

# Is race still relevant in ads?

 By [Bonnie Ramaila](#)

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Our creative industry seems to be standing in the present, yet living in the past. I think we have come a long way as a country to be where we are today. However, I think racial undertones and subtle nuances of racial segregation in TV adverts seems rife, and I find them more disturbing than thoughtful, especially when a TV advert shows one product communicating the same message, yet represented by two different racial groups.

The first rendition of a certain mobile service provider's recent advert had a White man, as a presenter telling consumers of the benefits of switching to that service provider. The frequency of this advert was quite high - hence I still remember the content. It went into a bit of a recess, and now it's back on our small screen and this time, presented by a Black woman.

The new presenter is conveying the same message on the same product as the previous presenter did ('Black' and 'White' being operative words in this article).

Why couldn't they present together the first time if the message is the same? Why did they change the character or presenter?

As a democratic country, I thought we had since moved on from this racial segregation in adverts to a point where it shouldn't matter anymore who conveys a message of a product or service. It's the message we listen to and not who delivers it.

## Are race groups relevant for 'believability'?

I would have thought that the criteria used to get a presenter for this particular ad was to have an articulate and well-poised person (and both presenters suit the criteria). I'm wondering what the reasoning behind the use of two renditions of this advert was. Are race groups relevant for 'believability'? Did research inform these two race groups representing the same product with the same message? Why? Do white people believe and heed the call to action when a White person says it, and Black people when a Black person says it? Does it really matter who says it? Were these insights gathered from the pre and post testing research of the advert's content, message and delivery thereof when focus groups were held? Or did they ask what consumers thought, ignored what they said and did as they pleased? Was the research about ticking the box?

Honestly, we no longer live in the 80s where every advert had to have three different languages, two different race groups for the same ad with the same format and message.

At this point in our country, wherein we are advocating social cohesion for our society, I don't think it's necessary to have different race groups doing the same advert, with same message and same format. I'd understand if it were two different products.

If a client wants to do an advert with different racial groups, then take into consideration *all* the racial groups that we have in our country and do various executions depicting all different racial groups. Now we are talking. Ridiculous isn't it? So is the depiction of just two groups.

Don't get me wrong, I don't have a problem with different executions of a product, for different target audiences, as I know that there are some products that are targeted at specific people.

However, if the same product with the same benefits and results for all racial groups is produced (like a mobile service provider for example), why go through the trouble of producing the two different executions as though it has different results for the different racial groups? Or does it?

## **A waste of money**

There are good examples of adverts that aim to integrate both racial groups in the execution of an advert, like some alcoholic beverage adverts. They are a good representative of all racial groups.

In my opinion, two different executions with the same message to the same target audience, is a waste of money for a client - especially in these tough economic times. Or is it about more money for the production and advertising agencies producing this? It's so unnecessary.

In today's digital age, shouldn't we be thinking creatively in terms of how we can skin the cat, as opposed to making glaring and unnecessary subtle nuances like that of a racial split?

Are we ever going to transcend this race issue in our advertising industry?

## **ABOUT BONNIE RAMAILA**

Bonnie Ramaila is an international communication consultant. She previously worked in the private and public sector as a communication expert. She runs a consultancy that specialises in bespoke communication for niche clients and individuals. Services include communication and media advice, facilitation, publicity and strategy development. She writes in her personal capacity.

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