

The South African consumer is a real person

By [Juanita Pienaar](#)

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International trends spotter Marian Salzman joined trend analyst and culture strategist Nicola Cooper and trend spotter at Flux Trends, Khumo Theko in highlighting the top pop culture trends affecting females at an event held at Inner City Ideas Cartel in Cape Town earlier this month. Here follows my coverage of Cooper's part of the talk. If you missed the first part featuring Salzman click [here](#).

Human value systems

Cooper has founded her own trends agency called Nicola Cooper and Associates, specialising in trend analysis, researching, trend talks, workshops and strategies tailored for business.

She started off by saying that as someone who specialises in fashion, lifestyle and pop culture, at the end of the day when she's standing in retail spaces, she believes it's all about the consumer and what they had to deal with before they even entered that space and what they are dealing with on a day-to-day basis from the zeitgeist and specifically from a South African zeitgeist.

"The big takeaway is that they are really about human value systems and I think that we're starting to see that more and more. That's really how we're starting to identify just what is happening behind the brand and what is happening with the people behind the brand. And does that align with who I am personally and what I stand for with the future that I believe in?"



Trend forecaster, Nicola Cooper. © [Nicola Cooper & Associates website](#).



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The three Rs

She says more than anything trends are always a response to what is happening in the technological, economic and political social spheres. So, when they're developing strategy for businesses, specifically South African businesses, there are three Rs that they like to keep into account.

They are: *recognition, representation and redistribution* and Cooper says these are really important facets to the South African consumer.

- **Recognition** - an awareness of who the consumer is as a citizen. "I think we're only starting to find our new identities in South Africa, post-apartheid and we have to take that into account that each citizen is just finding out who they are now."
- **Representation** - that all levels of the business are represented in core groups and that there's active and meaningful representation. "This is really specific when we speak about women and when I speak about women, I speak about 'womxn' with an 'x' in the word. It's not women in general, it's people who identify as a woman."

- **Redistribution** - how is this going to impact our economy? "How is it going to make a difference to our community? Is it something that has longevity or is it going to harm the way in which we live?"

Women empowerment

Cooper says it's also really about how far women empowerment has come. Over the past couple of years, we've seen the fourth wave, neo-feminism rise. She says it's evident if we look at the #MeToo movement, Harvey Weinstein and what's happening in the world and the profound ripple effect that it's having on our community here in South Africa and specifically for women or 'womxn'.



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"One of the things I really believe in is the idea of brands really taking a stand. This is something that consumers are demanding more of. If I'm going to align with the brand's personality, I want to know what it stands for. You saw that with the Colin Kaepernick Nike campaign where people wanted to boycott it as a result but we also saw a lot of people in support of that, wearing Nike on the red carpet. But I also think what they did with Caster Semenya was incredible."

When we look at popular culture, we're starting to see what's happening especially on Twitter where we're able to have conversations with other women, asking them, 'Are you feeling the same way as me?'

"I can see how the standard of beauty has been altered because of technology because we're taking pictures of their stretch marks and other women were going, 'Actually, I have those too and maybe it's not such a bad thing.' So, technology has really changed things for women because now we are a community and not just in our own geographical boundaries but to reach out and really communicate with women. Social media has had this profound effect on people that didn't have a voice in the past."

Cooper mentioned the recent issue with Woolworths and their Valentine's campaign, which got a lot of public criticism and then, as a result, the campaign was pulled. She says the amount of money that could have been saved on an entire campaign would have been substantial if they just had the diversity in that workspace; if they just had people that weren't heterosexual; people that weren't female stereotypes; people that weren't male stereotypes. In this case, social media rose up and demanded that it was pulled down.



Woolworths pulls "gender stereotyping" Valentine's Day campaign

5 Feb 2019



She also mentioned documentaries such as *Surviving R Kelly*, *Leaving Neverland* and *Fyre Festival*. “Really what is happening is that people are taking charge and realising that if something is not happening then we’re going to speak about it and then something is going to happen. So, because we have these platforms to engage with women and because we’re able to communicate directly with women, it’s a really important conversation.”



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Communicate with your consumers

It's quite ironic because Cooper works with a number of South African retailers and one of the retailers that she works with, one of their platforms had 70,000 followers on Facebook. But they hadn't spoken to their consumers. "That 70,000 people wanting to speak to them and they were ignoring them."

She said that the first thing they usually ask brands is, 'Have you spoken to your consumers? Have you tweeted them, have you spoke to them on Facebook? Have you engaged with them?' And a lot of them are just petrified of taking that first step and opening that communication. The irony is that communication happens anyway so you may as well be a part of that conversation and it's really important to lead that conversation.

Cooper said one of the biggest trends is **personalisation, customisation and creolisation** or identifying your consumer as a real person: as a woman, as a man and as an African.

“It's really about how do you customise information; how do you customise branding and advertising to actually start speaking to active consumers.”

Cooper ended off and said that a lot of the time while working with beauty brands, she sees them using a copy-and-paste approach of a European, white female with pale skin and blue eyes and then they wonder why the consumer is not responding. “Well because they don’t see themselves in it,” she says.

“So, a lot of the times we fight with global brands to give them the information to take to their global marketing space to say, ‘Actually, we need to generate new content that represents the people on this continent, the people of South Africa and woman specifically.’”

Some essential truths that brands should really consider if they want to effectively communicate with their consumers. For more, you can follow Cooper on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [LinkedIn](#).

Juanita is the editor of the marketing & media portal on the Bizcommunity website. She is also a contributing writer.

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