

5 AFRICAN TRENDS FOR 2018

2018 is here. Are you ready?

Below, you'll find 5 African trends that need to be on the radar of every switched-on business professional in 2018. Let's dive in:

1. AFRICAN MAGIC

Why in 2018, exceptional African brands and talent will be the best in class.

2. CITIZEN WOKE

Why global brands must strive to decolonize consumerism in 2018.

3. GREEN ARMY

In 2018, the pendulum of sustainability will swing between the preventative and restorative.

4. MANIFEST EMPATHY

In Africa, the future of human brands is empathetic brands.

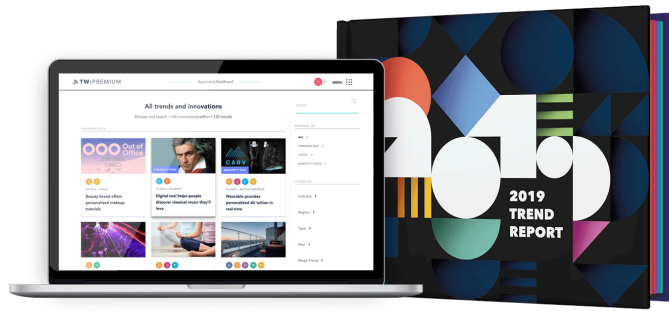
5. SMART MARKET

Smart technology reaches its tipping point across the continent in 2018.

You're about to discover a selection of innovations that are (re)defining the expectations of African consumers. These innovations - and the 5 big consumer trends they represent - offer you insights into what Africans on the continent and in the diaspora will want next.

We hope these trends inspire and empower you. Understanding them is the key to staying ahead of customer expectations *and* your competitors.

So, read, think, discuss. Then start DOING.



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1. AFRICAN MAGIC

Why in 2018, exceptional African brands and talent will be the best in class

2017 saw 2.6% growth, up from 2016's 1.3% - a modest recovery for sub-Saharan Africa (World Bank, October 2017). Yet as political and economic woes continue to grip African nations, equally major milestones were achieved, signifying a new era for citizens across the continent.

Kenya's groundbreaking presidential election saw Raila Odinga, the incumbent's main opposition leader, successfully challenge the fairness of the election process. He was able to encourage the vast majority of Kenyan voters, 80% of who had previously turned out to vote in the initial poll, to shun and boycott the 'illegitimate' rerun, which eventually resulted in only 34% of the population voting.

It's clear that the stubborn relics of Africa's post-colonial struggles are finally crumbling, in ways that clichéd narratives and labels such as 'Africa Rising' or 'emerging markets' could never quite capture. Yet unlike in the past, where foreign interventions were common, today, Africa is liberating herself, the African way. The coup-not-coup ending Robert Mugabe's 37-year reign in Zimbabwe, or Angola's transition from the entrenched Dos Santos family, are examples of this too.

Despite the tumultuous nature of these transitions, revolutionary times mean that many Africans no longer want products and services that channel the spirit of their colonial forefathers. Instead, they're aspiring to a new African standard, that sets superior benchmarks and positively brands Africa on the global stage. In turn, jaded consumers in the West are now looking towards previously ignored markets, like Africa for quirky innovations, fresh inspiration, and novel inventions.

'Africa is the next logical flashpoint for this inspiration. It is arguably the main remaining world food culture left to be adopted, adapted and commercialized' (Bompas & Parr's *Imminent Future of Food*, December 2017)

So whether launching offerings for the domestic market that are unheard of elsewhere or making waves creatively in international markets, in 2018, AFRICAN MAGIC will fight against global mundanity, competing with and beating the established Western incumbents at their own game.

Examples



LESOTHO – The Government of Lesotho became the first in Africa to grant a license to legally grow, manufacture and export medical marijuana in October 2017. Despite African governments' typically conservative values and

THE SERPENTINE GALLERIES – The Serpentine Galleries in London appointed Burkina Faso's Francis Kéré to design its annual temporary park pavilion in July 2017. The tree in the architect's home village, which functioned as a

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fears about recreational drug use, Lesotho granted the license to South African company Verve Dynamics. The firm's initiative will employ local citizens and establish a profit-sharing deal with Lesotho communities. The bulk of the medical marijuana cultivated will be exported to North America and Europe.

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If you're a brand, creative or entrepreneur from Africa, it's your time to shine. Deliver high quality, well-designed products that are the best of the best and the world is your oyster. Like Africa's first ever female bobsled team, hailing from Nigeria and recently qualifying for the winter Olympics, don't limit yourself to 'traditional' industries.

Equally, remember that you needn't focus your offering on expansion in the West. Like Ethiopian airlines allowing travelers to process visas through their platform, consider AFRICAN MAGIC strategies that pull people from the rest of the world to your country!

Of course, for Western brands and entrepreneurs, partnership with AFRICAN MAGIC is essential. And even if you do decide to go solo, take a look at the CITIZEN WOKE trend for tips on how to remain culturally relevant and competitive.

2. CITIZEN WOKE

Why global brands must strive to decolonize consumerism in 2018.

Whether African, African-American, hailing from the diaspora, an immigrant, a person of color (POC), a 'global citizen' or Black and Ethnic Minority (BAME),

activism surrounding racial politics has been one of the hottest topics of 2017. Moreover, citizens' hyper-awareness concerning cultural appropriation has paved the way for a highly sensitized and yet more polarized consumer landscape across the globe. Increasingly celebrities, political figureheads and the general public are no longer willing to accept lazy, ignorant or backwards misrepresentations of race or culture.

A few examples of recent backlashes stemming from misguided branding and marketing:

Between October and November 2017, Kenyan actress [Lupita Nyong'o](#) and African-American singer [Solange Knowles](#) – cover stars for Grazia magazine and The Evening Standard respectively – challenged both UK publications for photoshopping out parts of their hair.

And in October 2017, a [Chinese museum was accused of racism](#) after putting on an exhibition comparing Africans to wild animals.

A Brazilian toilet paper manufacturer came under fire and [was forced to apologize](#) after using black empowerment slogan 'Black is Beautiful' to market the brand's new luxurious black toilet paper.

In January 2018, a photo on H&M's website of a black boy wearing a green hoodie with the inscription 'coolest monkey in the jungle' triggered global outrage. In South Africa, the Economic Freedom Fighters (a radical group set up by the expelled head of the youth wing of the ruling African National Congress) [organized protests at several H&M outlets in and around Johannesburg](#).

Grievances involving the slower pace of progress on racial inclusion / enlightenment in comparison to other movements such as gender politics or LGBTQ rights has prompted Africans and other POC living outside of the continent to join forces and fight together. Whilst some Africans empathize with those facing racial discrimination overseas, many others are also looking inwards at the prevailing injustices occurring on their own shores – especially those that continue the legacies of colonization and the apartheid. In addition to this, the discrimination and further ostracizing of African immigrants abroad has forced many to dig deeper into their own cultures, find their roots and enthusiastically celebrate what it means to be black or African.

Beyond the negativity, a recent surge of positive African representation on the global stage has also catalyzed many to rediscover their culture and proudly celebrate their AFRICAN MAGIC. Today's African role models, such as Nigeria's prized author Chimamanda Ngozie Adichie or South African fashion designer Laduma Ngxokolo, insist on not only being exceptional in their craft but also unapologetically African. This is instigating a stronger sense of African pride that resonates with consumers throughout the globe.

One example of that? In October 2017, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie unveiled [My Fashion Nationalism](#): a project where she committed to only wearing fashion created by Nigerian designers to public events and occasions, with the aim of raising the profile of the industry.

In 2018 and beyond, savvy brands will respond to the cries for less globally homogenized product offerings and more regionally relevant experiences and campaigns. Brands that appeal to CITIZEN WOKE will be

respectful, acknowledge African heritage and celebrate the cultural nuances of the markets being served and ultimately decolonize consumption.

Examples



JAMESON – In October 2017, Irish whiskey brand Jameson celebrated Nigeria's Independence Day with Jameson connects Nigeria. The free event celebrated Nigerian history and culture with traditional food and palm wine cocktails, and was held at The Old Running Shed, which houses Lagos' oldest train relics.

DHL – A partnership facilitating the sale of African products to customers in the United States was announced in October 2017. US express services provider DHL will provide drop-off points for products in the US, while global e-commerce company MallforAfrica's eBay platform will promote African arts, designs, and crafts. The initiative offers businesses in Africa an opportunity to sell locally manufactured products directly on eBay.

BBC WORLD – BBC World Service launched a new English-based news, current affairs, and health and wellness program presence in Africa.

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Play it safe! Rather than taking an activist hardline approach, consider strategies that enable your brand to subtly take a stand by celebrating or highlighting African aesthetics, craft, culture or heritage. What nuanced quirks or forgotten traditions can you embed in your global offerings, in a fun and playful manner?

Remember that as a global brand, you don't want to perpetuate the negative effects of colonization. So rather than enforce your idea of how certain cultures *should* be represented, make sure that your strategies employ local expertise, whether through partnership or crowdsourced platforms. Getting your end product or message culturally accurate is a must!

3. GREEN ARMY

In 2018, the pendulum of sustainability will swing between the *preventative* and the *restorative*.

As the continent attempts to learn from the mistakes of the West and reverse the damage done by pollution and careless consumption, green has become the new black. However, like the other trends, Africans today are seeking quintessentially African solutions to their challenges. The sustainability sector is no different.

African consumers, with a renewed appreciation for their culture, communities and environments, are eager to consume more ethically and consciously. And yet, apart from the well-travelled, wealthier inhabitants living in the ex-pat bubbles of built-up metropolises, the majority of African cities do not have the infrastructure to create the eco-friendly processes that ensure cleaner, greener environments.

Suffice to say the GREEN ARMY race is on, especially for governments and even entire nations, who have set grandiose goals in the hope that large-scale strategies will tackle the problem. Consider that **Cape Verde has pledged to run on 100% renewable energy by 2025**.

2018 will give rise to two key strategies in the fight to win the war against eco-negligence in Africa:

Eco-prevention Prohibitive and preventative measures will be taken by institutions and governmental bodies to ensure that African consumers will be fined or punished for bad behavior (littering or poaching wildlife, for example). Additionally, entrepreneurs and startups will create new technologies that pre-empt, monitor or catch those doing wrong.

Eco-restoration Many brands and initiatives in Africa will find novel ways to salvage a situation where environmental damage is already done and possibly reversible. Whether via upcycling, recycling, reclaiming or making the best of a bad situation, this approach will be familiar to the many Africans who have already adopting these strategies in their daily lives.

Examples

KENYAN GOVERNMENT – In August 2017, Kenya's government completely banned plastic bags. Punishment for carrying, manufacturing or importing plastic bags has a fine of around USD 19,000 up to 38,000, plus jail terms of four years. Liners for trash bins and bags for disposal of chemical or medical waste are exempt from the ban, with retailers introducing paper or fiber bags, or cardboard cartons or boxes. Plastic bags can be dropped off at local grocery stores, to be disposed of.

UPFUSE – UpFuse creates accessories - tote bags, camera straps, wallets and laptop cases - made of upcycled plastic bags. The Egypt-based company employs locals to sort through trash in Cairo and create the merchandise; 30% of each tote bag, for instance, is constructed from plastic bags. UpFuse won the WeMena competition, for female entrepreneurs in North Africa and the Middle East, in April 2017. In September 2017, the company upcycled 50,000 plastic bags.

FOREST WATCH – Forest Watch helps forest guards connect to local communities through G

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In many cases, the success of whichever strategy is applied will depend on how well you can collaborate with those affected by the negative impact, as well as those who will benefit from the positive results of a more sustainable, cleaner and greener environment.

Of course, some measure of sensitivity will equally need to be exercised towards the treatment and circumstances of the culprits, if you choose to go down the hard route. There's nothing worse than solving a detrimental environmental issue but then creating a new detrimental social issue.

4. MANIFEST EMPATHY

Because in Africa, the future of human brands is empathetic brands.

In 2017's **UNDERDOGS RISING** trend, we highlighted brands that were boldly championing taboos in African communities. The story now? In an era of trolling, extreme rhetoric and political polemics, brands are finding less antagonistic ways to pacify and service a more diversified demography of Africans who would normally not be catered to.

'Whilst still in power, UK Prime Minister, David Cameron, warned African countries that they risked aid cuts if they failed to respect gay rights. Ghana's president at the time, the late John Evans Atta Mills, rejected the threat stating that the UK could not impose its values on Ghana.' (**Africa Briefing**, November 2017)

African culture has long been labeled as harsh, inflexible and generally conservative. Yet a number of these 'African' stances can be traced back to the socio-cultural teachings and laws formed during colonization. And despite its decline in the West, religious fervor remains another post-colonial remnant that continues to grow throughout the continent.

In 1950, approximately 80% of the world's Christians were in Western countries. It's predicted that by 2025, **at least 50% will hail from Africa, Latin America and regions in Asia.**

A new wave of outward-looking Africans (who might be more religious than their global counterparts but equally expect their fellow citizens to move with the times and be honest about the complexities of certain social-cultural conundrums) are becoming more liberal, the African way. This may not translate to total acceptance of previously shunned upon pastimes, occupations that stray from the 'straight and narrow', or traditional hierarchies of respect - but this also doesn't mean that citizens are not wanting to exercise greater empathy towards such issues either.

So in 2018, Africans will be opening up to brands that can MANIFEST EMPATHY by tactfully catering to those who choose to (or are forced to circumstantially) walk alternative, less 'respected' paths, without rocking the boat.

Examples

CYM VAN DYKE CLINIC – July 2017 saw the Cym Van Dyke sexual health clinic open in South Africa. At the center, visitors will be offered tests for STDs, pregnancy and Tuberculosis, and can access drug counseling, cervical cancer screenings, condoms and legal services. The clinic's aim is to help sex workers who are often stigmatized in the country, but services are also available to members of the general public. The Cym Van Dyke clinic plans to open mobile clinics to reach those in rural areas.

MERMAID – MerMaid is an on-demand platform that connects homeowners in Egypt with local cleaners and domestic workers. The company acts as an intermediary between owners and workers; its aim is also to eliminate abuse of domestic workers, and employ refugees and migrants. The online platform is location-based and was selected to participate in July 2017's Tech Open Air conference in Berlin.

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This trend is all about finding the most empathetic way to meet the needs of those who may not be privy to certain products, services or interactions due to their social status, personal preferences or economic stature. Identify which customers are missing out on your services or lacking mainstream attention, then find a suitable, culturally appropriate method in which to reach them.

Remember that even if you have a very 'progressive' stance on a particular issue, insisting on implementing this, in full force, through your product offering, without understanding the nature of the community you're also intending to serve, can result in an undesirable business outcome. The key here is empathy for *both* sides.

5. SMART MARKET

Smart technology reaches its tipping point across the continent in 2018.

AR, VR, IOT, Big Data, 3D printing... the list goes on. In short, as the rest of the world tinkers with breakthrough solutions that will push humanity into a new phase of innovation and technological advancement, Africa represents a region where smart technology game is yet to truly take flight.

The lives of many Africans remain untouched by intelligent, automated infrastructure. Rather, Jugaad innovation, bottom of the pyramid tech, no-frills and feature-based solutions have worked indisputably across the continent, as they take into account the infrastructural constraints and other obstacles affecting the everyday lives of consumers.

However driven by increased smartphone adoption, falling internet costs, a growing entrepreneurial scene, a surge in startup funding and groundbreaking investments in the tech ecosystem, many are hedging their bets on the time being now, for the continent to finally leapfrog into smarter technological solutions. The exponential growth of tech incubators cropping up, coding training programs and the likes, shows no sign of slowing down.

Some examples of that?

In October 2017, **Somalia opened its first innovation hub**, iRise Hub, in Mogadishu to foster the growth of startups in the country.

The same month, **Facebook pledged to train 50,000 Nigerians** in digital skills and sponsored the first-ever TechCrunch Startup Battlefield in Kenya, bringing together startups, developers, influencers and community leaders.

Meltwater Entrepreneurial School of Technology (MEST) opened its first pan-African incubator (outside of Ghana) in Lagos in November 2017.

In November 2017, Google CEO, Sundar Pichai announced that the company's **first-ever launchpad space outside of the US would open in Africa**.

This race to turn the continent into a SMART MARKET is resulting in a democratization of technology that will serve tomorrow's African consumers' emerging expectations, compared to the no-frills offerings of years gone by.

So be ready for 2018, where a rising numbers of Africans will expect brands to use more forward-looking technologies to put truly smart products and services into their pockets, homes, inboxes, and more. In turn, these solutions will only become more ubiquitous, universal, and impossible to live without.

Examples

THE INTERNET OF LIFE – The horns of black rhinos (classified as a critically-endangered species) were equipped with internet-connected sensors in September 2017. Installed by animal protection group The Internet of Life, the sensors enable rangers at Tanzania's Mkomazi National Park to track black rhinos' whereabouts and prevent poaching. The sensors use LoRaWAN technology to connect with rangers' computers (and other devices) over long distances. The Internet of Life's initiative is part of its Smart Park program to protect wildlife in Africa through technology.

SMART STICK – In October 2017, final year students at a Malawi university created a sensory walking stick for the blind. Using readily available and affordable cell batteries, the device senses moisture, distance and light and sends audio directions to the user. Effective even at night, the Smart Stick is yet to be made commercially available.

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Yes, this is all about fostering, investing in, inventing and innovating within the continent's less patronizing tech scene – and utilizing contemporary tech tools is at the heart of this trend. However, remember that even if the tech itself changes, your customers still face the same old issues. It's imperative that all innovations keep in mind the core needs of African consumers.

THE BIGGER PICTURE

The 5 trends featured here are important, but they represent just a small fraction of the consumer landscape.

Clients of our **Premium Service** have an instant global Trend Department at their fingertips. They have access to our entire Trend Framework, built around the 16 mega-trends that define modern consumerism. Beneath these sit 120+ actionable trends (the trends featured here, along with a host of others we continue to track), all illustrated with 15,000+ hand-curated, best practice innovations. If you're serious about trends, it's a no-brainer.

OVER TO YOU

As always, we wrap up these annual Trend Briefings with a call to action...

While it's our job just to watch trends, ambitious business professionals should read this Briefing with only one thing in mind: how to apply these trends to create compelling new innovations that will delight your customers (and win new ones!).








In February 2018, we're hosting a **Trend Seminar in Cape Town**, where participants learn more about – and work with – 2018's biggest trends.

Otherwise, what are you waiting for? Time to make 2018 your best year yet!

**Cheers! Proost! Furaha! Salud! Skål! O Dun! Santé! Prost! Şerefe!
Farxad! Saúde! Chok dee!**

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