

How digital research is best positioned to understand African consumers

Pamro (Pan African Media Research Organisation) in association with Borderless Access presented a webinar on 21 July, where African research and the digital evolution of the continent's consumers was unpacked.



Image source: [123RF.com](https://www.123RF.com)

The webinar included a real-life project presented by Stacey Grant, insights director, country and customer development for Africa at Unilever, who said, “Despite the potential digital research holds for the continent we are off to a sub-optimal start. There is no continent that needs digital intervention more than Africa does. There are places in Africa that a researcher simply cannot get to physically, either due to cost, safety or health factors. The Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted a number of the pitfalls of traditional research and has necessitated a better approach. These limitations can be reduced or even overcome by conducting research digitally.

Digital provides constant and higher levels of engagement

“As a continent, we are at the forefront of digitised consumers, mobile penetration is extremely high, and mobile connectivity has leapfrogged that of personal computers in Africa. More and more people are living their lives online – a trend we have seen accelerated by Covid-19. Our research needs to be where the people are, and to understand the world through their eyes. And so, to this end, engaging in research digitally is a business imperative.

“Digital provides constant and higher levels of engagement and the opportunity for brands to adapt. It also enables deep insights into consumers that brands should be hungry after. The best way is to listen, we need to be passive listeners and proactive partners. Through technology such as social media listening, there is no longer an excuse not to hear our target market.

“Digital research should not threaten traditional research methods, rather it should complement them. Especially in a market as diverse as Africa, a hybrid approach may at times be absolutely necessary. What is most important is the business question or challenge you are addressing, and if this is clear, then the research methodology selection of digital, traditional or hybrid is an easy one to make, to ensure we glean the right insights,” explained Grant.

The importance of collaboration

Bev Tigar Basset, associate vice president at Borderless Access, and one of the presenters of the Pamro webinar added, “We’re a young digital continent, we have an opportunity to move forward. The digital revolution is enabling the insight industry in ways we would not have imagined. It is constantly challenging our industry to be open and to adopt change to use technology in new ways which optimise the delivery of insight to the clients we serve.”

Sifiso Falala, CEO of Plus 94 Research and Pamro president added, “Our webinar highlighted the importance of collaboration and discussion between key industry players. There is much to be learnt when bringing CMO-level individuals together. It is up to us as an industry to share learnings about how we leverage African digital online opportunities.”

With market research continuously finding new ways to work with consumers digitally, Falala concluded that the industry “is getting closer to harnessing the digital revolution to leverage the exceptional depth of insight that it provides for brands doing business in Africa.”

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