

What meaningful leadership looks like

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This year Havas Media's Katherine Couzyn made it onto the **Mail & Guardian 200 Young South Africans 2021**. The list celebrates the country's most eminent and accomplished professionals under 35, and the accolade follows her recent promotion to deputy managing director of Havas Media South Africa. These two major milestones highlight the agency's focus on young leadership and meaningful contribution to the industry. Managing partner Havas Africa, Vineel Agarwal, states Katherine's industry recognition is a testament to the agencies' commitment to cultivating the young leaders of the tomorrow.



Havas Media's new deputy MD, Katherine Couzyn, is all about youth leadership and consumer-first thinking in a digital world.

Katherine credits her success to the formidable and adept team she gets to work with and to the culture at Havas. "My first responsibility is to the people I work with. Effective, meaningful leadership empowers people first and then aligns their strengths to business needs. At all times I want my team to feel they can approach me, debate with me, and challenge my thinking." This is how she and her team reach their fullest creative potential. "This is how I was supported at Havas and how I support my team. The more capable they are, the more capable I am."

Most of Katherine's team members (who call her "Kat") are young digital-native South Africans, eager to make a mark in a field known for its hyper-accelerated evolution. She encourages her team to grow and actively cultivates a working environment that prioritises a growth mindset. "The most meaningful thing you can do as a leader is to give your people the opportunity to develop, both professionally and as individuals." She has leaned into the Havas ethos of passing down to others, they must, in turn, pass down themselves. "I know I have succeeded at my job when my team can operate without me."

Under Katherine's management, digital media is no longer isolated but forms part of the day-to-day communication of many Havas clients. "There is no separation for the consumer," she points out matter-of-factly, "it's only logical that in 2021 agencies should be integrating digital media within key strategic objectives across all communication platforms". However, she cautions against blindly over-relying on the power of digital, which is too often viewed as a fix-all for a tight budget or seen only as a supporting act for ATL media. "Digital is its own world, with its own rules and unique capabilities. It should

have its own seat at the table, not be used as the garnish on another channel's plate."

Brands all over the world continue to play into the hands of global monopolised digital platforms, without stepping back to consider the value that local publishers bring to the very same consumer. "Digital heavyweights promise greater reach, but if you're trying to cut the clutter and do something that truly benefits and speaks to the consumer, brands cannot solely focus audience reach to achieve their strategic objectives. That's where a great untapped potential for digital in Africa exists: driving meaningful and relevant messaging on beloved local platforms." But meaningful media implementation continues to elude many industry players, and Katherine emphasises how this undermines the industry at large. "For the consumer, that's like going to a restaurant and ordering the vegetarian option, but getting the beef. It's always disappointing to be served messages you don't actually care about on a platform you do care about. And it's so, so damaging to both the industry and to creativity. Not to mention, the bottom line!"

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