

Consumer influences on the shopping renaissance

By [Belinda Clur](#)

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Despite the harsh economic and social climate, the longer-term trend in trading densities (sales per square metre) in more than 100 shopping centres in South Africa and Namibia shows a clear improvement since the 2020/21 Covid-induced downturn in performance.



Image supplied. Belinda Clur, managing director of Our International, says we are living through a renaissance

In many respects, in looking at this revival, current times can be likened to a renaissance.

The Renaissance was a fervent period of cultural, artistic, economic and political rebirth and innovation. It is also a time that celebrates humanity and life.

Today we note Covid-19 sped up many trends and made people reconsider their lives, world and values, and has inspired extensive innovative thought.

In our modern renaissance, we must understand key contemporary global consumer influences as we navigate turbulence to profitability into the future. What are these influences?

People want to fall in love with life again

A desire for a life affair sees a holistic approach being embraced, spanning body, mind and spirit. This encompasses wellness, diet, exercise, home and pets, self-improvement, mindfulness, kindness and sensitivity.

Underpinning this is a drive to work smarter and allow more time for life experiences on the back of a hybrid work model and a potential four-day work week in the UK and Europe.

Gone are the days of padded slow-moving corporate existence. The new way cuts out unnecessary work steps, streamlines and gets straight to the point: shortening work, and extending life.

Lessening of lockdowns and restrictive measures has led to the emergence of 'revenge travel', an indulgent splurging vacation full of luxuries and experiences, to offset lost time.



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Dignity is the new cultural attitude

Diversity, inclusivity, fluidity, neutrality, tolerance and equality have set the foundation for a greater cultural shift embracing dignity. This is based on cornerstones of acceptance and belonging. Movements related to Black Lives Matter, LGBTQ2S+, Women's Rights and abortion ruling protests all highlight this evolving social value, which is echoed in SA.

Take note of Sofia Jirau, the first model with Down's syndrome to pose for Victoria's Secret, Lebohang Monyatsi, SA's first wheelchair model, and Precious Lee, a plus-size model, who became the new face of Versace.

Make-up for men is becoming mainstream as evidenced by the success in the UK and the US of the War Paint brand. An attitude of dignity must reflect as a key value in the way brands communicate and engage with their audience.

The Respect Economy sets a new framework for life

Stark recognition of the impact of daily life on the environment has led to a new value system driven by ethics, thoughtfulness and innovation. Key to this is responding to climate change, emissions, animal rights and managing the protein supply chain.

The global and SA retail industry is embracing this in multiple ways.

Pioneering internationally competitive SA bio-tech start-ups are attracting significant interest and funding.

Mzansi Meat Co. is bringing cultivated meat to Africa, reimagining food systems by growing affordable, sustainable and healthy meat from cells, with no harm to animals. Inseco converts low-value organic by-products into nutritious insect ingredients, and Plato's is making crisps from recycled beer grains.

Innovations in textile, leather, cellular agriculture and insect solutions, will change apparel and food consumption patterns altering fashion, grocery store and restaurant offerings, along with veganism, upcycling and re-apparelling.



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Omniverse is the new universe

People are increasingly living between two worlds, the physical and virtual. This has massive implications for many areas of life and retail. We have moved from physical to online to omnichannel retail to the metaverse.

Shopping centres need to exist in all these realms and successfully manage this new multi-dimensional mix.

Whilst some mind-blowing “phygital” stores have been created, the metaverse still needs to mature and is an important space to be watched. Ultimately, physical retail is at the heart of all of these formats, and is an established place where humanity connects, and has a full sensory and authentically social experience.

“Respec-tech”, technology that respects life and sets the rules for engagement in our multi-dimensional society, is crucial.



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Age convergence is driving a major shift in the basic infrastructure of society

A convergence of knowledge, communication and innovation across generations is eliminating traditional age distinctions, almost creating an ageless world. Youth are informed beyond their years via technology access, whilst their elders are ever-younger in looks, attitude, health and tech-savvy. The generation gap is now less relevant.

There is disruption of traditional age/ work/ living/ income structures, with funding concerns about affordable retirement, health care and living standards in an overpopulated world with limited resources.

An interesting trend is emerging with younger generations viewing time as a currency worth more than money. This clearly shows a shift towards prioritising life.

Today we see multigenerational living development formats and “refirement” with retirees launching and engaging in new ventures. Workplace synergy of older wisdom and experience and younger energy and impulsiveness could create a powerful force to be directed and funded.

The border between art and technology is blurring, creating new frontiers

We are living in highly creative times, with limitless intertwined possibilities influencing art, technology and artificial intelligence. Physical, touchable art is complemented by digital purely visual art, which doesn't really exist and is selling for a fortune such as Beeple's non-fungible token fetching \$69m at Christie's.

AI sees robots increasingly assisting with inventory, crop spraying, security, cleaning and in some cases, art creation from oceanic plastic pollution such as at Selfridges in London. Digital, immersive, moving art and robotics offer novelty experiential and practical applications and installations to retailers and shopping centres across physical and other channels.



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Design, a force to be harnessed for the good of the world

Design as a general theme is evolving rapidly, but of specific importance is the way it may influence how and where we live.

Latest advancements showcase innovative use of containers and homes and structures that unfold and build themselves in a matter of minutes, with potential upliftment and lifesaving use in various scenarios.

Further, we are now seeing the development of self-contained floating cities in areas threatened by climate change, as in the Maldives.

The first signs of a mobile way of life and mobile communities are starting to emerge. Do we need to start thinking about mobile and floating shopping centres?

The fundamental differential

As we return to a more interactive life, the fundamental differential has to be the experience that is offered within the bricks and mortar of the physical shopping centre. The values of what has emerged as an enlightened centre must be contained in the in-store, centre and entertainment experiential aspects.

Centres must therefore celebrate humanity, be emotionally intelligent, and hold a rich sense of life.

In addition, personal touch, and an important relationship economy, underpinned by excellent service, customer knowledge, thoughtfulness and philanthropy are coming to the fore as people value these aspects highly after isolation and ongoing hard times.

(This is from a keynote address at a Women's Property Network event, hosted by Liberty Two Degrees, covering current global influential trends and shopping centre industry performance by Belinda Clur.)

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