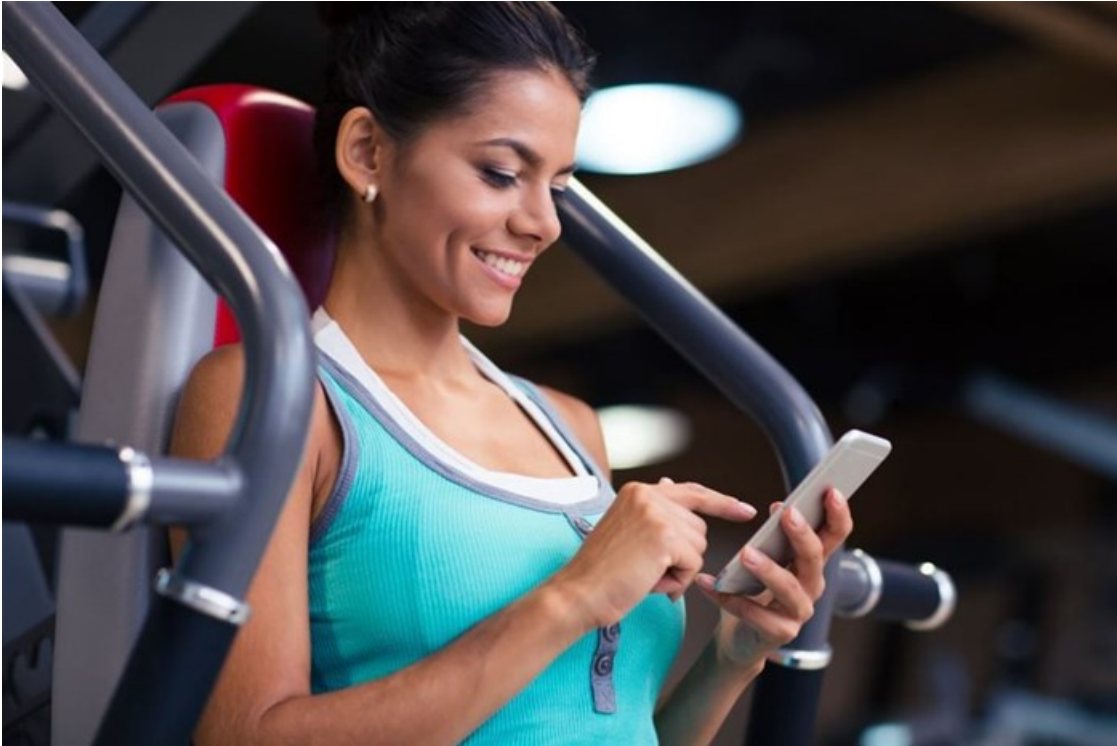


Health innovation is an opportunity for South African brands across multiple industries

 By [Rachel Thompson](#), issued by [GfK – An NIQ Company](#)

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With government striving to pass legislation to create a National Health Insurance (NHI) scheme to serve all South Africans, the country's health and wellness market is in flux. Along with the global trends reshaping the sector, this is a recipe for massive change and disruption that could have wide implications for consumer brands in every segment.



Our global longitudinal study, [GfK Consumer Life](#)* – which includes 1,000 South African respondents that are representative of the online population – pinpoints three major trends. These developments do not only affect health-related brands such as pharma, medical aid, private health and wellness companies. They also create threats and opportunities for brands in categories as diverse as consumer tech, food and beverages, entertainment and domestic appliances.

Let's take a closer look:

1. Seeking relief

One of the trends we're seeing among consumers in many parts of the world is rising anxiety, social stress and concern about safety and security. In South Africa, concerns about crime and worries about technology are helping to intensify feelings of insecurity among consumers, with 73% of our survey sample saying they are always concerned about their safety. This is up from 56% in 2017.

Consumers are seeking relief from the anxiety and stress they experience in their day to day lives. They are looking for products and services that make them feel safer and healthier – a trend that is apparent across all categories. People are looking for products that help them feel secure and in control at all times – for example, driver details, peer review and minute by minute control of the ride are major pluses of Uber.

Providing security can also be about transparency and simplicity. Monzo the digital bank based in the UK, offers security to

consumers through its casual, easy-to-understand approach to banking. Another symptom of the trend is the demand for premium services and products, with consumers seeking relief through pampering and indulgence (up 7% since 2017).

The popularity of 'hometainment' is also partly related to this trend. Three quarters of South Africans say they enjoy spending time at home – the reasons for this include safety and the ability to make sophisticated premium entertainment choices. Between video and music streaming services, the proliferation of food delivery services, and more ecommerce options, this trend is likely to grow.

Implication for brands: Consider how your product and service can address your customer's need for safety and self-care. Are there 'white space' opportunities to address? For example, consider the rise of new subcategories such as non-alcoholic beer, cannabis oil and weighted blankets. Or can you make consumers feel more secure through clarity and transparency?

2. Pivoting to prevention

The growing preoccupation with personal wellness – along with the eternal desire to retain youthfulness and skyrocketing healthcare costs – means that people are becoming more proactive about managing their health. There is a shift from cure to prevention – around 60% of online South Africans exercise at least once a week (up from 48% in 2017) and 51% agree that they aim for prevention rather than treatment.

Detection will also be an important element in health innovations. GfK Consumer Life research shows that consumers worldwide share a growing desire for proactive identification of threats such as allergens, contaminants, polluted air, and much more. New devices and services that do better jobs of identifying these threats to our health will become more of a "must have" in the future.

Implication for brands: Brands should look for new opportunities to address the focus on preventative healthcare and communicate the benefits to their customers in a clear manner. This is not limited to personal health products like probiotics or vitamins. For example, small domestic appliance manufacturers have seen a boom in demand for hot air fryers as connected South Africans embrace healthier eating habits.

3. Self-directed health

As part of the wider consumer shift towards taking control over their lifestyles and the brands with which they interact, consumers are embracing 'life logging', and 'health and fitness tracking'. South Africa's Discovery is a global pioneer in this space, with many life and health insurers worldwide using its Vitality behavioural wellness programme to help people manage their own health better.

More and more people are using wearables and smartphones to track health and fitness metrics such as heart rate, calorie intake, steps taken, and more, all with the goal of better managing their own wellbeing. Some 19% of online South Africans own a smart watch and 20% use mobile devices to track their health. Programmes such as Vitality add incentives and a layer of gamification on top of this health data.

Burnout is a word we hear more often as consumers feel the pressure to perform in an always-on environment. Consumers are turning to ways that they can transform themselves into super-humans, helping to drive growth of the superfoods and bio-hacking categories.

Plus, knowledge, learning and creativity are now among South Africans' top five values as reflected by our research.

As such, people are using online communities and other online resources to make better health choices – including brand and product selection. This shift of control from brands, retailers, and advertisers to customers is apparent across many other categories. This is due to not only how attitudes and personal values are shifting, but also the vast amount of information now available from our peers via social media, review sites, and more.

Implications for brands: Empower your customers to follow their own health journey, supporting them with personalised messages that help them make the right choices. Where appropriate, offer benefits and rewards related to self-quantification.

Seeking innovation

Consumers are seeking health innovations and depending on brands to help them achieve their goals. Regardless of industry, understanding these trends more deeply can help brands leverage an extraordinary opportunity.

*[*GfK Consumer Life](#) is a global data and insight service that provides a view on how consumers' everyday lives are evolving. It provides access to what people think, and what people do on a global, regional, local or micro level.*

ABOUT RACHEL THOMPSON

Rachel Thompson is the Insights Director at GfK South Africa. She has 16 years of experience in market research, working first for Research International and then moving to GfK South Africa in 2009. She has experience across a wide range of research disciplines and a strong interest in innovation. Rachel has an Honours degree in Economics from the University of Natal.

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