

# Tomorrow's leading brands are busy writing the omnichannel rulebook

By Zak Haeri, issued by GfK – An NIQ Company

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South African brands have spoken about omnichannel customer experiences and engagements for years. Yet despite the massive growth of digital sales and marketing channels during the pandemic, true omnichannel strategies remain far and few between. Many retailers and consumer brands are still struggling to catch up with the trends that emerged during Covid-19 lockdowns and are not ready for the next wave.



Covid-19 was a massive tailwind for digital commerce in South Africa, with Internet sales of technical consumer goods rising from 1.1% of sales units in 2019 to 2.2% in 2023 and from 8.2% of sales revenue to 10.7% in the same timeframe. During lockdowns, we saw digital consumers start to take seamless, channel agnostic experiences for granted.

Models that straddled the line between traditional and digital experiences started to become commonplace — for example, click-and-collect or buy online, pick up instore. Consumers started to demand the ability to shop or check stock online and collect or return in a shop or to browse in store and order online. Behaviours such as researching products online while watching ads on TV became even more prevalent. As many as 82% of customers check product availability on digital channels prior to going to a store.

Zak Haeri, managing director - South Africa, GfK

## From TikTok to smart speakers: navigating the ever-evolving sales landscape

There's little doubt that the changes in consumer behaviour are here to stay. Consumers are open to engaging with brands and retailers across a range of sales channels, and brands that can create effective customer experiences will win new fans and boost sales. The handful of companies that can offer a seamless experience across channels have a distinct advantage.

Marketers using three or more channels in a campaign earned a 494% higher order rate than those using a single channel campaign according to international research from Omnisend. E-commerce is growing, but increasingly, customers want online shopping and more. Only a truly omnichannel experience will satisfy the most demanding customers today.

The market continues to evolve with new channels, technologies and consumer behaviours. Short-form video has exploded as TikTok and YouTube shorts have taken off. In many parts of the world, social commerce is taking off and technologies such as smart speakers are on the cusp of mainstream adoption. Virtual and augmented reality are on the horizon. These new channels will continue to grow as generations Z and alpha come of age.

## Finding the right balance between data, technology, and creativity

It's becoming more important for omnichannel marketing and experiences to fill the void left in a world where more of the retail buying process now takes place without any interaction with the sales team. The customer buying journey is no longer linear. It's harder to pinpoint what encourages people to buy and what encourages them to become repeat customers.

Customers want digital experiences to be personalised and expect brands to be consistent and easy to navigate, regardless of whether they're buying online, in-store, direct or through a third party. That's easier said than done with seemingly endless touchpoints through which consumers can interact and engage with a brand. Few brands have as yet mastered

consistent messaging, tone of voice, brand sentiment and experiences across multiple platforms.

Delivering an omnipresent brand is a formidable challenge. To get it right, brands need to find the right balance between using data, technology and creativity. Data is integral to understanding the nuances of customer behaviour, but it needs to be blended with creativity to deliver great experiences, no matter where the consumer is. Technology needs to be an enabler, rather than a blocker, serving the right data at the right place and the right moment.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Zak Haeri, managing director - South Africa, [<https://www.gfk.com/home> GfK].

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