

# Challenger Type: The Democratiser

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*Taking something important, previously accessible only to the privileged, and making it available to a wider range of people*

For a long time, 'nude' underwear has catered almost exclusively to peachy or beige colours – nudes for pale skin tones, white women. African women have not been catered for.

This observation struck entrepreneur and strategist Gugu Nkabinde. If we can match make-up to skin tones, why can't we do the same with underwear?

This is where South African underwear brand Gugu Intimates comes in.

Gugu Intimates is a brand which has changed the norm of 'nude' underwear to address the gap in the market to include darker skin tones more representative of the African skin palette. It's the underwear brand that "celebrates melanin-rich goddesses" – especially pertinent on a continent of a predominantly Black population, where skin tones vary dramatically.

"I started this brand to start a movement pro-brown skin. Not against anything else, but creating a product that can give confidence to women like me who have not felt represented in the shades of underwear that we can wear under white or sheer clothing. And I strongly believed from the start that, if meaningful solutions to problems that affect us as (black) women are to be – it will be because we have come together to do it for ourselves." – [Gugu Nkabinde](#), [Founder and CEO](#)



Image source: [Between10and5](#)

Importantly, the brand doesn't only fill a commercial gap, but also has deeper emotional meaning. In a category that focuses on the Western ideals of beauty, having underwear that matches women's skin tone is about identity and helping women feel like they belong in their own skin. Nkabinde's understanding of how well-considered clothing can support and expand women's self-confidence has resulted in a dramatic disruption of the underwear category.

Through their 'The New Naked' range, an African first, the brand aims to lead a movement that challenges the status quo in

the representation of nude shade of underwear. In so doing, the brand hopes to empower African women to be more comfortable and confident in their own skin tones.

This is clear in the brand's clear, singular mission: "To adorn brown skinned girls in beautiful, premium quality underwear that complements your skin tone no matter what shade you are." That's why the names for their various shades of underwear all translate to 'beauty' in different African languages: Elewa (Yoruba), Amara (Arabic), Buhle (Zulu, Ndebele, and Xhosa), Zuri (Swahili), and Runako (Shona).

It may be argued that Gugu Intimates is a Missionary brand, looking to change something in the world that is seen as broken or unfair. The reality is that a brand may straddle Challenger types. While the brand carries attributes of a Missionary, we believe that, ultimately, Gugu Intimates is a Democratiser brand.

Why? Being a Democratiser isn't always about breaking down cost barriers. Democratisers are led by a big idea that breaks down and challenges a range of exclusivity barriers, opening up a limited category to a broader group of people.

So while Gugu Intimates is a premium brand that is targeted to upper-income individuals, it is a Democratiser because it makes something that was once exclusive to a small elite – in this case, nude underwear for women with light skin tones – and gives nude underwear to the many. Gugu Intimates is a brand for African women, challenging the privilege of the nude underwear category to champion diversity and accessibility.

At the heart of the Democratiser narrative are three key elements:

**1. A fierce belief that the benefits of the category are genuinely important**

Gugu Intimates believes strongly in making Black women comfortable in their own skin through nude underwear that actually matches their skin tone

**2. A frustration that those benefits are not available to everyone, but unfairly restricted to just a few**

Gugu Intimates was created as a challenge to the restrictive norm that nude equals pale

**3. A different business model or breakthrough that has radically reduced the access barriers and therefore opened up that access to more people**

The brand has made nude underwear available to the many with Black skin tones for through a focus on African women, their confidence, and their beauty

The message of Gugu Intimates has resonated so strongly across Black audiences that the brand has now expanded its footprint globally with stores not only in South Africa, but also Zimbabwe, and even New York. Worldwide shipping is also available. This has increased access not only to African women, but to brown-skinned women all over the world.

Critical to the success of Gugu Intimates is that there is a very human feel to the brand. The brand has started fresh conversations around representation and diversity, celebrating women from different backgrounds, colours, sizes, and body shapes.

*Overthrow II*, by **eatbigfish** & PHD, explores 10 of the most powerful strategies and mindsets used by today's challengers to disrupt their markets. Get your copy of the book at [overthrow2.com](https://www.Overthrow2.com). Find out what challenger type of Challenger you or your business is. Take the quiz: <https://www.Overthrow2.com/challengertype/>

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We act as catalysts rather than consultants and, through our collaborative approach, we provide inspiration and frameworks which enable 'would be' challengers to deliver breakthrough solutions for their teams and brand.



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