

Ignore the differences at your peril: Millennials versus Afrilenials

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Marketers who ignore the differences between Millennials and Afrilenials are taking a great risk with their brands and communication strategies, but those who appreciate the subtle nuances between the two 'generations' and use this understanding to finetune their brands' relationship with consumers should experience growth in terms of sales and brand value.



Rita Doherty, FCB Africa Group Chief Strategist

This is the message from FCB Africa Group Chief Strategist, Rita Doherty, in a talk she prepared for seminars being held in Johannesburg and Cape Town.

In her presentation, Doherty stressed it is vital that marketers understand and appreciate what is shaping Millennials, one of the most important consumer segments in today's market, but they should also take one step further to appreciate the Afrilenial, as they are vital influencers in a South African context.

"The term 'Millennial' was originally coined by Howe and Strauss to refer to Americans who were 18 years old in the year 2000. Today it's used to refer to the generation of people born between 1982 and 2004, so therefore roughly between the ages of 13-35.

"Crucially, what makes Millennials very different to generations before them is that they've grown up in a digitally connected world, and their unprecedented access from a young age to global and social systems make them the most empowered generation we've ever had.

"But, with the global recession of 2008, Millennials saw their dreams fading - education, the key to success, became too expensive and the job market slumped. Then, the political and social turmoil kicked in with unprecedented numbers of refugees excluded from society and the rise of the right across the world.

"The Millennials' response has been to agitate for change. They're challenging governments and businesses to be more transparent and responsive, and this behaviour is fuelling disruptive products, services and technologies.

"This is particularly true of the Afrilenial, who knows that access to education is the key to success and are agitating for radical change to open opportunities for all.

"Link this to the fact that Afrilenials are more nationalist than their Western counterparts and it is not surprising that Afrilenials are intent on shaping the Africa they want to see. They describe themselves a 'woke', as visionaries, claiming 'We have no chill because our Mommas didn't work so hard for us to be mediocre'."

Doherty explained how there are currently four major Millennial characteristics - value experience, fluid identity, information snacking and selfie culture.

"Millennials prefer to spend their money on new experiences like traveling, hobbies and education, rather than on expensive stuff. Their self-confidence and happiness depends on how filled their life is with events, not things, because they desire to enrich their life with experiences that cannot be taken away from them.

"As a result, many 'Western' Millennials don't want to invest in expensive and long-term projects, and prefer to rent and move around using Uber instead of carrying huge loans. This doesn't mean they are anti-materialistic, they just want more

sustainable ways of doing things. So, instead of everyone buying everything, they share.

“Consider the impact of this behaviour on financial services institutions, vehicle manufacturers and other consumer goods sectors in Europe, North America, Australia, New Zealand and the like. But then also consider that, unlike many Western Millennials, conspicuous consumption is okay for Afrilenials.

“Most Afrilenials are first generation middle-class and are actively playing asset catch-up. For them, dressing the part helps you become the part.”

Globally, Millennials are redefining value to include social, economic and environmental responsibility. They place a premium on authenticity – and they don’t like being ‘sold’ to. They also have a fluid identity and are blurring the lines between genders and traditional family values. This freedom is paving the way for various trends, such as child-free lifestyle or switching family roles.

“Millennials see the world through concise images and messages in social network systems, quite often not needing to assemble them into an organic whole. Bitesize consumption of information is the norm and there’s very little time for in-depth study, but the new generation knows something about many more things than ever before.

“Crucially, in the Millennials’ chase for content consumption, they often don’t crave depth, sometimes not even truth. Further, they tend to adjust the world to their interests and needs, not the other way around. Millennials like to make themselves and their friends their heroes. They look up to each other.

“For a Millennial, anyone can become a media channel. And, while they aren’t trying to be perfect - they aspire to being ‘flawsome’ – awesomely imperfect. This is vital for Afrilenials, they are Proudly African whereas their American counterparts are not as nationalistic; they aspire to put their unique African touch on their look and ideas.”

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