

# Consumer habits and shopping preferences

 By [Jason Stewart](#)

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Brands need to be clear on consumers changing habits, specifically around their desire to connect with others and how they spend their time on shopping preferences.



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Our behaviour has been forced to shift, and the most notable changes have been across the following domains.

**Social** - We now know how much we need other people and social connection over the next 12 months is going to be central to much of our activity, and will shape our behaviour patterns.

Many key purchase decisions in the past have been driven on social status, badging and presenting an image to others. This has been stripped for the time being, but it will come flooding back as soon as people start engaging with others once again.

**Home** - At the same time, and in direct contradiction, being at home has become a new comfort zone, unleashing new habits, rituals and comfort providing activities. We have become better at doing not much and enjoying it, which will persist

for much, much longer as people juggle between these two contradictions.

**E-commerce** - Purchase behaviour has been forced online, but not in the whole and not with a sense of everlasting adoption. That being said, this is a powerful new sales channel that brands need to take advantage of. This scalable and efficient way to drive sales and e-commerce is going to become a staple of many brand teams' focuses. However, South Africans are still sceptical and are showing a dominant preference for going back into store.

Brands need to have a deep and clear understanding of how their audience sees themselves, what they care about and how they expect brands to align on these.

## The herd mentality

Our fear of germs and viruses is now either very important or not important at all. We either believe in science and follow experts or believe in conspiracy theories flouted across social media. But what drives these beliefs is a trend called 'ideological in-grouping', which is a fancy way of saying that we no longer look at issues individually and make up our own mind by weighing up both sides. Now, we are following our tribes wholeheartedly and it isn't about what is right, but rather who is right. We believe by association with association based on how we identify ourselves. This identity is based on what is important to us and it could be our religion, our values, our gender or our race.

So, badging, beliefs and behaviour are now set via association, or who you want to be seen with and the herd mentality has been amplified by social media.

The past few years have shown a shift in how consumers no longer view brands as separate entities but include the business, people and CEO behind the brand in their estimations. Likewise, there is a growing expectation for these entities to make positive impacts on society and play responsible roles.

These issues provide direction for what consumers care about, and what brands should prioritise when wanting to be seen as a positive, influential contributor to their employees, customers, community and country.

Brands need to be cognisant of the evolving emotional state of their consumers, as this impacts what they buy and the brands they are drawn to.

Our financial state has been threatened and millions of South Africans have been - and more will continue to be - impacted. Spending power for the majority will be down and pressure will be on brands and businesses to fight for less. Brands, therefore, will need to work harder to convince consumers to buy them.

Our emotional state is one that is more threatened; we are under more pressure and stress than ever before (to different degrees for different people) and this in a country that already boasts the highest levels of anxiety in the world.

A person's financial well-being acutely affects their emotional well-being and in addition, one's psychological safety (feeling calm and confident about your reality) affects how we feel and as a consequence, how we behave.

This causes different responses in different people; some will look to fight (in different ways such as activism, xenophobia, proactive positive action, etc.), others will flee (emigrate, suicide), some will freeze (do nothing except experience increased levels of internal stress), while others will look for opportunities to flock together (socialise, connect, laugh or do all the above in tribal groups).

## ABOUT JASON STEWART

Jason Stewart is the co-founder and MD of HaveYouHeard ([www.haveyouheard.co.za](http://www.haveyouheard.co.za)), a communications agency immersed in culture to influence it. With 11 years' trading experience and offices in Johannesburg, Cape Town and London, HaveYouHeard uncovers unique insights to create innovative ideas that influence the audience by bringing the brands it partners with to the centre of culture.

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