

Cultural context key to successful South African PR narratives

 By [Obren Msuku](#)

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Brand exposure opportunities have exploded and fragmented in recent years, with new technologies and communications platforms opening a world of possibilities to PR professionals and beginners alike.



Image credit: Rachel Pfuetzner on Unsplash.

In theory, this seems like a positive development, but the litany of choices is proving increasingly difficult for brands and their communications agencies to navigate. When the whole world is shouting at the top of its lungs, shouting even louder, although tempting, is at best a short-term solution.



For the culture or from the culture?

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One size does not fit all

To drive business value and growth, media exposure has to be of the right quality, and it has to be experienced by the target audience in the right context.

A million views or likes or shares might sound great, but the real question for a brand is whether they are reaching *their* audience or not – and whether that audience is engaging with the details of their message.

In a country with 11 official languages, cultural context is an especially slippery force. Not only do brand narratives need to be carefully crafted in terms of tone and style and language, but getting content distribution right also requires several different types of expertise.



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In South Africa, a lot of different cultural reference points, icons and stories have to be catered to. We all understand that you can't use classical music on an urban youth radio station – the dividing line is very clear.

Many other lines within our various communities and cultures are far less clear – which also have a big impact on whether the message a brand is sending out will be welcomed by a media channel or its audience.

So, how should brands approach getting their voice 'out there' in 21st century South Africa? There are two crucial elements to consider: audience understanding and industry relationships.



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Diverse approach for a diverse audience

In South Africa, it's not enough to just do a generic demographic breakdown of age and race and gender – you need to be much more specific. You need to understand your audience and be able to converse in their language – literally and in terms of narrative.



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This applies as much to the urban context as it does to peri-urban and rural areas.

If you have the cultural understanding you can use humour and style to get your story across and engage your audience. If you're taking a one-size-fits-all approach to a brand narrative, really, you're just shouting as loudly as you can, and hoping people will listen.



In addition to audience understanding, industry relationships can be a crucial testing force for South African PR narratives.

Simply put, the better the feedback loop between the communications agency and media gatekeepers, the better the chances of long-term placement success.

If producers and editors don't like your content, they're effectively telling you the context is wrong for their audience. Often, they'll tell you this directly.

If you listen to them, interact with them and re-develop your concepts and content according to their feedback, you can improve the rate and quality of coverage a lot.

ABOUT OBREN MSUKU

Obren Msuku founded Msuku Media in 2018. Msuku Media is a 360° public relations, marketing and brand activation agency that specialises in developing communications strategies and execution plans for private businesses and public sector organisations.

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