

Rearview reflections to clarify your 2021 windscreen view

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Lessons from South Africa 2020 to tackle the unknown of the 2021 business year



As the clock struck midnight and we rang in the new year with excited celebrations, the industry had expectations for 2020 to be the best year yet. Unfortunately, Covid-19 arrived just a few weeks in, resulting in hard knocks that blew most of us completely off our now socially distanced course. It's time to learn from the major milestones of the past few months to better plan for the year to come...

Back in March, the lucky among us were able to work from home as shopfronts were shuttered indefinitely and reality took a big bite. Hyperconnected isolation saw hugs and handshakes become a thing of the past, as we embraced video calls with friends and colleagues alike.

Pets and home-schooled children unintentionally made guest appearances in conference calls as we quickly mastered Zoom and Teams, playing with video backgrounds and filters to mask those first makeup-free weeks in our PJs. The classic business opening line 'I hope this email finds you well' took on new meaning as we asked colleagues to activate their microphones and repeat themselves – so much so that 'you're on mute' became a [catchphrase](#) of Q2.

But the changes went deeper than that – both personally, economically and societally. A snapshot of South Africa-specific attitudes from the first wave of [Kantar's Covid-19 Barometer study](#)¹ in March – the weekend of President Ramaphosa's 'state of disaster' address – revealed that three-quarters of connected South Africans were concerned about Covid-19, with 58% already seeing their day-to-day life affected and 62% predicting a long-term economic impact. The second wave of the Barometer study saw financial uncertainty fast outweigh health worries.



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Our Barometer study also revealed that South Africa was among the most concerned markets globally, with 90% of the population having felt a financial knock as a result of Covid-19. We cried and panic-bought toilet paper, baking banana bread and brewing pineapple beer in those first few weeks of lockdown, sure that the next normal would be just over the horizon.

Nine months later, we're still largely working from home (or is that living at work?) but suffering from Covid-fatigue as infection waves have resurged and the promise of vaccines looms ever closer.

“ Only a minority of the public across the 7 countries surveyed in our recent research will ‘definitely’ take a Covid-19 [#vaccine](#). This hesitancy represents a challenge for governments aiming to control the pandemic.

Download our infographic for more info: <https://t.co/srKKKwhkcy> [pic.twitter.com/J5pWwnz9Qn](https://t.co/J5pWwnz9Qn)— Kantar (@Kantar) November 25, 2020 ”

On the upside, we've started buying local and have embraced online ordering apps for a sense of convenience and safety. But in South Africa, ecommerce isn't limited to the traditional web-service. We've seen innovative ordering via SMS, WhatsApp, Facebook and Facebook Messenger, as well as township deliveries by bicycle, with mobile payment simplifying the processes. Reminding us that local is lekker is the fab ad from Ogilvy South Africa and VW, “One Horse Town”, a star of the [Best Liked Ads for Q2 2020](#).

The ad serves as a true sign of the times as ongoing worries about small business survival coupled with concerns about contamination of imported goods mean we'll continue to be cautious, buying products with strong local provenance well into 2021. So, success at the tills in the new year will be about understanding how best to offer value, underpinned by the mantra that local is more *lekker* than ever before.

Now, as we approach the new year, South Africans are taking this caution a step further, skipping the end-of-year seaside holidays of the past as 43% add they are likely to avoid bars and restaurants. Instead, they're stocking up on affordable luxuries and cheaper indulgences like chocolate and alcohol, planning to hole up at home over the holiday season, resetting expectations for the year to come.



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Karin Du Chenne 17 Sep 2020



But some of our early Covid-19 consumer mindset shifts are expected to stick, especially as the post-lockdown world won't be what we knew pre-pandemic – and who says we'd want to return to "normal" anyway? In times of crisis, we tend to view the good old days of just last year through rosy frames, forgetting that those times had their own problems. Sure, we weren't facing an unknown virus that has taken its toll globally, but we were already battling economic recession and global warming, amongst other things.

Brands, we have just one ask: Be the change we want to see

Many of us were fed up with the way things were and the pandemic brought to light the fact that we need to stand together to make a positive change.

No one expects world peace from their yoghurt or an end to global warming from their bank. Instead, people want proof of the small, tangible steps your brand is taking to help make life a little better for a person, community or part of the world, as actions have never spoken louder than words. This in turn creates a more credible and achievable brand purpose than 'saving the world' and results in more sustainable brand growth, as the [BrandZ™ Top 100 Most Valuable Global Brands](#) consistently grow in value at a faster rate, because they're striving for purpose rather than profit.

Brands must also push beyond category norms to offer the best experiences we've had in any category, as people want Woolworths' level of quality and great shopping [experience](#) as well as Nando's-style quirky communications (Hello, [20WTF](#)). Because if nothing else, the past few months have taught us to expect the unexpected. This extends to the fact that we now want action beyond activism, so brands need to walk the talk to win and keep our favour.

At the tail-end of 2019 we were bright-eyed and optimistic in our expectations of a digital paradox, stating in our [Media Trends & Predictions Report for 2020](#): "Technology will continue to redefine the media landscape in 2020, creating opportunities and challenges for marketers. As ad spend on social and tech platforms continues to grow; technology innovations will also enable a renaissance in real-world engagement."

“ Who led the digital transformation of your company?

A. CEO

B. CTO

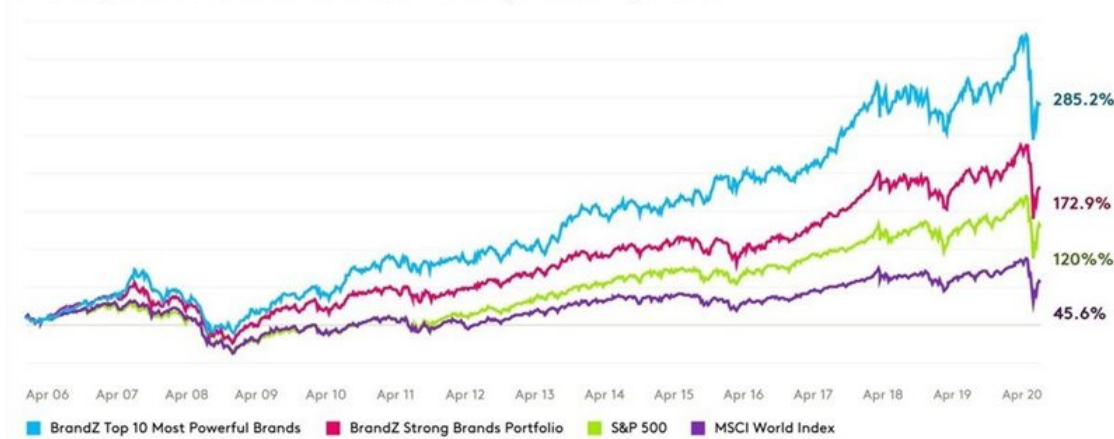
C. COVID-19 [#COVID19 pic.twitter.com/ZYDY3Qr0wP](#)— Jan Rezab (@janrezab) [March 30, 2020](#) ”

We certainly experienced a renaissance of engagement, but little did we know that we'd see a decade's worth of media evolution in a few short months. In-home media consumption grew, while consumer confidence and ad spend declined during 2020 even though our Barometer study consistently said that people still want to hear from brands.

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'[To spend or not to spend](#)' remains the brand question and the answer remains a resounding 'Yes'. Data from BrandZ™, the world's largest brand equity platform, backs our finding that [South Africa's most valuable brands](#) have proven time and again that they weather the macroeconomic climate better than most, no matter the crisis context. So, companies that invest in strong brands during difficult times are the ones that return to growth faster and more successfully than those that don't, provided you understand what's motivating purchase decisions.

BrandZ portfolios vs. S&P500 and MSCI World: April 2006 - April 2020



Be creative and innovative as the coronavirus is going nowhere soon, and people want practical and realistic solutions to navigate the challenges like reduced budgets and the new way of life. Toyota has already excelled in embracing the reality of working from home in being 'virtually present' with the luxury of freedom:

Going forward, remember that 98% of South Africans wanted brands to continue advertising at the height of the Covid-uncertainty and to step up and support the nation, as seen when MTN dedicated its September marketing budget to a campaign around mask wearing. Ultimate disruptor Uber also took the new marketing mantra to heart in offering healthcare workers free rides, restaurant discounts via Uber Eats while supplementing drivers' incomes.

So, start your 2021 to-do list by understanding the new [customer landscape](#) and chasing an inclusive ecommerce strategy tailored to South Africa. Redefine your brand purpose, an essential ingredient of brand growth, and recover ahead of competitors by making a meaningful difference that shows you care about more than your brand's bottom line.

¹ Powered by our [Barometer study](#), initially conducted across 30 markets globally and double that by its 8-wave conclusion in September, a sample of 500 South Africans with internet access was spoken to in each wave of the Barometer study to help brands better understand people's mindset.

Find out about all the trends predicted to impact your industry in our [Media Trends and Predictions 2021](#) report. Join the conversation on [LinkedIn](#) and [Twitter](#) to keep up to date with our comms. Wishing you and yours a safe and successful 2021.

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