

Why brands need to be more inclusive

 By [Khangelani Dziba](#)

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The transformation dialogue has long been a part of the South Africa's brand narrative and by extension, the brand advertising industry's battle, spanning 26 years post-apartheid and democracy.



Photo by Oladimeji Ajegbile from [Pexels](#).

It has been part of our rhetoric “for so long” that it seems many brand leaders in decision-making positions or leading brands have grown fatigued of the subject matter.

One can simply deduce that there is clearly no appreciation of how to go about achieving transformation and diversity especially when it comes to black people and minority groups in markets.

Nikon influencer marketing campaign

This, however, is a stumbling block and as many leading creatives have postulated, stands in the way of great work.

The recent debate sparked by the Nikon influencer marketing campaign which sought to introduce a new product to their offering (Nikon Z50) is one such example that sparked much debate and lamentations between industry professionals, particularly those who felt less represented in a country whose majority is black people. Yet the advertisement was so tone-deaf and whitewashed in its approach, it warranted being cancelled from platforms.

“ pic.twitter.com/AD6ZnF81Dy— Nikon South Africa (@Nikon_SA) [August 4, 2020](#) ”

For many industry professionals, myself included, this clearly demonstrated that the conversation about transformation, diversity and inclusion is long from being truly actualised.

Whilst there is another side to the debate that speaks to brands having target markets and them owing it to themselves to be explicit about that, it cannot be at the expense of driving a divide and a narrative of homogeneity and exclusion in a country that is still heavily dealing with unresolved race tensions.

Now many may ask the question about how it is possible to achieve this when brands are supported by all sorts of groups and people who come from different backgrounds and hold such diverse experiences?

My honest answer to that is in fact that there is no one solution and that we all need to play our part by holding ourselves accountable for thinking differently and being inclusive in our solutions.

Three key questions

Brands, on the other hand, need to return to three key questions that Marty Neumeier (2016) implores us to ask ourselves in his book – *Brand Gap* which helps in framing brand identity. These questions are framed as:

- Who are you?
- What do you do? And
- Why do you do what you do?

I would, in addition, add to these key questions about truly understanding brand identities in the context they exist in and environments they operate in:

- Who do you do what you do for? And
- How do you do it?

These questions would go a long way in achieving what Google's CMO, Mzamo Masito (2020) suggested in his recent talk on SA Creatives with Velokuhle Ngubane that "...brands need to earn their right to speak...". This simply means that transformation and diversity need to not only form part of the brand's rhetoric but needs to be an intrinsic part, as well as an extension, of what we see.



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The role of brands are bigger than just driving bottom-line

The lack of being able to comprehend this simply reveals the lack of apathy as it relates to the effects of such communication and that in fact, these conversations affect others more than it does those that are privileged by a system that thrives in a society already heavily divided by socio-economic issues vis-a-vis those who have and those who have not.

Perhaps it is time we go back to what many scholars in brand leadership such Dr Carla Enslin, Dr Kevin Keller and Dr David Aaker to name a few who have written so profoundly about the role of brands being bigger than just driving bottom-line but also being about being a force of social change and driving unity in societies through having inclusive brand approaches for all – including black people and queer communities.

A perfect contemporary and perhaps a brand that should be a barometer for all our brand advertising and communication efforts at a global scale even is Nike who through all their touchpoints have demonstrated awareness of what drives this agenda that is now more than ever being called for by our global citizenry.

Simply put, brands need to read the room and ensure that their strategies which ultimately become manifest through their marketing efforts in advertising and below the line efforts, resonate with the time we are in and what people need to see from them which is more diversity, more transformation and more inclusion.

After all, it is not only about what you say but what you do that matters!

ABOUT KHANGELANI DZIBA

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