

How SA consumer behaviour is changing in the Covid-19 world

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It seems like the script for an apocalyptic movie, but none of us will even be venturing into cinemas - until much later in 2020, at least - as much of the world as we know it is in lockdown. Here's how the #lockdown is affecting brand and consumer behaviour alike within our borders.



While the current three weeks of solitude in South Africa will undoubtedly change the face of business as we know it, it's not all negative. Facebook posts from those who've been in quarantine for the past eight+ weeks say: "I never knew we could hear birdsong in Wuhan." Human desertion has also led to such improvement of air and water quality that swans and dolphins are returning to Venice's canals, and Italians are holding nightly serenades from the safety of their balconies to keep spirits high.

Now, as working from home becomes the new norm in South Africa, cheeps and tail wags from cheerful pets are also popping into global conference calls, giving 'beyond the 9-to-5' personality to our fellow employees and, frankly, making them more human and relatable.

For example, did you know that Sir Isaac Newton is said to have discovered his theories on optics, calculus and gravity while working from home? [The BBC](#) confirms that many of his best ideas came from his work while Cambridge University was closed due to the Bubonic Plague. So, there's hope that brand innovation will bloom as we finetune ideas in isolation, ready to return to the working world.

Of course, brands are also stepping into the fray. Some have entered panic-mode of their own, with empty shelves as a result of consumers' bulk-buy panic, but others have heeded the call to future-proof their marketing strategy by thinking long-term. As restaurants are effectively shuttered until lockdown lifts, some are offering vouchers to redeem once the crisis clouds have settled, and focusing on maintaining a digital presence, at the very least.



Because digital is where it's all happening. To dive deeper into the impact on SA consumers, we've put together a snapshot of South Africa-specific attitudes from Kantar's first Covid-19 Barometer study across 30+ markets* globally.

Our first wave of device-agnostic research took place from 14 to 16 March 2020 – the weekend of President Ramaphosa's 'state of disaster' address – reveals that three-quarters of connected South Africans are concerned about the impact of Covid-19, with 58% already seeing their day-to-day life impacted before lockdown kicked in.

Speaking of impact, 62% of respondents predict a long-term economic impact, with 66% expressing a need to be more proactive in their own personal financial planning. But when it comes to brand expectations, only 2% of SA respondents felt advertising should stop – instead, brands must be more tone-sensitive to ensure their messaging offers security in these testing times.

The new marketing messaging directive for 2020

With an 80% response agreement in the study for marketing to not exploit consumers, the call is for all brand messaging to be more authentic, reassuring and practical in our communications rather than merely punting products.

Pick n Pay has already excelled in this regard with their catchy 'friends don't let friends panic buy' initiative, looping in SA musos via WhatsApp call.

“ Too good not to share! 💎💎

A great message from our friends at [@PicknPay](#). [#WeAreAllInThisTogether](#) <https://t.co/o17Pwcf8c4>— Woolworths SA (@WOOLWORTHS_SA) [March 25, 2020](#) ”

Fellow retail giant Woolworths loved it so much they couldn't resist retweeting – proof that the sharing economy is alive and well.

Nando's has also tapped into the neighbourly camaraderie required to successfully navigate these #alonetogether times, stating: "If there's one thing this country knows, it's how to come together... even if we have to stay apart," sharing a video of how they're turning off their flames for the first time since lighting them in 1987, as it's how brands behave today that will lead their future legacy.

“ We love how [@NandosSA](#) has tapped into the neighbourly camaraderie required to successfully navigate these [#alonetogether](#) times, stating: "If there's one thing this country knows, it's how to come together... even if we have to stay apart." 💎💎💎💎 More in the vid below 💎💎👉 [#LockdownSA](#) pic.twitter.com/b5Fgfyqt2K— Kantar_AME (@Kantar_AME) [March 27, 2020](#) ”

That's a clarion call for all brands, as the way companies deal with the crisis now will undoubtedly influence future consumer behaviour.

Changing media and shopping behaviour in coronavirus times

This particular pandemic has already started changing media and social connection habits like never before. Digital and broadcast media consumption is on the rise due to self-isolation, and with hugs and handshakes a thing of the past, for now, consumers are increasing their personal connection via social networks, with a 43% spike in Facebook and 45% on WhatsApp respectively.

EARLY SIGNS INDICATE SA CONSUMERS PREPARING FOR 'EYE OF THE STORM', WORRYING ABOUT THE FUTURE

Concern and Impact

74% Concerned about Covid-19

58% Day-to-day life impacted

Current Preparedness

44% Being prepared and informed is fundamental

16% Ready to take this head on

Economic and Financial Impact

66% Need to be more proactive about financial planning

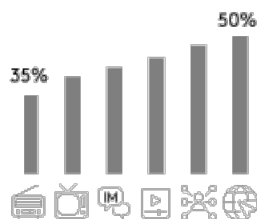
62% Will have long-term economic impact

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THE PANDEMIC IS CHANGING MEDIA AND SOCIAL CONNECTION HABITS

Increased media use in past month

Digital and broadcast media increasing due to self-isolation



Social connection in past month

Consumers increasing personal connection via social networks



43%



45%

Trusted media sources

Despite increased use, only 1 in 4 trust social media

23% Social media

41% My doctor

65% National media channels

ONLY 2% OF SOUTH AFRICANS FEEL ADVERTISING SHOULD STOP. BE TONE- SENSITIVE TO OFFER SECURITY IN THESE TESTING TIMES. SA FEELS BRANDS AND COMPANIES SHOULD:

SA feels brands need to be practical and realistic and help consumers in their everyday life

32%

Reassure 81%

Inform 86%

Be helpful 88%

Do not exploit 90%

83% Agree

Companies should worry about employees' health

High expectation for companies to fulfil responsibilities as employers and in wider community

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BRANDS NEED TO ACCELERATE DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION AND eCOMMERCE INVESTMENT

eCommerce

Consumers embracing new channels

22% Shopping online more often (Total)

42% Under 35 year olds shopping less often in physical outlets

Impact on physical stores

Social distancing already a new behaviour

35% Shopping in physical stores less often

48% Avoiding big malls & superstores

Shopping preferences

SA shopping near to home, avoiding cash notes and sticking to brands they know/love

73% Prefer to shop near home

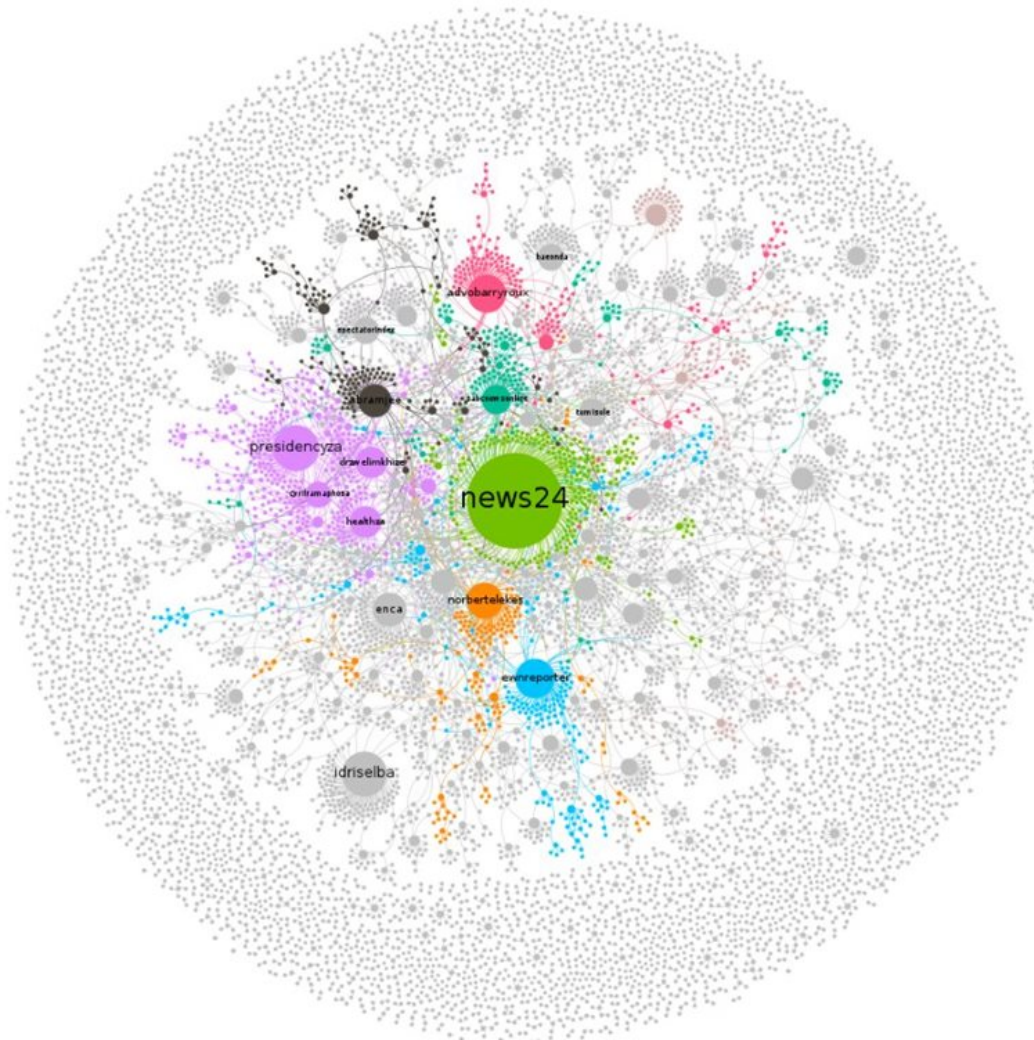
66% Prefer electronic payment over cash notes

63% Sticking to my usual brands

Yet despite this increased use, only one in four respondents trusts social media as an information source, rather seeing it as a platform for collaboration and comfort.

Drilling down to SA Twitter behaviour, we've seen about 100,000 Covid-19 coronavirus-related tweets a day in the past week, with 1.69-million related posts since 1 Jan 2020.

A whopping 1.59-million of those were composed in the last month, from 25 February 2020 to date, and the vast majority of conversations have been about the social and health aspect of the pandemic. Unlike other 'trending' topics, which are dominated by certain groups, this is the most widespread level of engagement across the Twittersphere we have seen.

[click to enlarge](#)

The new digital face of customer experience

Taking heed of changing consumer behaviour, especially in light of the new lockdown restrictions, retailers need to note that local consumers are embracing new channels, both in shoppers online more often and already practicing social distancing as a new behaviour.

We see 48% of respondents claiming they already avoid big malls and superstores entirely, and 73% preferring to shop near home, fitting for current lockdown conditions. *connected consumers

In these uncertain and changing times, brands would do well to optimise their customer experience, as responses also show that 63% are sticking to the usual brands they already know and love, and 66% prefer electronic over cash payment methods, as it means you can skip that unnecessary trip to the bank when you need to stock up on essentials.



All of this proves that experience is still king, but as experiences that require physical interaction won't be an option for brands and marketers in the foreseeable future, instead take this time to polish experiences so that they delight customers, with a focus on AI to simplify tasks and satisfy demand to avoid service bottlenecks. Proactivity will promote brand loyalty and preference for the future, because while there's uncertainty as to when the true impact of the pandemic will subside, there's always space for growth in crisis.

Go long: Branding advice for marketers

But don't look for growth where the rules pertaining to your category are especially stringent. For example, with alcohol sales banned for the duration of the #SAlockdown, take the following advice from Robert Klara, senior editor for brands at [AdWeek](#), to heart: "You may have marketing plans in the can ready to go – you'll have to rethink that... You can't show a picnic or a large party or large crowds cheering. That's sending the wrong message."

On [Marketing Week](#), Mini MBAs in marketing and brand management professor Mark Ritson says that as the coronavirus crisis will test us all, marketers need to think long-term: "This virus, too, shall pass. At some point consumers will return to the streets, the cafes and the various other activities that they have been denied during the dark days ahead. Keep the brand light burning, because the cost of snuffing it out for the rest of 2020 and then trying to reignite it next year is gigantic."



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After all, [PR Daily](#) reveals that clamming up and not offering transparent communication is the top mistake brands make in a crisis. So, get your digital ducks in a row and get your message out there, to reassure clients that you're still open for business – you're just changing the method to meet the madness the times dictate.

Want to find out more? Catch up on our [SA-specific webinar](#) on how to navigate growth in a Covid-19 world, based on our first-wave Barometer study in SA (you'll need to register to watch on demand). Also stock up on updates and insights to help your brand manage the effects of Covid-19 and prepare for the future on our [Covid-19 page](#). Follow us on Kantar [LinkedIn](#) and [Twitter](#) to keep up to date with our comms, and stay safe!

**While the first wave of Kantar's Covid-19 Barometer study was conducted across 30+ markets globally at the time of writing, new markets are continually being added and over 50 markets are currently included.*

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