

What retailers can learn from social media feedback during Covid-19

By [Nic Ray](#)

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The retail industry has been profoundly affected by the Covid-19 crisis. The way consumers buy from and engage with grocery stores has changed. And as the crisis unfolds, consumer behaviour will evolve too.



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For retailers, staying switched on to evolving consumer priorities and preferences will be key to delivering customer-centric goals. To do this, they will need to tap into fresh data inputs that can provide an accurate and real-time voice of the consumer to inform continuous improvements and better decisions.

Social media is one source of volunteered and real-time consumer feedback. And, if gathered accurately at scale, it can provide a sense of what the consumer is feeling, why they're feeling that way and, where, in the customer journey, particular pain points exist.

In our analysis of grocery retail on social media during the pandemic in South Africa and the UK, we found that conversation focused on four key areas that will be critical for retail in the months and years ahead: e-commerce, health and hygiene, staff, and CSR.

Consumer sentiment trends for grocery retail in South Africa



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Selling online will require improving online customer service

As consumer preferences move online, retailers must improve their online experience. Online grocery shopping has boomed during lockdown, as a result, demand for customer service online is going to increase. During the first few weeks of hard lockdown retail conversation on social media in South Africa increased by 300%.

Retailers were insufficiently prepared for these volumes of online queries. As a result, retailers' response rates to customers on Twitter [dropped by 36%](#). Social media is going to be a growing source of queries and complaints. Finding these important conversations and responding to them quickly will be key to unlocking loyalty.



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New hygiene standards require monitoring and improvement

Across all the markets BrandsEye analysed, consumers have been sharing their preferred retailers based on Covid-19 hygiene standards. In South Africa, social media conversation about in-store hygiene had the second-largest increase during the lockdown, increasing by 11.7 points; while complaints about this theme increased by 13.5 points.

Consumers will continue to call out retailers and individual stores that fall short of their safety expectations. Retailers should monitor these to ensure they can intervene at a store or brand level.

Employee experience impacts customer satisfaction

In [research BrandsEye conducted](#) jointly with Deloitte, consumers in South Africa were concerned about how retailers were treating their staff. Retailers must ensure that they are looking after their staff, particularly during the pandemic. Consumers will rightly call them out when they do not and will choose to shop elsewhere.

Retailers who implemented relief and other measures to protect staff saw higher levels of positive sentiment on social media. [In the UK](#), initiatives geared towards employee wellbeing, such as bonuses, working conditions and access to PPE had a positive impact on consumer sentiment and brand reputation.



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Consumers have become acutely aware of the efforts across society to help those affected by Covid-19. In particular, they're looking to the brands they buy from to show leadership on this front. Those brands who are willing to make concerted efforts to help those in need are likely to build trust with a growing number of socially conscious consumers.

For the UK's online retailers' the overwhelming majority of positive consumer feedback stemmed from their CSR and charity initiatives.



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Listen to valuable feedback or risk losing customers

[Research conducted by BrandsEye](#) and rewards programme, Bonsella, revealed that shoppers are currently doing less frequent grocery shops, but when they do, their baskets are bigger than pre-pandemic. During this pandemic, the experience of grocery shopping, both online and instore, is something that is given more thought than usual. As a result, consumers are highly sensitive to this experience, from health and hygiene measures to timeous online delivery.

To fulfill these expectations, retailers must use social media to understand where they can improve and what their customers want. Retailers that get wise to this will undoubtedly have a significant advantage.

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