers and unskilled laborers. 63% of SA youth (under 25) are unemployed, 30% of South Africans are on social grants, and SA has 1.5 million people running non-VAT registered businesses.

And big business is not going to turn this around. “Young people no longer want to work in big businesses,” explains Levin. “20 years ago you wanted to be somebody who worked at Anglo, now young people want to work in an environment where they’re challenged, stimulated, have international transfer opportunities and can be themselves, and those tend to be smaller organisations. So entrepreneurship and small business is going to play a huge role in creating employment and help fulfil the career aspirations of young South Africans,” he believes.

So in terms of their working aspirations, 37% would like to open their own company, 27% would like to work for a company overseas, 17% would like to work for a company in South Africa and 16% for an international company in the country.

The youth of today

Today’s youth are ambitious and highly independent. “As things stand, we’ve betrayed that. We’re not creating the infrastructure that schools need to create leaders, we’re not opening up leadership opportunities, and we’re not creating workplaces that are well suited to their abilities and desires. And either we get a reality clap and turn those prospects around pretty quickly or we stand the chance of not green flagging no. 1, which is the failed state risk.”

They're prosumers, critically conscious and can mobilise. "As we saw with the #MustFall movement: fees must fall, rape must fall, statues must fall... Young people now mobilise themselves extremely convincingly and powerfully."

They're more sensible than they get credit for; "so very community-minded, family-minded and increasingly more religion-minded".

"But, the corollary of that is that they're crazy image conscious and they want flash, cash, amazing trainers, etc." There's a culture of conspicuous consumption amongst them because image counts... a lot!

"The really consoling part is that they're not self-obsessed and self-absorbed. They care about themselves of course and their future prospects, but they care about their families and their communities too."

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