

Expanding the Stern Model of Communication for multicultural markets:  
A study on language in advertising in Africa

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# Expanding the Stern Model of Communication for multicultural markets: A study on language in advertising in Africa

## **Abstract**

The objective of this research was to explore the well-established Stern Model of Communication in a multilingual (and by implication multicultural) emerging market setting. By interviewing seven top marketing professionals operating across multiple African countries and cultures, the study sought to understand the challenges and needs within a multinational multicultural communications framework and to provide a direction for international marketers to frame their thinking about language and culture in advertising. The study was set in a South African context as the country has eleven official languages and a spread of tribes and cultures. The participants, however, oversee marketing in almost two dozen African countries. The core findings show that while more vernacular advertisements are being produced in African contexts, there still many challenges with the use of language in African advertising. Issues of tone are seen to be as important as language and the use of local language does provide opportunity for deeper resonance. The loss of message in simple translation is another challenge faced. When suggesting solutions, the experts suggest that subtitling and dubbing be further explored in Africa. In addition, a deeper view of tone, form, phonology, function and appropriacy needs to be included in pre-testing. The creative team needs more psychological safety to explore questions of appropriateness and a more diverse team is often missing from decision making functions. The use of multi-language approaches (and specifically Xhonglish) is still under researched and there is no standard DEI creative guideline for agencies. Finally, the experts suggest that awards do more to promote non-English advertising. This study is the first of its kind to explore the communication process in advertising across African multilingualism.

**Subject Areas:** *Advertising, Cross-cultural and International Marketing, Marketing-Mix Effectiveness*

**Track:** International Marketing & Marketing in Emerging Countries