

# Operation (RE)BRAND AFRICA

A few weeks ago, I came across an image depicting two men, shaking hands, standing on opposite sides of what used to be a road—a tattered, narrow strip barely recognisable as infrastructure. The caption read, “30 million road construction project completed in (African country).” The irony was stark, but beyond that, it illuminated a much deeper issue: the narratives we choose to accept and perpetuate about Africa, especially as Africans.

As Africans, we bear the responsibility of scrutinising the narratives we consume and share about our continent. In the most digitised era of all time, where recording devices sit at our fingertips, information spreads at an unprecedented rate. This highly digitised world presents both an opportunity and a challenge. On the one hand, it allows us to capture and share authentic African stories; on the other, it makes us susceptible to misinformation, bias, and the perpetuation of stereotypes.

## NARRATIVE IN SHAPING PERCEPTION

In business, it is widely accepted that the owner must be the biggest believer and ambassador of their brand. Likewise, we, as Africans, must be the foremost ambassadors of Africa. Of course, no one denies that there is room for growth and improvement—corruption, governance, and economic instability are real issues.

However, while acknowledging these challenges, we must also participate in the socio-economic discourse shaping policies, laws, and regulations within the continent.

Many of us have assumed a role of mocking – and looking down upon – places (countries within Africa) we have never visited, basing our perceptions solely on media portrayals. Media principles such as agenda setting, framing, priming and gatekeeping play significant roles in shaping public opinion, often favouring negative narratives. These incomplete stories are harmful, reinforcing stereotypes that perpetuate ignorance, bias, and even (self)-hate.

## THE POWER AND RESPONSIBILITY OF STORYTELLING

A recurring discourse throughout history has been the lack of recorded African history. The responsibility now rests upon us to change that. Not only do we have the opportunity to document history, but we can also actively shape it for future generations.

- We must reject harmful narratives outright. Africa is not a monolithic entity; it is a diverse and dynamic continent brimming with innovation, culture, and resilience. The next time we repeat something about an African country, we should pause and ask ourselves:
- *Why do I believe this?*
- *Where did I hear this narrative?*
- *Why do I feel comfortable reiterating this story?*
- *How certain am I about its truth?*

## DID YOU KNOW?

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### MODERN AFRICA & ECONOMY

- **Largest Diamond Producer** – Africa is the world's leading producer of diamonds. Botswana, South Africa, and the Democratic Republic of Congo are major sources (BusinessDay, 2024).
- **Leading in Renewable Energy** – Countries like Morocco, Kenya, and South Africa are investing in solar and wind energy, making Africa a leader in renewable energy (Bloomberg, 2024).
- **Fastest-Growing Cities** – Cities like Lagos (Nigeria), Nairobi (Kenya), and Addis Ababa (Ethiopia) are among the world's fastest-growing urban areas (The Guardian, 2024).
- **African Tech Boom** – The continent is experiencing a tech revolution, with cities like Lagos and Nairobi becoming major hubs for startups and fintech (CNBC Africa, 2023).

Before referring to Africa as “the dark continent” or “the hopeless continent” we must ask ourselves: Who coined that term, and why have we accepted it? The power to reshape our identity is in our hands. Each of us has a role to play in making history and telling a more balanced, truthful, and inspiring story about Africa.

We face a significant challenge, one to take seriously: actively participating in shaping Africa's narrative—not only for the global audience but also for ourselves and future generations. This call to action encompasses everyone. Regardless of your industry or profession, whether you work in fashion, agriculture, health, engineering, finance, or any other field—be it blue-collar or white-collar, content creator or hairstylist, mechanic or culinary expert, STEM professional or influencer, parent, teacher, or self-employed individual—recognise the responsibility that rests upon you to contribute positively, and intentionally, to our narrative.

**Ask yourself: What role will I play toward the rebrand of the African continent?**

### FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION

- Acknowledge that, despite your existing knowledge about Africa, there is always more to learn. The deeper your understanding, the more you come to realise the vastness of what remains unknown.
- Look beyond surface-level interpretations. When encountering trending topics, consider the various perspectives and angles that may exist within that narrative.
- Cultivate relationships that extend beyond your own national borders. Connect with individuals on your digital platforms who reside in countries of interest, and invite them to share their insights and experiences.



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