

# Marketing the future: Unlocking the human element in a digital world

 By [Leigh Andrews](#)

12 Sep 2019

A data science expert, mind science practitioner and advertising strategist walk into a bar... When that trio actually comprises Shavani Naidoo of Primedia, Anne Thistleton of Light Consultancy and 'everyone's favourite ad commentator' Andy Rice, it must be the bar at IMM Graduate School's second annual 'marketing the future' event, held at the Nedbank Clocktower at the V&A Waterfront. Here's what they each shared on 'marketing the future'.



© Sergey Nivens via [123RF](#)

MC for the afternoon was writer and marketing stalwart [Sean McCoy](#), who now plays an advisory role for the IMM Graduate School – a 60-year-old institution with a focus on practice-based distance learning.

McCoy added that event sponsor Nedbank is a purpose-driven, values-aligned brand that aims to 'do good' and get people to see money differently as we get ready for further digital disruption.

For example...

McCoy feels the human dimension in the realm of digital in gaining significance, as change really is the only constant today.

We're moving towards a world that's becoming borderless, yet increasingly more complex.

As proof of this, while Cape Town was surrounded by protest action on the day of the event, he felt it was an appropriate format for the marketing industry to stand united behind the cause in getting something done.



## #FairnessFirst: Stepping up to keep SA's females safe

Leigh Andrews 9 Sep 2019



Speakers for the afternoon included Primedia data science expert Shavani Naidoo, mind science practitioner Anne Thistleton, and advertising strategist Andy Rice.

## Shavani Naidoo: How the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) will change the way creatives work

Naidoo spoke first of her work with machine learning and client development that involves harnessing the benefits of big data and artificial intelligence.



Session speakers Naidoo, Thistleton and Rice.

She's clearly passionate about innovation and creative problem-solving through the use of technology.

Explaining how 4IR will change the way others work, she shared that it's a new world for creatives right now, and she expects the world creatives work in will change more in the next twenty years than it has in the last 20,000.



## Report reveals digitalisation, automation could actually increase jobs

5 Sep 2019



Adding context, Naidoo spoke through the recent speed of change.

*“ Many agree we started with the initial hunter-gatherer age, which lasted a very long time. This was followed by the first Industrial Revolution, marked by the invention of the steam engine; followed by the ‘science boom’ and mass production era of the second industrial revolution; and the third industrial revolution of the digital Information Age; which lasted just a few decades. ”*

Naidoo says we’re currently at the cusp of what’s being called 4IR, as the next new era for the human species, where artificial intelligence and augmented reality are set to play an enormous role.



## Dial into the next decade's digital world with foresight from 10-year-olds

Leigh Andrews 9 Jul 2019



This will result in enhanced intelligence and cognitive enhancements, which are not as futuristic as many fear:

*“ We are already somewhat Cyborg-like, as we have information at our fingertips, through our phones. ”*

In this light, Naidoo also spoke of [driver-less shuttles](#), coming soon to Sun City.

We also have local innovations to celebrate, like the world’s first successful inner ear transplant, thanks to 3D printing.



## IAB Insight Series: These are the trends transforming the digital economy

Juanita Pienaar 25 Feb 2019



This goes to prove the way all things digital are driving the current way of life, largely through the **internet of things**, as well as crowdsourcing to raise both awareness and funds for socio-economic issues.

**Virtual reality** or VR is another top driver of the 4IR, but access, connectivity and speed are imperative, especially as customer-centricity remains at the forefront of any good brand experience.

The World Economic Forum or WEF recently held here predicted that by 2025, the first automated machine will sit on a board of directors.



## Gender diversity, female entrepreneurship highlighted at WEF in Africa

5 Sep 2019



There’s no denying that new technology will dramatically change the world of work, especially in industries where mechanically repetitive tasks are paramount and automation can increase efficiency.

It's not all bad news for humans though, as demand will grow for roles that require what for now remains uniquely human aspects, like empathy.

So we won't necessarily be replaced by robots.



### #BODCT: Don't let robots take your job, boost your creative thinking!

Leigh Andrews 13 Oct 2017



Naidoo concluded that it's not about *when* the 4IR will come to Africa, as we're already feeling the winds of change – rather, it's about *how* we will deal with it.

As author Klaus Schwab wrote of the 4IR: “The changes are so profound that, from the perspective of human history, there has never been a time of greater promise or potential peril...”

Let's prepare for both.

## Anne Thistleton: “We are of two minds, as consumers – and marketers are listening and talking to the wrong one”

One way to heed Naidoo's caution is to consider the next speaker, Anne Thistleton's area of expertise.

Today considered a consumer marketing veteran and mind science practitioner, she first came to SA two decades ago as a lead strategist for Coca-Cola and has spent much time focused on consumer insights.



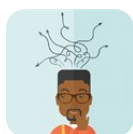
### The double-edged demand of the South African consumer

26 Aug 2019



Most recently, she's been undertaking this work at her own Light consultancy. Thistleton's presentation focused on her findings working with some of the world's leading cognitive psychologists, neuroscientists and behavioural economists, around how our mental-operating system processes the communications that are constantly thrown at us.

Thistleton says: “The fact that as consumers, we are usually “of two minds” – the conscious and the subconscious. Unfortunately, she feels that most marketers only tackle this basic human truth at the surface level. “



### Talking 'mental availability' for brands with Spark Media

Leigh Andrews 10 Oct 2017



She shared that she first moved from Ohio to Massachusetts to attend Harvard University at the age of 24.

There was much talk at registration about where you would sit in the lecture room, and while she initially opted for the 'sky deck' at the back of the room, she soon found that the professor was writing squiggles, so she went to the eye doctor for a pair of glasses.

All of a sudden, things became clear and she understood what was on the blackboard. Thistleton aimed to give the

afternoon's attendees the same ability to 'see' what's really going on, by sharing a baseline understanding of the 'two minds' model.



### #TEDxCT: Are you listening?

Beverley Klein 19 Oct 2016



In keeping the session easy to follow, Thistleton didn't share all she had learned along the way, but rather the things she had deliberately tried to learn, which would help us understand the marketing gap.

First is the truth that nothing we've been taught about how the human mind works explain anything but 'rational man', and completely rational man just doesn't exist.

Thistleton said that Daniel Kahneman was the first non-economist to receive the Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences (shared with Vernon L. Smith) in 2002 for his work on just this, in terms of the psychology of judgment, decision-making, and behavioural economics.



### Zaltman or Kahneman: who's right?

Sid Peimer 11 Jul 2013



Most of us do have an idea of the brain being filled with firing neurons, with knowledge coming from the connections we make.

“ Cognitive biases are then hardwired into our systems. ”

So Thistleton's 'two minds' analogy isn't about two brains, but rather about our conscious and unconscious processors. The problem is that economic theory is based on only the conscious brain, so marketers have spent their time talking mainly here. That's why there are three things she wishes we understood in this regard:



### #Loeries2019: "Relevance, resonance and emotions - the hardest brand currency to master" - Ralf Heuel

Leigh Andrews 28 Jun 2019



1. The **mind is associative**. We take incoming data and connect or associate it to what we already know, in order to make sense of it.

Thistleton said this is a constant process, with 11m bits of data coming at us every second through our senses, though the sense of sight is strongest. This means that when there is a conflict of sight and another sense, we defer to sight. That's why most of us would agree that 'green ketchup' is a bad idea unless we are blindfolded when introduced to the concept.



### How to make customers love your marketing

Leigh Andrews 24 Mar 2016



There's also a placebo effect of non-conscious processing to consider, and the fact that most of us associate lower price with lower quality.

## 2. Thought is primarily beneath our level of awareness.

Thistleton explained that only about 50 of the 11m bits of data actually go through the unconscious mind to be processed, which really is just the tip of the iceberg.

We can't control this process as we don't have access to it, but certain processes get hardwired over time through repetition and habit.

## 3. Decisions are primarily a function of feelings, not thinking, especially as we move them up our consciousness.

But not all decisions are made in the subconscious – it serves more as a decision filter, usually at the start and end of the process, which we use to help narrow and justify our decisions in stories we tell ourselves.

Thistleton added that words definitely matter, as they tend to set off a series of chain reactions linked to emotions – be careful of the words you choose to use.



### Phineas Gage is a strange story we should all know

Damon Stapleton 11 Sep 2019



---

Marketers need to get beyond the tip of the iceberg if they aim to really get into the consumer's mind, and ask themselves if they're lighting up on the customer experience from all five senses.

Thistleton says to be deliberate about it and ask whether the reaction received is what you intended.

*“ Question the market research your brand is doing, because if you're only talking to the conscious mind through a panel or focus groups, remember that' just the tip of the iceberg. We need to find ways to get beneath the surface. ”*

Thistleton also spoke of the importance of recognising that a brand is usually processed by consumers as a network of memories that drive action.



### How emotion affects advertising

John Laurence 25 May 2017



---

How do you build and drive those memories? By constantly communicating with your customers.

Thistleton said to simplify the process so that it gets into working memory, especially in this age of distraction. Marketers need to work hard to make their messages sticky.

Don't be afraid to “repeat repeat repeat,” as neurons that fire together wire together when we make a choice.

Thistleton said the following ‘don't drink and drive’ messaging excels on the aspects of simple and sticky so well that they didn't need to worry as much about the repeat factor:



Johnnie Walked.

Thistleton concluded that as marketers and content creators, we need to keep in mind that we have the same mind as consumers.

Our creativity comes to life when we encounter new experiences, and when our memories meet current challenges.

We have plenty of ideas, we just need to give them a chance to be heard.

Unfortunately, these opportunities don't come frequently enough, so Thistleton says we need to find our interruption-free mental playground, so both minds can dance together.

For example, the following demonstrates just how associative our minds are:

As Kahneman himself said, priming is a form of behavioural economics, which is, in turn, a social science – [disbelief is not an option](#).

### **Andy Rice: “Even a Ferrari has a rear-view mirror”**

The afternoon ended with a keynote presentation from Andy Rice, co-founder of Yellowwood Brand Architects – the first specialist brand strategy consultancy in South Africa.



Described by McCoy as being ‘head and shoulders above the rest’ – he admitted to stealing this tagline off Rice’s website but added that Rice is a giant in more than just the physical sense, having been awarded the likes of the AdFocus lifetime achievement award, amongst others.



### #FMAAdFocus2017: Innovation and consistency rewarded

Danette Breitenbach 23 Nov 2017



In a presentation peppered with both wisdom and humour, Rice mentioned that the World Economic Forum’s agenda in Africa included the likes of IoT, AI, VR and 4IR as hot topics, but questioned whether these are truly the most pressing issues on the continent today, or if we’re trying to run before we walk.

In truth, it’s a bit of both, but we need those contrary views to be voiced, said Rice.

He also explained the metaphorical topic of his presentation as such: No matter what your performance is or how fast you can go, you still need to keep an eye on where you came from.

If that sounds familiar, Rice says he actually first presented on this topic 23 years ago, in 1996 – he’s since updated the content, of course, but says when it came to trendspotting back in 1996, the likes of Alvin Toffler and Faith Popcorn were two of the top names.

Since then, it’s become a bit more difficult to spot the difference between trends and fads.



### #BizTrends2019: The state we are in

Dion Chang, Khumo Theko 7 Jan 2019



Even if your focus is on trends – as it well should be, if you work in the marketing industry – few remember to check for the predictions’ accuracy in looking back on what actually happened at the end of the year.

Rice shared that Lincoln Steffens, an American investigative journalist seen as “one of the leading muckrakers of the Progressive Era in the early 20th century,” famously said:

“ *I have seen the future and it works.* ”

All well and good until taken in context, that the society Steffens was commenting on was the Soviet Union in 1919. We all know how that went.

Linked to that global perspective, Rice spoke of his various experiences judging at Cannes Lions.



### #BehindtheSelfie - and Cannes Lions judging insights - with... Andy Rice

Leigh Andrews 8 Jul 2015



Rice said that while any talk on the ‘future of advertising’ tends to be a rehash of what we’ve seen and heard before, there are two phrases he learned at Cannes that hold value.



The first of these is **infobesity**, which comes in defining the problem.



Infobesity.

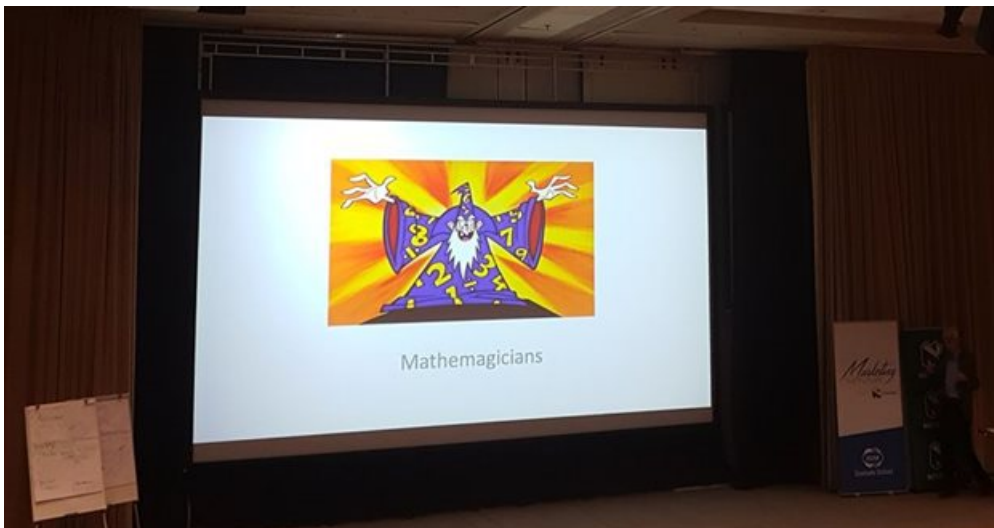
It's a scary one, and serves as a reminder to put things back into context when collecting data, said Rice.

There's a definite glut of information out there at the moment, and we need to sift through the bulk of it to find the insightful nuggets that really matter to our consumers and the way we run our business.

The second phrase is a response to the infobesity problem:

When the 'math men' and the 'mad men' get together, they result in '**mathemagicians**', who can turn the data from something other than just a grouping of linear numbers.

The best strategists out there can acquire information linearly and manipulate it laterally, whereas most of us can either do one or the other.



Mathemagicians.

Rice says these rare beings are particularly handy when facing challenges where we need to prevent putting into context victories of:

- Proof over instinct;
- Channel over insight;
- Numbers over hunches and what you feel is right;
- Caution over risk;

- How over why; and
- Data over interpretation.

Rise also said we don't need to start from scratch.

In explaining the power of the 'wisdom of the industry elders', he quoted industry great David Ogilvy, who said of market research in the 1960s and 1970s that too many marketers use research in the way a drunk uses a lamppost – for support rather than illumination.

Rice also quoted Jeremy Bullmore, famous for asking: Why is an insight like a refrigerator? When you look into both of them, a little light comes on.

Rice also recommended learning from the likes of the [Ad Contrarian](#)'s Bob Hoffman and Mark Ritson.

Rice concluded by commenting that the industry is cluttered with 'c' words, like consistency and creativity, but says the most important one is courage, as the only real risk is to take no risk at all.

He spoke of Rory Sutherland's work on behavioural economics, and how marketers of today are scared of taking risks, yet responsible risk-taking should be their very lifeblood.

Rice also showed attendees two examples of ads where the idea is pre-eminent over the channel.

As many believe that virtual reality is the next big thing, showed the Jaguar F type VR test drive video, as well as the Loeries Creative Effectiveness gold campaign-winning Huggies' Baby Marathon work.

Rice says neither of these would have been the output of the typical rational process as described by Thistleton earlier in the afternoon.

In summarising the afternoon's top points, McCoy said it's important to keep in mind both where we are going are where we are coming from.

South Africa remains a tale of two cities, of the excluded and the included, and Rice said John Le Carre's observation has never held more weight:

“ *The desk is a dangerous place from which to view the world.* ”

Marketers need to balance this dichotomy and become the change we need to see while keeping track of trends and technological changes affecting that way consumers relate and react to brands, with 4IR undeniably underway and transforming the traditional role of marketers today.

*All in all, a thoroughly enjoyable afternoon. Click here for more from [IMM Graduate School](#), and be sure to follow [McCoy](#), [Naidoo](#), [Thistleton](#) and [Rice](#) on Twitter for the latest updates.*

## 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
- #Dl2020: Ignite your inner activist - representation through illustration - 27 Feb 2020
- #Dl2020: How Sho Madjozi brought traditional Tsonga *xibelani* into 2020 - 27 Feb 2020
- #Dl2020: Silver jubilee shines with Department of Audacious Projects launch - 26 Feb 2020
- #BehindtheSelfie with... Qingile 'WingWing' Mdlulwa, CCO at The Whole Idea - 26 Feb 2020

View my profile and articles...