

What's influencing where South Africans shop during lockdown?

South Africa's cash-strapped consumers are not just concerned about pricing when grocery shopping, but also about the measures taken by retailers to ensure shopper safety during the Covid-19 pandemic. This is according to [a new report](#) published by BrandsEye, using consumer insights from rewards programme Bonsella.



The report analyses BrandsEye's social media data and Bonsella's consumer survey data to assess shifts in buying habits and consumer priorities during the pandemic. Bonsella is a consumer rewards programme located in 150 tier 2 independent retailers across South Africa. The programme rewards customers with instant airtime to their mobile phones.

Commenting on the report findings, BrandsEye chief executive, Nic Ray said: "Since the lockdown, complaints about retailers have focused on Covid-19 issues such as price changes, stockouts and store hygiene. And while pricing is unsurprisingly consumers' chief concern in deciding where to shop, across all LSMs, people are acutely aware of the safety and health measures retailers are taking around Covid-19. These measures are influencing where people are deciding to do their shopping."



Covid-19 driving fundamental shifts in Africa's consumers

















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In-store Covid-19 safety protocols








The majority of shoppers surveyed wanted Covid-19 safety protocols implemented by retailers. Social media conversations about branch or store physical safety had the second-largest increase during lockdown increasing by 11.7 points, and complaints about it increased by 13.5 points.

Shoppers expected retailers to adhere to social distancing measures and took to social media to praise those that met their expectations and criticise those that did not.

	Before 16 Jan – 16 Mar	During 17 Mar – 17 May	Volume change
Affordability	7.2% 	20.3% 	▲ 13.1 pp
Branch or store physical safety	2.6% 	14.4% 	▲ 11.7 pp
Changes in pricing	0.6% 	9.6% 	▲ 9.0 pp
Charity or outreach programmes (CSI)	1.0% 	6.5% 	▲ 5.4 pp
Courier or delivery service	1.7% 	6.9% 	▲ 5.2 pp
Online shopping/ordering	1.6% 	6.0% 	▲ 4.4 pp
Management and/or supervisors	2.8% 	6.8% 	▲ 4.0 pp
Branch or store hygiene	2.0% 	4.4% 	▲ 2.4 pp

The above table shows the 8 sentiment bearing topics with the largest increase in volume between the two time periods.

Main reasons why customers choose to shop at their primary store

Best pricing	81.5%	
Specials and sales	52.2%	
Covid-19 safety measures and sanitation	39.1%	
Store location near home	35.9%	
Safety /security in and around the store	34.8%	
Friendly staff	32.6%	
Product variety	30.4%	

The above table shows answers to survey Q. "What are the main reasons why you choose to shop at this store?"

The report reveals that 39.1% of customers said the main reasons why they shopped at their primary store was due to Covid-19 safety measures and store sanitation.

Desired in-store COVID-19 safety measures

Social distancing measurements marked out at pay points and queues	70.7%	<div></div>
All shoppers wearing masks	68.5%	<div></div>
All staff wearing masks	57.6%	<div></div>
Hand sanitiser provided at the entrance	51.1%	<div></div>
Only a few shoppers let into stores at a time	46.7%	<div></div>
None – I don't care about COVID-19 safety measures	3.3%	<div></div>

The above table shows answers to survey Q. "Which of the following COVID-19 safety measures do you want to see implemented at your primary supermarket?"

Social distancing at checkout-tills was the most desired in-store Covid-19 safety measure mentioned by 70.7% of those surveyed. This was followed by shoppers wearing masks (68.5%) and staff wearing masks (57.6%).

According to Andrew Weinberg, CEO of Retail Engage, which owns the Bonsella brand, there has been significant shift in consumer adoption to health precautions in stores, over the last three months. Most stores implemented the appropriate health and safety measures quite quickly resulting in consumer confidence and continued support of the stores.

The most valuable resources and indicator on "what is happening on the ground" is the analysis of consumer buying behaviour, combined with intercept consumer research and review of historical trendlines. Retail Engage has staff located in stores throughout South Africa, and the feedback and research surveys from these staff have been extremely valuable, the company says.



How Covid-19 is shifting retail customer priorities - report

8 May 2020



Pricing a deciding factor

According to the report, 81.5% of surveyed shoppers chose their primary store based on price, followed by specials and sales (52.2%). On social media, affordability and changes in pricing were conversation topics that had the largest increases during the lockdown.

Consumers took to digital channels to complain about price-hikes in particular, leading to a 14.7 point increase in complaints about changes in pricing and an 11.6 point increase in complaints about competition and price-fixing.

	Before 16 Jan – 16 Mar	After 17 Mar – 17 May	Volume Change
Affordability	8.8% <div></div>	29.2% <div></div>	▲ 20.4 pp
Changes in pricing	1.0% <div></div>	15.7% <div></div>	▲ 14.7 pp
Branch or store physical safety	4.1% <div></div>	17.6% <div></div>	▲ 13.5 pp
Online shopping/ordering	1.8% <div></div>	6.9% <div></div>	▲ 5.1 pp
Comparing brands to brands	11.1% <div></div>	15.7% <div></div>	▲ 4.7 pp
Manufactured goods (NOT food)	2.7% <div></div>	7.0% <div></div>	▲ 4.3 pp
Courier or delivery service	1.9% <div></div>	6.2% <div></div>	▲ 4.3 pp

Shopping less often but spending more per visit

Since lockdown began, consumers have made less frequent visits to shops but are spending more per visit, with basket value increasing by 30%.

	Pre-COVID-19 16 Jan – 16 Mar	During COVID-19 17 Mar – 17 May	Change in rand value	Percentage change
Total sales value	R4 667 037 780	R4 224 068 485	▼ R442 969 295	-9.5%
Total transactions	3 716 027	2 809 225	▼ 906 802	-24.4%
Average consumer spend for period	R1 255	R1 503	▲ R248	+19.8%
Average consumer basket spend	R146	R191	▲ R45	+30.8%

Survey Question: What product(s) have you bought more of because of the lockdown and why?

"All of the mentioned were purchased in larger quantities than usual to avoid frequent trips to shop"

"Tinned foods - fear of shop running out"

"Rice and oil. Because the price is going up"

Some survey respondents said they had been purchasing groceries in larger quantities to decrease the number of visits made to the shops, while others did so because of concern over stock-outs and forthcoming price hikes.

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