

# Editorial:

## The Strain of Global Shifts on Retail and Marketing

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These days, there's a weight hanging over businesses, one that's hard to ignore. The world feels more uncertain than it ever has. We're still feeling the ripple effects of the pandemic, tensions between countries are rising, and the economic fallout continues to hit hard. Everywhere you look, businesses are struggling to stay afloat, and for those in retail and marketing, the pressure's only intensifying. It's not just about rising costs or supply chains falling apart anymore—there's a sense of not knowing what comes next, and that's a hard thing to navigate.

Geopolitical shifts are shaking up the way the world operates. Trade barriers are going up, nationalism is on the rise, and the stability that once seemed so solid now feels fragile. These changes are reverberating through economies, messing with supply chains, pushing up costs, and shifting demand in ways we never expected. It was already difficult to keep a business going in "normal" times, but now businesses feels like they are constantly trying to keep up with something that's always changing.

Retailers are feeling it the most. The world's changed, and so have customers. They're no longer just after a good deal—they're looking for businesses that stand for something. They want transparency, sustainability, and ethical practices, and if they feel like companies are falling short, they won't hesitate to take their money elsewhere. It's not just about what you sell anymore—it's about how you sell it, and whether you're aligned with what your customers believe in.

Similarly marketing is a whole other beast right now. Privacy concerns are growing, data laws are tightening, and the digital space we once relied on is constantly shifting. The tools we used to count on—those data-driven campaigns and precise targeting—are under fire. Privacy laws are getting stricter, and social media algorithms seem to change on a whim. What worked before isn't guaranteed to work now, and everybody is scrambling to find new ways to reach people, to engage them in a way that doesn't overstep boundaries.



There's a real sense of despair taking place and especially smaller businesses are feeling it deeply. The rising costs, the labour shortages, the uncertainty of it all—it's a lot to juggle, especially when every cent counts. For those trying to keep up with the digital transformation, it can feel like they are always playing catch-up.

However, despite all of this, there's also room for growth. It might sound strange, but in these times of struggle, there are opportunities. The businesses that will thrive aren't the ones sitting back and waiting for things to get better—they're the ones who are looking at the world as it is now and finding ways to adapt. It's not about sticking to old strategies or hoping for things to go back to normal—it's about accepting that the rules have changed and figuring out how to make them work .

The world isn't going to wait for businesses to catch up. They either get ahead of the curve, or risk being left behind. It's not just about surviving—it's about resilience. It's not just about keeping the cash flow steady, but about staying agile, staying proactive, and keeping up with the changes. Businesses that are waiting for something to happen will get stuck in the mud. The ones that are driving change, taking risks, and finding new ways to stay relevant? They'll be the ones who shape the future.

In the end, the ball's in the court of businesses. They can either fold under the weight of all of this or step up and meet the challenge head-on. It's not just about profits anymore—it's about how companies engage with the world. And as tough as things are, there's a chance to turn this grief into something bigger, something better. Retail and business are at a crossroads, and how they react to these challenges will determine what the retail and marketing world looks like in the years to come.

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## Looking ahead: An agenda for the sector and for research

The themes emerging across retail point towards several priorities for the coming years:

- Strengthening resilience in the face of energy and infrastructure constraints
- Supporting inclusive economic participation and skills development
- Ensuring ethical, transparent and consumer-centred use of data and technology
- Developing more sustainable models of sourcing, distribution and packaging
- Deepening our understanding of township and informal retail ecosystems

The Retail and Marketing Review remains committed to providing a platform where these issues can be examined with rigour, creativity and a sensitivity to the realities of the South African context. The insights offered by our authors are not only academically valuable; they speak directly to the practical challenges and opportunities shaping the sector.

Retail in South Africa is dynamic, adaptive and deeply woven into everyday life. Its future will be shaped not only by economic conditions, but also by the imagination and resilience of the people who work within it. Our hope is that the thinking shared in this issue contributes-however modestly-to that next chapter.

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