

Why South African brands need serious queer representation

By [Khangela Dziba](#)

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It's time for us to start having broader conversations about who is represented, how are they represented and why they are represented the way they are in South African brand advertising during Pride Month.



Image credit: Alex Jackman on Unsplash.

In South Africa, October is when the LGBTQIA+ community celebrates Pride Month as the first [South African pride parade](#) was held in Johannesburg on 13 October 1990. The rest of the world celebrates Pride Month in June to commemorate the [Stonewall riots](#), which occurred at the end of June 1969.



Johannesburg Pride Parade launches Pride of Africa

29 Jul 2019



Capitalising on pink capitalism

During this time, international and local brands pledge their allegiance and support to the LGBTQIA+ community. They start tailoring their marketing communications campaigns to specifically attract this community and push business sales objectives.

Known as [pink capitalism](#), it's a concept many queer scholars have written about. In a nutshell, pink capitalism is predicated on a set of assumptions that queer people fall outside the socially-accepted [heteronormative ideology](#) of a procreating heteropatriarchal nuclear family.



Reebok launches 'Pride Collection' ahead of Pride Month

20 May 2019



According to [John D'Emilio](#), they are assumed to have more disposable income and buying power. And, within this context, queer bodies tend to be portrayed within the extremities of femininity and hyper-masculinity; a perspective that reifies and reinforces the existence of queer bodies through the prism of the heteronormative male-female cis-gender binary.

These representations, intentionally or unintentionally, fuel what Mikki (Marié Elizabeth) van Zyl refers to as [homoprejudice](#).

The above really sets the tone and purpose of this article – which is to challenge the dominant ways brands think about queerness and how it is portrayed, if at all, in our planned brand communications strategies and brand messaging.



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Need for serious queer representation

This is important because many of our locally-supported brands enjoy the support of queer people without doing much to gain that support. Many studies conducted in the US, UK and Germany show the immense contribution queer people make towards the global economy – which sits just above \$700bn annually.

Yet, little-to-no full representation of the community can be spotted and related to in an authentic manner in advertising – especially in South Africa.

This, perhaps, alludes to a broader conversation that needs to be had around how marketing is done for the queer communities. And why it seems that they are deliberately alienated from product development, design and marketing.

Not only during Pride Month but throughout the year.



Woolworths pulls "gender stereotyping" Valentine's Day campaign

5 Feb 2019



The above is probably where it needs to begin and the ideal solution given the fact that we are one of the most progressive countries in the world when it comes to recognising gay rights and the leading African country in so far as championing this cause.

A starting point – and where we honestly need to do a deep dive – is by looking at the many brands are loved by this queer

community and asking how they can be included and fairly represented.



#FairnessFirst: Not-so-secretly supporting Pride Month with Russia's #thehiddenflag

Leigh Andrews 16 Jul 2018



Quite frankly, Pride Month – in my humble opinion – is more than just about buying expensive flamboyant garments and parading on the streets of Sandton. It is also a time that should be about raising consciousness, legitimating the existence of queer people and driving change.

From where I sit, brands and marketing should play a bigger role in contributing to this narrative. And bring deep, meaningful engagement on this matter with the communities that support their beloved brands during this time.

ABOUT KHANGELANI DZIBA

Khangelani Dziba is the divisional head of PR & influencer partnerships at Rapt Creative. They are a Master in Brand Leadership graduate from Vega School and are passionate about gender, diversity, and inclusion in brand advertising.

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