

# The critical South African consumer

 By [Stephanie Matterson](#)

3 Feb 2016

There is a growing confidence among South African consumers that they no longer have to compromise even with limited funds.



Stephanie Matterson

This trend of an increased expectation of choice and less willingness to settle has emerged gradually over time, but is now a much more pervasive sentiment observed across a variety of categories, products and services.

We've noticed increased levels of rejection when consumers are made to feel that they are compromising. This shared sentiment amongst South African consumers is interesting because it is a marked shift away from the more accepting stance this market is known for.

South African consumers in the past have been slightly apologetic and people with less buying power simply accepted when brands made them feel less significant than others by offering poor quality and limited choice. But it is now evident that as a nation we're no longer happy to be undermined. Consumers want to choose the level at which they engage with brands, they want to choose their point of entry and not be made to feel that they can only afford 'x or y'.

## Innovative efficiencies

In my view, this is being driven by two key dynamics. Firstly, there's been extensive innovation in the market. There are enough brands and products out there now that understand people and can deliver to them without compromising in some way. This has been supported by innovation in efficiencies, with savings being passed onto customers.

## Democratisation of information

Secondly, the democratisation of information has also supported the rise of a more empowered and entitled South African consumer. With the advent of the information age there is a much greater awareness, not only of what's available, but a more globally shared aspiration of who people want to be and how they want to get there. As a result, people's expectations are no longer so closely tied to their economic situation.

## Consumer consciousness

This rise of the critical consumer has some parallels with the current political consciousness where there is a less apologetic mind set with the thinking, 'just because I have less, it doesn't mean I am worth less.' In my view, this shift in thinking is most noticeable in the mass South African market where historically there was a sentiment of 'I am lucky to have what I have'.

## Brand caution

The implication of this growing trend is that all brands must now be much more cautious of how they communicate with their customers. We as marketers haven't been mindful enough of our language and tonality in acknowledging that consumers want to feel empowered and that they are actually the drivers in the relationship. Brands are used to being the driver and making people reach out to them, but now consumers are doing the picking and choosing based on their individual needs.

In short, marketing efforts must be explicit in acknowledging that consumers have the power and they are the ones who actually decide how to spend their money. The kind of messaging that reminds people about their need to aim for less must be avoided, it's about what they want and understanding that value is determined by what they deem important and worthwhile.

The South African consumer is looking for *real value* - real value as defined by them.

## ABOUT STEPHANIE MATTERSON

Stephanie Matterson is Managing Director at KLA. She took over the reins of market research agency KLA, which now forms part of Kagiso Media, in 2004. With a background as a practising lawyer, Matterson initially started work for KLA in a consulting role. Matterson has more than 17 years' experience in the market research industry.

■ Embracing human complexity to drive brand innovation - 30 Mar 2020

■ [BizTrends 2016] The critical South African consumer - 3 Feb 2016

[View my profile and articles...](#)

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>