

Charmagne Mavudzi of Volvo Car South Africa



By Imran Salie

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Charmagne Mavudzi is a force to be reckoned with. As a student, she launched an industry-first mobile beauty app platform that was honoured on *Dragon's Den*. As a professional, she held managerial roles at Handel and Accenture. Currently, she heads up the Volvo Car South Africa (VCSA) brand, an admirable feat. Mavudzi's official title is head of consumer experience, which is essentially a hybrid marketing role.



Charmagne Mavudzi

Here, Mavudzi uncovers what it's like being in charge of such a prominent luxury car brand, recent campaigns she has worked on, the challenges faced by VCSA during last year's lockdown, and plans for sustainability.

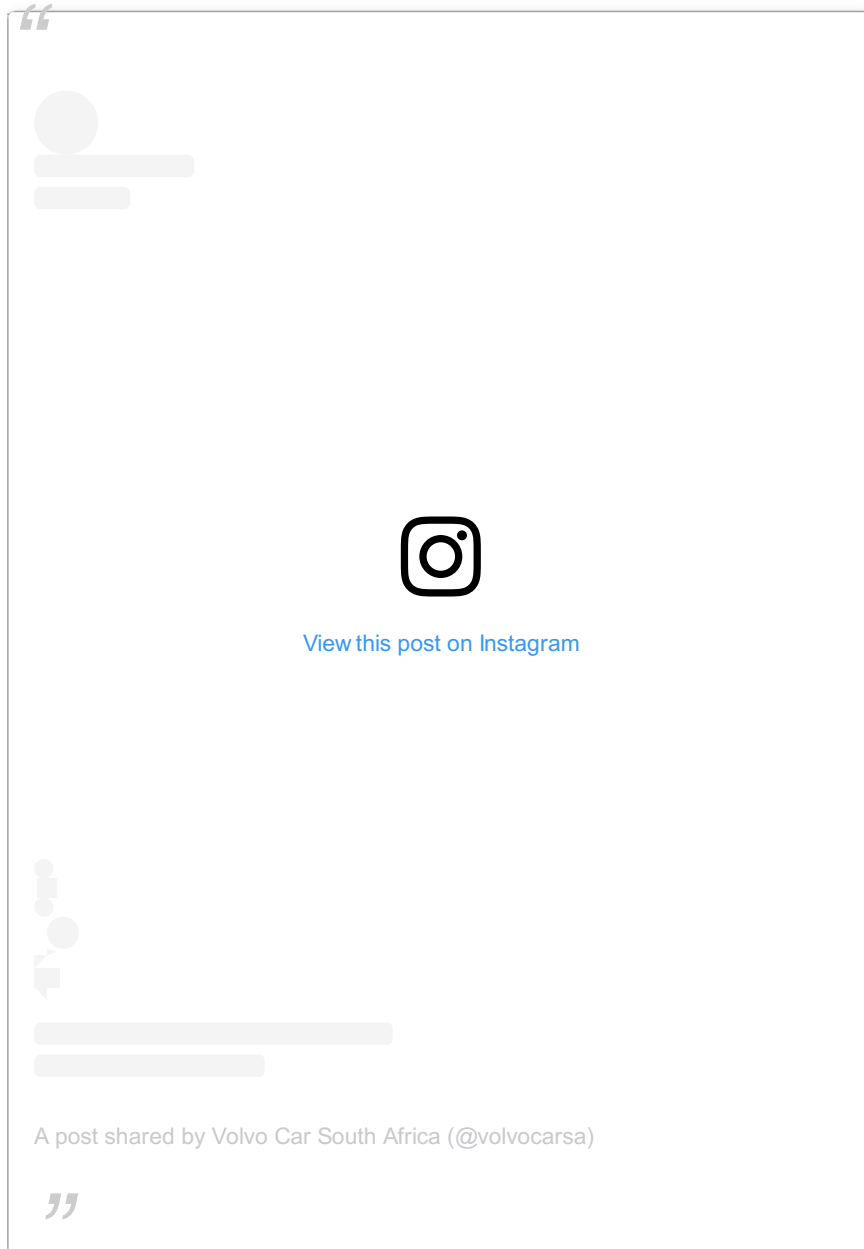
■ Can you share with our readers your recent brand campaigns and the rationales behind them?

I recently worked on a campaign called Hidden Gems, which performed well. I am particularly proud of this campaign. VCSA partnered with South African fashion designer Rich Mnisi to customise a Volvo XC40. The campaign was created with two objectives:

1. Support the larger global Volvo initiative that sought to celebrate the reopening of the world, and encourage people to revisit their places of inspiration, their #HiddenGem during the Covid pandemic.

2. Secure brand engagement on social media and in the press in order to reposition Volvo locally as a highly desirable luxury product.

The Volvo brand benefits from being synonymous with safety. However, it suffers from the negative perception of being a car brand that is suited for old people. It ranked particularly poorly in this regard in the minds of the affluent Black African demographic, which is one of the target groups we are actively focusing on as part of our growth strategy.



A post shared by Volvo Car South Africa (@volvocarsa)

This national campaign utilised social media and online press as the main channel of communication to change this perception. The overall goal was to utilise the global #HiddenGem campaign to improve brand perceptions in South Africa and position Volvo as a highly desirable luxury car. This was measured by positive engagement by our target market - young, Black South Africans - on Instagram and in increased potential audience reach via the online press.

📌 **Tell us more about your role and what it entails exactly.**

As head of CX and marketing communications for VCSA, I wear quite a few hats. In a single day, I can go from brand planning to communications meetings to consumer journey planning.

In a nutshell, my role is to look after the customer from acquisition right through to retention, not an easy task but certainly an exciting one.

I work very closely with our global team to ensure our marketing and communications efforts are on-brand and aligned to the overall global strategy whilst still localising in a manner that is relevant and relatable. And at a local level, I work with creative and media agencies, dealer marketing teams and various stakeholders to ensure the implementation of all plans is done so effectively and to drive results.

■ ***Tell us about your career: what you studied and why, and how you ended up where you are today.***

I studied a Bachelor of Commerce in marketing and business. I've grown to be a strong believer in the power of education. I chose to do my master's degree at an early age whilst I still had more time and completed it at the Gordons Institute of Business.

This year, I decided to further my studies. I'm currently doing an executive post-graduate diploma in digital transformation. This purely was driven by how the world is changing and how digital is now a key driver for anything we do business-related. Because I'm curious and I've grown to enjoy learning it was the natural next step for me in terms of my studies and I doubt it will stop there.

■ ***How has the pandemic and subsequent national lockdowns affected your work and the brand you oversee?***

It's safe to say the national lockdown was tough on everyone. The automotive industry was hit quite hard as there were serious restrictions on mobility. The subsequent effect was not only on vehicle sales but also the service business. Consumer-spend dropped significantly and we saw consumer needs changing. As a brand, we had to adapt quickly or suffer the consequences.

“ While our results were impacted by the coronavirus pandemic, we expect our business to recover in the second half of the year [#VolvoCarsResults](https://t.co/Q3RDB8Rm9M) [pic.twitter.com/cU4b9cL6S7](https://t.co/cU4b9cL6S7)— Volvo Cars (@volvocars) [July 21, 2020](#) ”

We started looking at how we can reach consumers differently and do business differently, for example: offering competitive pricing and payment terms, shifting focus to driving used cars more and looking at new sales channels such as online sales. We also made sure as a brand we remained empathetic when it mattered most. We are lucky to have survived a tough period and even better, we are performing very well looking at the first quarter of 2021.

■ ***Comment on the power of branded content as a form of advertising.***

Research shows us that a higher percentage of customers are more likely to buy from a brand that creates custom content. It creates a level of authenticity and allows for less of a product push. In today's world, customers are inundated with options, branded content allows you as a brand to not only stand out but to have your own voice that allows customers to relate to you. It's a very effective way of bringing heart and emotion to a company.

■ ***What professional development, musical, cultural, literary or leisure activities do you engage in?***

I've had the privilege of being on a few panels in the industry which I thoroughly enjoy. The idea of being able to share knowledge, learn from others and have interesting discussions around consumers and the advertising industry is something I'm passionate about.

In my spare time, I enjoy visiting art galleries, markets and generally finding hidden gems that show off people's creativity and provide unconventional networking and social spaces.

■ ***Consumers are increasingly favouring green and sustainable brands; do you have any plans or purpose to increase sustainability in the next 12 months?***

Sustainability is one of the core pillars of Volvo Cars. We are known for making cars that are safe, however, we also aspire to make cars that are safe for the environment the people who buy our cars.

Beyond the move to electric cars, we encourage our dealers to practice sustainable practices through reduced use of single used plastics in the dealerships and value chain.

We also recycle at the office; you could call our team sport. All of these might be small steps, but we believe its small steps combined that can make a big difference.

Keep an eye out – we are working on some exciting campaigns that will focus on creating necessary dialogue around sustainability in South Africa.

■ ***What do you enjoy most about working in this space?***

The opportunities to create amazing work is endless. Automotive is an evolving industry with lots of room for fresh young talent. Over the next few years, I have no doubt we will see more and more of the younger generation coming into this space across different roles and at different levels. I always believe when making career choices, go into an environment that will allow you to make a meaningful contribution.

■ ***What advice would you give to aspiring marketing and brand professionals?***

Your youth and your knowledge are your superpowers, so use them unapologetically. Brands are actively looking for upcoming talent who have a view and who own their voice to bring meaningful insights and contributions into the boardroom.

Believe in yourself in the pursuit of your passions and seek to always add value. People can forget people, but they never forget the difference they made.

ABOUT IMRAN SALIE

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