

Do we suffer from late bloomer syndrome?

By [Khangelani Dziba](#)

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If anything that this time we are in has forced us to come to terms with is the fact that the postmodernist era that many philosophers such as Jean-François Lyotard, Jacques Derrida, and Fredric Jameson have theorised as it relates to technological advances is finally in full effect and it is up to us whether we sink or swim.



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Late bloomer syndrome sadly, in my humble opinion, and observation characterises our industry.

Late bloomer syndrome

Loosely defined, late bloomer syndrome is used metaphorically in many instances to describe a child or adolescent who develops stagnantly than others in their age group, but eventually catches up. It is also used in the case of describing an adult whose talent or genius in a particular field only appears later in life than is “normal” and in some cases only surfaces in old age.

I would like to argue that as the marketing and brand communications industry we suffer from this syndrome, more so when you zoom in on the different disciplines that make up the marketing mix (PR and advertising).



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There is a myriad of reasons where this could possibly be stemming from:

1. The lack of transformation,
2. Talent not matching those in managerial positions and in power to make the relevant decisions for brands at various levels,
3. Lack of keeping up with the latest seminal work produced in academia and applying recommendations thereof; and
4. Budgets that do not always match expectations and allow for the creation of revolutionary work to name but a few.

The purpose of this article, however, is not so much to drag those in brand leadership positions in South Africa.

Rather it is to remind us who we are doing this all for and why it is important to always be thinking ahead. It is also to perhaps make suggestions based on evidence produced by leading scholars in the industry that implore us to centre the consumer - the very people we are all seemingly at war for share of voice with hopes of earning brand loyalty which will ultimately lead to brand equity (Keller, 2016).

Brand Equity Model

The lens I adopt to do this work quite briefly is from Kevin Keller's (2009) Consumer Based Brand Equity Model (CBBE) which has been put into conversation and empirical testing in hundreds of research papers, especially at an international level with countries such as the United States leading in this regard.

The thinking behind the Brand Equity Model is simply put as, in order to build a strong brand, you must shape how customers think and feel about your product. You have to build the right type of experiences around your brand so that customers have specific, positive thoughts, feelings, beliefs, opinions, and perceptions about it (Mindtools, 2018).



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Essentially, what characterises the CBBE model is that consumer knowledge of the brand determines the extent to which they support the marketing initiatives of brands. Meaning that the more time that is spent trying to build a rapport with consumers through communicating the brand's core reason for being, which they subsequently draw parallels with their own lives and schema, will yield continued support for the brands that they love.

It was important for me to bring this model into conversation not only because it informs my current academic endeavours but also because through it I have realised that if more practitioners spent time trying to understand how it works and applied it more rigorously from a South African brand industry perspective and their approach with stakeholders they partner with, they would realise that even in the time we are in, Keller's thinking enables us to pivot much sooner than we have been able to.

Is it to say we have not been doing so before?

No. But our responses could be more agile and match the time that we are in with the demands of our changing consumer landscape.

Integrating across platforms and disciplines

Simply put, there is a rising need for us to integrate across platforms and disciplines to ensure we communicate brand messages but most importantly, meet the needs and desires of consumers through the opportunity to innovate in the delivery of our business objectives. The time we are in calls for it even more as we have seen the devastating effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on the industry.

This simply means we need to continue to work towards earning the love and support of consumers by displaying across platforms why they need to continue pledging their loyalty towards brands.

This I believe includes embracing the postmodernist era we are in, guided by models such as the one presented above and applying that thinking to the strategies and implementation plans being shared in boardrooms. Failure to do this will expose us much more and we will continue being characterised by the late bloomer syndrome.

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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