

# Maverick of brand thinking insights - Is your brand 'woke'?

By  Mfundo Ntsibande

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As cliché as it sounds, brands need to adapt to consumers' current state of mind and way of things or suffer the consequences of being called out or being irrelevant. (H&M, case in point.)



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When this happens, the reputational damage far outweighs profits because the 'woke' community is not just consumers but a consciousness culture – they decide what moves or doesn't.

## What does being “woke” mean?

“Woke is a slang term that is easing into the mainstream from some varieties of a dialect called African-American Vernacular. In English awake is often rendered as woke as in – I was sleeping but now I'm woke – a byword for social awareness.”

In simple terms it describes a renewed sense of thinking, an awakening to social injustices (**racism, patriarchy, sexism, homophobia to name a few**) that had been accepted as normal.

This era of social media activism gives a voice to the voiceless and a platform to those who have been long ignored or

marginalised by mainstream media and brands. The “woke” generation are “mavericks” on their own right who challenge the status quo and stereotypes about social injustice and call out inequality.

Here are my 3 insights and learning's for marketers:

## 1. Nothing moves without the “culture”

From deciding what is the popular fashion trends (locally and internationally) to the craze over Gin and Tonic, to attending music festivals that allow individuals to express themselves (example Afropunk), to consuming radio via podcast. The consumers are in the driving seat, they will decide how they want to consume your brand. Marketers must pay close attention to the fast-changing lifestyle of consumers and ensure your brand fits in with their environment and not the other way around. Disruption is no longer a cool advertising term but a reality and ‘culture’ dictates how you innovate and disrupt.

## 2. We don't read the news, we make the news

After sexual harassment allegations, American actor Kevin Spacey was removed from the series *House of Cards* by Netflix. It only takes a social media ‘outcry or Twitterwar’ between two people (brand) or more for that to make headlines in mainstream media that can cause huge reputational damage. That means journalists now get their ‘scoop’ on social media and it only takes a hasty post or campaign for it to be challenged or ‘dragged’ to make news on mainstream media for the wrong reason.



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## 3. Cross your T's, check your balances and remain authentic

Behind brands are real human beings, and therefore it is imperative that as human beings we become compassionate and thoughtful towards other human beings. Before marketers sign off a marketing campaign, do all your checks and balances to see that you don't offend your target market. This has been a PR nightmare for some brands who had to apologise for haphazard marketing campaigns (Dove).



The power of consumer insights (combined with woke strategy and creative)

Thomas Sepheka 20 Oct 2017



## In conclusion

Therefore In 2018 your brand cannot be seen as insensitive to the world's social plight of injustice, this is no longer a CSI job that is driven by PR but the responsibility of the overall brand promise. A brand should be authentic for consumers to feel it represents their values and what they stand for because consumers can tell when a brand is authentic or when it pretends to be.



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My appeal to all marketers to dot your I's and cross your T's, before finalising your next campaign, be vigilant and enculturated, to ensure that you do not offend your target market.

The question remains, is your brand 'woke'? Does your brand personality (blue print) still represents a conservative narrative and is in contradiction to where the world is moving to? (Hello Trump!)

## ABOUT MFUNDO NTSIBANDE

Mfundo Ntsibande is marketing professional with over 16 years career of building brands, with a maverick approach to brand thinking. A thought-leader with a background in media and broadcasting (TV, Radio, Print), Advertising and entrepreneurship. A winner of Promaxbda Gold Award.

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