

GfK research: Lockdown gives South Africa's online consumers an opportunity to prioritise what really matters

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52 percent increased their time on leisure activities and only 47 percent could work from home

The Covid-19 outbreak looks set to further deepen and accelerate a well-established trend towards ‘cocooning’ in South Africa as families stay home to keep safe and make better use of their finances – a trend that is likely to outlast the pandemic. This is according to new [Consumer Pulse](#) research from GfK South Africa into the behaviours of online consumers during the Level 5 lockdown.



Rachel Thompson

Some 85 percent of consumers who usually work full time reported significant impact on their working habits. Nearly half (47%) of full-time employees were able to work remotely, but among this group 74 percent claimed they were working less than normal. These usually time-poor consumers took the opportunity to put their careers and performance aside, while they focused on themselves, projects and interests they don't usually have time for, and the people they really care about.

“The national lockdown to curb the spread of Covid-19 in South Africa is reshaping consumers’ behaviours in every sphere – from shopping to media consumption to work,” says **Rachel Thompson, Insights Director at GfK South Africa**. “New norms are emerging as time becomes more fluid and the boundaries between work and leisure are blurred.”

Focus on self-improvement

The GfK research shows that some consumers in this demographic used the time of the Level 5 lockdown for self-improvement; 31 percent claimed that they used the time to learn a new skill and 41 percent increased the time spent reading books. This trend is especially evident among people who usually work full-time.

With the closure of restaurants and takeaways, along with free disposable time, South Africans put their culinary skills to the test. More than three quarters (78%) cooked more homemade meals from scratch and 55 percent were consuming fresh vegetables, a habit that they would like to continue post-lockdown. Consumers reported that recipes were their second most searched for topic on YouTube. As part of a move towards a healthier lifestyle, 40 percent agreed that they have increased their level of physical activity.

Home improvement was high on the lockdown to-do list. In the week before lockdown when consumers knew that they would have free time for DIY projects, sales of emulsion and special paint climbed 16 and 10 percent respectively. Consumers said that DIY content was the top topic they searched for on YouTube during the Level 5 lockdown.

‘Alone together’

Although the lockdown was designed to keep people socially distanced, consumers found ways to connect deeply with loved ones within and outside their homes. Around 65 percent were using video chat to reach family members who don't share their home and 52 percent increased the time they spent looking after family members.

With more free hours on their hands, 52 percent have increased their time on leisure activities alone and with the family. Some 38 percent have increased the time they spend playing games like boardgames, trivia, crosswords, and colouring in,

while 31 percent reported cooking more with the children and 18 percent cooking more as a couple.

Most also upped their media intake. Around 76 percent have increased their viewing of films and TV series, while 38 percent increased the time they spent on paid streaming services like Netflix. In the week before the lockdown, videogame console sales increased 104 percent compared to an average week; 44 percent of surveyed consumers reported that they spent more time playing videogames during the first phase of the lockdown.

Trend towards cocooning

“Our research has found a trend towards cocooning in South Africa over the past five years, with people staying home rather than heading for the malls and nightclubs, partly because of growing personal safety concerns,” says Thompson. “Consumers in this demographic were well prepared for the lockdown because they have been moving towards home-entertainment for a number of years. This segment spent the lockdown investing time into their homes and relationships — and discovering new digital means of shopping, connection and entertainment.

“These trends will remain entrenched, even when the worst of the pandemic is over. To master the crisis, marketers should seek to understand the new normal that has emerged for their customers and be ready to pivot along with consumers on the other side of the pandemic,” Thompson concludes.

[Click here](#) to register for a webinar on this study taking place on Tuesday, 26 May, at 11h00.

About the GfK Consumer Pulse study

The GfK Consumer Pulse study is conducted weekly across 30 markets worldwide to track consumer perceptions, mood and behaviours in various industries. This will help brands and businesses to #MasterTheCrisis by understanding consumer attitudes, behaviour, purchase intent, media consumption, and more – both now and in the future. The study reveals changes in demand for goods and services, so that companies can respond with confidence and come out of the crisis stronger, better positioned, and closer to consumers than before.

The results come from the first of four waves in this research study. In this wave GfK interviewed a representative sample of 500 online SA consumers (LSM7-10) during the week commencing 26 April.

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