

"It's time to hear the black voices in advertising" - Neo Makongoza

 By Leigh Andrews

29 Mar 2018

It's a touchy subject for some, but completely necessary to explore: Here's how Fort Review is amplifying the need to truly hear the black voices in advertising and stop being creative Jekyll and Hydes.



Makongoza behind the decks at the Fort Review second edition VIP launch event, at Rockets' rooftop in Bryanston on 16 February.

It's no secret that the SA ad industry is in drastic need of transformation. It's not necessarily that there aren't enough black voices in the industry, more that those voices are not being heard, and those truths are not being well told. That's what I call an advertising fail.

Take Neo Makongoza, senior copywriter at Native VML, for example. He has worked in the industry for a decade, yet has never reported to a black creative director.



On being a black face in a predominantly white space

Paballo Mlahlehi 19 Mar 2018



#LadiesofLoeries: "SA's bizarre advertising industry demographic" - Neo Segola

Leigh Andrews 29 Aug 2017



Neo Segola, creative director at FCB, further comments on the situation:

“ How on earth does that happen in Africa? Most importantly, how do we change it? We're sitting here with huge gender and racial diversity gaps in a country whose majority is both black and female, where white guys are talking to black people

about black issues. ”

Unearthing these realities is a core focus of the Fort Review.



Fort Review launches second edition, a video series

Jessica Tennant 16 Feb 2018



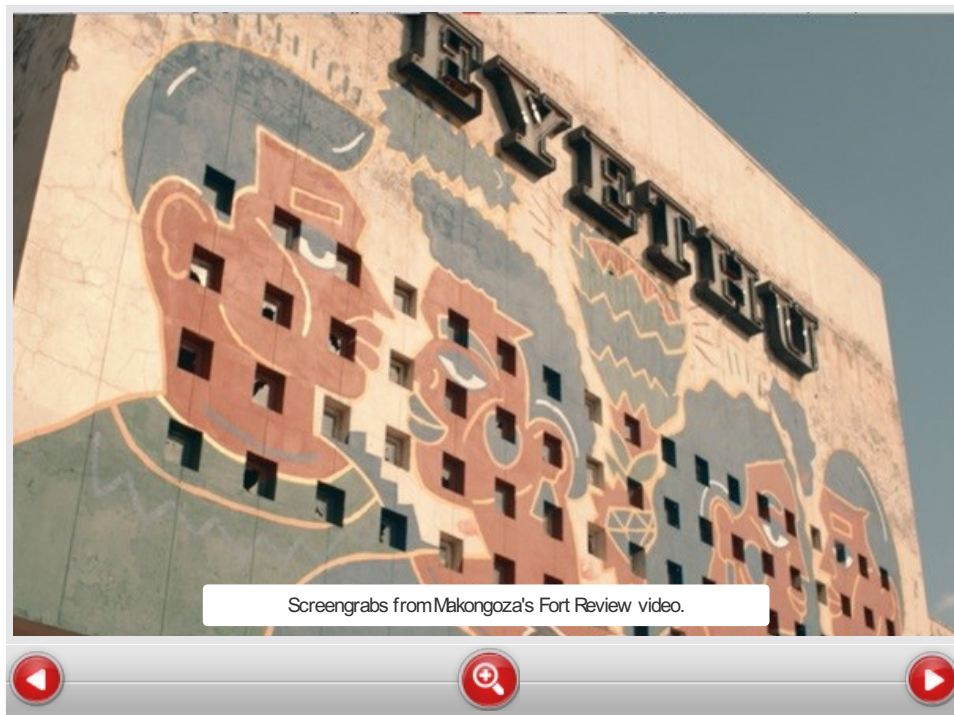
#FortReview: "How creativity can save lives when put to good use" - Annie Raman

Leigh Andrews 1 Mar 2018



There's no better time than now to start the conversation. Last year, a colleague at Native VML interviewed Makongoza on the need to talk about race in advertising.

“ As a person of colour, you can walk into a brainstorm with a real insight, with a real idea and howto translate it creatively, but seven times out of 10 it's misunderstood... where marketers are looking for The Black Story more and more, it's imperative that you don't isolate black people. ”



More than this, the advertising tropes that so grate us may well have been created by strong, educated and assertive woke black individuals. The reason? Makongoza says they're simply looking to "keep their jobs by keeping to the strategic system quo. And not disrupt it with true, sincere and insightful thinking... they become coconuts for the cause."



Can we talk about race and advertising?

Nas Hoosen 15 May 2017



In his [Fort Review chapter](#), Makongoza shares that these black creative ‘Jekyll and Hydes’ can love everything black about themselves and disregard it in the same breath.

Makongoza adds:

“ *[Black creatives] don’t want to be seen as revolutionaries. For anyone who comes from a previously disadvantaged family, myself included, speaking out is not something you want to do when you’re trying to feed your family.* ”

But if nobody speaks out, the story won’t change. The time for meaningful transformation is now, by taking steps to change the narrative.

Makongoza explains more in his just-released #FortReview video episode.

Powerful stuff. Here, Makongoza shares with us insights behind his personal story, the impact of not sharing the black narrative strongly enough, how to ensure advertising agencies are more reflective of the audience they target internally, and more...

❏ ***“Being black in advertising started right here...” – explain the context of the location chosen for shooting the video.***

The Eyethu Cinema in Mofolo, Soweto, was historically the first black-owned cinema, opened in 1969. The entertainment and cultural hub screened cigarette ads before movies, which systematically inspired black moviegoers to appreciate advertising more.

If you didn't have a TV – which was the case for most black South Africans at the time – this was the place to get your fix; my childhood experience included.

❏ **Briefly elaborate on why there aren't more black voices in SA advertising.**

I don't think it's a case of there not being enough black voices, but more about our voices not being heard, and our truths not being well told. Both counterparts aren't sharing the black narrative strongly enough.

We hide behind outdated strategies with partly defined insights that don't reflect black people and who they truly are. And when we do find accurate human truths, we never execute them to their true potential, no matter how creatively brilliant the results are.

❏ **Time for everyone to step up to the plate, then. How will bravely stepping away from 'stereotyped advertising' have advertising's desired effect of true societal change?**

It all starts with the strategic insights that sometimes define our creative idea; some of them are outdated and in some cases reference the living standard measurements or LSMs concluded as far back as the Apartheid years. In all honesty, these could have been precise then but should have been updated as the years went by – black people as an audience and a target market have become far more progressive.

These outdated strategic insights have created a social ignorance, which is a big part of the reason why certain products are marketed only to black people, right down to the way they are consumed.

“ Putting it bluntly, stereotype advertising is downright racist. For any real change to start taking place, the anomaly that is the black narrative needs to be embraced even more by our own people, and then recognised and understood even further by our counterparts. ”

Let's vehemently interrogate the causes of this misinformed marketing communication and then look at strategic measurements of preventing it, all this before the actual creative idea.

❏ **Yes! Share a few examples of those stereotyped advertising archetypes and tropes we need to discard, like the 'dancing Thembis' in soap ads.**

Let's stop depicting black people dancing for everything under the sun, including things that don't deserve jubilee or praise, like household chores.



Find black actors. Hit the music. Dance. You've got your advert!

Bogosi Mbotshengwa 5 Apr 2017



“ Over-exaggerated facial expressions is also a no-no. And so is using unnecessary mash-ups between township colloquial terms and English (especially in the wrong context or tone), it's insincere and insults the type of people who revere their culture and languages the way black people do. ”

The list is almost endless, but these are some of the things that grate us most.

❏ **In conclusion, the industry definitely needs to shake things up to ensure the agencies are more reflective of the audience they target internally, and also 'tell a specific colour's story through and through'. Share a few ways we can do so.**

Embrace transformation and always keep your marketing communication as authentic as possible, truth always wins. Research and know your market, it is the most important key to communicating with any diverse group. Move ahead of the social current but stay agile enough to flow at its pace.

“ If your agency's strategy research isn't well informed enough about certain social topics that include the black market you're communicating to, then don't sit at that table, you might run the risk of offending someone or a group of people. ”

Employ and promote more black creative directors who have first-hand experience in some of the things you would like to communicate, and also, do not be afraid to listen to the youngest or oldest black voice in your boardroom – they may be exactly the person you're marketing to and know more about your strategy than you do.

“ Black South Africans are not the same, we are as diverse as our eleven official languages, so never assume you know what all our everyday struggles are, they differ from citizen to citizen. ”

Lastly, don't be condescending and pretend to know what's best for the emerging market because you did a crash-course, marketing exercise with your domestic worker – they'll always tell you whatever you want to hear.

Hear, hear. Let's hope that sinks in. There's lots more we all need to do, to properly flip the script. Keep an eye out for more on the Fort Review series, which will be made available on [Fort's website](#) and across its social media platforms in the coming months. Also follow them on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#), [Vimeo](#) or [YouTube](#) to be notified as and when these are released.

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

Leigh Andrews AKA the #MilkshakeQueen, is former Editor-in-Chief: Marketing & Media at Bizcommunity.com, with a passion for issues of diversity, inclusion and equality, and of course, gourmet food and drinks! She can be reached on Twitter at @Leigh_Andrews.

- #Loeries2020: Behavioural economics as creativity, but not as we know it... - 24 Nov 2020
- #D2020: Ignite your inner activist - representation through illustration - 27 Feb 2020
- #D2020: How Sho Madjozi brought traditional Tsonga *xibelani* into 2020 - 27 Feb 2020
- #D2020: Silver jubilee shines with Department of Audacious Projects launch - 26 Feb 2020
- #BehindtheSelfie with... Qingqile 'VingWing' Mdlulwa, COO at The Whole Idea - 26 Feb 2020

[View my profile and articles...](#)

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>