

Most Voters Have Won, Most Marketers Are Still Lost.

Ten years on, the electorate of this young democracy have sent out a few signals for all the world to see. With little regard to issues of gender, society, race and religion, the Indonesian voter stood firm in the choices they made. A landslide will usher in an incumbent, re-elected democratically for the first time. Anybody who would like to continue suggesting that Islam and democracy cannot co-exist, is ignoring history being made. For the world at large, here is living proof.

For the much maligned LSI, the day of reckoning delivered the vindication they deserve. The quick count results from around the country were in keeping with their survey projections, a confirmation of their honest efforts and a condemnation of all efforts to the contrary. Not surprisingly, the vast majority of voters were never fooled, able to see the differences and decipher the truth, instinctively. For the political parties involved, the obvious lessons were reiterated yet again. Any effort to honestly understand the voter will pay dividends, any effort to dupe them will not. Each time they ran a poll, LSI and its client released the topline results for political impact but the real learnings, geographic, demographic and psychographic, would have been used behind the scenes to fine-tune the campaign. Not only is democracy in Indonesia coming of age, campaigning for elections is becoming a lot more sophisticated.

Professionally speaking, Indonesia's politicians have made more progress more rapidly than have Indonesia's marketers. As a friend of Indonesia for two decades now, this writer has witnessed many changes in the making. Over time, the difference in the quality of conversations with politicians and marketers has become too obvious to ignore. Both understand that sheer physical presence across the nation is more than half the reason for success. Both understand that consistency is important, that gimmicks don't really work, that consumers aren't easily fooled. But only a handful of marketers really make the effort to get to know their 'voters', beyond the biggest 10 or 15 cities.

The fact that these 15 cities do not even add up to 20 per cent of Indonesia's population, is a reality that seemingly escapes them. With the exception of a few high-end products, the overwhelming majority of the consumers of today as well as the consumers of tomorrow, reside outside these big cities. There is an alarming number of reports periodically sent to CEOs, regional and global offices that simply mis-represent the truth. If sales data is gathered from only these 10 or 15 cities, they will distort the much larger market realities beyond. It stands to logic that a headache pill distributed only in the big cities could have a disproportionately high market share in that restricted geography. In sharp contrast, the brand is dwarfed by other brands operating with much success in the smaller cities, towns and villages that make up more than 75 per cent of the population.

These mis-representations are not just theoretical, they are indeed routine practice. Only those who look beyond data coming from beyond these few traditionally monitored cities have a finger on the pulse of the real marketplace. It is the difference between fact and fiction. Does it really matter that a brand that is actually No.3 in the national landscape is always reported as a dominant No.2, based on retail data coming out of these few big cities? Does it really matter that almost 40 per cent of new motorcycles sold are actually bought by

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women, even though almost all ownership documents are drawn in the name of the male head of household? Does it really matter that while there could be 150 million SIM cards deemed 'active' by operators, there cannot be 140 million cellular subscribers in a country with 30 per cent living below the poverty line? If fundamental questions like these don't concern the majority of marketers, it is a telling comment on marketing practices in Indonesia today. Politicians have come a long way in 10 years, marketers simply have not.

Proof of that conviction lies in the fact that Indonesia has among the poorest research to advertising spend ratios among major markets. In other words, the amount spent on understanding a brand's consumer and the amount spent on advertising are poles apart. This, in a country where most people are glued to their TV sets every day and every night. It's no surprise then to know that TV audience data is also collected in just those 10 proverbial big cities. It's a cosy, unreal little world, where most knowledge about the consumer seemingly resides. Even today, it is what most marketers, their advertising agencies and media owners use to determine how much gets spent on which programs and how many times. Unbelievable, but true.

Where are the leaders of industry, pushing for better knowledge and higher standards of professional conduct? There is a noticeable absence of professionals willing to come together to make the few available industry tools work harder, better, and in the places they should be. Most people seem keen to keep on breaking the old stones the old way, shy to embrace even the most obvious of improvements. In contrast, the urge to corrupt, hoodwink or browbeat the consumer continues unabated, best exemplified by the shameless campaigns advertising hundreds of cars and thousands of motorcycles to apparently unsuspecting bank customers. Doesn't anybody know that many of the same depositors move their money around from promotion to promotion, leaving accounts idling with small dormant amounts, like gypsies? What is the cost of maintaining these accounts? While the same people are reported as a growing number of "accounts" to Bank Indonesia, does anybody care that the actual number of account-holders has been declining? The truth seems not to matter.

If there was no better way, a more cost-efficient way of doing things, the situation today would be easy to understand. The truth is that both the tools and the minds already exist in Indonesia today, capable of conducting the practice of marketing with integrity and professionalism. The exceptions prove the rule. They know who they are. Many of the others are the same people who accuse the politicians of corruption, both material and intellectual.. An honest look at the mirror should tell us who we really are, every day.

These opinions are based on continuing conversations with politicians, journalists and marketers. They are influenced by Roy Morgan Single Source, a syndicated survey with over 25,000 Indonesians 14 years and older interviewed each year. That national database is updated every quarter. Almost 90 per cent of the population is covered, from the cities, towns and villages of Indonesia. It is one way to keep in touch with the truth across the country, one way to keep all stakeholders honest and accountable.

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