

Digital culture plugs - The new frontier in urban youth marketing

 By [Bonga Mpungose Smanga](#)

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The first time I ever heard the term '*culture plugs*' was at a boardroom getting briefed by an alcohol and soft beverages group and I must say the term had a nice ring to it. A 'plug' in urban colloquial terms refers to an individual normally viewed as a 'connector' because they may have access to information or something of value that is able to benefit you.



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South African urban youth culture is a very complex space to navigate and without the right credible 'plugs' on the ground to introduce you or expose you to information about this culture and what is deemed valuable by urban centennials has become a very tough job for brands particularly in infiltrating this space and create relevance for themselves. In a culture of fake news spreading daily on the internet credibility has never been more important for centennials in 2020 and therefore what they subscribe to are what they deem as plausible sources.

Urban 'cool' culture

Urban 'cool' culture is essentially built on the idea of one's progressiveness in 'taste' and how unique it is. Everyone has a different taste and centennials strive for this sense of individuality and not necessarily follow or subscribe to what everyone else subscribes to. This could be taste in music, taste in fashion or taste in art or just spaces they frequent for entertainment.

There is a new wave of South African digital publishers who aren't necessarily looking for millions of eyeballs on their content but rather identify a niche group of centennials and afro-millennials who are seeking for the kind of content they publish. This essentially makes this group of publishers tastemakers and the experts in their field because they are providing their audiences that particular content at it's highest quality.

These 'culture plugs' have taken the responsibility to understand urban youth culture and ensure that they are constantly at least a step or two ahead in introducing their subscribers or rather 'putting them onto' new trends. The 'put on' is on the latest music, fashion and art or any particular niche interest the publication specialises in.

The platforms are regarded as the most progressive in the space in that they aren't just digital publishers but digital agencies trying to help clients better communicate to the varied audiences, mostly youth on their platforms with different interests. The platforms have credibility and a captured audience because each has a unique content offering tailored for a specific niche group within the broader youth audience spectrum.

Youth digital marketing

Digital publishers are re-working their positioning and service offering giving clients a one-stop-shop which essentially will save the client money. These aren't just platforms but content creators with the capabilities to offer content in any format. This is giving digital publishers the upper hand because they aren't just offering services clients will normally get from their creative and digital agency but also a captured audience the client may be interested in.

Youth digital marketing is more than just sponsoring posts on social media and directing the content to the targeted audience or programmatic display banners. It goes far beyond getting influencers to get a hashtag to trend on Twitter and it's never been more important now more than ever for marketing managers to understand this more specifically for teams that look after digital. This applies for brands in Telecoms, Clothing, Alcohol and Soft Beverages, Banking, Fast Food and any other sector with an interest in investing in and growing their youth consumer data-base.

The value proposition offered by digital publishers has become more than just an audience but an understanding of the audience and how to best engage them. Data and insights about these audiences has become extremely valuable for clients. Digital publishers with this approach and thinking are able to present a more compelling value proposition.

I've identified 3 of the most influential 'culture plugs' in 2020 which brands cannot afford to exclude on their youth briefs whether it's developing youth comms strategies, leveraging their captured audiences or just gathering insights for research purposes, these are at the forefront of culture and hottest players in the streets right now!

1. Zkhiphani

The [Zkhiphani platform](#) celebrates 11 years of existence this year and has evolved from just being a gig guide to an industry-recognised credible player in the South African urban youth space. It has stood the test of time and remains at the forefront of culture and reliable 'culture plug' introducing its readers and consumers to the hottest in fashion, music and the arts as it's content pillars. The platform's most notable work is the Budweiser King of the Decks Campaign.

2. Slikour On Life

[Slikour On Life](#) celebrates seven years of existence and has quickly become a leader and most dominant platforms in South African Hip Hop Music as their primary content pillar. The publication also has its own shows which at the start of 2020 are now being syndicated to Channel O. The platform's most notable work includes work done on the Castle Lite Unlocks brand activations annual campaign.

3. Bubblegum Club

[Bubblegum Club](#) celebrates 5 years, the platform was started with the purpose of being a cultural intelligence agency with an aim to provide analysis to help corporate clients interpret and connect with South African youth culture. This platform has become an indispensable source of information on some of the most innovative young artists and performers in South Africa while being increasingly recognised by international creators as a key site for them to reach a discerning audience. Some of the platform's most notable work includes work done on Adidas Originals campaigns.

ABOUT BONGA MPUNGOSE SMANGA

Bonga Mpungose is the co-founder and New Business Director of FRESH AF a business to business and business to consumer branded content and content marketing specialist. The business has over 11 years of experience in the field with clients that range from SOEs to blue-chip private sector businesses. Fresh AF is also the publisher of Zkhiphani, SA Creatives and Mqosi it's own in house publications serving over a million-plus page-views and impressions across it's network on a monthly basis.

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