

Predicting the future with WGSN trends

 By [Louise Marsland](#)

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Global trends authority WGSN launched its latest trends research in South Africa today. WGSN regional director for Africa, Hannari Slabbert, told Bizcommunity.com why the event was an important one on their global calendar.



Hannari Slabbert

■ Tell me more about this futures event - how does it differ from other trend events?

Futures Cape Town is one of the six events that are part of our global [WGSN Futures](#) programme. In 2017 this flagship summit is running in London, New York, Hong Kong, Sao Paulo, Melbourne and Cape Town. The focus of the programme is centred around the 'Future Consumer' looking at those key drivers that are shifting consumer behaviour over the next three to five years. One of the biggest challenges for executives today is to stay true to their brand's DNA in a fast-paced market. We will discuss why that is important for the longevity of companies and how do they keep up with ever evolving consumer needs and desires.

We are very excited to have our first major trend summit to South Africa. Cape Town will see a community of more than 100 creative executives get together and connect. It is a strong testament to the powerful creative community that we know exists in Cape Town and in SA at large.

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■ Why is WGSN focusing on the African continent at this time?

The South African retail value chain has been significantly disrupted over the past few years and retailers and suppliers need to have a clear point of differentiation and confidence in their design execution. Added to that is a complex consumer mix who are increasingly influenced by international media and expect a contemporary offering in-store. In 2017, we significantly expanded our trend content across Africa, focusing on the important social and style movements coming from

this continent to help customers make profitable creative decisions to stay ahead of these challenges.

■ What are some of the most significant consumer trends being presented, that stand out for you?

Personally I think that the most important trend that we will be talking about is that of the *Future of Experience Design - The Meaning Economy*.

Forrester research has found that for every dollar invested in user experience brings in \$100 in return. This year, Gartner predicted that 89% of marketers expect customer experience to be their primary differentiator.

People do not publicise purchases as much on social media much anymore, they share experiences they are having, and things they care about. We may often forget the stuff we own, but we won't forget as easily the sensation of a particular event we attended or a moment we share with someone.

But if you want to go way, way back almost 10 years ago, the experience economy really began after the 2008 recession. Many people felt poorer, our lifestyles seemed in jeopardy, but everyone could enjoy a swim, a hike or a burger, and thanks to technology, they could record and SHARE the moment with an exponential amount of others via social media.

The good thing about experience is that it is DEMOCRATIC: we all have them, big or small, good or bad, cheap or expensive.

When you travel, you can go to a luxury hotel, but many people feel they have a better experience renting a cosy Airbnb and being taken around town by a local. You can fly for the luxury holiday of a lifetime to Bali, but you can also hike in the mountains just outside Hong Kong and have a wonderful, memorable time.

TODAY even with the economy improving people continue to want experiences over stuff.

I love this quote by Vogue's International editor Suzy Menkes: "We live in a changed world that is shifting from the material to the immaterial. Ask any young person today and they'd rather lose their wallet than their phone."

■ As regards the branding trends, what is the most key for marketers to take home?

Global uncertainty is rapidly re-shaping what we value. We are all aware that experiences and products alone are not solutions. We're looking for meaning. And it's this quest that is carving out new generational priorities.

Wherever we sit on the generational spectrum we live within a false cult-of-productivity, where our engagement with tech is creating a world where we are too distracted to properly process our emotions.

So what's making us so anxious – well the biggest culprit is connection itself. We are more connected than ever. We hit the man-to-machine tipping point in 2016, when, according to Gartner, connected devices reached 7.8 billion units. By next year there will be more connected devices than humans on the earth.

With the age of anxiety upon us we are already seeing that brands and retailers who embed a caring element into the

purchasing experience are reflecting the concerns of multiple demographics.

Cohn & Wolfe's *Age of Authenticity* survey found "nearly nine in 10 people (89%) said it was important for businesses to act with integrity at all times, surpassing 'innovation' (72%); and bringing 'unique products to market' (71%), as factors in their buying decisions".

Another great quote for brand marketers from Geoff Beattie, global practice leader at Cohn & Wolfe: "Truth really is the only sustainable advantage."

■ What do you hope that attendees will take away from the event?

Delegates of Futures Cape Town can expect to be inspired by six hours of keynote presentations on: the future of the meaning economy, at the heart of global consumer trends (Andrea Bell); key consumer trends specific to Africa and SA (And People); the future of experience design (Lisa White) and brand collaborations (Luceny Fofana); how African and global brands can prepare for the future consumer (respectively, Brian Mtongana and Andrea Bell).

Futures Cape Town will welcome 100 senior delegates across leading retailers, agencies, FMCG brands and design firms. Delegates will also receive a summary report on key insights from all our global Futures events to get a fully universal view as well on our trend research across the world. Combined with the insights from local South African experts who are joining our speaker list, this event will provide unrivalled intelligence to everyone attending.

■ Why is this event important for the WGSN brand?

Whether we are aware of it or not, trends dictate the products we want and services we crave. Identifying trends before they reach critical mass enables companies to tap into unlimited potential growth. We created Futures to challenge the way brands see the world, inspire creativity and to connect our community. The fundamental role of WGSN as a business is to provide unrivalled business intelligence to organisations so that they can validate those very expensive and important creative decisions. It's about helping our clients to understand their market, their consumer and it is about the future. What is coming next.

ABOUT LOUISE MARSLAND

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