

What does the African mobile consumer really want for the new decade?

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The start of this new decade marks almost 10 years since the smartphone entered Africa - with just a few smartphone users initially joining the fray, to now having one in almost everyone's hands.



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At the start of 2010, Africa was predominantly a feature phone market with high-end Apple and Samsung smartphone devices entering the market. Apps were considered a luxury and an unnecessary spend for businesses except for those with a high wealth consumer base who were likely to own these devices.

At that stage, there were still just a handful of apps to choose from. South Africa alone did not have access to local app stores until several years later and following the introduction of more affordable smartphones entering the market, the shift towards smartphone ownership increased and businesses began suddenly taking notice as engagement levels on mobile devices increased.

The big question, as we currently stand with a burgeoning population of smartphone users, is, what now?

In 2020, what is next and what are the biggest mobile trends to adopt to leverage off existing technology that has already been adopted, while taking into consideration the number one challenge as a continent that we are still facing, with no improvement in sight – high data costs.

Mobile will accelerate digital transformation

Businesses are under time pressure to transform their processes and organisations to a digital mindset and mobile will be used more so to speed up the process. While this is not an overnight process due to the integration of enterprise and customised legacy systems, this will be a work in progress.

It is important to note, however, that mobile will be used as a primary driver in this process as users are likely to adopt a simple, purposeful mobile solution rather than complex processes.

Mobile will continue to be the personalisation hub of the consumer

With the user's permission, consumer data will enable markets such as retailers to understand their customers better, such as providing more relevant results and recommendations.

In some cases the expectation from the consumer is that the app should know them well enough, to predict when they are likely to want to reorder something.

For example, if I order my skincare online, after three months I would expect to get a notification from my brand reminding me to re-order my moisturiser or notifying me if there are offers related to that particular product.

Entertainment apps such as music or movies will start getting a sense of what genres their consumers prefer and are likely to improve their algorithms in customising their playlists and watchlists to possibly having customised shortcuts/icons if viewed on a mobile device (keep in mind though the real estate constraints of a mobile screen).

Ensuring consumer trust by using the privacy by design approach

With the countless number of recent data breaches, the consumer has become increasingly aware and sceptical of sharing their personal data.

Mobile has the power of hidden harvesting through data and data is essential to enable personalisation. Thus it becomes really important to integrate mobile into your privacy-by-design approach by ensuring mobile offerings are designed with privacy in mind as a priority with whatever features that get implemented in order to gain the trust of the consumer so that they will be willing to share their data with you.

The continuous rise of Instant Messaging platforms

Mobile consumption across instant messaging apps has exploded worldwide and in Africa, apps as WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger have grown significantly in usage.

Telecoms operator MTN, one of the biggest global telecommunication companies launched its own instant messaging app last year called Ayoba. In November 2019 it was announced that the app had already reached over a million monthly active users. This platform is available for all consumers within the African and Middle East regions, with special features for MTN customers and is proven to be more affordable to ensure that people in its markets can reap the social, economic and developmental dividends of being online.

2020 could see the rise of more affordable instant messaging platforms for Africa, but also will give rise to businesses leveraging these instant messaging platforms to communicate with their target audience.

The rise of new social media platforms alongside deeper engagement with veteran platforms

By now, most mobile marketers have understood the need to integrate their mobile experiences with popular veteran social

media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, however soon Gen Z will be a major target audience for brands to appeal to.

Platforms such as Snapchat and most recently TikTok are gaining popularity with the younger demographic and brands are likely to experiment with their mobile marketing campaigns and app integration with these platforms this year.

However, to make a successful attempt one must still remember the golden rules of being available, human and relatable to the audience and not simply maintaining a brand presence on every platform for the sake of it.

Improving the omnichannel customer in-store experiences with actual humans

Customer service levels have been dropping over the years, in particular across businesses that offer omnichannel offerings with a physical store presence.

This will be the year where brands will try to improve their retention rate in terms of customer loyalty and retailers and service providers will continue to experiment with using mobile devices to provide store assistants with the information they need to efficiently assist customers and streamline the checkout process.

This means that employees can assist the customer quickly by easily locating items for them and help them purchase and get items delivered to their homes in cases of large appliances. This would help immensely with the path to purchase for the mobile consumer while also giving them the ability to track their order in real-time.

It's all about the value - Improving app features

It is mandatory for every business to have a mobile presence, however, not every business needs a mobile app. A mobile app is an investment and needs to continuously surprise and delight the consumer in a way that adds value to their lives. This can be a costly exercise for a brand.

Those businesses with successful mobile apps can usually attribute their success to always prioritising their mobile app as part of their omnichannel strategy.

Brands, such as Amazon and ASOS for example, have continued to experiment with visual search on their apps as they want their app to deliver capabilities that mobile sites cannot deliver.

This year, and going forward, brands with a solid app foundation in place will need to re-evaluate how to appeal to their ever-changing consumers' needs, understand their target market and continuously introduce new features that will appeal to their users and alerting them to download update their apps showcasing the value it will add.

With the millions of apps available to download today, users don't want a clutter of apps on their phone with complicated user experiences, or ones that consume too much data and add very little or zero value to their day to day activities.

ABOUT LYNETTE HUNDERMARK

With over 15 years of experience in the tech, digital marketing and mobile solutions space, Hundermark co-founded specialist mobile solutions consultancy Useful & Beautiful. With a passion for developing mobile products that are aligned to business goals, Hundermark's appetite for keeping abreast of the latest industry trends is fast establishing her as an expert tech commentator and opinion leader in South Africa. Follow @lynetteeathony on Twitter.

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