

5 cultural shifts that are influencing marketing

By [Nkgabiseng Mtau](#)

29 Jan 2020

Now more than ever, marketing is becoming a living, breathing response to culture rather than an attempt to dictate it. In one or two magical moments, marketing ideas have ignited culture, but that comes along once in a unicorn-shadowed blue moon.



Nkgabiseng Mtau, co-founder and chief creative officer at Think Creative Hub.

Creating pockets of influence and finding a spot in conversation is a far more deliberate activity, which entails keeping one's eyes peeled and ears close to the ground. Here are five shifts in culture that, even if you haven't picked up on them, will inevitably find their way into a brief on your desk or a conversation in a boardroom...

1. The rental economy

Can't afford luxury? Rent it. Renting is not a new subject, it has been done for centuries, but what's different about this form of renting is that you can rent luxury for a day or two and send it back to the lender.

This new form of business is becoming popular both globally and right here at home. Companies like Front Row, Wear The Walk and Hairmeout are tapping into this market.

“ From monthly rentals to circular product swapping, more retailers are catering the whims of shoppers who are inclined to invest in what they fantasise their homes and lives to be for occasions, but not forever. ”

The types of goods that are available for rental are also different, take Hairmeout for example.

“ When my friend & her business partner come through and save the day with 1 of their pieces! I can't believe wigs used to be such a taboo concept & now we can even rent them out! Check out their growing hair empire ([@hairmeout_za](#)) across all social media platforms!! [#HairMeOutZA](#) [pic.twitter.com/SCQBmTfZlg](#)— President Dreamist ([@KiviPatrova](#)) February 18, 2019 ”

This is an up-and-coming online wig rental business based in Johannesburg. With the normalising of wig-wearing as a socially shareable truth, businesses like Hairmeout are able to appeal to a new market with niche interests. Wigs, like other luxury rentals, do not come cheap to purchase. Prices range from R2,000 to R10,000 or even more.

This presents an opportunity for those who want fleeting glam but cannot afford the top-shelf prices to flirt with the lifestyle rather than marry it, so to speak.

2. Brands have a change of tone on social media

Brands have realised the power of the emerged black audience and are speaking to this consumer in vernacular, especially on social media channels. Brands are unapologetic and not attempting to translate into English.

Key brands embracing this include Nando's, Budweiser, Castle Milk Stout and Rocomama's, which has become a favourite on Twitter.

“ 🍻🍻🍻🍻🍻 ”

At least y'all clap backs are always fresh— #FreeKanyaCekeshe (@Tickle_Me_Joey) [December 14, 2019](#) ”

Brands need to urgently speak how their consumers speak or risk being seen as out of touch, aloof or outdated. In addition, brands are now *clapping back*.

The customer is not always right. While the power on Twitter is still very much in the consumer's hands, consumers now have to be careful as brands with high brand love are able to shut down negative comments.

“ [@buji](#), O ntse o phela? But then again... If you lived up to your name you would've had your own bowl. 🍻🍻
<https://t.co/g7Eip4LD2H>— NandosSA (@NandosSA) [July 24, 2019](#) ”

One of a few examples, Nando's clapped back hard at popular celebrity, 'Buji' over their Boujee bowl, and the consumers *loved* it. Nandos trended all night following that *diss*.

3. The great un-gendering

There is a very important moment unfolding before us.

“ *From every perspective, the idea of gender is being challenged and brought closer to the 21st century. From the inclusion of preferred pronouns into work environments, to gender-neutral children's clothing and gender-neutral job titles, this is a welcome shift as the latter has had negative or limiting effects on individuals and industries.* ”

There is an opportunity for brands to start a conversation or to provoke thought around gendered titles.

The language we use to describe a job role matters. [According to Judith Baxter](#), Emeritus Professor of Applied Linguistics at Aston University, sexist language perpetuates gender-biased attitudes by defining what we see as normal for both men and women.

“The language we use not only reflects our culture but also constructs it,” she explains. “It sets up expectations about how people are supposed to be. Job descriptions can often slip through the net, less with official titles, and more with implied sexism”.

The move, for instance, from fireman to firefighter could open up more opportunities for women to see themselves in that role, as is the case with the move from air hostess to flight-attendant. These titles inform behaviour and can have powerful effects.

4. Vulnerability Is ‘cool’

Brands often shy away from difficult, sad, uncomfortable and emotionally wrought conversations with consumers. How many times has someone in a presentation said ‘we can’t leave the ad off on a sad note’?

This trend is showing that South Africans are healing together by sharing the ugly side of life. Case in point, the rise of the now Twitter staple, “O jewa keng?”

“ Congratulations [@akreana_](#) mother of 'O jewa ke eng?'
Great time to be a South African! pic.twitter.com/MT6FVKlygd— Kagiso Tony (@kmabal) [December 11, 2019](#) ”

“O jewa ke eng?” is Sotho for “What’s bothering you?” and first used by [@akreana_](#), who had simply tweeted this on 5 January 2019. The tweet quickly went viral as people responded with stories of rape trauma, painful infidelity, loneliness, and every kind of misfortune.

The tweet has gained over 10-million impressions and continues to elicit responses. In line with the above openness to vulnerability, Twitter and Facebook users are showing up to help complete strangers online.

“ O jewa ke eng? If there is someone who might be stranded in Polokwane and needs transport to Giyani or Tzaneen am available. Am cheaper than Uber!— Thapelo Tloukgolo (@Thapelo_Tlou1) [December 13, 2019](#) ”

Everything from e-wallet transactions helping those who call out for transport money to get to an interview, to people hiring those in need of employment.

“ I’m extremely grateful to everyone who RT’d this “O jewa keng” tweet. After two grueling interviews, this December, I finally got the call that’s about to change my life forever

I start my first job in Feb. And it’s all thanks to Twitter

MODIMO O MOHOLO👍👍👍👍👍!#TaxBracketBoyz2020 <https://t.co/dMsLYO5Mt8>— Kgopelo Matlala (@KgopeloMatlala) [December 17, 2019](#) ”

5. Pregnancy is no longer the “P” word

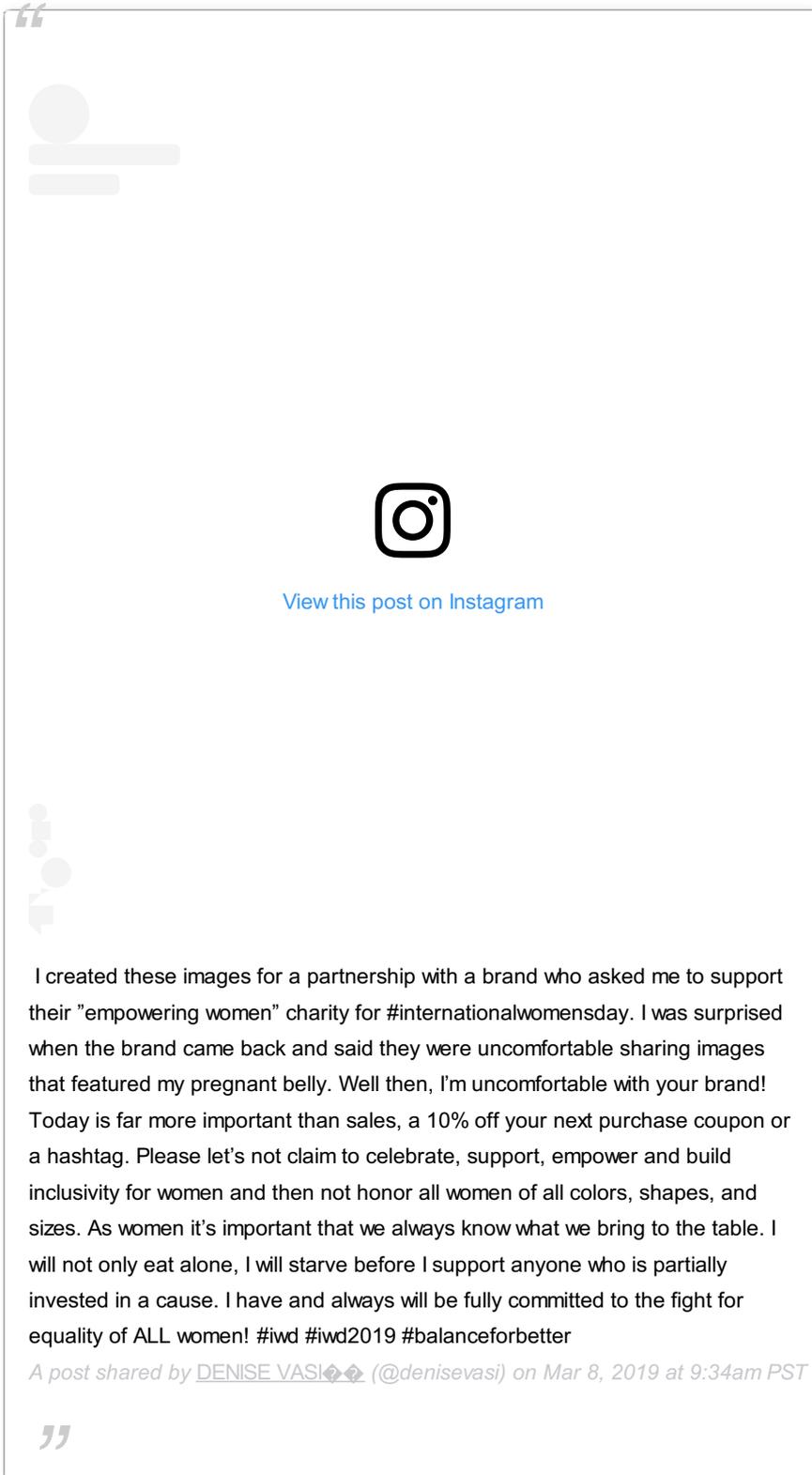
The stigma around pregnancy seems to be falling, finally. Both from the perspective of premarital pregnancy shame as well as the shame associated with being pregnant in a high-performance work environment.

The hashtag #siyamitha2019 “We are falling pregnant 2019,” rose to trend status when various influencers and celebrities announced their pregnancies online with pride.

“ [#Siyamitha2019](#) was a success, we are now waiting for the boy to make his debut 🎉🎉

pic.twitter.com/3CBHcW2OYa— Yolanda Mgwatyu (@TheeYolanda) [December 12, 2019](#) ”

Women who are tied to brand campaigns and television shows have begun to speak out about the biases and discrimination associated with pregnancy and some like Denise Vasi have even called brands out for retracting when women are pregnant.



How invisible pregnant women are in advertising?

They are only visible when selling Gaviscon, nappies, Bio-oil or life cover?

Pregnancy is treated more like a disability than a normal part of life. This is an area the advertising community has chosen to ignore, except when we need to make a joke, like in the following two ads:

This cute video of a pregnant television and radio personality being active and dancing with her baby bump trended and was hugely popular on Twitter:

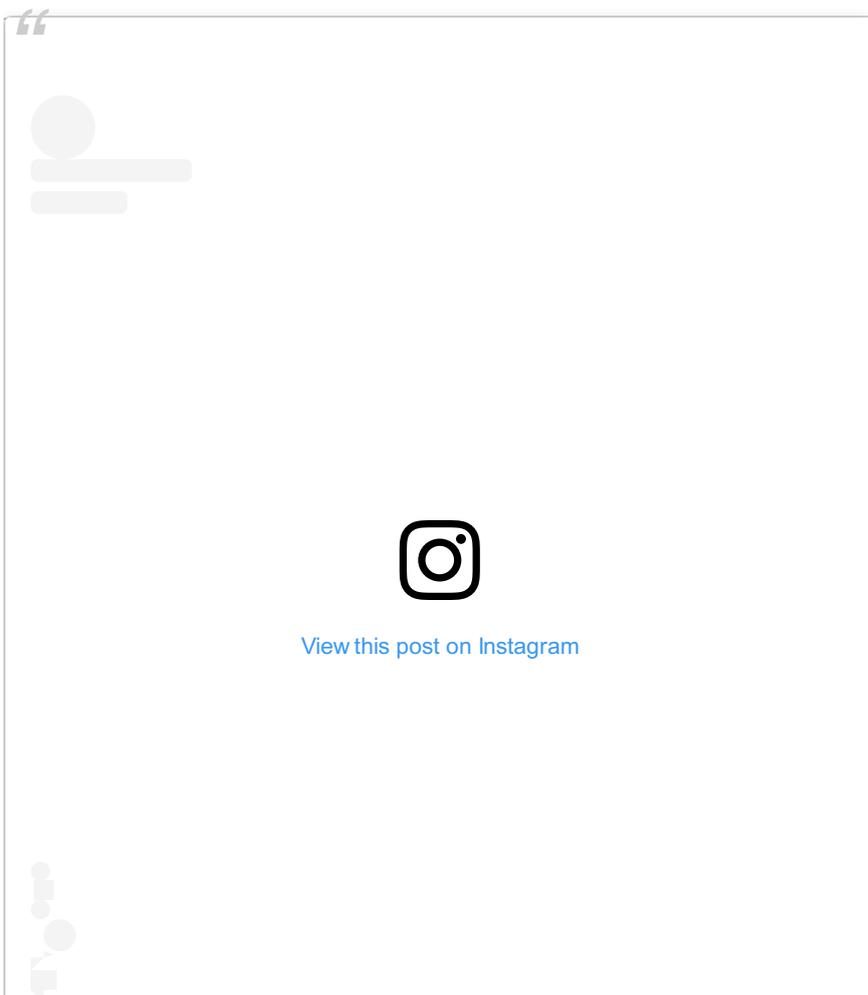
“ The MOOD going into [#Womyn2Womyn](#) tomorrow morning 🎉🎉🎉🎉🎉. I'm teaching a dance class, many months in, so all you ladies coming through have no excuse - Re tlo jaiva goed 🎉🎉!!! 7am-1pm at Nelson Square, Sandton. You can still get your tickets. See you then! 🎉🎉🎉🎉🎉🎉🎉🎉🎉🎉🎉 #BontleBaAfrika pic.twitter.com/S1ytaNHbHp— BontleBaAfrika Moloji (@BontleModiselle) [August 30, 2019](#) ”

Why do hair care, fashion, cellphone providers, retailers generally ignore pregnant woman?

One advert that beautifully bucked this trend was the Cadbury advert with the twins. South Africans rewarded this creativity by voting this the most-liked advert of 2014:

Women are ready to embrace pregnancy in the communications space and to echo this, the cover of *INC. Magazine*, leading the charge by featuring Audrey Gelman, CEO of The Wing, during her pregnancy, had a massively positive response:

“



View this post on Instagram

Audrey Gelman, the 32-year-old CEO of co-working space-slash-women's club @the.wing, co-founded the NYC-based company with Lauren Kassan in 2016 and has raised \$117.5 million in venture capital. At first glance, the Wing is not so different from most co-working places. To the women it attracts, though, it's something far more powerful than a pastel WeWork for ladies. Today, the Wing has eight locations across the U.S. and plans for three more before the end of the year and another nine around the globe in 2020. @audreygelman contends that her plan "is not about blitz-scaling. It's about creating quality and meaning and doing everything with real intention." But reaching the next level of growth--and sustaining it in shaky times--requires a whole new flight plan. Click the link in our bio to read Inc.'s October issue cover story. #FemaleFounders (💎💎: @hollyandres) . . . #entrepreneur #thewing #feminist #nyc #newyorkcity #newyork #coworking #hustle #success #team #founder #ceo #venturecapital #quality #scaling #fastgrowth #goals #business #motivation #inspiration #startup #entrepreneurship #entrepreneurlife #lifestyle #mindset #instagood

A post shared by [Inc.](#) (@incmagazine) on Sep 18, 2019 at 5:47am PDT

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ABOUT NKGABISENG MOTAU

Nkgabiseng is co-founder and COO of Think Creative Africa. Think is a through-the-line creative agency that combines truly African creativity and data-led insights to generate ideas that solve business problems and impact society.

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