

Brand Bonang: From influencer to influential

By [Solani Hlayisi](#) and [Babalwa Nyembezi](#)

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One word that comes to mind when we think Bonang Matheba is Ghetto Fabulous! Now hear us out. When we say Ghetto Fabulous, we don't mean it in the stereotypical sense where individuals are living a life of affluent materialistic style while not always having luxurious possessions or wealth. We mean the double consciousness that comes with being an authentically black South African woman, who on one hand is the country's biggest media personality, globetrotter, and businesswoman with her own bubbly brand. On the other hand, Bonang is a reality TV star who has cemented herself in colloquial and meme culture thanks to her relatable and funny catch phrases. Bonang is on the cusp of global domination and is doing so authentically with a glass of champagne in one hand and a Savanna Dry in the other. This is Ghetto Fabulous Dahling!



Screengrab from [A Very Bonang Year](#) trailer.

Bonang has all the qualities that make for a successful personal brand. She is unique, cohesive, clear, consistent and aims to serve a well-defined audience. This is what we believe has cemented Brand Bonang in South African pop culture and the reason why her star quality resonates with millions of young girls, women and femmes around the country.

What makes her unique?

Bonang is unique in that she's not just social media famous. There's depth to her career and so much more than posts for her fanbase to double-tap. She started her career as a TV presenter who always had her finger on the pulse of pop culture, a noticeable style and some of the most unforgettable links we've ever seen on live television. Her unique, deep and sultry voice was cut through so much so, many TV personalities have mimicked it over the years. Her career and success do not come overnight. She is a local icon on the verge of global domination who has put in the necessary groundwork.

Early on in her career she partnered with the likes of LEGiT and Brutal Fruit, brands that had great appeal for her core target consumers – hopeful young girls who loved to see someone like them on their TV screens. This was a sweet spot as South Africa positions itself as a country that is alive with possibilities. Any person who epitomizes this notion is able to win the hearts of many South Africans.



Bonang Matheba named African Influencer of the Year at 2019 E! People's Choice Awards

31 Oct 2019



The type of brand collaborations she took on grew along with her career. The more refined she became, the more sophisticated her partnerships became. An example of this is her Distraction Lingerie collaboration that was established back in 2014 with Woolworths. This however never came at the expense of her relationship with her core market. Bonang always ensured that she was on a platform with scalable reach. When she went off TV, after a long run on *Live and Top Billing*, she signed onto Metro FM – the biggest urban radio station in the country that came with an impressive 6.5 million listeners.

Big question: Is there always strategy behind her moves?

Bonang employs vital strategies to build her brand, some strategies have been intentional, and others have come from once-off hot-in-culture moments. Remember the Moghel T-shirt collaboration with Spree? How the term “champagne dahling!”, moved from her lips to a social media hashtag, #GirlsWithVineyards to launching House of BNG? Her agility and adaptability keep her top of mind and grows our insatiable obsession with her.

Being in the spotlight, Bonang has had her fair share of controversy. The premature release of her autobiography is one of such notable misalignments. Bonang still has a lot to give to her followers and releasing a life story while still at the peak of her career was not necessarily a good move. To top it all off, the book was marred with spelling mistakes, grammatical errors and inconsistent timelines. The other notable brand misalignment was her very public relationship with renowned ill-tempered rapper A.K.A and the details surrounding how their relationship came about. This was arguably the most unproductive time in her career.



What is really in the letter "A" that cannot be fixed anyway?

Khangalani Dziba 26 Mar 2019



Nonetheless, after each mistake, Brand Bonang has always emerged in a way that her charm, charisma, and light outweighed the darkness that tried to consume her.

Unlocking the business of influence

Her distinctive character has over the years, enabled her to build a reputation for herself as someone who stands out from other South African celebrities. Her ability to connect with her fans and “give the people what they want” before they even know what they need next from Brand Bonang ensures that she is consistently ahead of the curve. Which other South African celebrity (outside of the hip-hop community) has been interviewed by Charlamagne and his crew on The Breakfast Club in New York?

Each move that she makes to build her brand switches up the narrative and moves her beyond the dazzling glitz of celebrity to establish herself as a business. This, we believe, is what has catapulted Bonang from celebrity to brand status.

Being Bonang: Beyond the ‘Gram

While over the years fans have seen glimpses of Bonang’s personality and her propensity for humour through her work and social media, the launch of Being Bonang gave fans a deep dive into her world. The reality TV show, which ran for 3 seasons, was a game-changer in Bonang’s career. Beyond giving her fans access to her world, the real win of the show was Bonang winning over South Africans with her candid diary reflections in each episode.

Each week that the show was on air, she completely owned the share of conversation on the timeline. In our industry we speak about Share of Voice, through Being Bonang we saw what Share of Culture looks like. Her diary scenes, and various clips from the show were being cut into reaction videos by fans for them to use as memes on the timeline. All that she and her team had to do was to put out the content, and the fans did the rest. Becoming meme-able further entrenched her as someone who is key to the culture.



Bonang Matheba accepts 5 For Changemaker Award at #5ForChange Jozi debut

30 Oct 2018



The result of each venture that she takes on, only leaves her fans wanting more. There’s something to be said about knowing how long a brand campaign should last, and if we look at each Bonang launch as a campaign, she’s been consistent in giving fans just enough before pulling back and moving on to the next thing.

Why A Very Bonang Year is significant AF

This is a brand that has the potential to succeed globally. She’s built up her fanbase and understands who they are. Now it’s time to take Brand Bonang to the world, dahling. Over the last two years, in particular, we’ve seen Bonang start to take up space on different stages around the world. Her big win at The Global Social Awards in Prague, and being snapped on the red carpet with Trevor Noah in New York come to mind.

The launch of her two-part special on SABC 1 comes as the next natural step in her career. When we were discussing this article, we coined this launch as Bonang’s “Homecoming”. This woman who started her career spending Friday nights with us on SABC 1 is now returning to share with South Africans who she is now, and where the journey has taken her.

This is a woman who understands the power of leveraging reach. Through *A Very Bonang Year*, the rest of South Africa is going to be re-introduced to a Bonang who understands her impact. While *Being Bonang* was a huge success, the audience was limited to people who had access to DStv's platforms or access to YouTube. There's something very significant about her committing to create a high-value production that will air on SABC 1, for millions of South Africans to see. Millions of little girls and boys around the country will see Bonang taking on a world they had never imagined themselves in, and start to dream a little bigger.

We often speak about the power of representation, and we're really looking forward to seeing the impact that this two-week special will have. The role of the public broadcaster is to educate through entertainment. This special is going to be a two-hour masterclass on the power of dreams, and what a little girl from Mafikeng with a dream can achieve.

From SABC 1 to the world. We'll be watching, and cheering her on with our glasses of House of BNG champagne and Savanna in hand!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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