

## ***Becoming a Nation: Exploring the heartbeat of a nation through the lens of Behaviour Groups***

*A series on social segmentation model research into the diverse and complex South African society*

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In 2017 Brand South Africa embarked on what some may have thought to be a bold research endeavour. We set out to develop a unique segmentation model, with the goal of gaining deeper insight into the behaviour, attitudes and values of South Africans, and to find how these shape 'who we are' - as a nation.

The development of the segmentation model, and resulting behaviour groups, are important for Brand South Africa due to the fact that as the official marketing agency of the South African Nation Brand, it cannot embark on any of its work if it is not attuned to the nuanced diversity that constitutes this fledgling/evolving nation (and its identity, albeit a developing one) at the Southern tip of the African continent.

The aim with this article is not to bore you with methodological details, instead readers are welcome to consult a more detailed descriptions and reports from this project on [www.brandsouthafrica.com](http://www.brandsouthafrica.com). Nevertheless, a comprehensive research intervention involving an annual national omnibus survey (2500 respondents), monthly online/mobile surveys (350 respondents/month), focus groups (12 per annum), and in-depth interviews (10) was launched. Through a comprehensive analysis of more than 6,000 research records derived from the quantitative and qualitative methods, the ten behaviour groups were identified. These are updated on an annual basis.

In 2018 it became clear that the project, and its findings have some merit. Key findings from the project were presented as a paper at the 2018 Annual Southern African Market Research Association Conference (June 2018). This paper won two awards: Over-all Best Research Award, and the Kantar Innovation Award.<sup>1</sup> The paper entitled - *A social segmentation model of the diverse and complex South African society with broader implications for the research industry*, clearly showed that the ten behaviour groups do in fact open unique windows/perspectives into the central tenants of the South African nation- and society. One key lesson stands out, that in the midst of the multi-verse of South Africa - our people share much more, and have much more in common, than what one may expect.

From the onset, as the project methodologies and analytical approaches were developed, it was acknowledged that the 'who we are,' as a nation, can only be understood as an outcome of tremendous underlying diversity. This is after all a nation of jazz and rugby, football fans, swimmers netting trophies like well-oiled fish in the water, paralympic- and chess champions, it is a nation of twelve official tongues (including of late - sign language) and a multi-verse of cultures, a nation with a history of struggle, pain and suffering, yet, also a nation of freedom and democracy and global icons in the form of the Luthuli's, Masekela's, Mandela's, Krog's, and September's of our country's complex past.

This is why, for the paper presented in 2018, we chose as a point of departure - a quote from Homi K Bhabha:

*A nation is a soul, a spiritual principle. Two things, which in truth are but one, constitute this soul or spiritual principle. One lies in the past, one in the present. One is the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories; the other is present-day consent, the desire to live together, the will to perpetuate the value of the heritage that one has received in an undivided form... The nation, like the individual, is the culmination of a long past of endeavours, sacrifice and devotion. Of all cults, that of the ancestors is the most legitimate, for the ancestors have made us what we are.*

Homi K. Bhabha<sup>1</sup>

While Homi K Bhabha's words from his seminal work - *Nation and Narration*, ring true, and appeal to the senses, they also run the risk of masking vast complexity in a simplistic wrapping of 'history forges a nation.' In fact, there is nothing more controversial than notions of nationhood and identity - this is not only the case in the South African context, but also at a global level.

Modern and Ancient conflict at a global level have been driven by various factors. Foremost among which one can count identity (be it ethnic, sub-ethnic, subaltern, intra- or inter-religious), cultural (be it driven by notions of exclusivity, or resistance against 'perceived' excessive inclusivity, such as is the case with absorption of African and Middle-Eastern refugees and migrants in Europe), generational, political-economic, and informational or virtual. Of course, there is a proverbial rabbit hole filled with possible permutations of conflict generating factors. But, the fact is that conflicting identities (perceived and real) continue to be a major driving force of fragmentation, conflagration, and chaos at all levels of human polities (sub-national, national, regional, and global).

According to Bhabha - two things constitute the soul of a nation. The one pertains to history, and the other to present-day consent. The present-day consent refers to a desire to live together. The development of this segmentation model is therefore founded in the objective of developing insight into the modes of behaviour that shape 'who we are'. These issues are found in our actions, attitudes, and values as expressed in what it is we do, and how we do it.

This is why, the foundational issue, the fundamental question, that precedes or underlies the development of a segmentation model for the South African society, relates to broad questions of nationhood; factors that influence both its making and un-making; how it is constituted through what people do, and how they do it, can also be the source of a nation's un-doing.

Bhabha further argues, a nation is much like an individual - it is an outcome. In his words, a nation is a culmination of a long past of endeavours, sacrifice and devotion. This may have several implications, but most importantly is the fact that this supposedly grand historical march, the sacrifices made- and devotion people have towards the 'nation', is not, and can never be a destination. This is especially true in the South African context. In this case, the journey is and will likely remain just that - the destination.

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<sup>1</sup> Homi K. Bhabha. 1990. *Nation and narration*. Routledge: New York, p. 19.

The sacrifices of our past have not only defined who we are today (as expressed in the values contained in the preamble of the South African Constitution), but, due to the brief history of nationhood that we share since 1994, means that the long march towards identifying and drawing the outlines of that South African national soul, will be a perpetual work in progress. This also implies that essentialist representations that assert ‘what’ the South African nation is, and ‘how’ it is constituted, should be taken not as a stop sign that invoke ‘warm and fuzzy’ feel-good feelings, but as route markers that point towards possible horizons of meaning along the path of nation-making.

The goal is not to concoct a *final* representational model of South African nationhood that fixes meaning for all time, but rather to draw the rough outline of behaviours, attitudes, and beliefs that inform the evolution of features, coherences and contradictions, that when taken together shed light not on the Who We Are - but serves as a guide towards *what we are becoming*.

As the custodian of the South African Nation Brand, Brand South Africa’s mandate is centrally located within the realms of understanding that which makes us a nation. Thus it is imperative that Brand South Africa develops mechanisms in which the nation and the identities that make the nation are adequately understood and interrogated in order to provide empirical insights that serve to demystify fact from fiction.

Over the course of the next ten months the series on South African behaviour groups will aim to share with the general public, and Brand South Africa stakeholders, the essential and unique features of each group. We hope these generate positive interaction and debate about not only on ‘who we are’, as a nation, but also what we are ‘becoming’. Ultimately we may have more in common than what we might imagine on any given day.

We also look forward to, and encourage feedback as we launch into this ten-month journey- and conversation on who we think we are, and what we may yet become...

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<sup>i</sup> Jan Wegelin, Dr Petrus de Kock and Dr Elsa Thirion-Venter. 2018. *A social segmentation model of the diverse and complex South African society with broader implications for the research industry*. Presented at the 2018 Annual Southern African Market Research Association Conference (June 2018).