

Carat releases findings from its 2021 Trends Report

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In many ways 2020 was a year of firsts, however, as we move into 2021, the overarching theme is that this will be the year of 'assimilation'. As people we will settle into a balance of pre- and post- pandemic behaviours and attitudes, and as brands we will need to operate with continued empathy and alertness.



Carat has released its annual [2021 Trends Report](#) focussing on societal, tech and media trends. To look ahead to 2021, the agency took stock of 2020, looked for patterns amidst all the rapid change and disruptions, and uncovered technologies and behaviours that are becoming a part of life for more people.

"2020 was a year of great change resulting in seismic shifts in behaviour that will continue to be felt in all areas of business and society. It made our 2021 Trends Report this year even more critical to help our clients understand how to navigate these changes and pinpoint the trends that we believe will be here to stay," said Lerina Bierman, managing director, Carat South Africa.

Graham Deneys, group strategy director at Carat South Africa added: *"This year's trends report includes a societal lens from which we have approached the media specific trends. This approach complements our 'designing for people' positioning, which places emphasis on the role that media plays in greater societal movements and cultural trends that define consumer behaviour today."*

Societal trends

Covid editions = life additions. Many new behaviours, such as BOPIS (buy online pickup in store), are here to stay. Brands must have both a robust virtual and physical offering with a focus on delivering both with flexibility and convenience.

Flexi-living. Covid is the now proven case study for flexible working, disrupting the traditional 'nine to five' and opening up new opportunities for consumers and brands alike. Brands must consider their mental availability to ensure that people continue to shop the brand even if physical availability has shifted. Local area marketing will also rise in importance as part of the comms mix.

Wellness to wellbeing. With the world experiencing a heightened sense of anxiety from global pandemics and social justice movements, we saw an accelerated focus on wellbeing, which manifested in a myriad of ways – mindfulness became mainstream. We gave ourselves permission to treat ourselves without the feeling of guilt, and wellbeing at work became a must-have as opposed to a nice-to-have.

Supporting people with their wellbeing goals is a prime route for brands to tap into, however, companies must be mindful that their internal policies and practices hold up to the standards the brand is setting.

Activated empathy. Where global activism has split along partisan lines, younger generations are uniting in collective allyship. Driving social, governmental and business change on the issues most urgent to their generation – such as climate

change and racial injustices.

Brands can expect to be part of the change and the conversation, and are not immune to criticism. Therefore, the emotional intelligence, transparency and societal actions of a brand has never been more pertinent.

Tech + media trends

Interactive reality. Once a dormant fad, the time is right for augmented reality and QR codes. These functional technologies helped us to live more remotely in the Covid era, and with usage behaviours now ingrained in our everyday, we expect AR and QR are here to stay.

With the rapid growth in e-commerce, brands have been experimenting with ways of bringing in-store experiences into the virtual world, and we're beginning to see brands move beyond novelty when using AR/QR, and starting to use it as a value add.

Sonic society. Exciting things are happening with audio. Smart speakers are reaching saturation point, music-first companies are rotating to audio-first and voice-led utility is becoming more ingrained in our everyday.

Brands must ensure that they are shoppable within audio enabled buying platforms, and also that they have distinctive brand codes for this medium. Look out for the resurgence of the jingle!

Brand safety to societal safety. There is a greater emphasis on brand safety in all its forms. Advertisers and agencies are moving from brand safety to societal safety – looking to not only ensure their advertising does not appear in inappropriate content, but to ensure that it does not fund inappropriate content or publishers.

State of subscription. We have seen the explosion and diversification of new paid content services launching in South Africa, with entertainment and media becoming more virtual, streamed, personal and – at least for the time being – more centred on the home than anyone could have anticipated.

With the influx, more questions are being raised around existing ad-funded models, with consumer revenue now overtaking advertising revenue, and the sustainability of these subscriptions as financial strain and fatigue kicks in.

One-stop shops. As the big technology companies consolidate their power, they are building synergies between their different services, making life easier, quicker and more seamless for consumers – and, in turn, shortening the traditional consumer purchase funnel. Integrating their services means that these companies are becoming 'one-stop shops' for all of your needs, rather than a disparate group of apps and sites – which will continue to impact the smaller players with more specific specialities.

Virtual in person (VIP) access. As Covid put an abrupt end to in-person events and live entertainment, new spaces and venues were created through virtual experiences. We became privy to artists' livestreaming intimate acoustic sets, were welcomed into chefs' home kitchens, and elite fitness trainers' backyards. This presents new opportunities for brands to play a role in providing access to, or enhancing, such content with the added benefit of a level of scale not afforded by physical events.

The report includes in detail the implications for marketers on all of the trends mentioned above. The full report can be found [here](#).

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About Carat

Most recently named a leader amongst global media agencies by Forrester, Carat is consistently ranked the number one media agency in the world with over 10,000 experts, operating across 190+ offices in 135+ countries. Carat delivers an unparalleled capability to unlock real human understanding to connect people and brands by designing powerful and engaging media experiences. Carat is a Dentsu company and privileged to work with some of the most storied and innovative brands in the world. In South Africa, we have operations in Johannesburg and Cape Town.

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