



STYLE  AFRICA

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UNLOCKING THE CREATORS,
CULTURE SHIFTS,
BIG MOMENTS, AND
MARKET MOVES THAT
DEFINED 2025

WRAPPED
GUIDE 2025

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06 2026 AT A GLANCE



SUMMARY

Looking back at 2025

The past 12 months reshaped the marketing landscape with bold experimentation, sharper consumer expectations and a mix of unforgettable wins and avoidable missteps. This guide reflects on the shifts that defined 2025 - from the creator economy's evolution to the cultural moments that dominated timelines, the campaigns that set new standards and the ones that probably should have stayed in the boardroom.

We look at how 2025 was the year where brands began to favour long-term creator partnership over short-term campaigns, how Nostalgia marketing made a comeback and how tone-deaf campaigns resulted in quick pullbacks!

Whether you were steering content, building brand strategy or simply staying culturally aware, these insights recap the forces that shaped the year and the lessons worth carrying forward.

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INFLUENCER SHIFTS THAT MOVED THE INDUSTRY IN 2025

2025 WRAPPED GUIDE

INFLUENCER TRENDS. THAT DEFINED. INFLUENCER TRENDS.

THE RISE OF “EVERYDAY EXPERTS”

In 2025, South African audiences gravitated heavily toward creators who provided practical, useful, everyday advice. These were micro and nano-creators who didn't necessarily have perfect feeds, but offered value-saving tips, fashion hacks, meal preps, skincare routines or wellness advice listeners could actually apply. From “How to survive on R1000 a week” to “Grocery haul creators who compared Shoprite, Woolies and Pick n Pay prices”. This shift showed that South Africans were choosing credibility and relatability over influencer perfection.

HYPER-LOCAL STORYTELLING BECAME THE WINNING FORMULA

South Africans responded best to content that reflected their world - township humour, SA slang, homegrown fashion, local meal content and recognisable neighbourhood backdrops. Creators were beginning to film ‘Spend The Day With Me,’ going to school, work or shopping and this resonated more deeply over luxury lifestyle content. We also saw township streetwear creators styling affordable looks that were sourced from local boutiques or downtown Johannesburg, and this became central to fashion conversations. Brands began prioritising creators who captured the spirit of South African culture over those who attempted to mimic global influencer aesthetics.

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LIVE SHOPPING & REAL-TIME REVIEWS EXPLODED

2025 saw the rise of creators who reviewed products live - from beauty items to fast fashion and tech gadgets. SA consumers trusted these formats because they felt unscripted and unfiltered. On Tiktok, we saw creators hosting Live Try-ons in fitting rooms, beauty creators were testing out products on camera and this resulted in real results without heavy editing. For brands, live content became a new conversion channel especially during sales periods like Black Friday.

CREATOR-LED POP-UP EVENTS & IRL EXPERIENCES RETURNED

In 2025, we witnessed more and more brands return to physical experiences with a twist, where creators (not celebrities) were the main attraction. Food and beverage brands used creators to host tasting events, beauty brands invited creators to host masterclasses and we even saw fashion retailers hosting in-store events where influencers curated fashion rails, hosted styling sessions and created in-store challenges. These events helped brands build more authentic, experience-driven touchpoints with audiences.



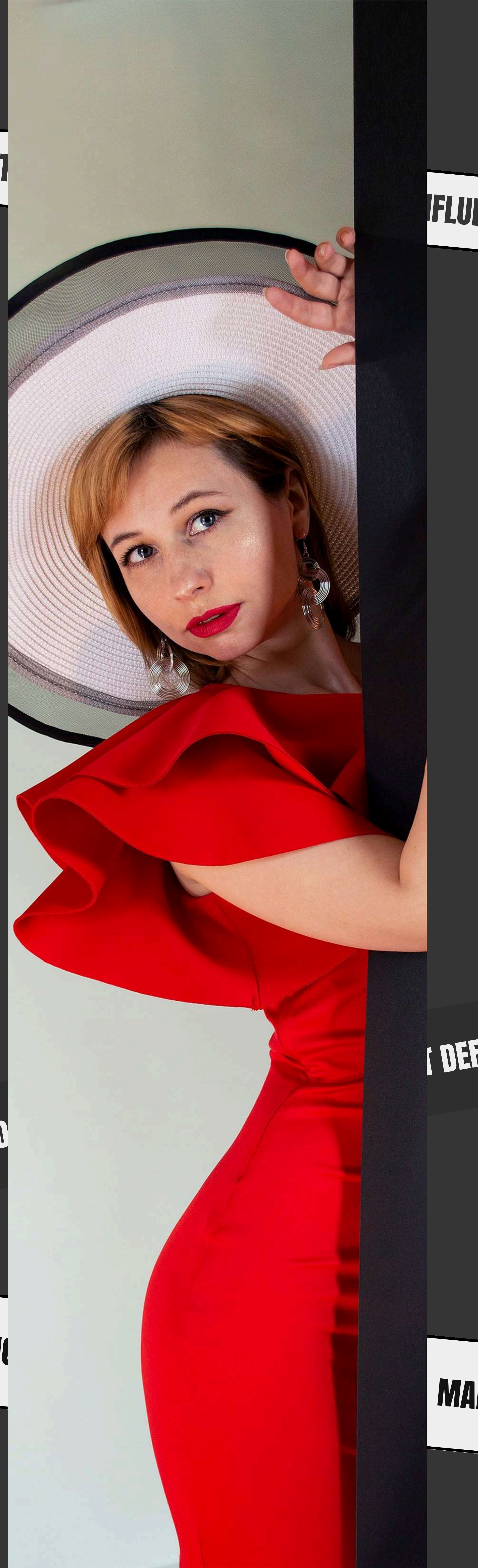
INFLUENCER TRENDS. INFLUENCER TRENDS. INFLUENCER TRENDS.

CREATOR TRANSPARENCY & AUTHENTICITY BECAME NON-NEGOTIABLE

After years of polished content, South Africans demanded transparency in 2025. They wanted real opinions, clear disclaimers, honest reviews and creators openly showing both wins and failures.

Creators began to share the behind-the-scenes realities of campaigns, “paid but honest” reviews to maintain trust and content showing the non-aesthetic side of life (from budget constraints and mental health check-ins to burnout conversations).

This type of content resonated more with curated luxury content and the creators who kept things real built stronger communities.



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A photograph of two women, one Black and one white, smiling and hugging each other. The Black woman is on the left, wearing a dark top and dark pants. The white woman is on the right, wearing a light-colored top and dark jeans. They are both looking towards the camera. The background is a solid brown color.

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POP CULTURE MOMENTS THAT DEFINED THE YEAR

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WOMEN FOR CHANGE

WOMEN FOR CHANGE:

Purple didn't just trend, it mobilised. South Africans used a simple visual cue to voice collective frustration with the country's GBV crisis. The virality proved something brands often underestimate: social justice is not a "moment"; it's a lived reality. The movement cut across demographics, bringing community-led awareness back into mainstream feeds and forcing brands, influencers and institutions to acknowledge their role in advocacy beyond performative posts. Purple became more than a colour story; it became cultural accountability.

PANTONE SUNDAYS

PANTONE SUNDAYS:

What started as a Sunday ritual became a full-blown cultural supply chain. Pantone Sundays levelled up from a social moment to a high-equity cultural touchpoint, prompting beauty, fashion, beverage and even finance brands to rush for relevance. Why did it resonate? It's hyper-local, stylish, and rooted in South African self-expression. The format democratised soft luxury and modern township cool. It showed brands firsthand: culture doesn't wait for a marketing budget, it builds itself, and you either plug in with respect or get left behind.



PODCAST CULTURE EXPLOSION:

Long-form content made a comeback but through the Gen Z lens: intimate, unfiltered, culturally specific. These podcasts created safe spaces for taboo-free conversations on success, burnout, womanhood, and the realities of being young and ambitious in SA. They resonated because they prioritised honesty over aesthetics and community over virality. For brands, it proved that micro-culture drives deeper influence than mass media hype. People want voices that sound like them, not to them.



SHAKA ILEMBE'S CINEMATIC IMPACT:

Shaka iLembe wasn't just entertainment; it was a cultural power move. It set a new benchmark for South African filmmaking from costume to worldbuilding to historical depth, reminding audiences that local stories can carry global-grade finesse. It reignited cultural pride and put African historical narratives back into the centre of mainstream pop culture. In a landscape fatigued by recycled formats, Shaka iLembe proved that quality storytelling is still the ultimate cultural flex.



THE SPRINGBOKS' SOCIAL CURRENCY BOOM:

Their World Cup run didn't just unite the country, it turned the players into premium cultural assets. The Springboks became South Africa's unofficial influencers, setting a new template for athlete-driven social storytelling. Off-field, their digital impact created a secondary economy: brand deals, content spins, creator collaborations, and meme cycles. This moment resonated because it reminded the industry that authentic national pride is a marketing goldmine when handled with emotional intelligence.

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GAME-CHANGING BRAND MOMENTS THAT MOVED THE INDUSTRY FORWARD

THE FLOW

2025 WRAPPED GUIDE



“MNTANA KA GOGO”

Some traditions are not passed down, they're rubbed in.



A 155 years of heritage.

VASELINE

Vaseline enters the top five on two fronts. Firstly the global impact of the Verified Campaign shot the brand to stratospheric heights, with millions of videos that were uploaded onto the internet, Vaseline set in motion a world wide conversation. Which of the “hacks” that people used were safe and truly hacks, and which were just down right dangerous. This signalled a cultural shift, a commonality between different people who connected over a single, seemingly innocuous product, Vaseline petroleum jelly.

On the local front, there was no more a nostalgic image than that of umntana ka gogo, the young child whose face is contorted by the loving hands of ugogo as she moisturizes the young face, This seemingly uncomfortable ritual is actually loaded with emotion as we all remember the loving hands of our gogos and gogo figures making sure we weren't ashy by applying liberal amounts of vaseline to our skins. This campaign relied on the connection that a people have through a shared history and a shared ritual. It achieved a connection between the brand and the consumer in a way that has cemented Vaseline into the very fabric of the South African Zeitgeist.



NEWS

**Spotify Wrapped 2025
is officially live**

SPOTIFY AFRICA WRAPPED

Spotify Wrapped Africa is the annual personalized recap of users' listening habits, but for Africa, it's a massive cultural event featuring unique local data, trending genres like Amapiano, Afrobeats, top artists and real-world street activations like amagwinya kombi tours in South Africa that blend digital data with local experiences, celebrating how music shapes daily life across the continent. It highlights local music dominance, with homegrown artists often making up the majority of top streams, and brings listeners together through shared cultural moments. This relies heavily on the shared cultural moments between Africans, again highlighting the currency that is connection.



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GAME-CHANGING

BRAND MOMENTS.

BRAND MOMENTS

WOMEN FOR CHANGE

WOMEN FOR CHANGE

South Africans are often accused of being lazy, armchair activists who will only scream and shout if it doesn't require too much effort. What started as a few voices and a few purple profile photos finally turned into a force for change that was unheard of. From across the globe users were asking why the world had suddenly gone purple. This not only lobbied the government to declare GBVF as a national disaster, but showed that the face of activism and protest has evolved to ALSO include digital activism.



LABUBUS

Some may see it as a fad but collectables have long been one of the most effective marketing strategies, for the older millennials they may have collected Pokemon tazos or Dragon Ball Z tokens, then there was the trolls phenomenon followed by the bratz dolls and now, Labubu. This has sparked a world wide craze that has even given rise to celebrity endorsements and a whole ecosystem of supply and demand. This new iteration of collectables signals that the old tried and tested strategies are as good as they ever were. The argument however is whether the appeal is mainly to millennials who still form part of economic life and thus indulge nostalgically in these phenomena, or whether it has genuinely captured the imagination of new, younger generations.



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BRAND MOMENTS.

BRAND MOMENTS



POLITICS/POLITICAL ANALYSIS

The G20 may not be the traditional marketing event or activation but it is one that has incredible marketing currency for brand South Africa. As an event that was held for the first time in the African continent and the ensuing boycott by the USA it was unusually busy.

This has sparked a larger amount of political analysis content, explainers and summaries. Coupled with the live streaming of the Madlanga Commission and the Parliamentary Ad Hoc Commission there has been a massive amount of interest.



GAME-CHANGING. GAME-CHANGING. GAME-CHANGING. GAME-CHANGING. GAME-CHANGING. BRAND MOMENTS. BRAND MOMENTS. BRAND MOMENTS. BRAND MOMENTS. BRAND MOMENTS.

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CREATIVE MISSTEPS: CONCEPTS THAT SHOULD'VE STAYED ON THE WHITEBOARD

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UKUHAMBA UNGENAYO I- INSURANCE KUFANA NOKUTHI "DUMELANG" KU TAXI DRIVER

PLS TUU, GET A QUOTE BAKITHI

> pineapple.co.za



CULTURAL/TRIBAL-HUMOUR ADS THAT RELY ON STEREOTYPES

Pineapple Insurance Case

Their 2025 advert comparing “driving without insurance” to “saying the ‘wrong’ language greeting to a taxi driver” was ruled discriminatory by the Advertising Regulatory Board (ARB). The campaign leaned on the stereotype of Zulu taxi-drivers being hostile to Sotho-Tswana speakers, a trope many found divisive and harmful.

NETFLIX’S WEDNESDAY SEASON 2 BILLBOARDS ANGER SOUTH AFRICAN MOTORISTS

Wednesday N1 Billboard

The Season-2 promotional campaign for Wednesday included billboards along major highways (including the N1 Highway) in Johannesburg. The ads featured a tagline along the lines of “Read this instead of keeping your eyes on the road.” This copy, on a high-speed, high-accident road, didn’t land well with many motorists.



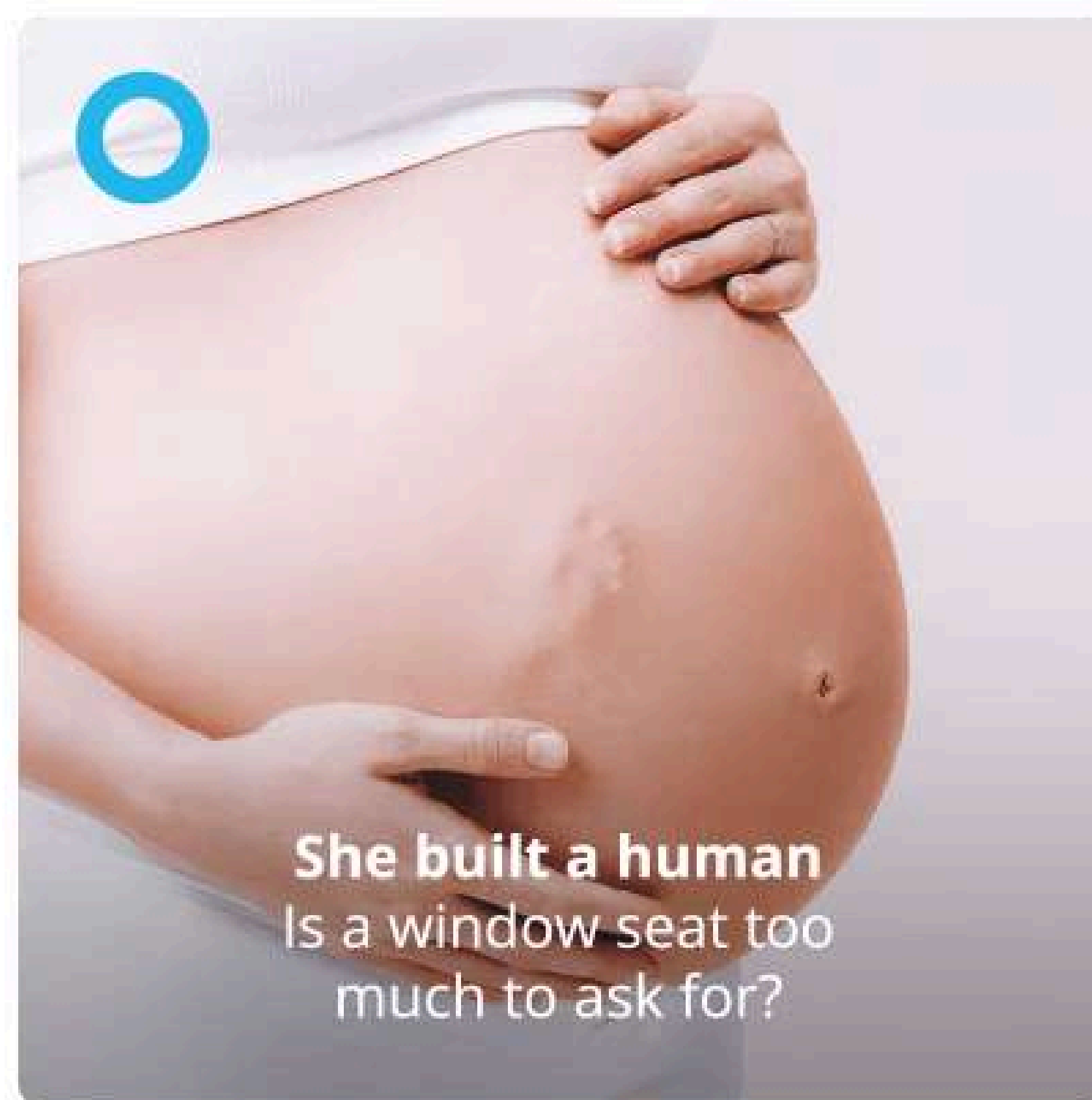
“JOU MA SE PO...SITIVELY CHEAP FLIGHTS” MOTHER’S DAY EMAIL

Travelstart

Their promotional email subject line, meant as a pun, stirred anger. Many people found it vulgar, offensive, and insensitive. Although a complaint was filed with the regulator, the ad authority ultimately dismissed it. Still, reputational damage had already set in: users publicly criticised the brand for tone-deafness. What might look like edgy wordplay in briefs can easily be misread by audiences, especially when using local slang or humour; context and tone-check remain critical.

travelstart

Flights | Packages | Cars | DEALS!



She carried you for 9 months. The least you can do is carry her bags on a trip.

This **Mother's Day**, forget the bath salts & perfumes. **Book her a local getaway** from bush to beach and beyond.

She earned it (raising YOU wasn't as easy as booking this flight for her).

Yo Momma so sweet, these fares are perfect for her!

 Joburg → Durban	R439	Book now
 Joburg → Gqeberha	R769	Book now
 Cape Town → Gqeberha	R879	Book now

Forget breakfast in bed and a cute text. Book her a package!



Travelstart

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JOU MA SE 🐒🤔 Po...sitively cheap flights

Mother's Day specials ✈️

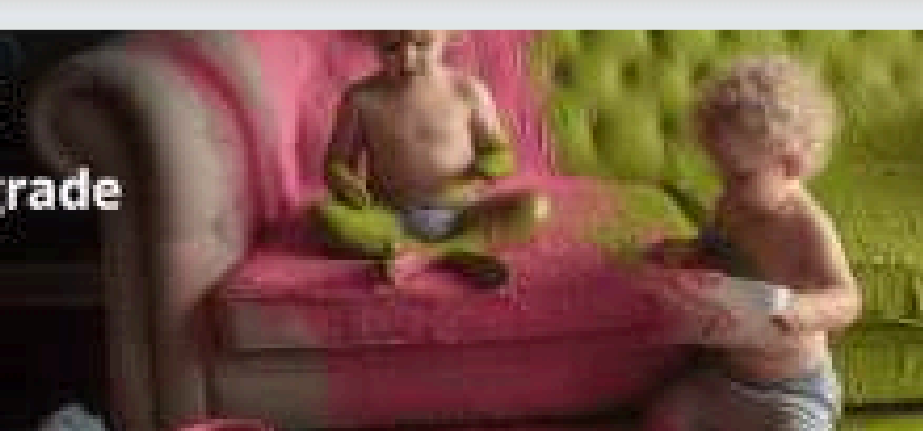
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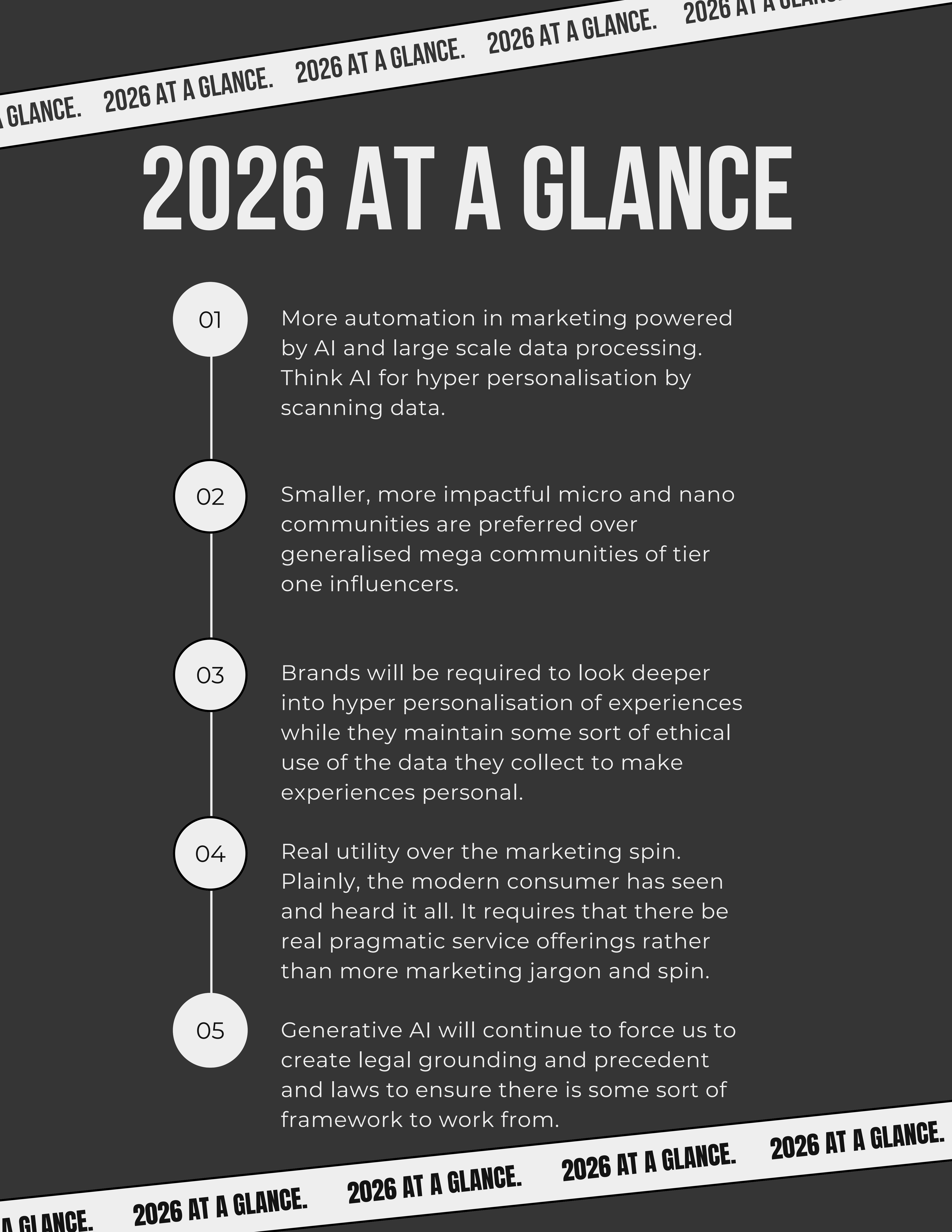
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Save Email 

You put her through a lot
The least you can do is **upgrade her to Travestart+**

[Upgrade Now!](#)





2026 AT A GLANCE

01

More automation in marketing powered by AI and large scale data processing. Think AI for hyper personalisation by scanning data.

02

Smaller, more impactful micro and nano communities are preferred over generalised mega communities of tier one influencers.

03

Brands will be required to look deeper into hyper personalisation of experiences while they maintain some sort of ethical use of the data they collect to make experiences personal.

04

Real utility over the marketing spin. Plainly, the modern consumer has seen and heard it all. It requires that there be real pragmatic service offerings rather than more marketing jargon and spin.

05

Generative AI will continue to force us to create legal grounding and precedent and laws to ensure there is some sort of framework to work from.

SIGNALLING



INTO 2026

In 2026, digital marketing won't be won by louder campaigns or smarter algorithms. It will be won by brands that can read culture, respect context, and respond with relevance. The following signals aren't trends in isolation; they're behavioural shifts already in motion across South Africa's social, creative and community ecosystems.

1. HYPER-PERSONALISATION MEETS PERSONAL BRANDING

In 2026, hyper-personalisation won't stop at consumers; it extends to marketers themselves. Creative, social and brand roles are increasingly assessed beyond CVs. Your digital footprint, opinions, side projects and cultural literacy matter.

South Africa's marketing industry is relationship-led, culture-driven and network-heavy. Hiring managers want proof you live the culture, not just schedule posts about it.

What this means for South African brands:

- Expect marketing talent to show up as thinking brands, not faceless employees.
- Brands should encourage employees to build credible public voices (LinkedIn, TikTok, podcasts).
- The era of "neutral marketers" is done; opinionated, culturally fluent talent wins.



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2.CREATIVE GIFTING SIGNALS A SHIFT FROM INFLUENCE TO INTIMACY

As influencer marketing costs climb and traditional PR gets saturated, brands are shifting toward creative gifting, culturally timely, hyper-personalised moments designed to spark organic virality.

This means South African creators will punch above their weight culturally, even with smaller audiences. One authentic story can outperform a six-figure influencer deal.

What this means for SA brands:

- Invest in ideas, not just influencer rates.
- Build agile social teams that can react to real-time moments.
- This is a major unlock for startups and challenger brands with limited budgets but strong cultural instincts.

INTO 2026. INTO 2026. INTO 2026. INTO 2026.



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3. GET IN, WE'RE GOING OUTSIDE!

Digital fatigue is real. 2026 signals a pivot toward physical, skill-based, community-driven experiences: callisthenics clubs, wellness collectives, outdoor workshops and real-world challenges.

We have always thrived in community spaces. This is a return to our roots, not a trend import.

What this means for SA brands:

- Sponsor or co-create real-world communities aligned to your values.
- Build offline touchpoints into your brand ecosystem (events, gear, guides).
- Content should document humans and moments, not polished ads.



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4. LIVESTREAMING EMERGES AS A HUMAN COUNTERWEIGHT TO AI SATURATION

As AI floods feeds with low-effort content, livestreaming is rising because it's raw, unfiltered and impossible to fake. It restores real-time connection and shared experience. South Africans value authenticity. Radio, live TV and call-in culture have always thrived here; livestreaming is the digital evolution of that.

What this means for SA brands:

- Experiment with live formats: launches, behind-the-scenes, cultural moments.
- Let go of over-produced perfection; unpredictability is the point.
- Livestreams create secondary content ecosystems through clips and cultural moments.

INTO 2026. INTO 2026. INTO 2026. INTO 2026.



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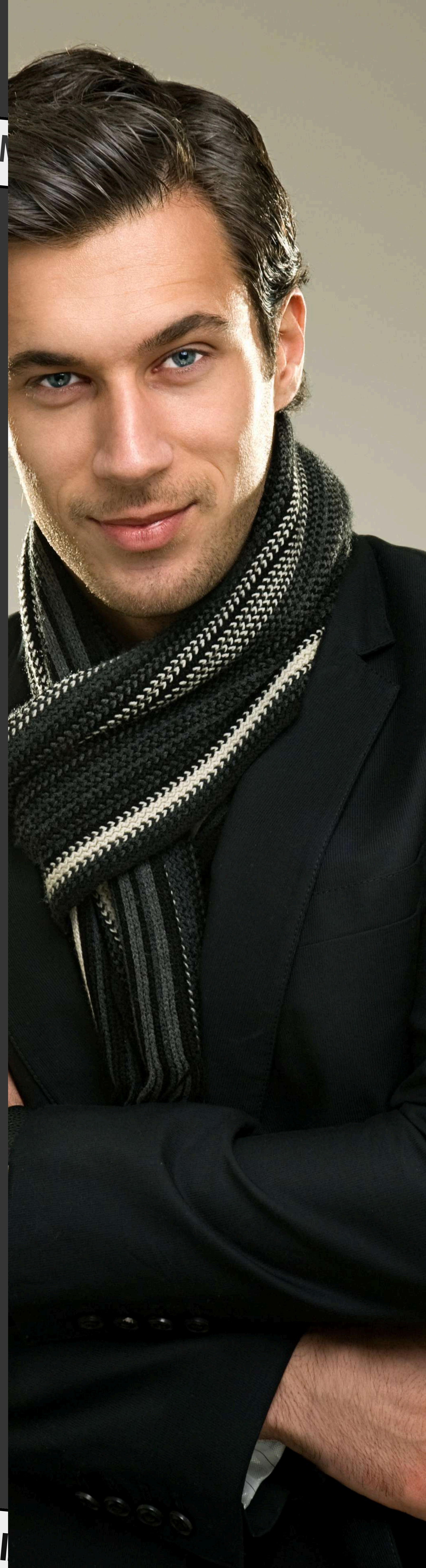
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5. SCREENSHOT-WORTHY CONTENT IS THE NEW KPI

In 2026, the most valuable content won't be what gets liked; it'll be what gets saved, screenshotted and shared privately. South African decision-making happens in closed circles. Screenshots become proof, persuasion and validation, especially in business and strategy conversations.

What this means for SA brands:

- Create content that's practical, insightful and portable.
- Think frameworks, charts, sharp takes and data people can use.
- If your content helps someone win an argument or justify a decision, you've won.



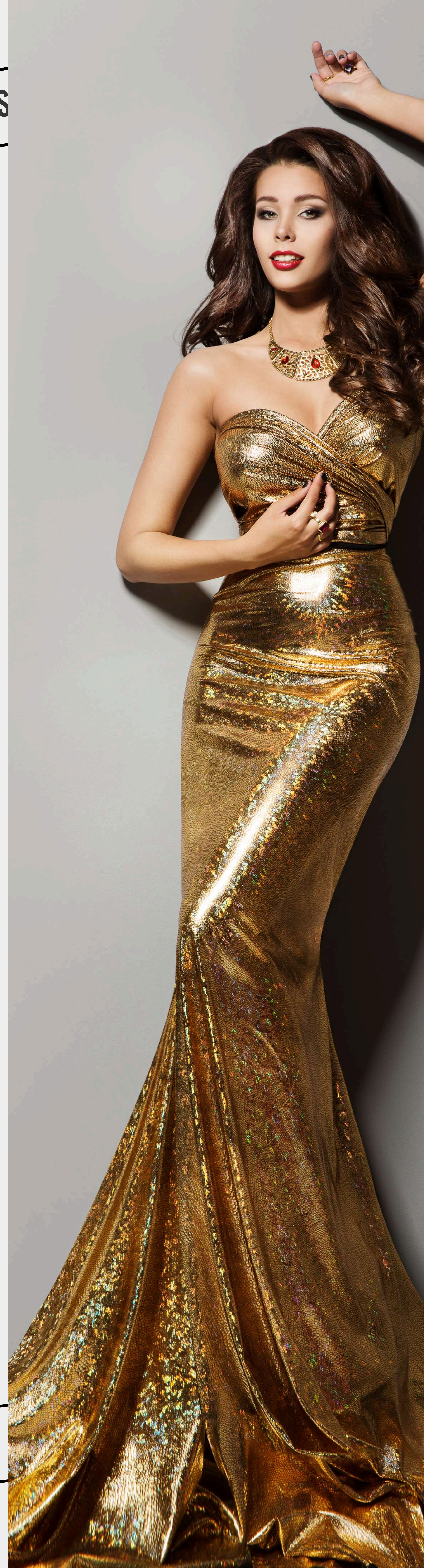
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6. THE BIG 2026 TRUTH: YOU CAN'T AUTOMATE TRUST

AI can generate content, but it can't generate credibility, community or emotional connection. Brands that win will be human, surprising and culturally present. Trust is everything in a complex, unequal market. Audiences reward brands that show up consistently and authentically.

What this means for SA brands:

- Invest in human voices: creators, employees, communities.
- Prioritise connection over scale.
- Build brands people feel, not just recognise.



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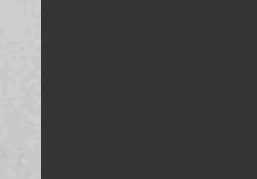
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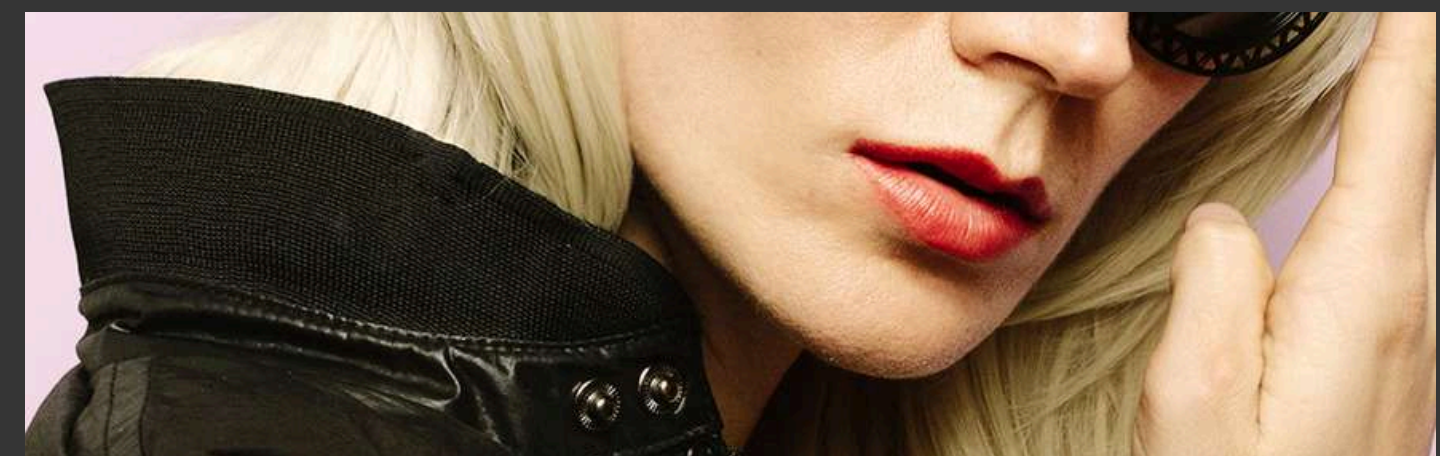
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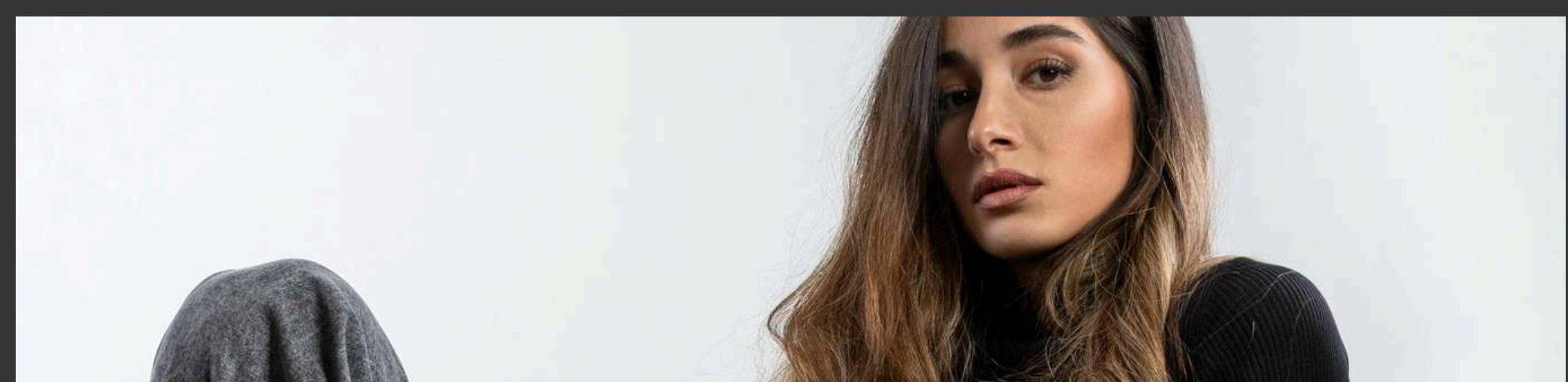
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WE LOOKING



FORWARD

TO 2026



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