

Umayr Mohamed of Vans SA inspires youth to stay true to themselves

Known for its strong ties to skateboarding, street culture, and creative self-expression, Vans has firmly embedded itself in South African youth culture.

 By [Evan-Lee Courie](#) 18 Jun 2025



Umayr Mohamed, brand communications manager at Vans South Africa. Image supplied

Over the years, the brand has gained significant traction among youth, creatives, and skaters, and continues to grow its cultural and retail footprint across the country.

This Youth Month, we chat to Umayr Mohamed, brand communications manager at Vans South Africa...

Briefly tell us about yourself and your journey.

I consider myself a brand builder first and foremost. My early career was rooted in a highly competitive, ideas-driven industry made up mostly of small startups operating in a tight, mid-sized market.

I was responsible for developing and executing creative strategies, often with very short turnaround times and immediate results. That environment sharpened my ability to think strategically, move quickly, and stay close to what resonates with people. It laid the foundation for how I approach brand building today; grounded in creativity, relevance, and impact.

What inspired you to get into this industry?

Before joining Vans and stepping into the fashion industry, I reached a point in my career where I wanted my personal interests, especially surfing, to align more closely with my work. What initially drew me in was the work Vans was doing in the surf space, which felt like a natural extension of my lifestyle and passions.

How did you take your first step into the industry, and what did it teach you?

There wasn't one defining moment that led me into the fashion industry. It was more of a natural progression; years of experience building brands gave me the skills to step into the role I'm in today.

One thing that remains constant across any industry as a marketer is understanding your customer and knowing how your brand is perceived. I'm reminded daily that if you're not relatable to your audience, you're missing something essential.

■ ***What has been the most difficult learning curve for you? What has been the biggest lesson you have learnt?***

The biggest learning curve has been balancing brand consistency with local relevance. Global brands come with established identities, but translating that into a culturally resonant, meaningful message in South Africa takes careful thought.

The biggest lesson I've learned is that context is everything; how your brand shows up in people's lives locally is just as important as global alignment.



Urrayr Mohamed, brand communications manager at Vans South Africa. Image supplied

■ ***What advice do you have for other young people looking to enter the industry?***

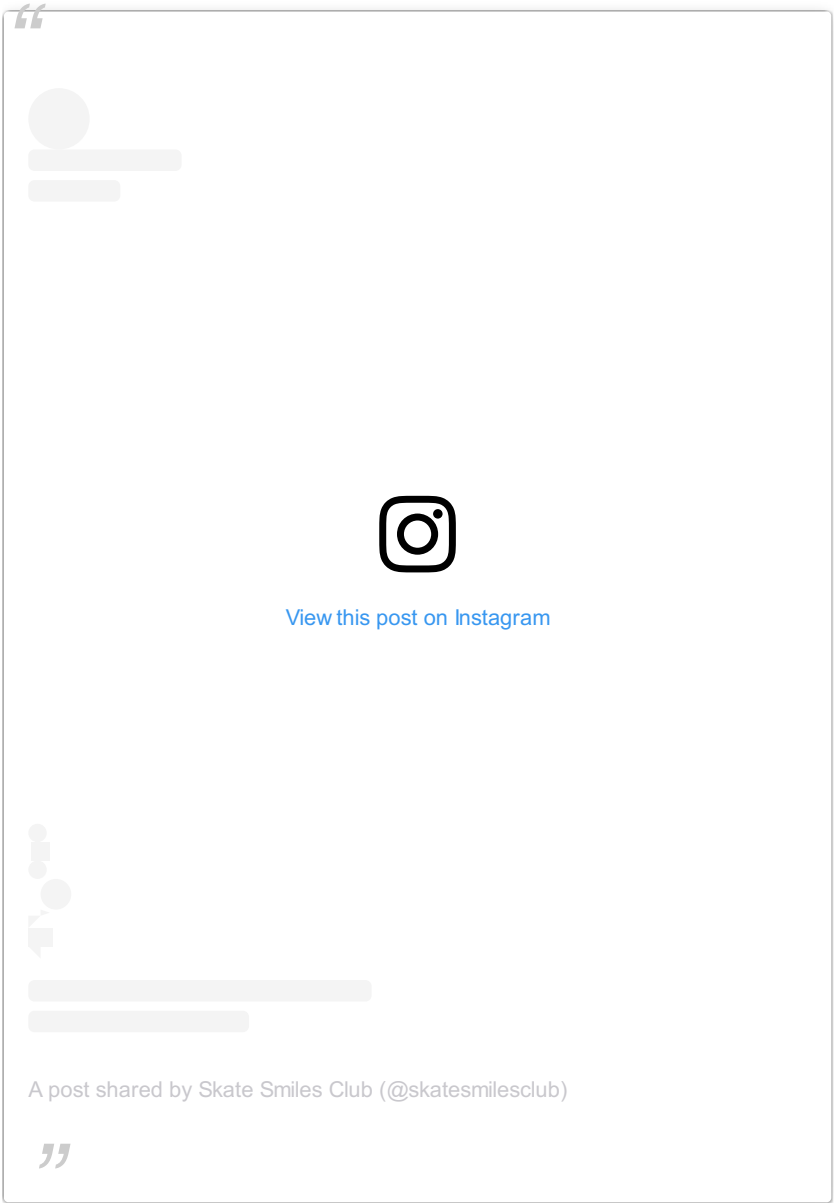
Try to get involved in as many aspects of marketing as possible. The more you understand how the different pieces fit together, from strategy to execution, the better your ideas will be.

Also, don't be afraid to test things. Marketing is about learning, adapting, and staying curious.

■ ***Is Vans committed to youth empowerment? If so, how?***

Youth empowerment is core to Vans' values, especially within the female and the youth skate community. Skateboarding is still largely male-dominated, and we're committed to creating safe, inclusive spaces for young girls to learn and grow.

For example, in Cape Town, we host free monthly skate nights with Skate Smiles Club, where young girls can learn from experienced coaches, some of whom have competed or coached at an Olympic level.



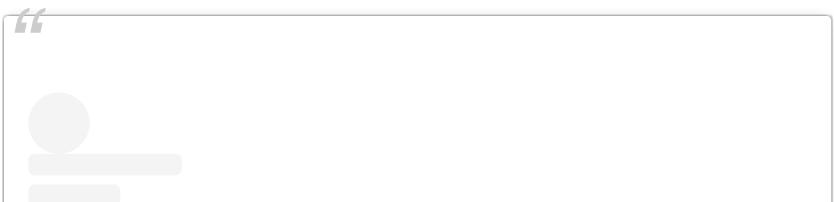
We also work closely with organisations like Skateistan and Sentinel Ocean Alliance, which focus on education, sustainability, and empowerment through skateboarding and ocean-based learning.

▣ *If you had the opportunity to address the nation's youth, what message would you share?*

Stay connected to what inspires you. In a digital age where social status is often seen as a measure of success, it's easy to lose sight of your true self. In my experience, being authentic; whether in your career personal life, leads to more meaningful success and a healthier mindset.

▣ *What does Youth Month mean to you?*

To me, Youth Month is a moment of reflection on what the youth of South Africa are capable of. It's also a reminder that the future of this country quite literally rests in our hands, and that deserves our recognition, support, and investment.





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