

# How public relations have had to evolve with a changing media landscape

By [Gomotsegang Motswatswe](#)

11 Jul 2022

Just last week, Khabane *Khaby* Lama made history as the most followed TikTokker with a staggering 143.2 million followers on the platform. Lama was a regular guy, a laid off factory worker as the *New York Post* referred to him.



Supplied. Gomotsegang Motswatswe, senior account manager at Tribeca Public Relations

With that level of following, however, Lama is so much more than that. He is, in fact, what the world has needed in the past two years of the Covid pandemic.

His numbers confirm the audience's appetite for content that speaks to their lived experience with a generous dose of wit and humour. Not only does he have a healthy level of influence, but he has also proven that innovation is imperative for current and future generations to flourish.

## Knowing the value of innovation

Ten years ago, TikTok did not exist, but the app, launched by Chinese startup company ByteDance, has taken on a life of its own, with nuggets of relatable, fun and snackable content from regular people and celebrities alike.

In stark contrast to this, the traditional media has been on a downward trajectory before Covid.

The South African media industry saw a 40% decline in print circulations last year, while we saw the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) and *eTV News*, among others, shed jobs in response to the challenging times.



A mixed bag for South African broadcast media

5 Jul 2022



Compounded challenges arising from a more junior and strained newsroom coupled with fake news, have increased the pressure on these media.

## Mistrust in the media

These have also led to an increasing widening public trust deficit.

According to the 2022 Edelman Trust Barometer, 69% of South African respondents believe that journalists and reporters are purposely trying to mislead people by saying things they know are false, or that they share gross exaggerations.

This is a marked increase from the 61% who saw news organisations as being biased in the previous year.

With audiences now more likely to trust content from people they know, than content from the media, influencer campaigns with everyday, regular and relatable individuals are creating an impact - more than campaigns with big names behind them.

It's no surprise that 71% of marketers polled in the Kantar 2022 Media Trends and Predictions expect an increase in influencer content investment.

## Content creators are kingmakers

While audiences are looking for meaning and resonance in the content they consume, they are also choosing when and how they access this content.

This very need is what has aided the growth of Video on Demand (VOD) platforms such as Netflix, Showmax, HBO Max, Apple TV and Disney+.

In addition, content creators have become kingmakers, effectively positioning themselves as a more authentic bridge between brands and consumers.

## A catalyst for PR

These have all changed the media landscape and the result has been a catalyst for the evolution of public relations.

As storytellers, what we know for sure is that impactful and sustainable campaigns depend on well-informed PR strategies that are data and insights-led.

These depend on engaged audiences rather than audiences that are fed information they can't relate to or make use of.

In addition, successful campaigns depend on integrated media strategies that take the unique socio-economic dispensation of our country into consideration.

For instance, relying only on press releases or media interviews to ride the wave of publicity isn't sustainable anymore.

While securing a feature on a weekly broadsheet remains first prize, amplifying that through podcasts, which have a long shelf life, don't limit the brand voice and can be curated to suit the specific brand voice, is excellent leverage for campaigns.

In addition, identifying opportunities for strategic partnerships within client portfolios for clients in completely different sectors on campaigns that are unexpected, yet socially and economically impactful has become one of the ways that public relations can show value.

## **Key components of PR**

In this way, we aren't just communicating what our clients and brands are doing, we're also on board to help them tap into initiatives that speak and align to their purpose. In that sense, we're creating communities.

With the instant gratification that has come through going viral or "trending" on social media, it has also become challenging for PR professionals to keep selling the slow burn value of brand building to clients. This means that social media and, by extension, influencer strategies aren't optional, but key components of PR offerings.

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Gomotsegang Mbotswatswe is a senior account manager at Tribeca Public Relations.

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