

THE TOWNSHIP CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE REPORT

2026

Rogerwilco



INTRODUCTION

Township residents pay for more than the products and services they use while balancing low incomes, high inflation and uneven access to connectivity and staple products. They also absorb the work required to keep daily life functioning when electricity, water and public services are unreliable. A power cut can spoil food, change supper and interrupt work. A dry tap adds the labour of finding, storing or buying water. Expensive data raises the cost of comparing, applying, banking or buying online. Each disruption demands another plan.

That hidden expense is the **COST OF COPING**. It is paid in money, time, food, attention, opportunity and stress. It also shapes what people buy, where they shop, how they save, which risks they take and which brands earn a place in daily life.

Since the first edition in 2021, the Township CX Report has traced the growing influence of township communities on South African commerce and culture.

THE TOWNSHIP IS EVERYWHERE challenged the idea that townships exist at the edges of the economy in 2024. **BREAKING BOUNDARIES** followed local shopping, financial, food and cultural practices beyond geography in 2025. This sixth edition turns the lens towards the household and the effort required to keep it moving.

Responses from 1,600 township residents show how widespread that effort has become. Electricity outages affect 79% at least once a month, 55% experience monthly water interruptions and 47% live with both. Service delivery challenges affect stress and decision-making "a lot" for 43% and somewhat for another 31%. Service delivery is among the factors shaping hope for 34% and hopelessness for 36%.

These pressures place customer experience inside a wider human experience. The journey begins before a person enters a supermarket, visits a spaza, opens an app or sees a promotion. It begins with the money left for the month, the food that can be stored safely, the electricity and water available to prepare it, the data that can be afforded and the time required to solve problems that should be routine.

Chapter 1, The Customer Journey Starts at Home, details how unreliable services change the value of a purchase before and after the till. A product may be affordable but become costly when it cannot be refrigerated or prepared. The chapter follows the way outages fragment the basket between planned supermarket shops, immediate spaza purchases and food prepared outside the home.

Chapter 2, Stretching Meals Further than the Rand,

tracks the same calculation through the grocery basket. Households are protecting foods that support familiar meals, feed more people and work across several occasions. More residents are buying maize meal and chicken, while 51% are buying less beef, mince and boerewors. More affordable everyday products lead household priorities at 61%, while price influences brand choice for 54% and quality for 53%. The finding is not a race to the lowest price. It is a demand for dependable value from the first serving to the last.

Chapter 3, Chasing Value through the Aisles,

maps how residents protect that basket through timing, distance and retailer choice. While 38% wait for specials or bundles before completing their main shop, 44% switched stores when prices became too high. Better promotions and a closer store each influenced 41%. Loyalty remains possible, but the saving must survive the cost of reaching the store, finding the product and completing the shop.

Chapter 4, Putting Hope on the Line,

follows limited money into two very different financial systems. Stokvels use time, rules and collective accountability to prepare for known expenses. Betting offers the possibility of a faster return while putting money at risk. Stokvel membership stands at 34% and gambling participation at 50%, while 55% of stokvel members also gambled. The overlap challenges any simple division between savers and bettors, and asks platforms to understand the full household effect of every transaction.

Chapter 5, Useful Is the New Visible,

turns to what residents expect from companies operating in these conditions. While 91% believe businesses should play some role when public services fail and 84% value an active local presence, only 20% feel brands help them cope with daily challenges. The gap is not an invitation for brands to replace government. It is a call to make pricing, pack sizes, product availability, local participation and community investment more relevant to the lives around the transaction.

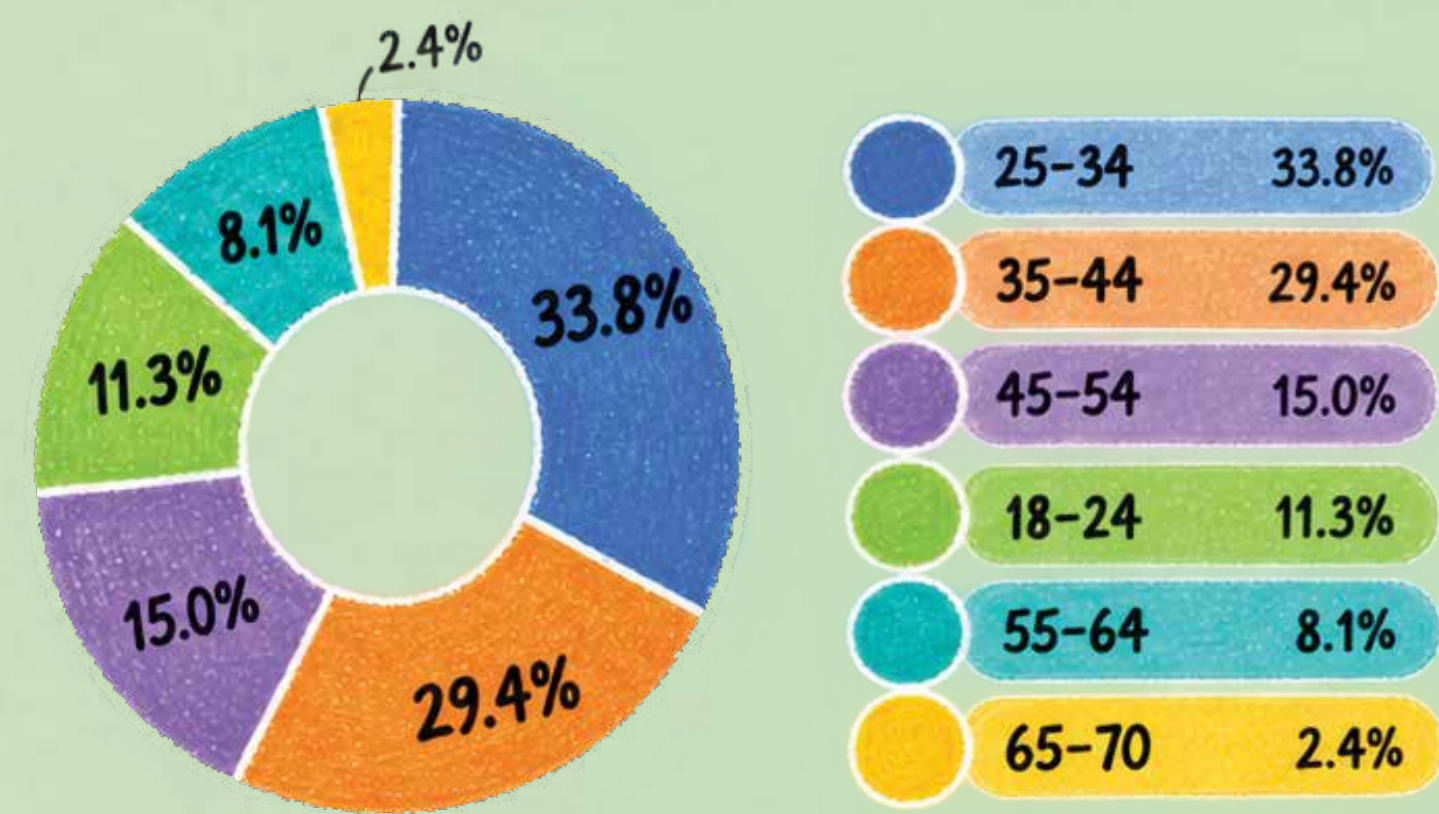
Chapter 6, When Digital Earns Its Data,

explores a connected market that still calculates the cost of participation. While 66% are online throughout the day, data costs sometimes or very often stop 37% from engaging with brands. Digital channels earn attention when they help people compare, order, pay, learn or decide with less friction. The same standard applies to AI, which 28% use for product discovery but only 3% list among their most trusted sources. Access may open the door, but usefulness and trust determine whether people continue through it.

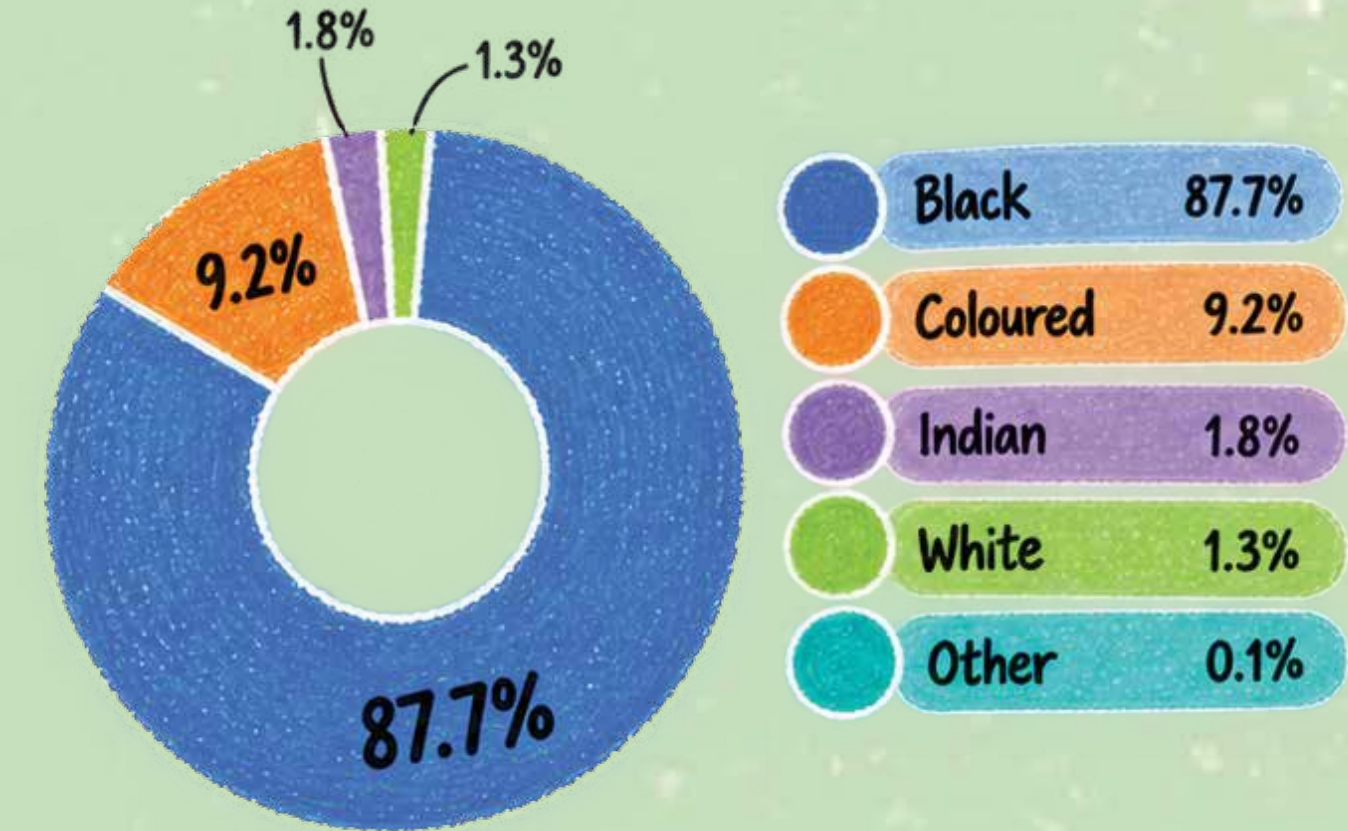
These six chapters show township residents adapting with speed and discipline without romanticising the burden of that adaptation. The report asks brands, retailers, platforms and institutions to understand what each interaction requires from the household and to reduce that demand wherever their decisions allow. Residents are already doing the work of adjusting. The question is whether the organisations seeking their trust will add to that work or help carry it.

DEMOGRAPHICS

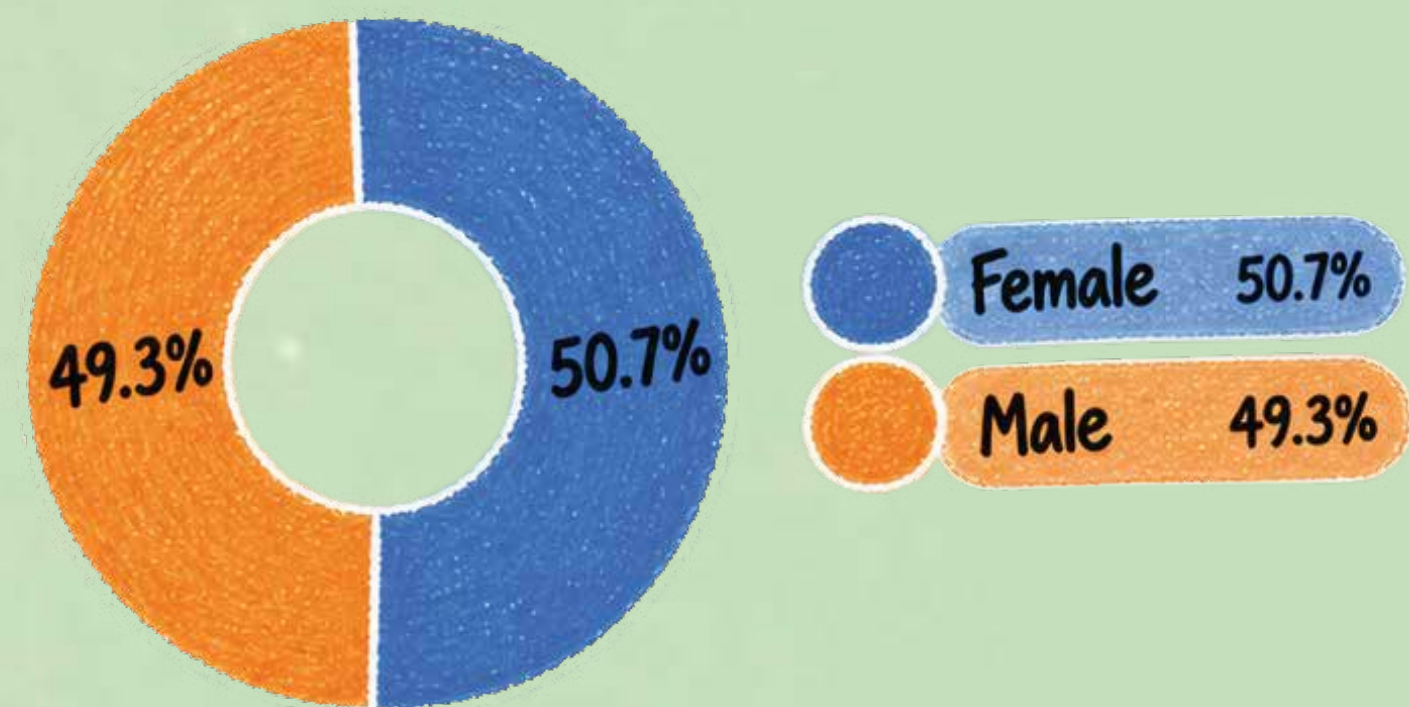
Age



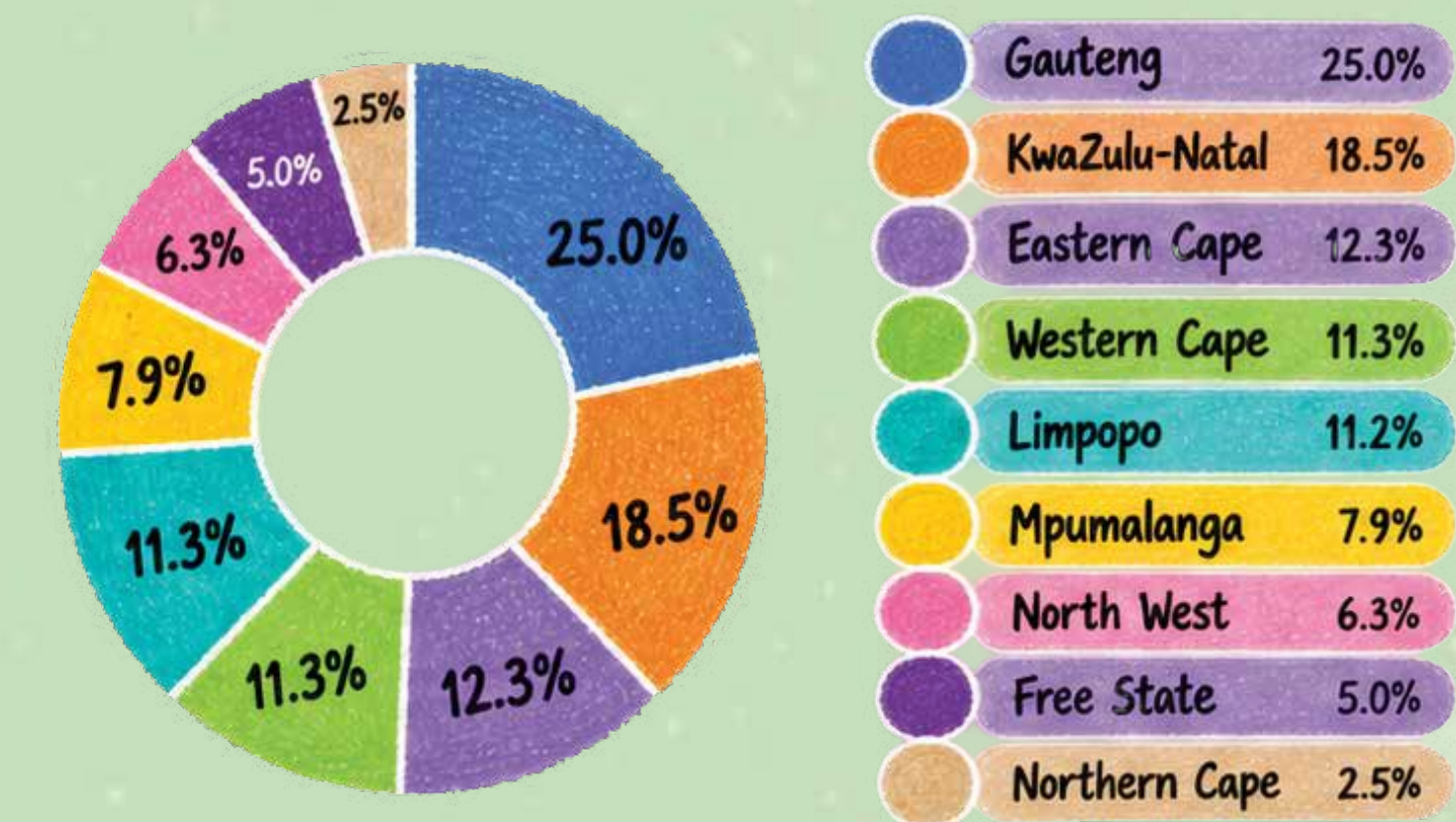
Race



Gender



Province



COMMENTATORS



BONGANI MABUZA

Founder and CEO, African Accent Brands

Bongani Mabuza, a seasoned entrepreneur based in Katlehong, leads African Accent Brands. With a background as a spaza shop owner, product developer, and distributor, Bongani is dedicated to elevating African brands and fostering economic opportunities for local communities. His work is a testament to his commitment to job creation and brand empowerment for other Africans.



DR SEMONA PILLAY

University of Johannesburg Senior Lecturer and Wholesale and Retail Leadership Chair in Gauteng

Dr Semona Pillay, a PhD graduate in Marketing Management and a lecturer in the Department of Marketing Management at the University of Johannesburg (UJ), is renowned as one of the most progressive researchers in Africa. Her passion lies at the intersection of Marketing and Retailing. Throughout her academic career at UJ, spanning 9 years, she has made significant strides in helping to reshape and redefine the landscape of retail education.

As a dedicated educator, Dr Pillay has transformed the Diploma in Retail Business Management programme, not only changing students' perceptions of Retailing but also enhancing the program to improve graduate success and employability.



MERVYN ABRAHAMS

Programme Coordinator, Pietermaritzburg Economic Justice & Dignity Group (PMBEJD)

As PMBEJD programme coordinator, Mervyn Abrahams oversees the publication of the monthly Household Affordability Index. His professional focus centres on advancing social and economic justice through empirical advocacy and systemic change.



BRIAN MAKWAIBA

Managing Director, Vuleka Platform

As Managing Director and Co-Founder of Vuleka Platform, Brian Makwaiba leads an e-commerce and fintech platform tailored to the informal sector. Acknowledged as one of South Africa's top youth entrepreneurs, Brian has been recognised with multiple innovation awards—such as one of 2015's Top 50 Youth Entrepreneurs in South Africa, Innovator of the Year in 2017, Standard Bank Rising Star 2018, and one of the Top 20 Business Heroes in Jack Ma's Africa NetPreneur prize 2019. His work with Vuleka underscores his commitment to harnessing digital solutions for sustainable growth in underserved markets.



BONGANI SOKO

Co-Founder and Business Development Director, Godlela

Bongani Soko is a visionary marketer with a deep understanding of cultural trends, emerging market dynamics, and community needs. As Co-Founder and Business Development Director at Godlela, he oversees turnkey fibre solutions that connect Africa's underserved regions—in Mpumalanga, Limpopo, and Gauteng—to the global digital economy. Partnering with industry leaders like Vuma and BritelinkMCT, Bongani's initiatives bridge infrastructure with community needs, supporting growth through inclusive technology access.



DIMITRI TSAPERAS

Group CEO of Network X OOH

Dimitri Tsaperas is CEO of Network X OOH and a specialist in understanding how brands can meaningfully connect with South Africa's township consumers. With a deep understanding of township environments, culture and consumer behaviour, he brings a practical OOH perspective to the insights explored in this report.



CHARNÉ MUNIEN

Strategy Director, Rogerwilco

Charné Munien is the Strategy Director at Rogerwilco and an IAB Bookmarks Black Pixel winner. A through-the-line planner operating at the intersection of brands, data and culture, she combines deep experience in communications, media, shopper and digital strategy. She is obsessed with human truths and CX, and is a dedicated advocate for diversity and empowering women in the ad industry.



SYDNEY MBHELE

Group Chief Brand, Marketing and Corporate Affairs Officer, Absa Group

Sydney is currently Group Chief Brand, Marketing and Corporate Affairs Officer. With over twenty years' experience in brand strategy, corporate communications and reputation management, His career journey spans senior and executive roles in global and multi-territory organisations such as Unilever, SABMiller, Nedbank and Sanlam. In these roles, he led marketing, communications and corporate affairs strategies that maximise organisational value creation.



PALESA LENGOLO

Author, Financial Inclusion Specialist and Stokvel Expert

Palesa Lengolo has over 15 years of experience in financial services, spanning banking, investments, accounting, governance, and financial literacy advocacy. She has dedicated her career to driving transformation, fostering financial inclusion, and ensuring systemic change within South Africa's financial sector. She has held key positions in financial product management, investment operations, and governance at institutions including Absa and Alexander Forbes. Palesa is also the author of Stokvels: How They Can Make Your Money Work for You.



MONGEZI MTATI

Marketing Manager, Rogerwilco

With over twelve years of experience in digital brand-building, Mongezi Mtati serves as Rogerwilco's Marketing Manager. He has been instrumental in brand thinking across the digital landscape for leading brands such as Standard Bank, Brand South Africa, Babcock, Nestlé and many others. When thinking through strategy, he obsesses over the intersection between human insight and data. You may find him podcasting, speaking at conferences or trying his hand at travel and wildlife photography.



TIM TREAGUS

Co-Founder and CEO, Yazi

Tim Treagus is the co-founder and CEO of Yazi, an AI-moderated research platform running interviews with consumers across 15+ African and emerging markets. He founded Yazi in 2022 and now spends most of his time on the methodology of AI-moderated research: how to design the interview, engineer the prompt, and get honest, useful data at scale.



SIBONGILE SIMELANE-QUNTANA

Executive Director, South African Responsible Gambling Foundation (SARAF)

Sibongile Simelane-Quntana operates at the intersection of evidence-based public health policy, behavioural epidemiology, systemic institutional governance, and advanced data analytics. With over 20 years of experience in executive management, she currently serves as the Executive Director of the SARAF. In this capacity, her mandate is to transform complex socio-economic challenges into sustainable, data-driven interventions that mitigate community harm while promoting and supporting policy and regulatory frameworks.



SUZAN LOSABA

Founder and Managing Director, Field & Insights Africa

Suzan Losaba brings nearly 30 years of industry experience, having held key insights roles on both the supplier and client sides for major companies such as Ipsos, L'Oréal, and GSK, focusing on the African market. Her expertise in market research, data analytics, and strategic consulting has been instrumental in building a diverse respondent panel and robust methodologies, positioning her as a trusted partner for navigating Africa's complex markets. Through her commitment to data-driven decision-making and deep understanding of African market dynamics, Suzan continues to drive growth and innovation, empowering organisations to make informed, strategy-shaping decisions based on empirical research.



MILES KUBHEKA

CEO, Wakanda and Gcwalisa

Miles embodies audacious innovation. Leaving a leading multinational, he took a bold leap. Inspired by a famous “beeg beeg dreamer” TV ad campaign, he ingeniously launched a real restaurant mirroring the fictional one's name and branding. This visionary move catapulted him into media stardom and transformed his innovative thinking into entrepreneurial success. This nexus of innovation, entrepreneurship and philanthropy led Miles to start two other businesses, Wakanda and Gcwalisa—a journey of a lived experience to impacting livelihoods.



CHAPTER 1

The Customer Journey

Starts at Home

THE CUSTOMER JOURNEY STARTS AT HOME

Township shopping is an ecosystem of formal and informal retail, shaped by how households move between supermarkets, spazas, butcheries and independent traders. Price remains central, although distance, available cash, time, storage and the reliability of household services also influence where money is spent, what enters the basket and how often people shop.

NielsenIQ estimates that the South African traditional trade sector comprises around 190 000 outlets, carries approximately R170-billion in annual FMCG sales and is used regularly by almost 80% of South African households.¹ With a channel of that size woven into everyday shopping, household infrastructure becomes part of the retail environment.

The 2026 Township CX Survey found that 79% of respondents experience electricity outages at least once a month, 55% face monthly water interruptions and 47% live with both. Whether caused by network failures, damaged infrastructure or load reduction, these interruptions affect what households can store and cook, when they shop and which outlets remain useful.

¹ "Traditional Trade in South Africa", NielsenIQ: <https://jo.my/niq170>



POWER FROM THE PEOPLE

South Africa's national power grid is in a considerably better position than it was during the height of loadshedding. Stats SA reports that 90% of households were connected to mains electricity in 2025, and 69% experienced no loadshedding or unscheduled interruptions during the week before they were interviewed.²

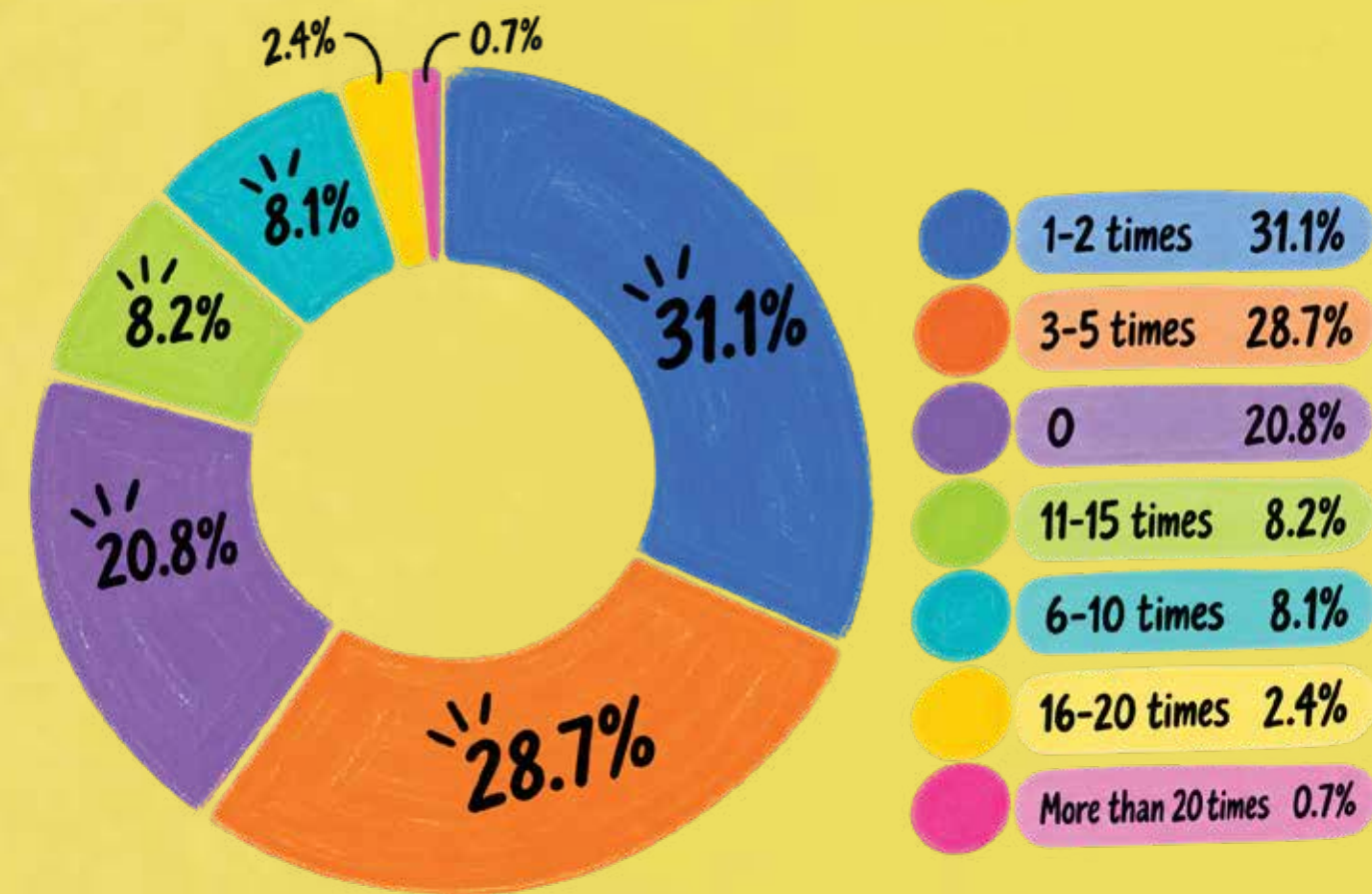
This national recovery has not produced consistent household reliability in township communities. The Township CX Survey found that 79% experience at least one outage a month, while Eskom reports that the proportion of its customers affected by load reduction has declined from 23% at its peak to approximately 7%. National generation can improve while local interruptions continue to affect cooking, trading and product use. More than one million customers have been removed from load-reduction schedules, although work to improve the grid continues in the Eastern Cape, Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal.³



² "General Household Survey 2025", Stats SA: <https://jo.my/ghs25>

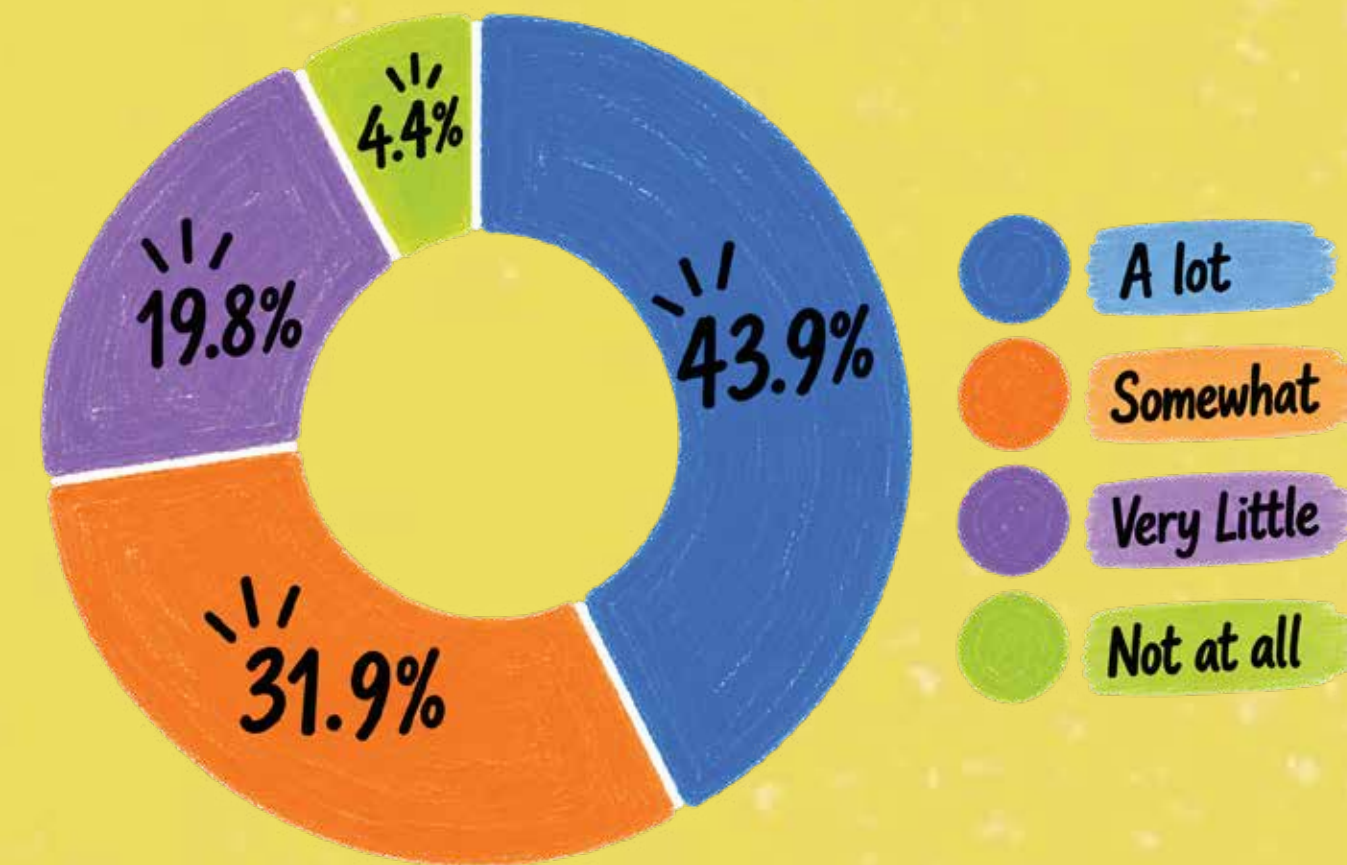
³ "Eskom maintains stronger system performance", Eskom: <https://jo.my/e1k3jl>

In a typical month, how many times do you experience electricity outages (load reduction or power cuts)?



With 31% losing power once or twice in a typical month and a further 29% reporting three to five interruptions, outages are close to weekly for a large segment of residents. Repeated disruption creates a planning burden that extends well beyond the hours without electricity because households must continually decide when to cook, shop or use products that depend on refrigeration. These homes are constantly required to change their plans rather than recover from a rare inconvenience.

How much do service delivery challenges impact your stress and decision-making?



The strain is evident in how residents describe their levels of stress and hope. Poor service delivery affects the stress and decisions of 44% “a lot”, while another 32% feel the effect somewhat. When asked what would make them more hopeful about the future, 34% selected better service delivery, while 36% identified poor service delivery as something that currently contributes to hopelessness. Reliable services are evidence that life is becoming more manageable, while repeated failure reinforces the notion that households must keep solving the same problems themselves.

“National power recovery can coexist with monthly outages for 79% of township residents.”

HOUSEHOLD BURDEN INFLUENCES DECISIONS

Electricity interruptions affect 79% of both women and men, rising to 83% among respondents aged 45 to 54 and 81% among those aged 35 to 44. The scale of exposure shows that unreliable power affects a broad range of residents, although it is highest among age groups that are more likely to balance work, dependants and household purchasing decisions. For these residents, an outage can mean deciding whether to change the evening meal, protect what is already in the fridge or spend scarce money replacing food that can no longer be used.

Among the larger provincial samples, monthly outages range from 84% in the Eastern Cape to 72% in the Free State. The implication for brands and retailers is national in scale but local in effect, as shopping behaviour depends on outage frequency, duration and the alternatives available nearby. Brands that treat outages as an external public-service issue risk overlooking the conditions that shape the decisions of their core household buyers.



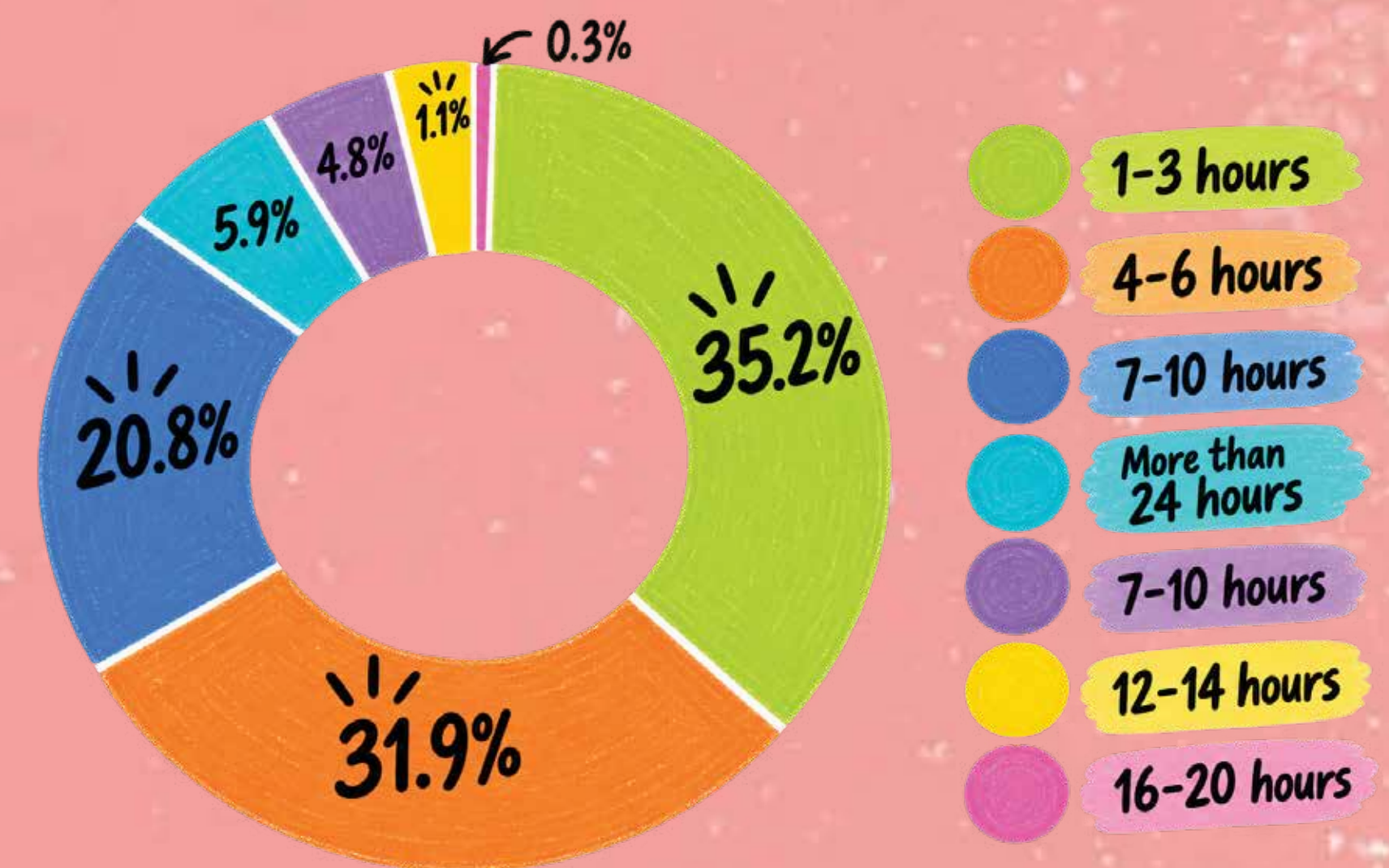
FRIDGES AND DEVICES SUPPORT LIVELIHOODS

Among residents experiencing electricity interruptions, 46% buy fewer fresh or perishable foods that require refrigeration. The share rises to 51% where outages last four to six hours and 63% where they last seven to ten hours. Affordability is judged at the till and again at home, where meat, milk, vegetables and leftovers lose their value if they cannot be preserved. Products that can be used quickly, stretched across several meals or stored without continuous refrigeration become more practical.

Familiar shelf-stable products offer certainty when household routines are disrupted. Mongezi Mtati, Senior Brand Strategist at Rogerwilco, sees this reflected in the way people plan for difficult periods.

“When electricity or water outages affect township homes, people often return to familiar brands and products. The usual can of pilchards, sardines or baked beans may already be set aside as backup, while other fallback options become part of the grocery list. The brands people remember in these moments are those associated with getting through hard times and trusted to be dependable.”

When electricity outages happen, how many hours do they usually last at a time?





“Infrastructure failure fragments the basket and reallocates spend.”

What replaces those purchases is not necessarily another product for the household pantry. Bongani Mabuza, Founder and CEO of African Accent Brands, sees some food demand move outside the home when electricity becomes unstable. “Rather than necessarily switching to canned food, people buy more prepared street food such as chicken dust (braaied chicken), inyama yenhloko (cow head meat) and kotas (quarter-loaf street sandwich), where traders can continue cooking with gas.” Snacks, bread and milk also remain popular because they are relatively affordable and require little preparation. His observation adds another dimension to the survey finding, showing that an outage can change not only what is bought, but where part of the meal is prepared.

Electricity also supports the phones that many residents use to work, trade and search for opportunities. The 2025 report found that 60% of township residents either sold products and services online or knew someone who did, while 60% of those spending more on connectivity used the internet for job hunting. An outage can compromise a meal and interrupt a source of income on the same evening. Chapter 6, When Digital Earns Its Data, develops this further, but, as a baseline, digital participation begins with a charged device and reliable power.

THE SPAZA AS A PRESSURE VALVE

Supermarkets and spazas often serve different shopping missions rather than operating as simple substitutes. A supermarket may win the planned main shop through price, range and promotions, while an outage around supper time creates an immediate need that may be difficult to meet at a distant store or shortly before closing.

Among residents experiencing electricity interruptions, 14% shop more at local spazas for smaller items and another 14% move more of their shopping to supermarkets with reliable power. “When electricity is unstable, we see shopping behaviour change quite quickly. More people spend time outside their homes and demand shifts towards smaller, immediate-use products.” His experience points to increased demand for snacks, cool drinks, single-unit noodles, smaller packs of maize meal, salt, spices and washing powder, as well as candles.

The shift, according to Bongani Mabuza, is not limited to essentials. He also reports increased demand for small premium treats such as higher-priced biscuits and chocolate. This suggests that the smaller outage-driven basket is not purely about minimising spend. Immediate affordability can coexist with small moments of indulgence, even while households are adapting to disruption.

A further 12% plan shopping around the expected availability of electricity. The split shows that infrastructure failure does not move spending in just one direction. It fragments the basket and reallocates spend according to the household’s immediate mission.

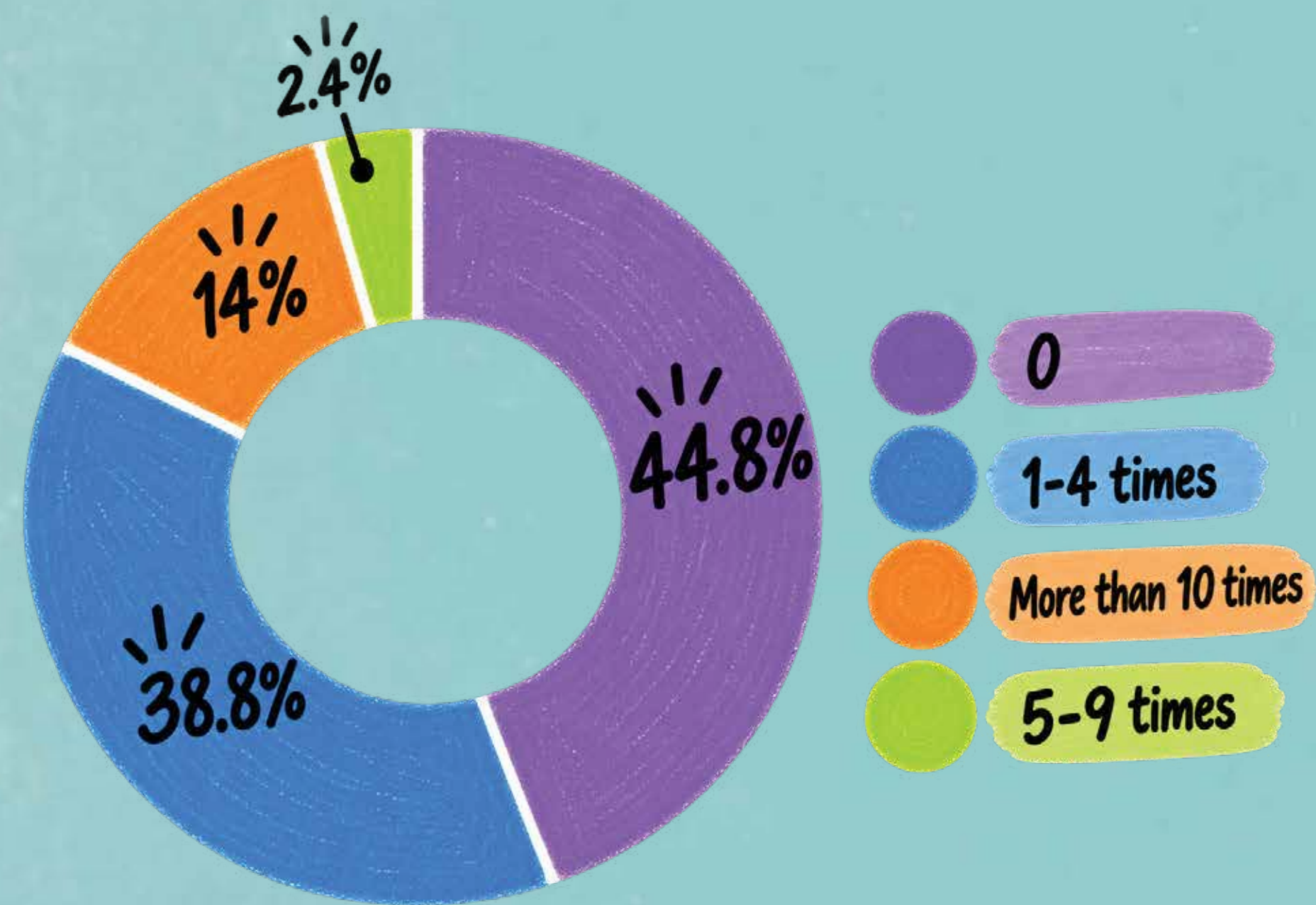
Proximity gives households another way to manage outages, allowing them to buy for an immediate need rather than keep larger quantities of food at home. This builds on the 2025 finding that 18% had increased their spaza shopping.



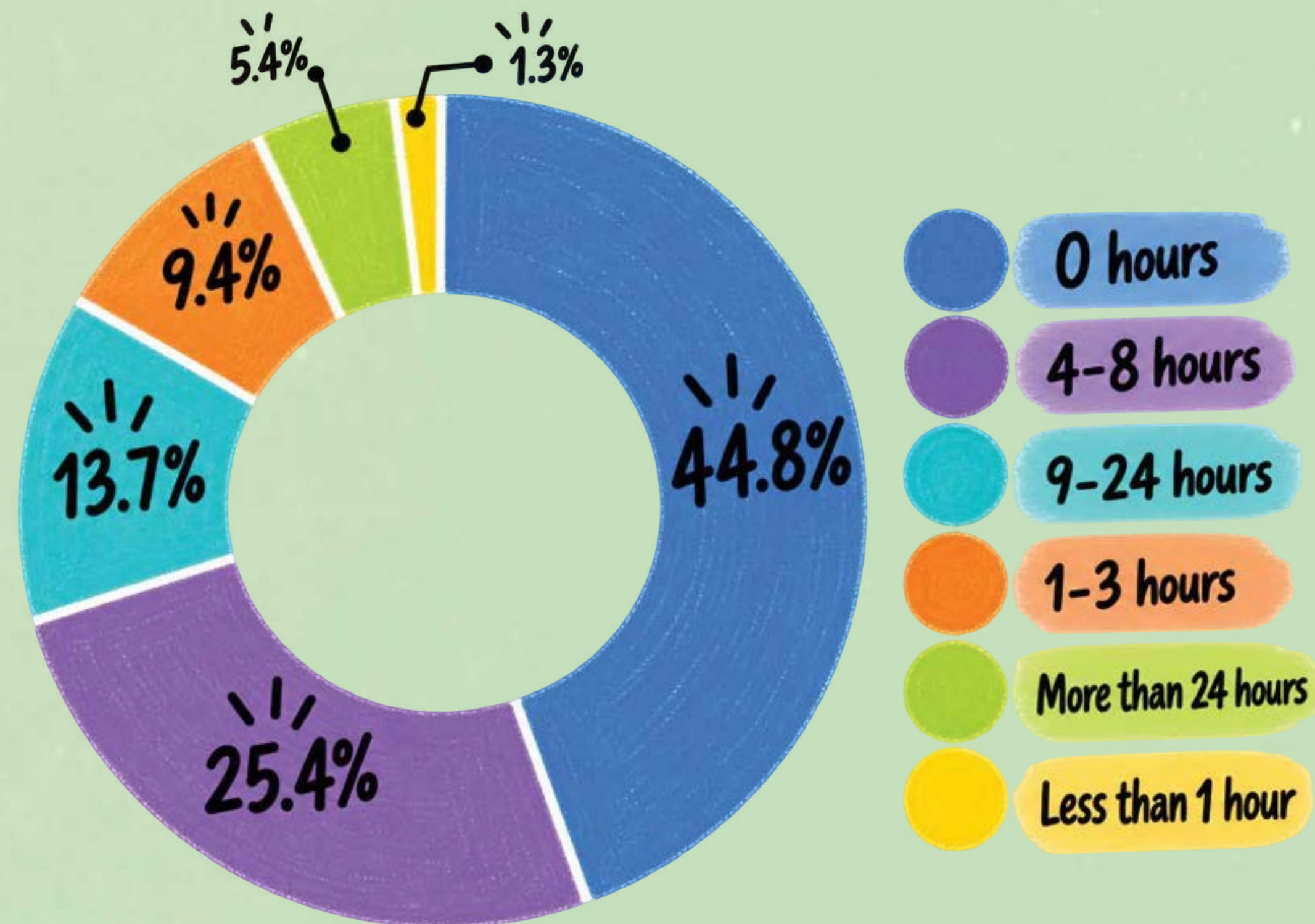
THE COST OF DRY TAPS

Stats SA's General Household Survey 2025 found that 56% of South African households experienced water interruptions, closely aligning with the 55% recorded in the 2026 Township CX Survey. The frequency varies considerably, with 14% experiencing more than ten interruptions in a typical month and 39% reporting between one and four.

In a typical month, how many times do you experience water outages in your area?



When water outages happen, how long do they usually last at a time?



KwaZulu-Natal records the highest prevalence in the township survey at 62%, followed by the Free State at 60% and Limpopo at 58%. A dry tap in these households may interrupt several lives at once, from children preparing for school to adults getting ready for work and older relatives requiring care.

Water interruptions affect 61% of residents aged 45 to 54, 58% of those aged 55 to 64 and 57% of people aged 35 to 44. Of those who experience water interruptions, 25% say they typically last four to eight hours, and 78% of this group face one to four such interruptions in a typical month. Losing water for several hours repeatedly can disrupt cooking, cleaning and washing while forcing households to find, store or buy water, transferring part of the labour of service provision to the home.

WHAT BRANDS AND RETAILERS CAN CONTROL

Brands and retailers have limited control over municipal or network failures, but they have considerable control over how much friction their products, stores and communications add to township homes. The higher expectation among residents facing both electricity and water interruptions shows that usefulness is judged most closely where the burden is greatest.

Product teams can consider formats that need less water or cooking time, keep for longer after opening, divide easily across meals and remain practical in smaller quantities. Commercial teams can use pack sizes and promotions to support more frequent, lower-value shopping trips without making the customer pay an excessive premium for buying less.

The customer journey starts at home because household conditions determine which needs become urgent, which products remain practical and which outlet is worth reaching. Infrastructure is not an issue sitting outside marketing. It shapes demand, channel choice, product use and the standards by which brands are judged. Organisations seeking growth in township markets need to reduce the cost of daily life wherever their products, services and decisions allow.



KEY INSIGHTS



- 1. Infrastructure reliability changes demand.**
With 79% experiencing monthly electricity interruptions and 55% facing water outages, distribution and activation decisions should reflect local service conditions rather than national averages.
- 2. Protect value after the purchase.**
Fresh and perishable purchases decline among 46% of residents facing outages, rising to 63% when interruptions last seven to ten hours. Affordability depends on whether a product can be stored, prepared and used before its value is lost.
- 3. Plan around different shopping occasions.**
Among residents facing outages, 12% change their shopping habits. Brands must serve both the planned shop and the urgent top-up.
- 4. Design accessible digital journeys.**
With 66% online throughout the day, reliable power supports work, trade and study. Digital journeys should use little data and be easy to access.
- 5. Localise the response.**
Monthly electricity interruptions range from 84% in the Eastern Cape to 72% in the Free State. National strategies need locally-informed execution.



CHAPTER 2

Stretching Meals further

than the Rand

STRETCHING MEALS FURTHER THAN THE RAND

South African households are carrying the accumulated pressure of food, transport, electricity and other essential costs, even as the rate of food inflation begins to ease. Pietermaritzburg Economic Justice and Dignity (PMBEJD) calculated that transport and electricity absorbed 63% of a full minimum wage, leaving a 51% shortfall against the cost of a basic nutritious food basket for a family of four.⁵ That pressure explains why the grocery basket is being rebuilt around foods that can feed several people, work in more than one meal and justify the money required to keep them in the home.

That negotiation is evident in the latest township household findings. More affordable everyday products would make the greatest difference to 61% of respondents, while 54% say price influences their brand choices. Quality is important to more than half (53%) of respondents, which indicates that households are not just chasing the lowest price. As highlighted annually, products must still deliver taste, familiarity, enough portions and confidence that the household can use everything in the proverbial trolley.



⁵ "Household Affordability Index, June 2026", PMBEJD: <https://jo.my/pbmrsh>

BALANCING THE BASKET

The latest Stats SA research found that headline inflation rose to a two-year high of 5%, even as food and non-alcoholic beverage inflation slowed to 1.6%. Maize meal and white rice were cheaper than a year earlier, but households experience the cost of the complete meal and the wider journey required to put it on the table.⁶ A cheaper staple offers limited relief when protein, transport, electricity or the remaining ingredients remain expensive, which means brands cannot judge affordability through an isolated price reduction.

Mervyn Abrahams, PMBEJD and Dignity Group, sees the same pressure in their Household Affordability Index.

“Food affordability is shaped by the wider household budget, not food prices alone”, he says. Food spending competes with transport, electricity, schooling, debt repayments and communication, meaning what remains after these obligations ultimately determines what households can put towards food. **As Abrahams puts it**, “Food inflation is therefore best understood as part of a broader cost-of-living and household survival challenge.”

The 2025 Township CX Report found that 39% of township residents switched brands when grocery prices increased.⁷ This year’s findings reveal a deeper adjustment, with households changing the structure of the meal as well as the brand. Brand switching remains part of the coping strategy, but the more fundamental decision is which foods remain useful enough to protect.

“Quality trails price by one point, challenging the idea that affordability means choosing the cheapest option.”



⁶ Statistics South Africa, “Inflation rises to a two-year high”: <https://jo.my/p1x8k>

⁷ 2025 Township CX Report: <https://jo.my/tcx5>

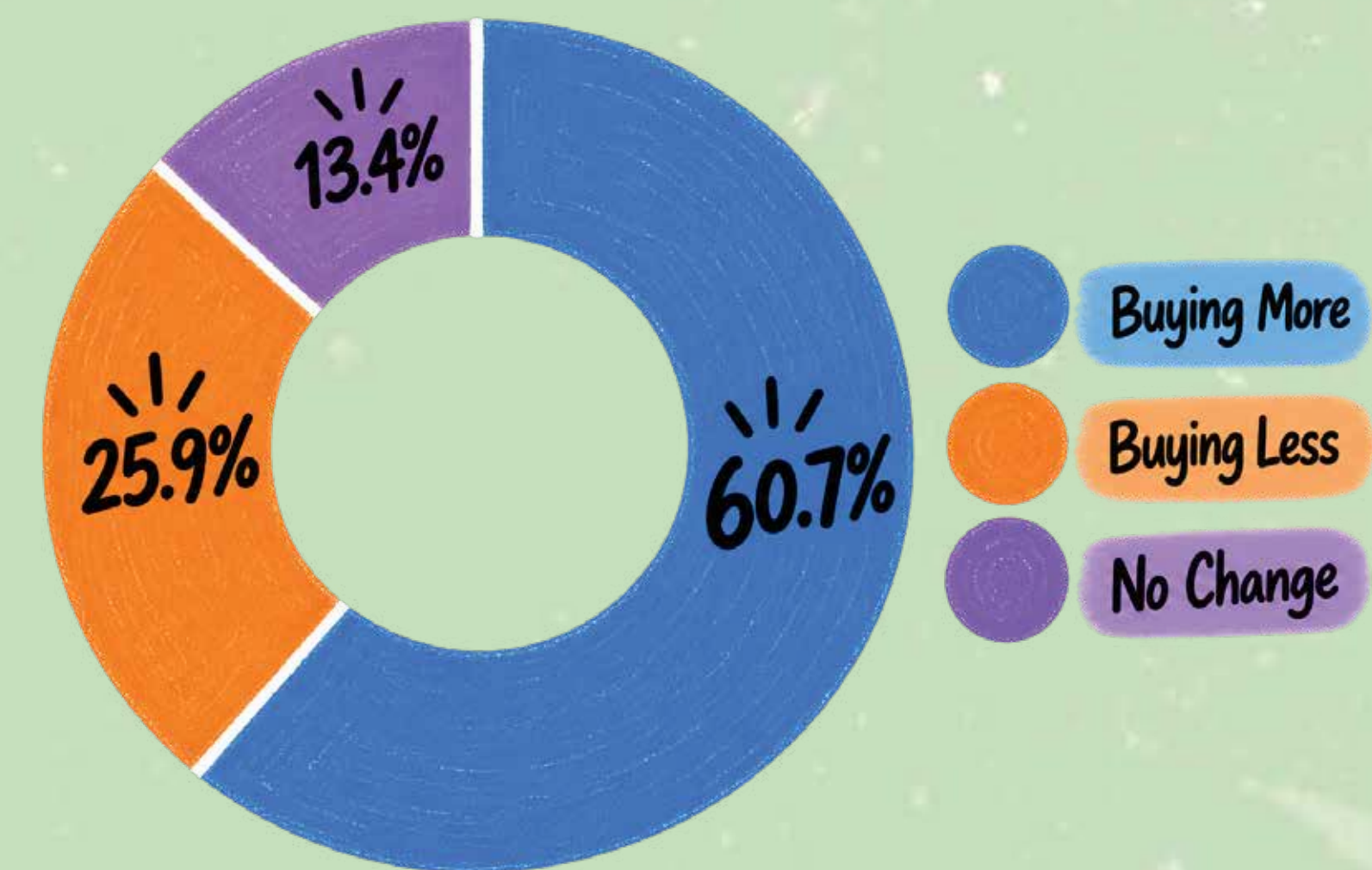
STAPLES CARRY THE MEAL

Products that can support familiar meals repeatedly are gaining ground, with 60% buying more maize meal and milk, 59% more fruit and vegetables, 58% more bread and 54% more rice. Although these foods perform different roles, they share the ability to support repeated meals or meet several needs within the household. Their value lies in how many meals they can support, how many people they can feed and how few additional ingredients the household needs to buy.

That pattern is also evident in The Grocery Basket of the Main Market, research co-created by MoyaApp and Hibirism across 2,500 South African households. Maize meal remained in 88% of baskets and cooking oil in 84%, while 59% reported a cultural attachment to their maize meal brand. Donald Mokgale, CEO of MoyaApp and Director of Hibirism, argues that this shows households are not cutting the basket evenly: “They’re protecting specific categories on purpose.” These findings also suggest that what survives is not only determined by price. In some categories, familiarity and heritage continue to influence what households protect.

For food brands, the findings shift the conversation from pack size and price to the meals every product enables. Maize meal and rice can carry different proteins, vegetables and even occasions, while bread and milk move between breakfast, school needs and quick meals. A product may cost less than its competitor but offer poorer household value when it supports fewer portions or requires several additional ingredients.

Over the past 12 months, how has your buying of the following items changed? [Maize meal]

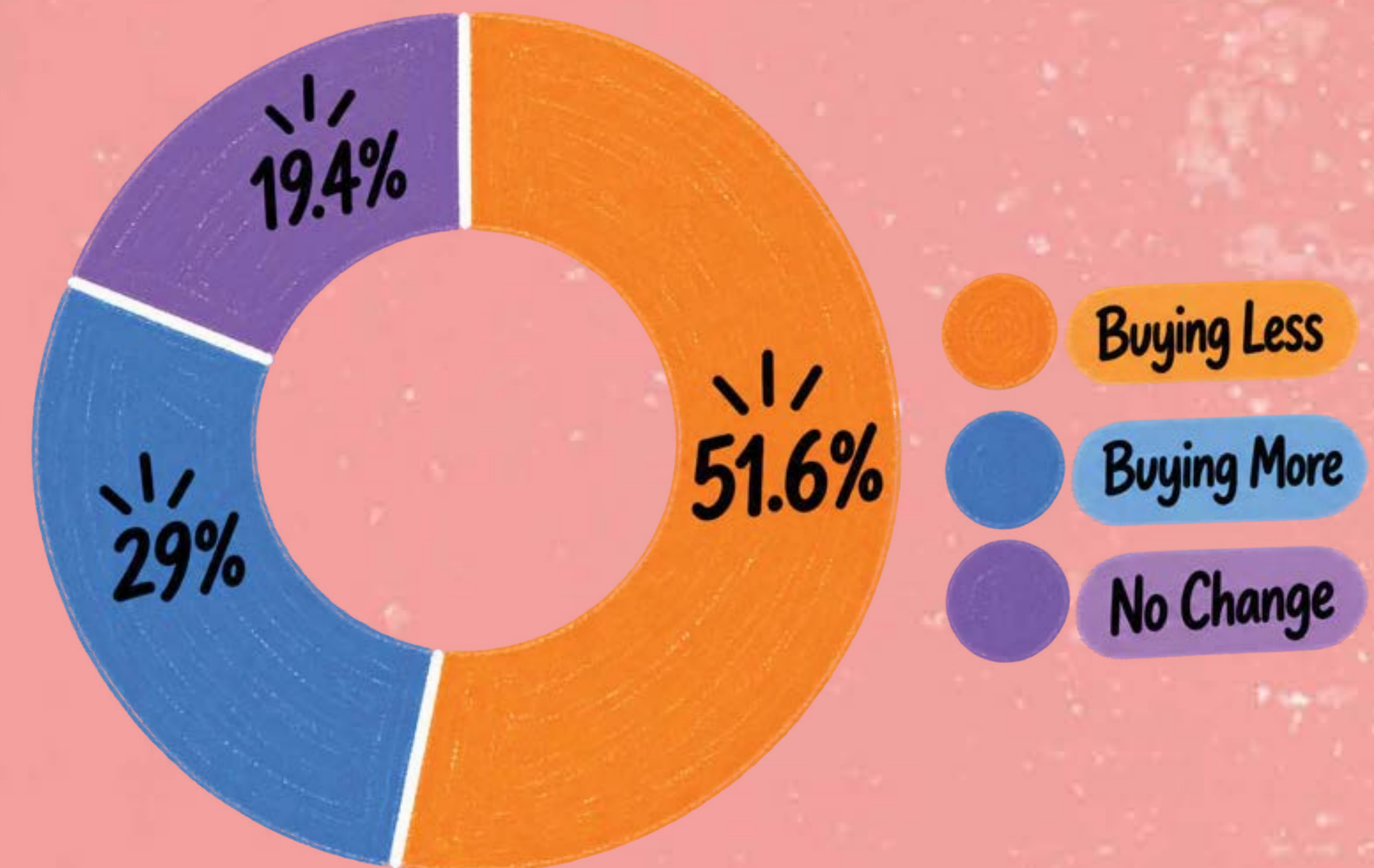


PROTEIN FOLLOWS THE HOUSEHOLD BUDGET

Families are preserving the role of protein while changing what it costs, with 51% buying less beef, mince and boerewors and 60% buying more chicken. Almost a third, 31%, report doing both. The combined movement is strongest among respondents aged 35 to 44, where 34% are reducing beef, mince and boerewors while increasing chicken, placing the trade-off among an age group often balancing several household needs.

Showing how this pressure translates into everyday township choices, Neo Moleko-Siphayi of Moleko Meat Company in Pimville told Sowetan that “people are buying more liver instead of brisket or roast beef because it’s cheaper”. He has also seen stronger demand for less expensive chicken cuts, showing how households are preserving protein by changing its form and cost rather than removing it from the meal.⁸

Over the past 12 months, how has your buying of the following items changed? [Meat]



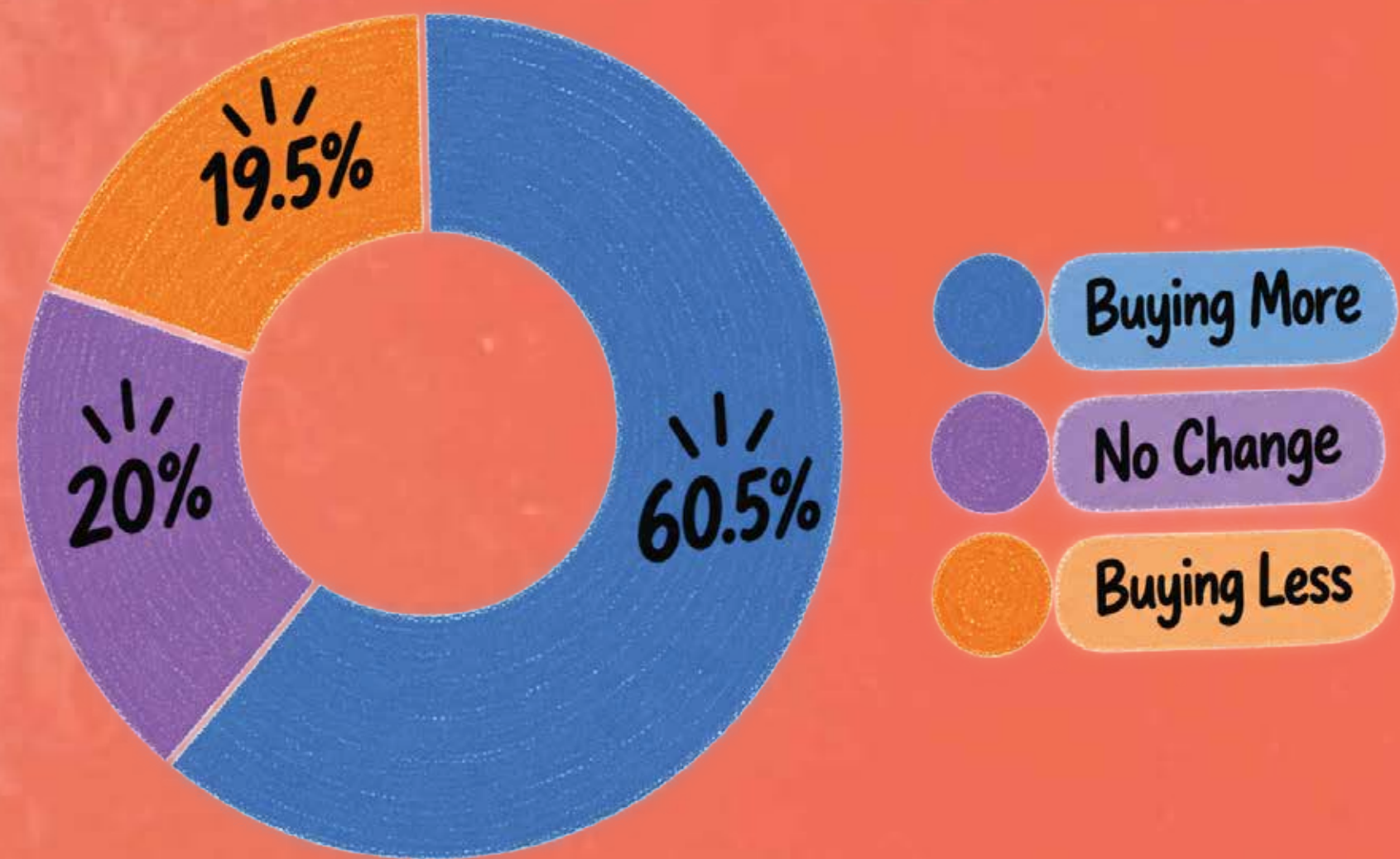
⁸ “Consumers rethink meal plans as beef prices soar”, *Sowetan*: <https://jo.my/jk7tx>

Chicken allows families to retain protein while gaining greater control over portions, preparation and how it combines with the staples already being protected. Stats SA's June figures reinforce the relative pressure within the category, with meat inflation at 5.1% and much higher increases recorded for products such as sausages and corned meat.

Mervyn Abrahams describes these shifts as “careful budgeting rather than changing preferences”, an important distinction for brands. The household may be changing the protein it buys without changing the role it expects protein to play in the meal.

Manufacturers and retailers should view the change as more than a category shift. Cut, portion size, preparation needs and the products bundled with the protein can determine whether the offer genuinely helps a household stretch the meal.

Over the past 12 months, how has your buying of the following items changed? [Chicken]

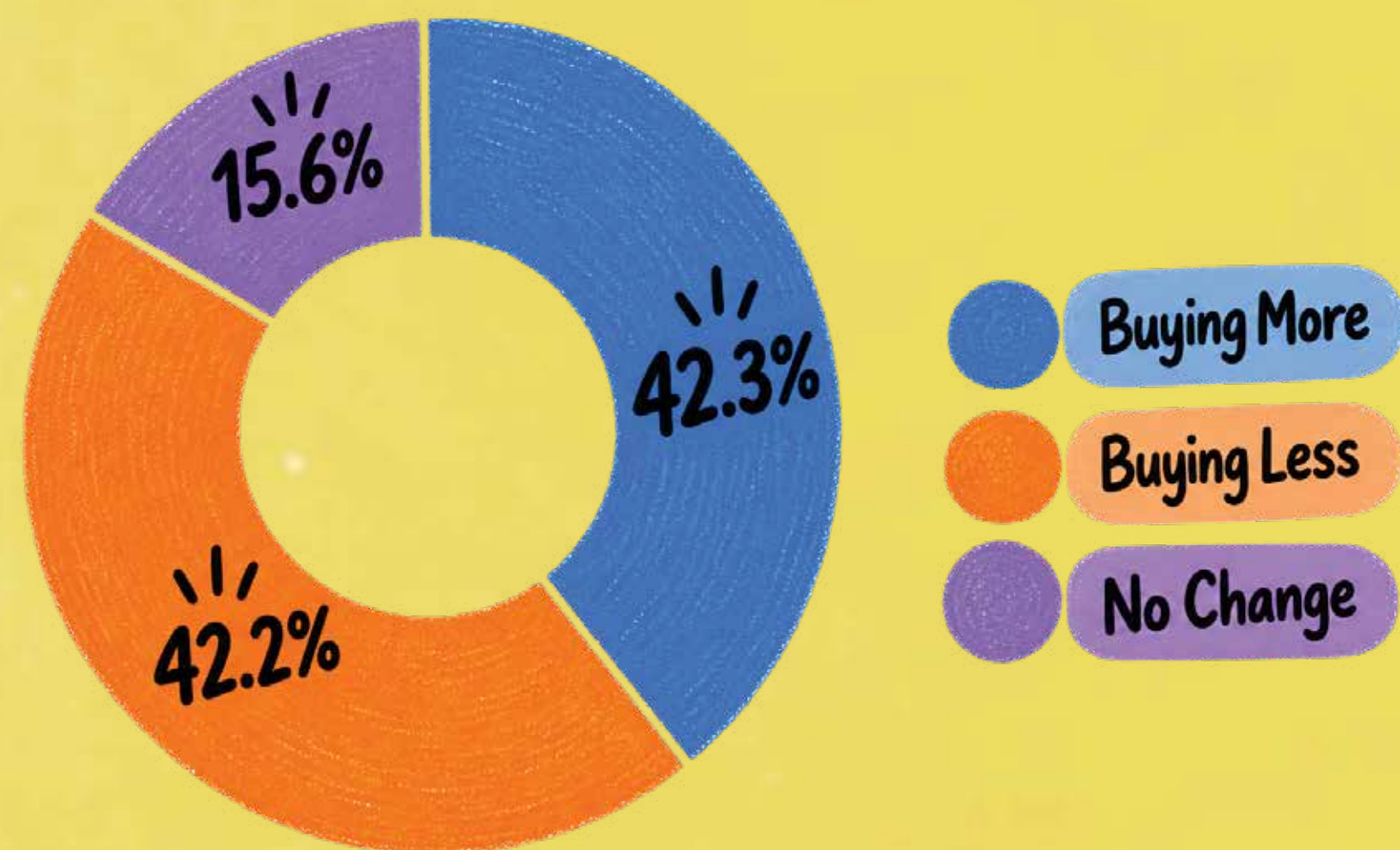


STORAGE AND PREPARATION SHAPE CHOICES

Canned food divides the basket evenly, with 42% buying more and 42% buying less. Demand is slightly stronger among residents facing both electricity and water interruptions, where 45% are buying more canned food compared with 39% of those experiencing neither.

The difference suggests that storage stability becomes more valuable when household services are unreliable, but the overall split shows that convenience does not guarantee broad category growth.

Over the past 12 months, how has your buying of the following items changed? [Canned foods]



Canned fish, beans and vegetables solve different meal needs, carry different price points and require different accompanying ingredients, so the format earns its place only when the specific product completes a useful and affordable meal.

As Chapter 1: The Customer Journey Starts at Home establishes, a product can lose value after purchase when it cannot be stored or prepared reliably. Brands should understand the meal and household circumstances their product serves rather than treating a long storage life as the entire value proposition.

Outages can make the spaza shop part of household contingency planning. Mongezi Mtati, Senior Brand Strategist at Rogerwilco, describes how replacement spending can take food from another meal. “Spazas are usually where people go for a few daily essentials or a quick top-up. With electricity outages so common in townships, that top-up becomes part of the plan as residents buy smaller basics to replace the cooked supper they had intended to make from ingredients bought earlier in the month. This adds stress when a low-income household may not have cash readily available, and bread intended for school lunches can end up becoming supper.”

THE VALUE OF EVERY MEAL

Food brands and retailers need to consider the full cost of use, including the pack, additional ingredients, preparation time, water, electricity and the risk of waste. A lower shelf price may still represent poor value when the family cannot finish the pack, preserve what remains or afford what is needed to turn it into a meal.

Fieldwork in Katlehong with the University of Johannesburg's Department of Marketing Management suggests that this calculation can extend beyond the individual shopper and even the immediate household. Dr Semona Pillay, Senior Lecturer and Deputy HOD for Non-Subsidised Programmes in the department, observed households provisioning for extended family, children beyond their own and, at times, neighbours. “Affordability isn't just about the number on the shelf, it's the probability that a purchase feeds everyone it's meant to.”

That changes the meaning of value and how should be perceived in communities. Pillay cautions against reading the basket simply as a budget, arguing that shoppers can also be managing the risk of falling short of the people they are responsible for. In homes where electricity and water cannot always be relied upon, storage, preparation and waste become part of that calculation. In her view, “running short here isn't a private inconvenience, it's a social one.”

Chapter 3, *Chasing Value through the Aisles*, explores how residents use promotions to manage these pressures. Bundles should reflect meals people actually prepare and reduce the number of additional purchases required, rather than grouping products simply to increase basket value. The brands that remain in the home will be those that preserve quality while helping families control portions, combine products across meals and carry value from the first serving to the last.





KEY INSIGHTS

- 1. Make everyday affordability count.**
More affordable everyday products would make the greatest difference to 61% of respondents. Savings need to reduce the cost of building meals with the ingredients needed, not isolated items.
- 2. Build around the protected basket.**
With 60% buying more maize meal, milk and chicken, availability and value should be strongest in the foods families are working hardest to retain.
- 3. Compete on meal yield.**
Price influences 54% of respondents and quality matters to 53%. Show how many people, portions and meals the product can support.
- 4. Follow the protein.**
While 51% buy less red meat, 60% buy more chicken. Cuts, pack sizes and promotions should reflect how families divide protein between meals.
- 5. Treat canned foods as meeting different needs.**
With 42% buying more canned food and 42% buying less, value must reflect the specific product and the meal it completes.



CHAPTER 3

Chasing Value through

The Aisles

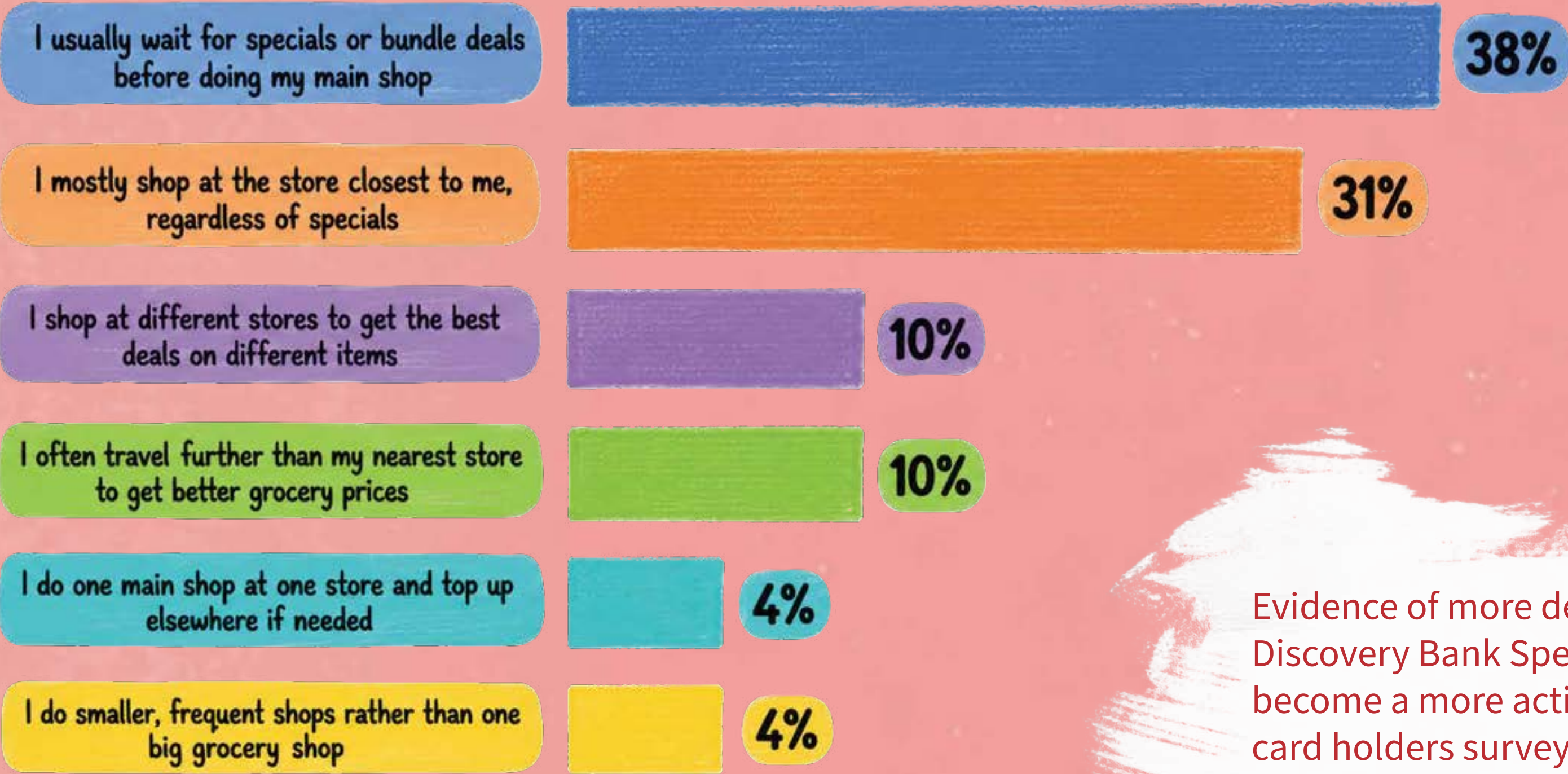
CHASING VALUE THROUGH THE AISLES

As Chapter 1, The Customer Journey Starts at Home establishes, the retail journey begins well before a customer enters a store. The main household shop is negotiated against payday, available cash, taxi fare, advertised specials and expected stock. A shopper may postpone a larger purchase until a better price appears, buy urgent items close to home, divide the list between stores or travel further when the saving remains worthwhile after transport. Every choice protects the same limited budget while placing a different demand on time, money and planning.

The 2026 Township CX Survey indicates how widely those considerations are applied. Waiting for a special or combo before doing the main shop is the most common approach, selected by 38%, while 31% generally use the closest store regardless of specials. A further 10% divide their purchases between retailers, while another 10% travel beyond the nearest option to find better prices. Only 4% have not changed where they shop in the past 12 months, which suggests that movement between stores has become part of ordinary shopping.



Which of the following best describes how you usually shop for groceries?



Evidence of more deliberate spending also appears in the 2026 Visa and Discovery Bank SpendTrend survey, where rewards and benefits had become a more active part of household spending for 54% of the credit card holders surveyed, up from 36%. While the study tracks a higher-income market, it captures a similar effort to make existing resources work harder, with Discovery Bank CEO Hylton Kallner describing households using rewards and budgeting tools "to stretch what they already have". The township version of that discipline carries a far narrower margin for error.

⁹ “#BizTrends | Spend Trend 2026 Part 2: Consumers adopt value-seeking spending strategies”, Bizcommunity: <https://jo.my/l7a2o>

WAITING IS A PLAN

Township residents aged 25 to 54 are the most likely to organise the main shop around an offer, with 41% waiting for a special or combo before buying, compared with 22% of those aged 18 to 24. The youngest group (18-24) is more likely to use the nearest store. Our data shows that 38% favour proximity, while also being more inclined to weigh prices and travel costs when shopping.

The practical value of waiting for deals and combos changes throughout various life stages. Respondents aged 25 to 54 may be managing larger, more structured shopping trips around income cycles.



This makes the wait a more deliberate way of adding more to the basket. By contrast, younger shoppers may be completing smaller or more immediate purchases, while older shoppers may prioritise proximity and convenience over timing.

The pattern is stronger where household services are unreliable, with 53% of residents facing more than 10 water interruptions in a typical month waiting for a special before doing the main shop, compared with 33% of those who experience none. As Chapter 1, The Customer Journey Starts at Home establishes, households that already plan around conditions they cannot control appear to apply the same planning to price.

Suzan Losaba, Founder and Managing Director of Field & Insights Africa, sees this behaviour as households calculating the total cost of completing a shopping mission rather than looking at just the shelf price.

“This includes transport, time, product availability and the risk of making an additional trip.” She observes households consolidating planned main shops around payday or worthwhile promotions, while using the closest retailer for urgent essentials and smaller top-up purchases. Others divide the basket, moving particular categories to whichever retailer offers the strongest value.

People who wait for specials before doing their main shop purchase supermarket combos at almost the same rate as those who do not wait, at 79% and 78% respectively. While promotions influence brand choice at 38% and 39%, waiting rates among women and men also differ by only one percentage point. These small gaps suggest that the key distinction is not who responds to promotions, but when they act on them. Among all the township residents surveyed, there is a timing strategy applied within the same shopper base rather than a separate promotional shopper segment.

Suzan Losaba's observation helps explain that distinction:

“Waiting for a special does not necessarily mean greater promotional participation; it often reflects when households can afford to act.” The promotion therefore influences not only what enters the basket, but when the household is able to commit to the shop.

“The key distinction is not who responds to promotions, but when they act on them.”



BRANDS STAY, STORES CHANGE

Movement between retailers does not necessarily mean movement away from brands. Trust in the brand influences brand choice for 42% of respondents, ahead of promotions at 39%, which suggests that households are protecting the products they prefer while changing the conditions under which they buy them. The 2025 report found that 39% of residents switched brands when grocery prices increased, whereas this year's movement has settled at store level, with 44% changing where they shop because prices became too high and 41% moving towards better promotions elsewhere.

The distinction between where people shop and what they shop for is very significant in township retail, as previous Township CX Reports have continually proven. Brian Makwaiba, Managing Director of Vuleka, sees supermarkets and spazas serving different moments rather than necessarily competing for the same basket.

“The supermarket is for the big monthly shop, the stock-up trip,” he says, while the spaza serves needs such as “tonight's cooking oil, tomorrow's bread, or a R10 airtime voucher when your data runs out at 10pm.”

In that moment, proximity has a value of its own. Makwaiba argues that the shopper is not necessarily comparing the price of every item with a supermarket several kilometres away; the calculation can include the distance travelled, the immediate need and the relationship with a local retailer. As he puts it, “That's two different baskets serving two different moments in the customer's week.”



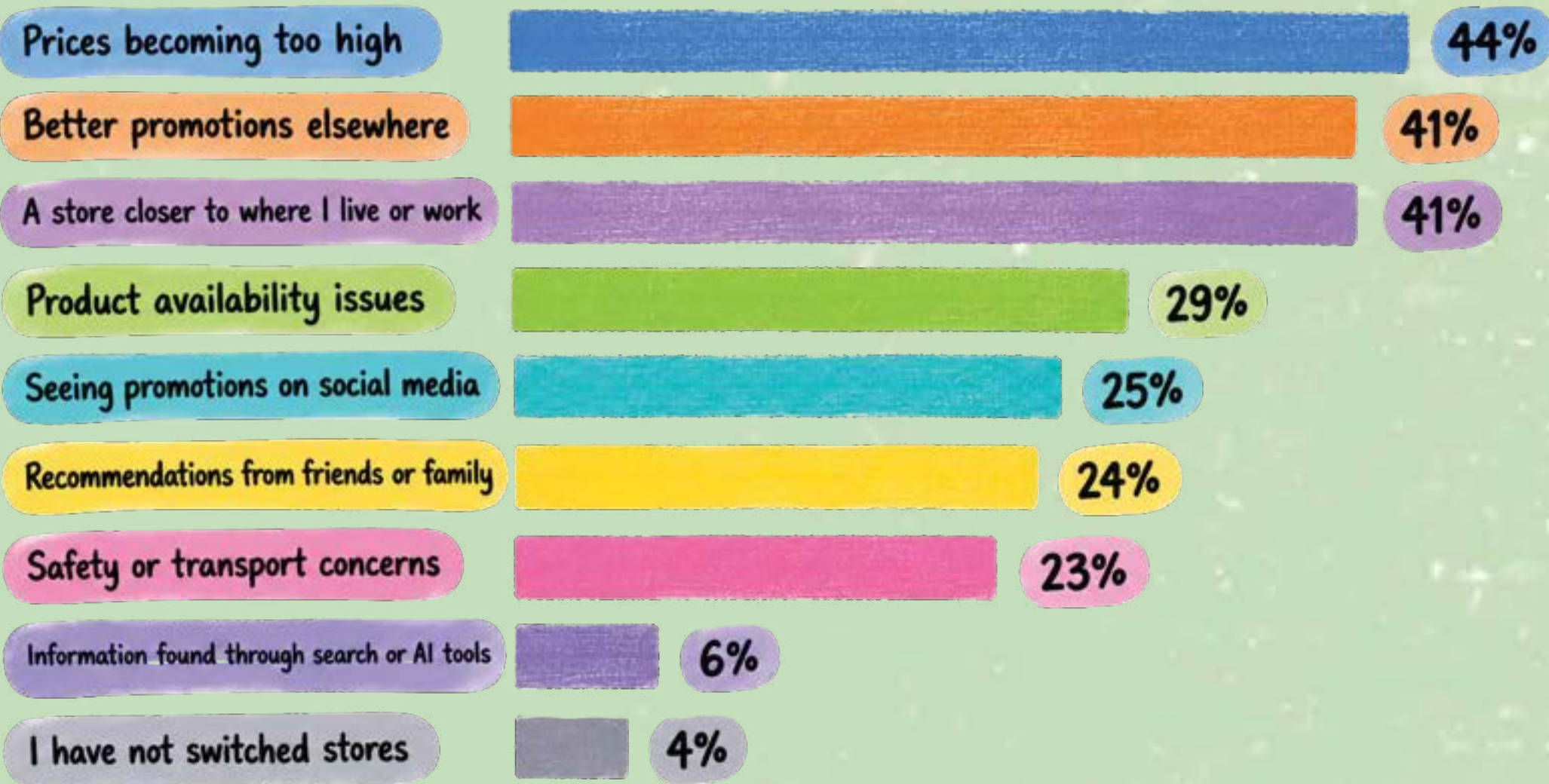
According to Stats SA’s General Household Survey, transport remains one of the most significant household expenses, accounting for 15% of total consumption expenditure nationally and ranking as the third-largest expenditure category, while taxis are used by 24.3% of workers travelling to work.¹⁰ A saving of R20 across a basket can disappear when the trip costs more than the saving, when the advertised item is out of stock, or when the shopper has to make a second journey for what the store could not supply.

“A R20 saving can disappear on the trip taken to collect it.”

Price is not the only trigger for switching, with product availability contributing for 29% of respondents and safety or transport concerns forming part of the decision for 23%. Residents are assessing whether a retailer can supply the products they need, at a worthwhile price, in a location they can reach without eroding the benefit, which makes distribution and stock decisions as commercially significant as the promotional price itself. Losaba describes this as “active basket management”, with shoppers balancing savings against convenience and certainty by changing the timing, location and composition of each shop.

Price pressure is judged locally rather than nationally, cited as a reason for switching by 50% of respondents in KwaZulu-Natal and 48% in the Eastern Cape, while Gauteng matches the national figure (44%) and the Western Cape falls to 40%. Proximity shows far less variation, sitting at 41% nationally and 41% in the five largest provinces. The order of these reasons varies, and in some provinces distance moves ahead of price, which makes promotions and discounts regional decisions rather than national ones.

In the past 12 months, which of the following have led you to switch where you shop?

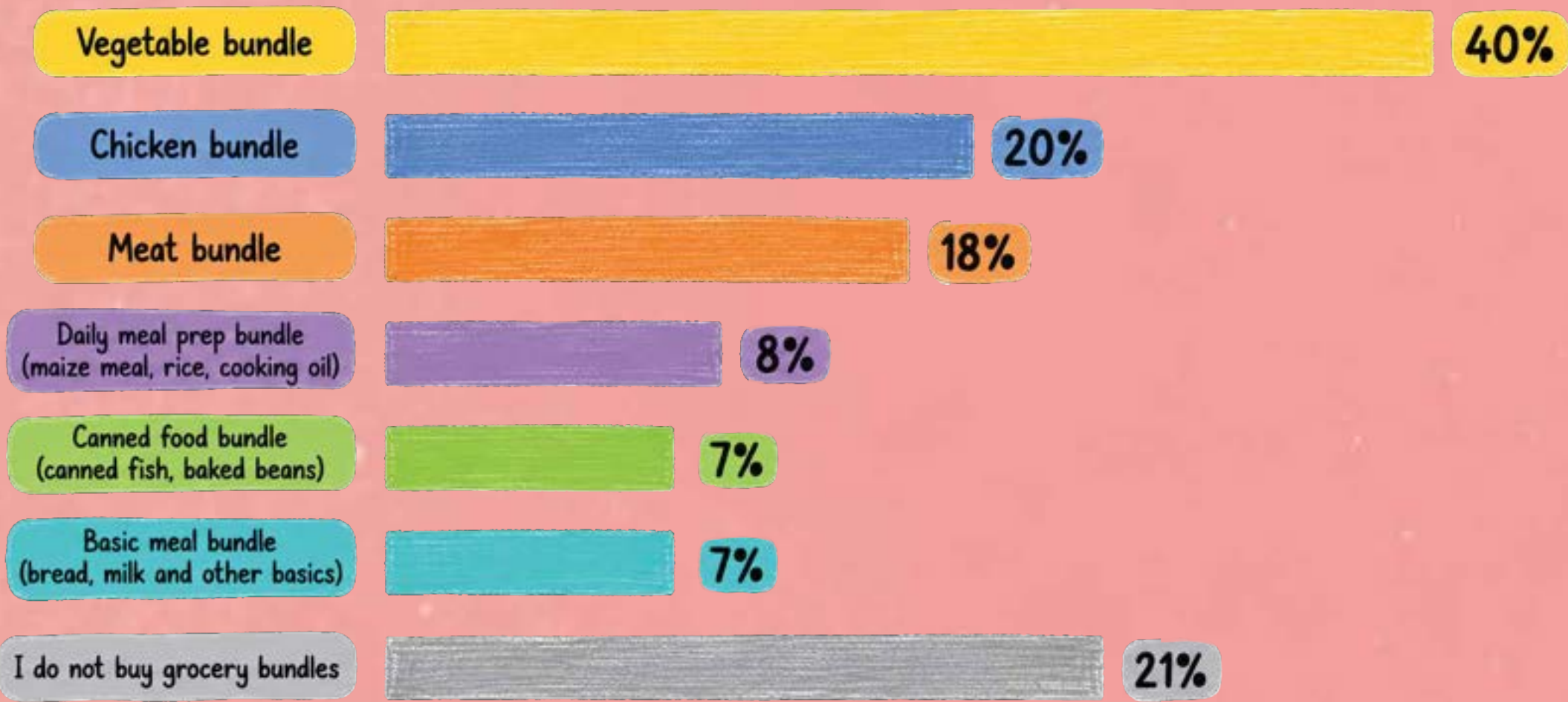


¹⁰ Statistics South Africa, “Transport Month: Key Data and Sector Insights”: <https://jo.my/pxvpv>

COMBOS MUST PROVE VALUE

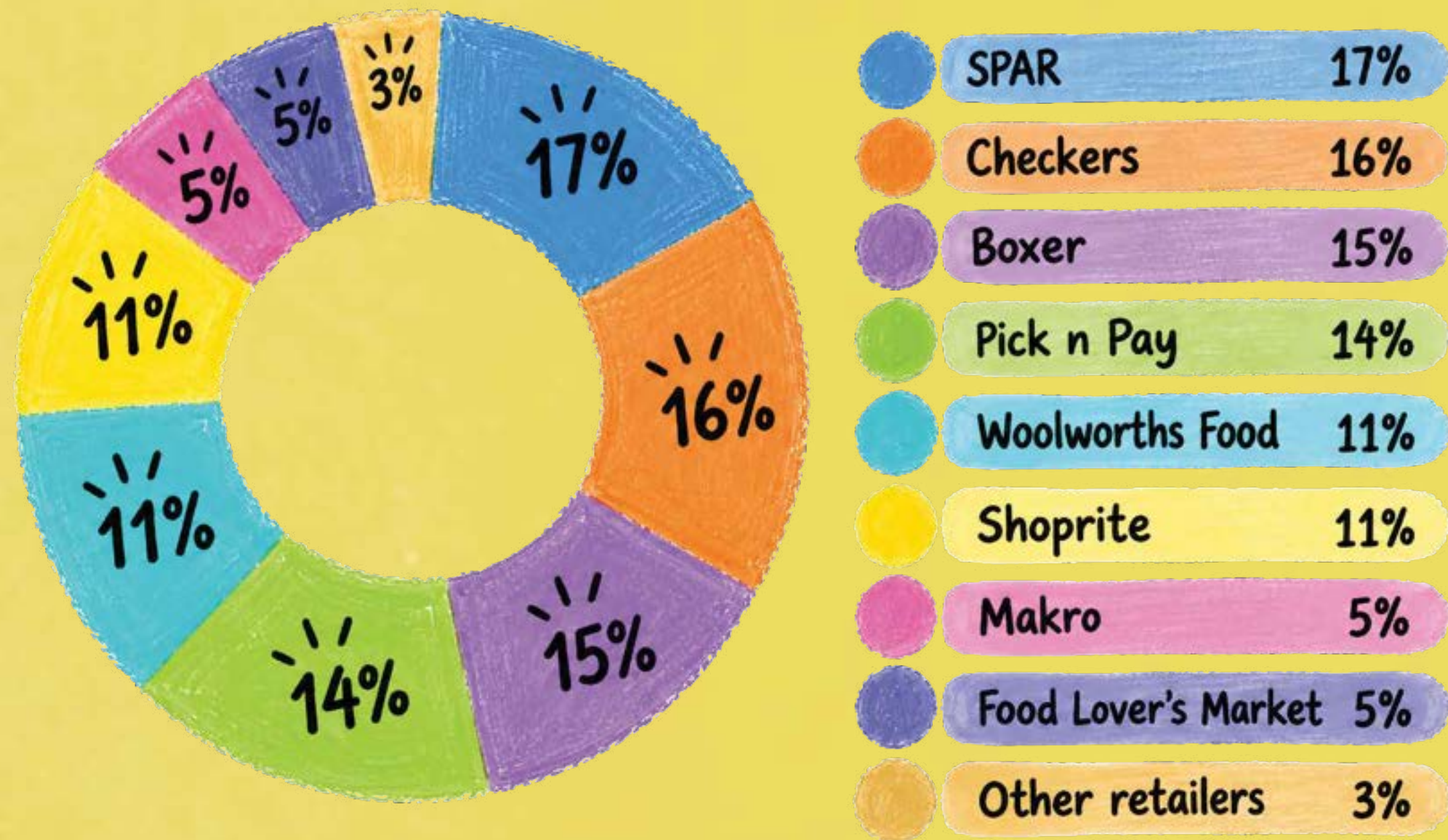
Supermarket bundles and combos are part of ordinary grocery shopping, with 78% of participants buying at least one during a typical month and 21% buying none at all. Because most households buy more than one type, these figures overlap and do not total 100%. Measured against all respondents, vegetable combinations are the most common at 40%, followed by chicken at 20% and meat at 18%, while the combinations that most closely resemble a full meal are far less common, at 8% for daily meal prep and 7% for basic meal bundles (such as bread and milk bundles).

Which supermarket grocery bundle or combo deals do you buy in a typical month?



As Chapter 2, Stretching Meals Further than the Rand highlights, food value depends on what the household can make and what else must still be purchased. A combination provides genuine value when the household planned to buy the products and when the quantities can be used before they spoil.

Where do you mostly shop for grocery bundles or combos?



Combo purchases are also spread fairly evenly across the leading supermarket groups. Among the residents who buy them, SPAR accounts for 17%, Checkers 16%, Boxer 15% and Pick n Pay 14%. The narrow margin between them shows no clear dominance, with shoppers spreading purchases among familiar outlets instead of concentrating them in one place. This creates an opportunity for brands to secure a place in combos within several retailers, while retailers can build stronger preferences through combinations that meet household needs and communicate a clear saving.



LOYALTY MUST REDUCE THE WORK OF FINDING VALUE

Promotional communication now forms part of the route between planning and purchase, with 25% citing offers seen on social media as one of the factors that led them to switch stores. As Chapter 6, When Digital Earns Its Data develops, that search is carried out on data the household has already paid for, so an unclear or expired offer wastes money before the shopper reaches the store.

For township retailers, however, communication is only as useful as the supply chain behind it. Makwaiba says the customer experience at a spaza shelf can be determined long before the customer enters the store. A shopper may see a national brand promotion on TV or a flyer only to find that the product or deal is unavailable at the local spaza. “That advertised deal was created by a brand's marketing team in Sandton, but the supply chain that gets it to a township shelf is fractured, slow and expensive.”

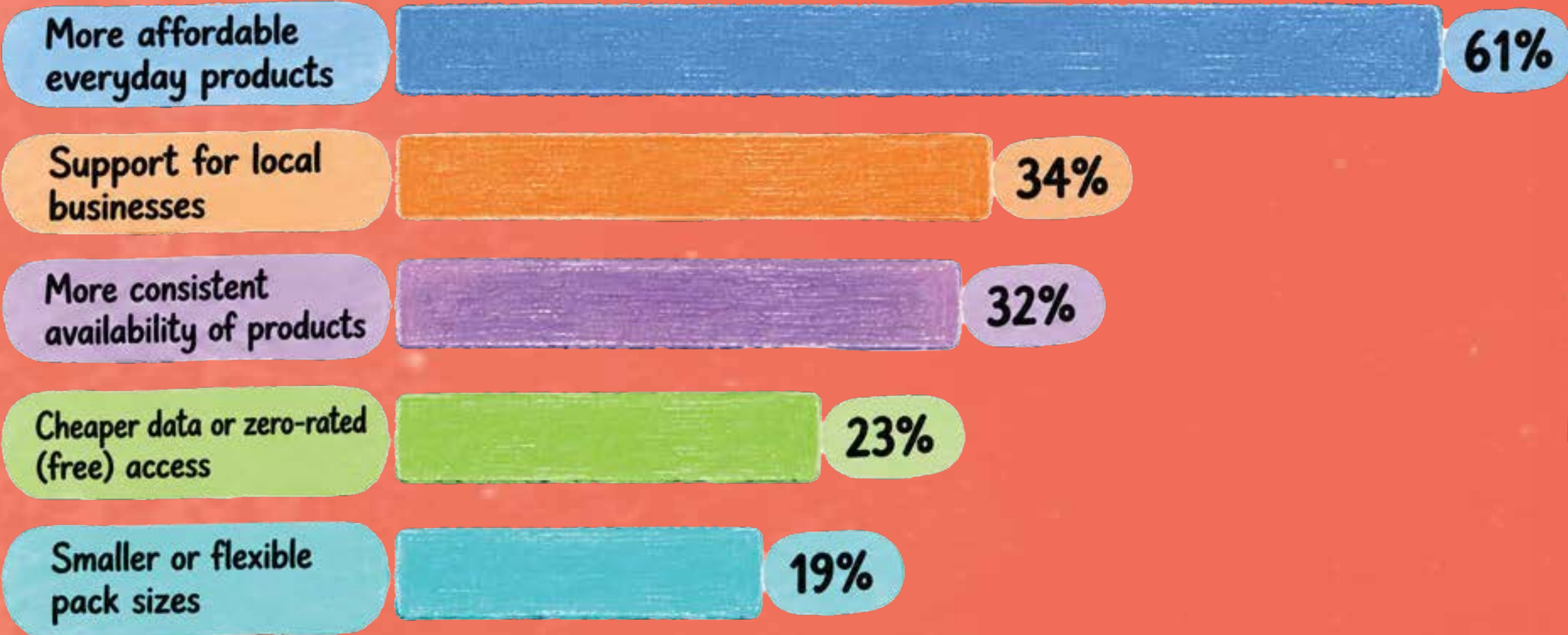
Many independent retailers do not buy directly from manufacturers and instead rely on wholesalers, which can affect their access to promotional stock and pricing. For brands, this turns distribution into part of the customer promise. Advertising an offer creates an expectation, regardless of whether the final retailer controls the supply chain required to fulfil it.

Retailers must make the price, promotional dates, participating branches, purchase limits and stock availability clear enough for residents to decide whether an offer justifies the journey. More affordable everyday products are the change respondents want most, selected by 61%, although the strongest response extends beyond permanent discounting to transparent comparisons, useful combinations, smaller packs and rewards that reduce the cost of products households repeatedly buy. Value becomes credible when it can be used in practice without forcing people to keep searching, travelling and improvising.

“A retailer competing only on discount is answering one of the two questions residents are asking.”

Residents weigh up more than price when deciding where to keep shopping. Support for local businesses was the second-most selected change respondents believed would benefit their households, chosen by 34%, behind more affordable everyday products at 61%. Separately, 59% said they would be more likely to keep buying from a brand that supports their community. For the township residents we polled, value extends beyond the transaction to whether a business understands, considers and responds to the needs of the community it serves.

Which of the following would make the biggest difference to your household right now?



KEY INSIGHTS



- 1. Make promotions possible to plan around.**
With 38% arranging the main shop around an offer, retailers should publish dates, participating branches, purchase limits and the savings of separate purchases.
- 2. Count the journey in the savings.**
Transport concerns contributed to switching stores for 23% of respondents. A promotion that cannot be reached and completed in one trip returns less to the household than it advertises.
- 3. Build combinations around meals.**
With 78% buying supermarket combos but fewer than one in ten buying meal bundles, the distance between participation and meal relevance is the clearest growth opportunity in the category.
- 4. Treat availability as part of the promise.**
Availability issues contributed to switching stores for 29%. An advertised deal creates an expectation, so promotional planning must extend from the campaign to the shelf, with realistic stock allocation and clear communication where offers are unavailable.
- 5. Permanent discounting erodes brand.**
With trust influencing brand choice for 42%, ahead of promotions at 39%, permanent discounting erodes an advantage brands already hold. Lower the cost of trusted products instead of teaching households to buy only on promotion.



CHAPTER 4

Putting Hope on

the Line

PUTTING HOPE ON THE LINE

Saving and gambling move limited money towards very different versions of hope. A stokvel protects regular contributions for a purpose the group has set and accepts that progress will be built over months, while a bet puts money at risk for an immediate return. Where essentials leave little room to set anything aside, a faster outcome can look as reasonable as a slower one. Some residents use stokvels, some place bets and many do both, which makes this less a choice between hopeful and hopeless people than the ordinary tension of managing tight finances.

The first three chapters show how much work limited income is already doing before any amount can be set aside. Households plan around unreliable electricity and water, rebuild meals around foods that stretch further, and change stores or shopping times to protect the basket.

The national labour market frames that squeeze, with official unemployment at 32% in the first quarter of 2026 and the expanded rate reaching 43%.¹¹ The pressure is evident in the survey, where the lack of jobs and income opportunities contribute to hopelessness for 50% of residents. Within that setting, 34% currently belong to a stokvel or group savings scheme and 50% gambled or placed a bet during the previous 12 months, while more than half of stokvel members, 55%, did both.



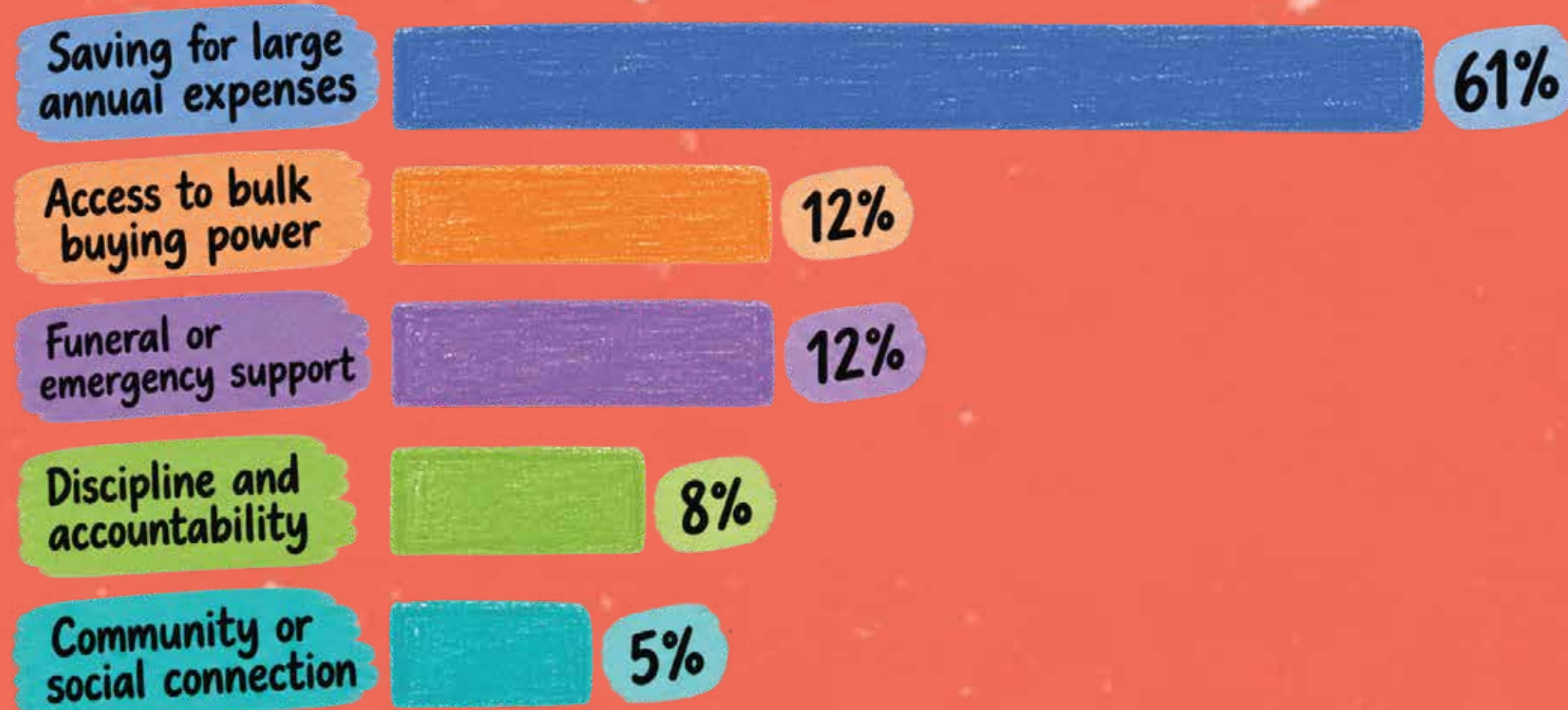
¹¹ Statistics South Africa, *Quarterly Labour Force Survey, Quarter 1: 2026*: <https://jo.my/9m7z>

SAVING AND ACCOUNTABILITY

The stokvel sector is substantial enough to matter to any financial institution, with Ipsos estimating more than 800 000 active groups holding around R50 billion a year for some 11 million members, most of it outside the formal banking system.¹² The 2026 Township CX Survey shows why people join, with saving for a large annual expense the purpose for 61% of stokvel members, ahead of bulk buying power and funeral or emergency support at 12% each. An additional 44% say they have contributed for at least seven years. These are instruments to cover costs that households can see coming, not for building wealth.

Research by Dr Akim Tafadzwa Lukwa and colleagues, published in the Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior, examined 20 grocery stokvels in Dunoon and Khayelitsha. Groups of 10 to 30 members contributed R200 to R1 500 a month, all under written constitutions, and 95% were led by women.¹³ Accountability of that kind is social rather than contractual, since a missed contribution is visible to people the member will see again and that visibility works in ways that no debit order can replicate.

Why residents belong to a stokvel



Palesa Lengolo, Financial Inclusion Specialist, Stokvel Expert and Author, sees that accountability as one of the model's strengths when household finances tighten. "Stokvels provide more than a savings mechanism; they create discipline, accountability and a sense of collective commitment." Although contributions can come under pressure, she argues that being accountable to the group can encourage members to continue prioritising an agreed goal. This helps explain why a system built around relatively simple financial contributions has remained durable across generations.

¹² "Stokvels remain the untapped 'human banks' of South Africa", Ipsos: <https://jo.my/6ie3>

¹³ "From Savings to Nutrition: How Stokvels Currently Operate and How They Could Enable Nutrition-Sensitive Interventions: A Realist Evaluation in South Africa", Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior: <https://jo.my/ulx1w>



That resilience is now being tested, with Old Mutual's 2026 Savings and Investment Monitor recording loans from mashonisas (informal community lenders), rising from 12% to 19% in a year, alongside increased borrowing from family, friends and stokvels.¹⁴ Stokvels were built to hold money until an agreed date, not to lend it out in between. As they take on that second role, they do so under rules the members set among themselves, with no regulator behind them and no recourse if a loan goes unpaid.

“A savings vehicle that becomes a lending vehicle carries a different kind of risk.”

For financial services platforms, the opportunity is to support the group without assuming an individual account can replace it. That means making contributions, approvals and balances visible, while leaving control with members.

Lengolo adds that technology should “simplify administration, improve transparency and provide greater visibility of contributions” without removing the relationships, agreed rules and collective accountability on which trust depends. The opportunity is therefore not simply to digitise saving, but to modernise the mechanics without stripping away what makes the model work.

¹⁴ “More workers in SA turn to debt and gambling”, *Mail & Guardian*: <https://jo.my/q1gmb>

SAVERS AND BETTORS OVERLAP

Saving and betting cannot be assigned to separate customer types. Current stokvel members were slightly more likely to report gambling than respondents outside a savings group, at 55% against 47%, though the result describes coexistence and not motivation. What rises among stokvel members who bet is frequency and not stake, since 43% bet weekly against 30% of gamblers who have never belonged to a group, while estimated monthly outlay barely moves.

The commercial consequence is that a segmentation sorting customers into savers and bettors will misplace roughly half of them, because the same person plans for a dated obligation and still tries a product that promises money sooner. As brands, regulators and key stakeholders consider product offerings, these nuances should form part of their logic.

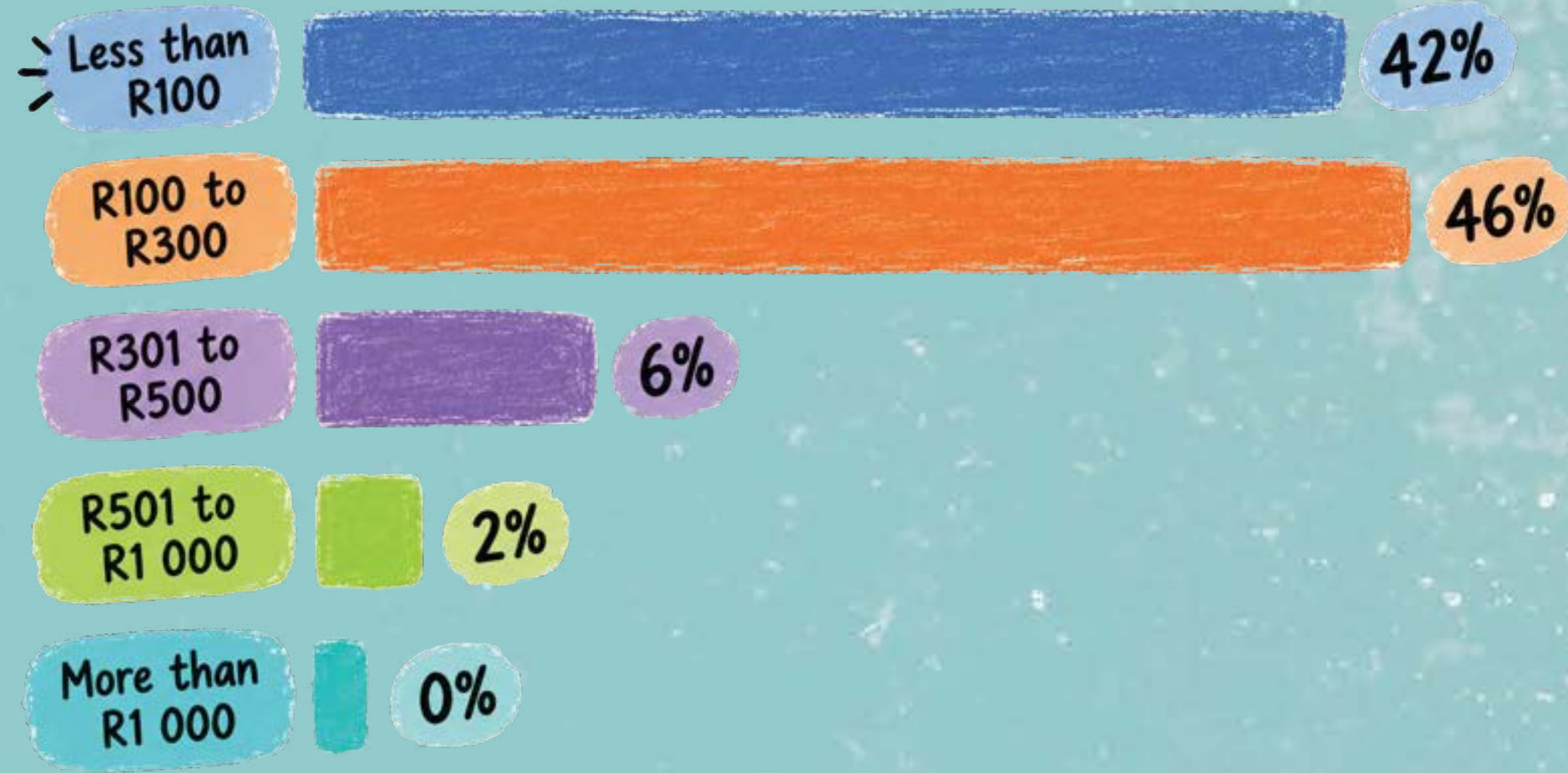


PHONING IN HOPE

Mobile access dominates participation, with 89% of residents who gambled doing so online using a phone. Monthly spend is concentrated at the lower end, where 42% spend less than R100 and 46% between R100 and R300. That journey runs on data the household has already paid for, a cost that *When Digital Earns Its Data delves into*.



Monthly spend among residents who gambled in the past 12 months



That ease of access also changes how betting can fit into everyday behaviour. Sibongile Simelane-Quntana, Executive Director of the South African Responsible Gambling Foundation, points out that when placing a bet becomes “as quick as checking your phone messages or social media”, small, repeated transactions can easily become normalised. The individual amounts may appear insignificant while their cumulative effect remains difficult for households to see.

FREQUENCY IS THE FLAG

Read on spend alone, the category looks harmless, since only 10% of gamblers spend more than R300 in a typical month, a figure that would place betting alongside airtime in the household budget. Read on frequency, a different picture emerges. Among weekly bettors, 22% spend more than R300 a month. Numbers show that higher spend is not spread across the base, as it is more prevalent among people already betting every week.

“No occasional bettor in the survey spent more than R300 a month. Frequency, not stake size, is where exposure begins.”

A study by the market research company Yazi, which polled people who had gambled online in the previous 30 days, found that 57% had sacrificed at least one essential item and 29% had borrowed to gamble. In the same group, 72% described themselves as “in control”, 58% sometimes placed another bet the same day to recover a loss, and 28% did not know that deposit limits or self-exclusion existed.¹⁵ The gap between a modest stake, a confident sense of control and the role that money was meant to play at home is where harm begins.



¹⁵ “2026 South African Gambling Impact Study”, Yazi: <https://jo.my/gmb26>



Tim Treagus, co-founder and CEO of Yazi, describes this as a self-image dilemma. “Control, as people describe it, often reflects identity rather than behaviour.” Someone may continue to see themselves as a responsible gambler even after betting begins to displace household needs or becomes an attempt to recover a loss. This makes self-reported control a weak warning signal when considered on its own.

For operators, the more useful signals may already exist in the behavioural data generated by the platform. Treagus points to repeated deposits, shorter gaps between bets, increasing stakes and another deposit immediately after a loss. “Once someone begins chasing losses, the opportunity to interrupt the behaviour is brief, while the cost of missing that moment is carried by the household.” Platforms therefore do not necessarily need to wait for a customer to identify themselves as being at risk before introducing friction or support.

Simelane-Quntana similarly cautions against judging risk by the size of individual transactions. “Because the money leaves in micro-amounts, families rarely notice the cumulative financial and emotional drain until the harm is already severe.” In a mobile-first betting environment, she argues that responsible gambling support should be visible and accessible directly within these platforms, giving people a non-judgemental route to recognise warning signs and seek help earlier.

NOT THE YOUNG

Mobile betting turns out not to be a young person's behaviour. Participation peaks at 65% among township respondents aged 45 to 54 and 64% among those aged 25 to 34, then falls sharply to 19% among the 55 to 64 group and 4% among 18 to 24-year-olds. Betting is concentrated in the working middle of adult life, the same ages that Chapter 3, Chasing Value through the Aisles described as organising the grocery shop around promotions.

Stokvel membership moves in the opposite direction along the same line, rising from 15% of the youngest group to 37% of those aged 45 to 54 and 57% of those aged 55 to 64. Gambling falls away at exactly the ages where stokvel membership climbs, which suggests that the ambition to get ahead does not fade with age, and what changes instead is the method people trust to deliver it.

Gambling and stokvel membership move in opposite directions across age



UNDER STRAIN

Chapter 1, The Customer Journey Starts at Home, shows how financial pressure interrupts household routines, while Chapter 2, Stretching Meals Further than the Rand, traces the compromises it creates at mealtimes. Hope follows the same lines, with the cost of living shaping how hopeful 48% feel and service delivery shaping hope for 34% and hopelessness for 36%.

Service delivery challenges affect the stress and decisions of 43% of residents a lot, rising to 58% among those who gambled against 29% of those who did not. The comparison cannot establish whether pressure precedes or follows betting, but it shows that respondents who gambled reported greater strain, making promises of easy winnings or financial escape particularly sensitive.

The South African Responsible Gambling Foundation treated more than 4 600 people for addiction in 2025, up from 2 600 in 2024. Executive director Sibongile Simelane-Quntana told Reuters that most South Africans now play out of desperation more than entertainment, describing a country “trying to gamble ourselves to prosperity”.¹⁶

The government has since proposed a 20% national tax on online gambling profits, which puts the affordability question in front of operators whether or not they choose to answer it.



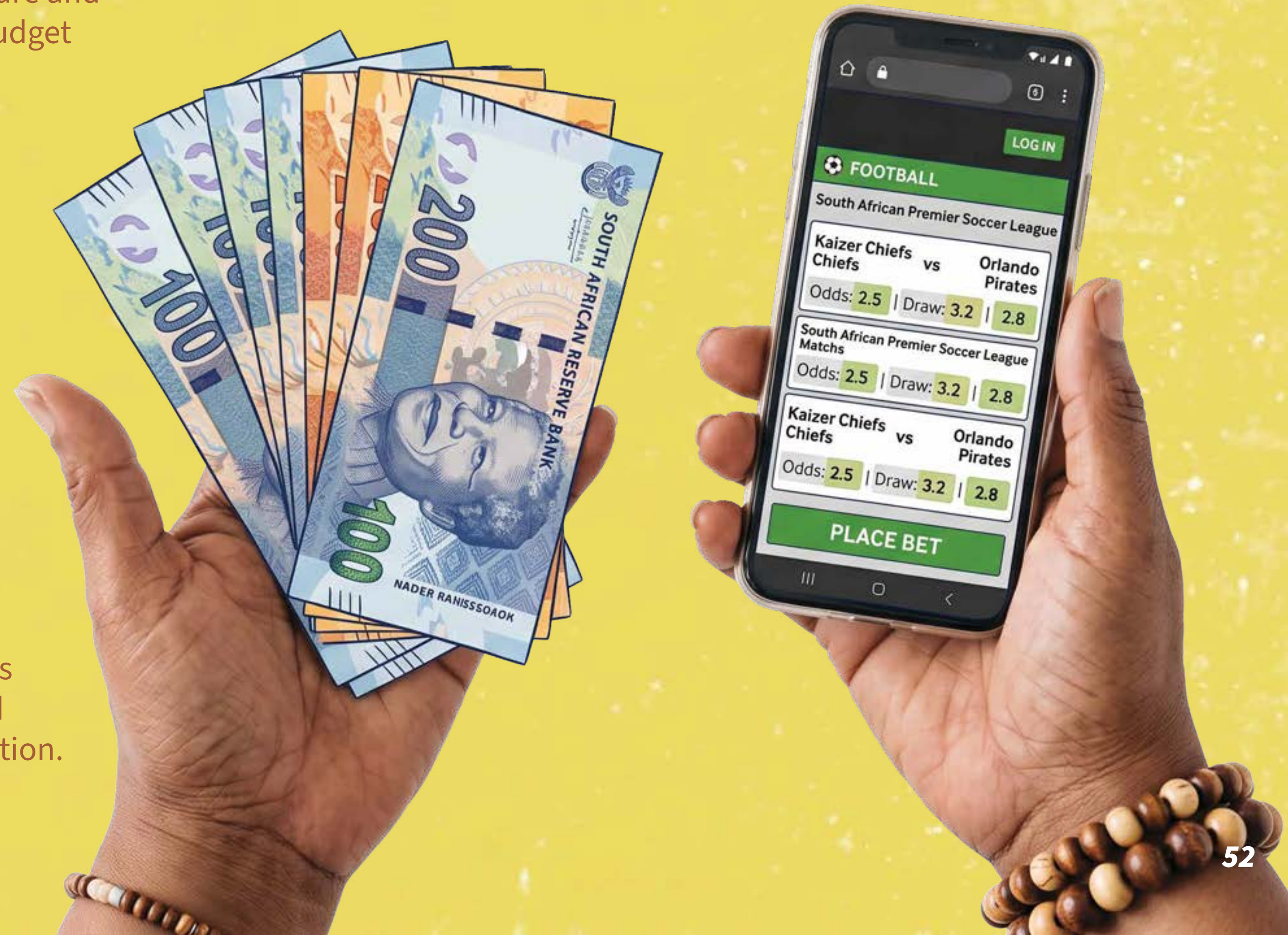
¹⁶ “African states hike gambling taxes as addiction soars, and industry fights back”, Reuters: <https://jo.my/m1cg3>

TWO DIFFERENT CLOCKS

Saving and betting are not equivalent instruments, even when the same person uses both. A stokvel organises contributions around a purpose and a timetable, while a bet offers entertainment and the uncertain possibility of increasing what is available. Mobile betting shortens the distance between financial pressure and action, where a stokvel deliberately lengthens it, and a loss returns to a budget already carrying food, transport and family commitments.

The difference is also structural. Stokvels create rules, visibility and accountability around the decision to save, while mobile betting can reduce the time between impulse and transaction to seconds. Technology therefore plays opposite roles in the two systems: it can reinforce the friction that protects a collective savings goal or remove the friction that gives someone time to reconsider another bet.

The township customer experience is shaped by what each product makes possible next. That obliges operators, platforms, financial institutions and advertisers to read the full household calculation and not a single transaction.



KEY INSIGHTS

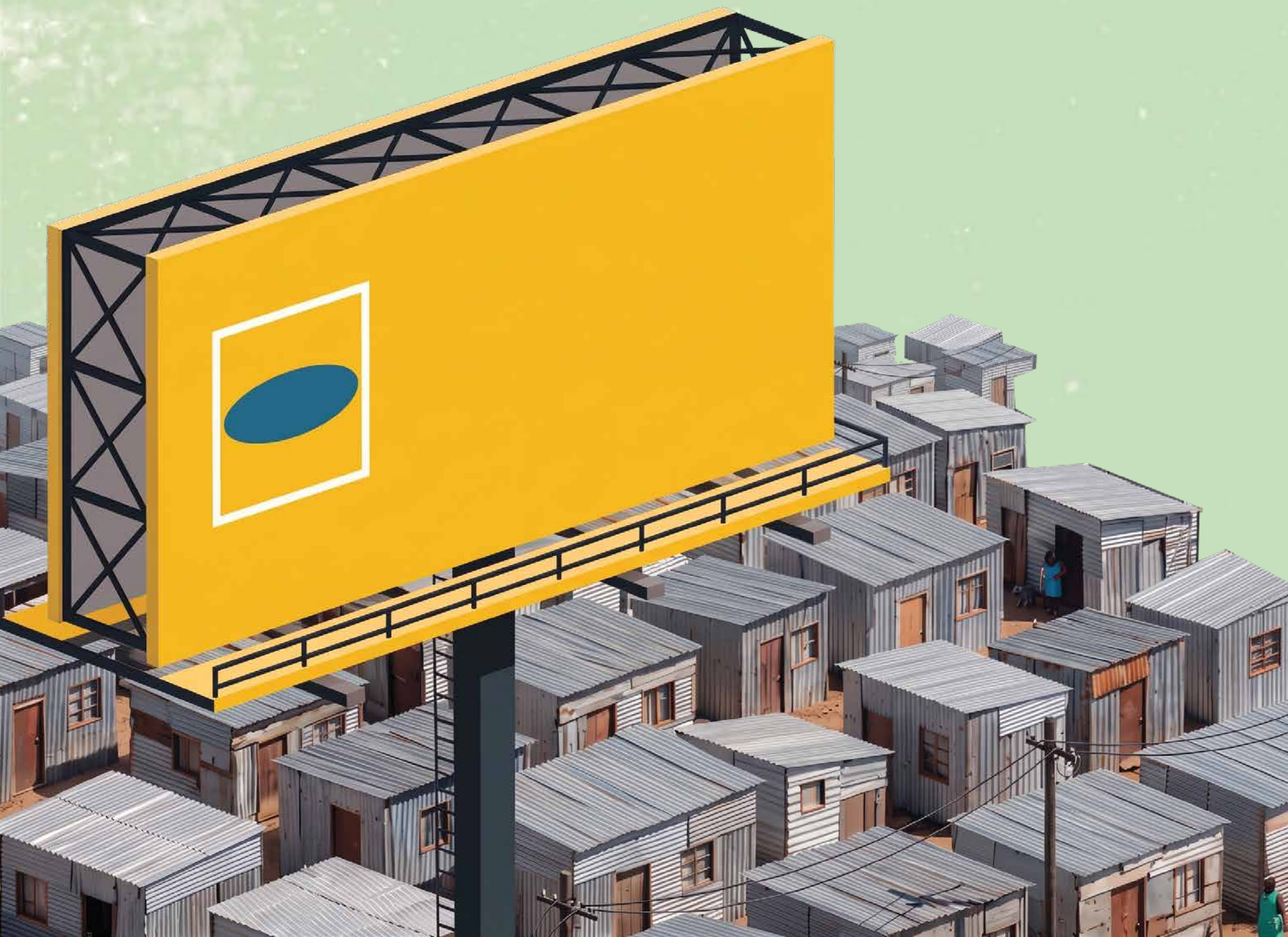


- 1. Support the goal without replacing the group.**
With 61% of stokvel members saving for a large annual expense, digital platforms should simplify administration and visibility while protecting the group rules and accountability that keep members committed.
- 2. Read frequency together with spend.**
Nine in ten residents who gamble spend R300 or less in a typical month, a share that falls to 77% among weekly bettors, while no occasional bettor exceeds R300 at all. Operators should surface cumulative deposits, stakes and losses across the month.
- 3. Place safeguards in the main mobile journey.**
With 89% betting on phones, operators should use behavioural signals such as repeated deposits and chasing losses to introduce friction, while making limits and non-judgemental support visible within the main user journey.
- 4. Keep entertainment separate from income claims.**
Because a lack of jobs and income opportunities contribute to hopelessness for 50% of residents, advertising should not present odds, bonuses or wins as a credible answer to financial pressure.
- 5. Design around overlapping behaviours.**
With 55% of stokvel members also reporting that they participate in gambling, build for a customer who does both rather than for fixed stereotypes of savers and bettors.



CHAPTER 5

Useful is the New Visible



USEFUL IS THE NEW VISIBLE

Brands have long used billboards, large murals, sponsorships and activations to signal their presence in township communities. While visibility can build recognition and familiarity, being noticed is a low threshold for relevance in communities where households carry the cost of unreliable services, rising food prices and limited income opportunities. The 2026 findings suggest that brand presence is increasingly judged by whether it improves something in people's homes, neighbourhoods or local economy.

PRESENCE MEETS EXPECTATION

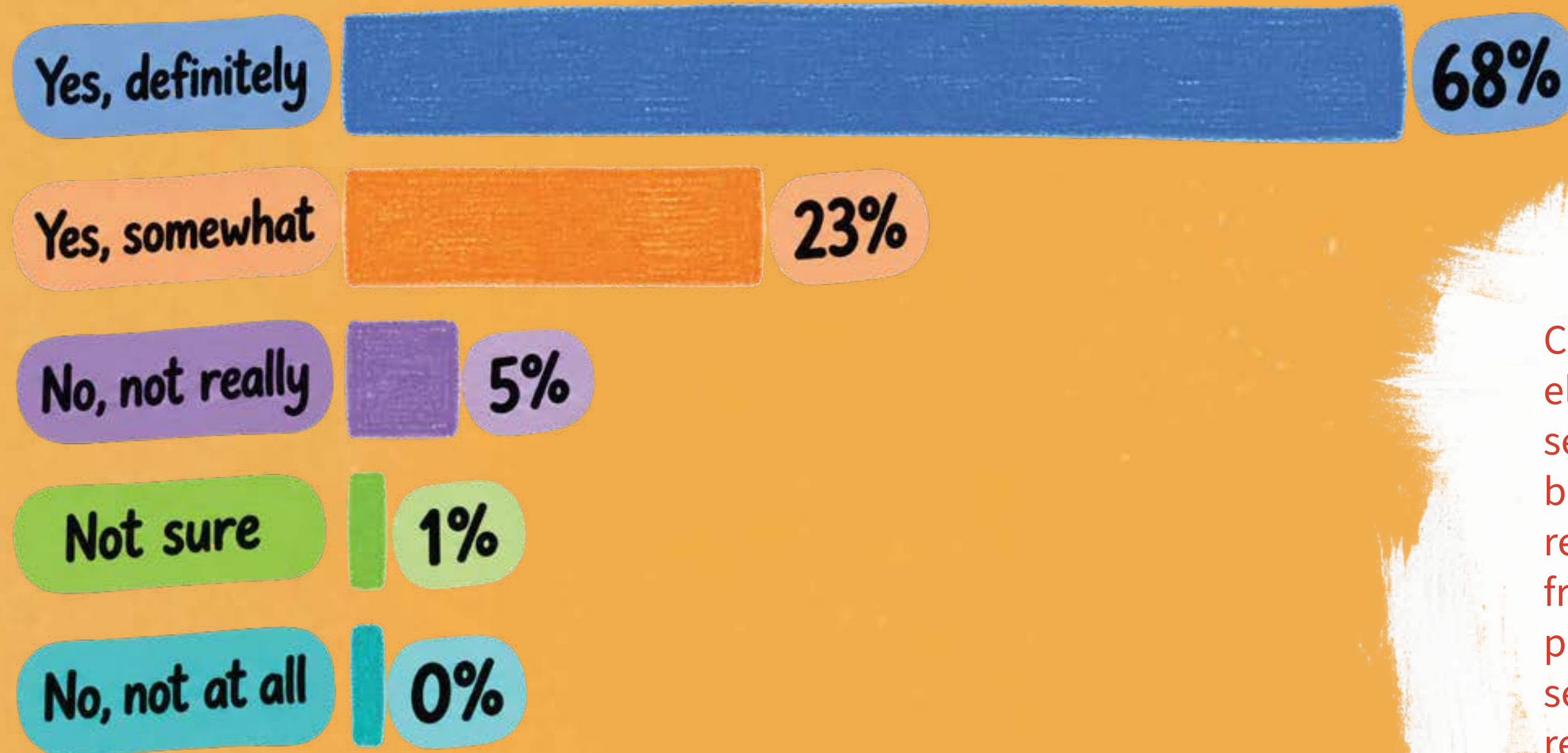
Our survey found that 91% of residents believe companies should play a role in supporting communities when government services fail, with 68% saying they definitely should. The expectation extends beyond moments of crisis, as 84% consider it important for a brand or company to feel present and active in their community.

The 2026 Edelman Trust Barometer provides important context, placing South Africa's overall Trust Index at 54, a neutral score calculated from average trust in business, government, media and NGOs. The index rises to 61 for South Africans in the top 25% of the study's household-income distribution, compared with 53 for those in the bottom 25%.¹⁷ This demonstrates that people do not experience institutions from the same economic position.



¹⁷ Edelman Trust Institute, 2026 Edelman Trust Barometer Global Report: <https://jo.my/j0l1>

Do you believe companies should play a role in supporting communities when government services fail?



Chapter 1, The Customer Journey Starts at Home, details how electricity and water outages transfer the cost and labour of service failure to households, influencing what people can store, buy and prepare. The findings do not suggest that brands should replace the state. They indicate that companies earning revenue from township communities are expected to understand the pressures residents carry and consider where their products, services and capabilities can ease them, while public services remain the government's obligation.

“Company support is expected by 91% of residents when government services fail.”



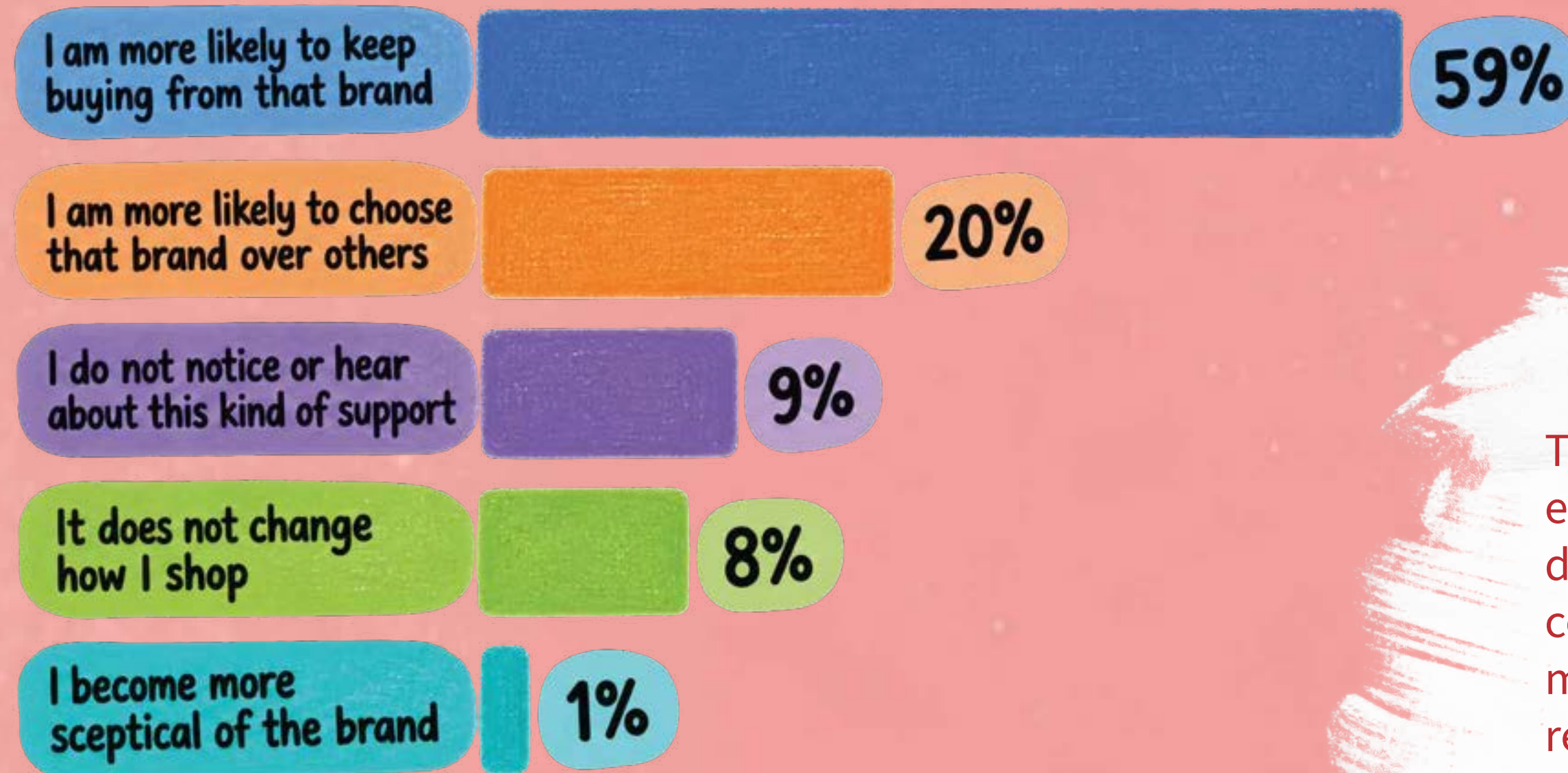
TRUST, LOYALTY AND THE USEFULNESS GAP

Trust complicates the assumption that financially constrained households will always choose the cheapest available option. The 2025 Mzansi Barometer, by Kantar, found that South Africans sometimes continue prioritising trusted brands even when they are more expensive because those brands carry less perceived risk.¹⁸ When income is limited or uneven, value includes confidence that the product will perform as expected and that scarce money will not be lost on an unsuccessful purchase. Loyalty under pressure is therefore not necessarily resistance to cheaper alternatives. It can be a way of reducing uncertainty, particularly for products that a household cannot afford to replace.

Community involvement can add another reason to retain that trust. When a brand they regularly buy supports their community, 59% say they are more likely to continue buying it, while a further 20% become more likely to choose it over competitors. These responses indicate stated intentions rather than proof that support directly causes a purchase, yet they suggest that usefulness can strengthen retention and preference when it comes from a brand people already know and use.

¹⁸ Kantar, The 2025 Mzansi Barometer: <https://jo.my/x96h>

When a brand you regularly buy from supports your community,
how does that influence your buying behaviour?



Township residents expect more from brands than they currently experience, with 46% feeling that brands do not make much difference to their lives and only 20% saying brands help them cope with daily challenges. A further 24% believe brands make life more expensive, while 9% say brands do not understand their reality. The difference between the role people believe companies could play and the value they experience creates the usefulness gap at the centre of this chapter.

“Brands make little difference to 46%, while 24% believe they make life more expensive.”

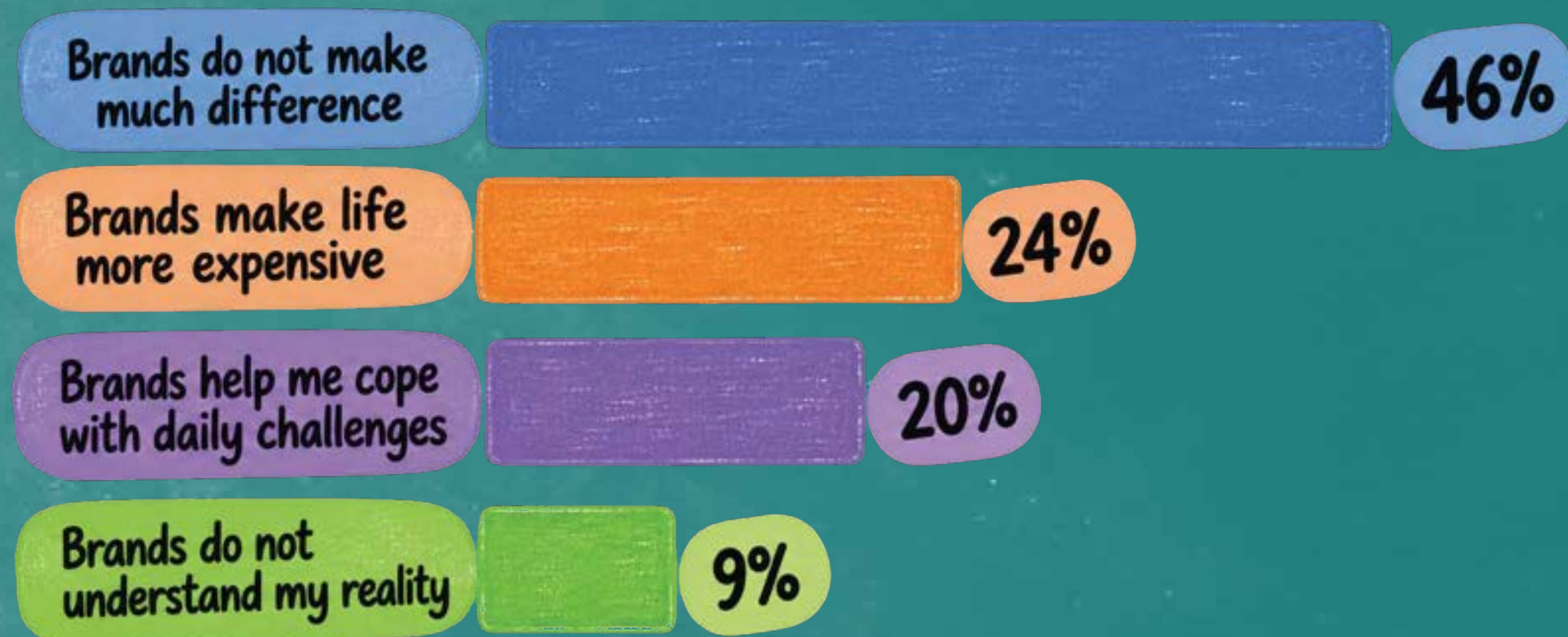
FROM VISIBILITY TO PRACTICAL VALUE

Communication may partly explain the gap between what township residents expect from brands and the value they experience in daily life, with 9% saying they do not notice or hear about brands' community support. Greater promotion of community work will not resolve the deeper problem if the activity does not connect to people's priorities. The contrast between the 84% who value local presence and the 20% who feel brands help them cope suggests that visibility is being achieved more often than practical relevance.

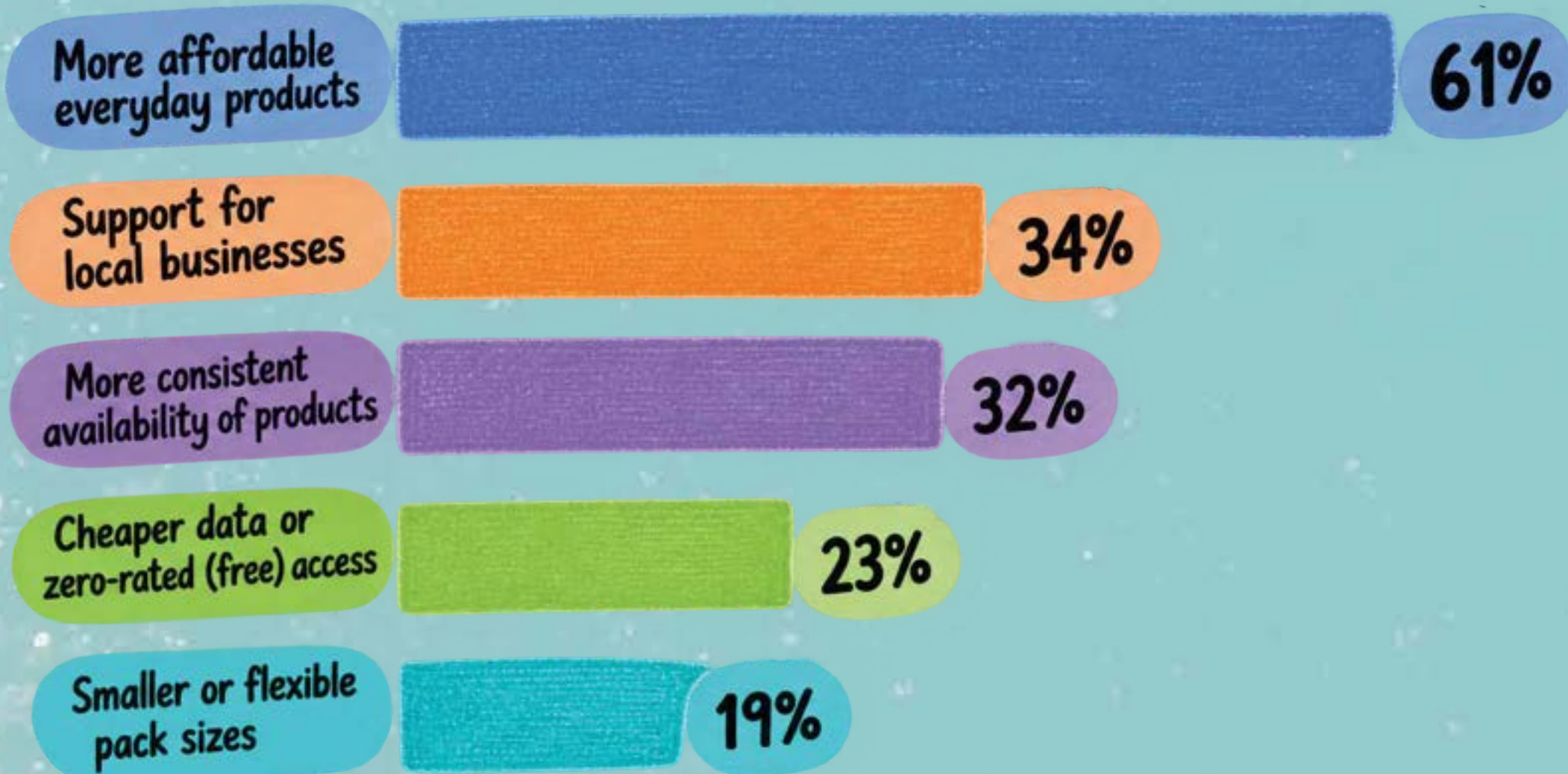
Sydney Mbhele, Group Chief Marketing and Corporate Affairs Officer at Absa Group, describes presence as “being seen”, while usefulness involves “solving real problems in ways that are authentic to a brand’s purpose and capabilities”. His distinction emphasises what a company enables through its presence, rather than how much attention that presence attracts.

The household priorities identified in our survey give this distinction practical meaning. When asked what would make the biggest difference to their household, 61% of residents selected more affordable everyday products. That was followed by support for local businesses at 34% and more consistent availability of products at 32%. A further 23% said cheaper data or zero-rated access would make the biggest difference to their household, while 19% pointed to smaller or more flexible pack sizes. Rather than separating community value from the commercial offer, these priorities connect usefulness to the way a company prices, designs and distributes what it sells, as well as the economic participation it enables around the product.

Which statement best reflects how you feel today?



Which of the following would make the biggest difference to your household right now? (Select up to two)



Mbhele describes the most meaningful interventions as “embedded value-adds that leverage a company’s core strengths”. For a bank, this could involve improving financial resilience through financial literacy, accessible savings options and flexible solutions that expand access to credit. A telecommunications company can create affordable, context-specific connectivity that supports education, job seeking and entrepreneurship. This approach aligns with the 23% of respondents who identified cheaper data or zero-rated access as an immediate household need. A beverage company can draw on education, product innovation and safeguards to encourage responsible consumption and reduce harmful use.

In each example, the contribution forms part of how the business operates rather than philanthropy sitting beside it. As Mbhele explains, it is “purpose expressed through products, services and customer experiences” that creates shared value for communities and businesses. Connecting an intervention to the company’s capabilities also provides a reason to remain involved and continue improving it, rather than withdrawing when a campaign or funding period ends.

USEFULNESS BEGINS WITH THE OFFER

Chapters 2 and 3 detail the discipline behind household shopping decisions. People are changing what they buy to extend meals, waiting for combinations and specials before completing their main grocery shop, or choosing the closest store when time and transport narrow their options. The 61% asking for more affordable everyday products should not be interpreted simply as demanding lower prices: a smaller pack can reduce the amount needed for an immediate purchase, while a larger combination may provide better overall value when enough money is available. More consistent product availability can also limit transport costs and the time spent searching elsewhere, making pricing, pack architecture and distribution part of the practical contribution brands make to household resilience.

Dimitri Tsaperas, Group CEO of Network X, says these findings reflect what the company sees in taxi-rank environments, where “shopping decisions begin long before people reach the till”. Taxi ranks bring travel and everyday shopping together, allowing people to weigh up price and value within their daily routines. OOH can therefore contribute earlier in the consideration journey, helping brands reach people while choices are still being formed and connect their visibility to the products, prices and practical benefits available when people are ready to buy.

The 34% who selected support for local businesses extend usefulness beyond the household to the economy surrounding it. Procurement from township businesses, support for traders, local employment and entrepreneur development can allow more of a company’s investment to circulate within the communities it serves. Brands can direct more of their media spend to local media owners, installers and creatives, building visibility while creating paid opportunities within the community.



FROM ACCESS TO APPLICATION

Six years of working with township communities in Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal and Limpopo have allowed Bongani Soko, the Co-Founder of Godlela, to observe how these expectations are changing. In the early stages of selling fibre connectivity in townships, much of the conversation involved explaining who internet service providers were and why households needed to be connected. Residents are now more likely to ask how that connection can pay for itself through income, careers, education and easier ways to solve community problems.

This movement from access towards application extends beyond telecommunications. It reflects a broader expectation that products and services should expand what people can earn, learn or accomplish, rather than simply giving them access to something new.



USEFULNESS BUILDS BRAND LEGACY

The 2024 Township CX Report established that residents wanted brands to understand their lives, address relevant community needs and move beyond transactional engagement. The 2026 findings turn that expectation into a more specific operating brief for marketers.

Usefulness is not a social impact layer added after decisions about products, pricing, distribution and media have been made. It is the discipline that connects those decisions to the pressures people are carrying. A brand earns a continuing role in township life when its investment leaves behind more than recall: a product people can afford, stock they can find, data they can use or economic value that circulates locally. Visibility puts the brand in the community; usefulness gives the community a reason to keep choosing it.



KEY INSIGHTS



- 1. Close the gap between presence and experienced value.**
While 84% consider local brand presence important, only 20% say brands help them cope with daily challenges. Audit what each campaign or activation enables after the advertising has been seen.
- 2. Treat community support as a retention and preference lever.**
Support would make 59% of residents more likely to continue buying a brand and 20% more likely to choose it over competitors. Connect community initiatives to the people who already buy the brand and measure whether the activity strengthens continued choice.
- 3. Build usefulness into the everyday offer.**
More affordable products lead household priorities at 61%, followed by product availability at 32% and flexible pack sizes at 19%. Review pricing, pack architecture and distribution before adding a separate community programme.
- 4. Make local economic participation part of the investment.**
Support for local businesses was selected by 34% of residents. Set clear targets for local procurement and the proportion of media or activation spending retained within the community.
- 5. Measure whether people feel the difference.**
Brands make little difference to 46% of residents, while 24% believe they make life more expensive and 9% feel misunderstood. Move beyond reach and activity measures by tracking whether people experience the brand as useful.



CHAPTER 6

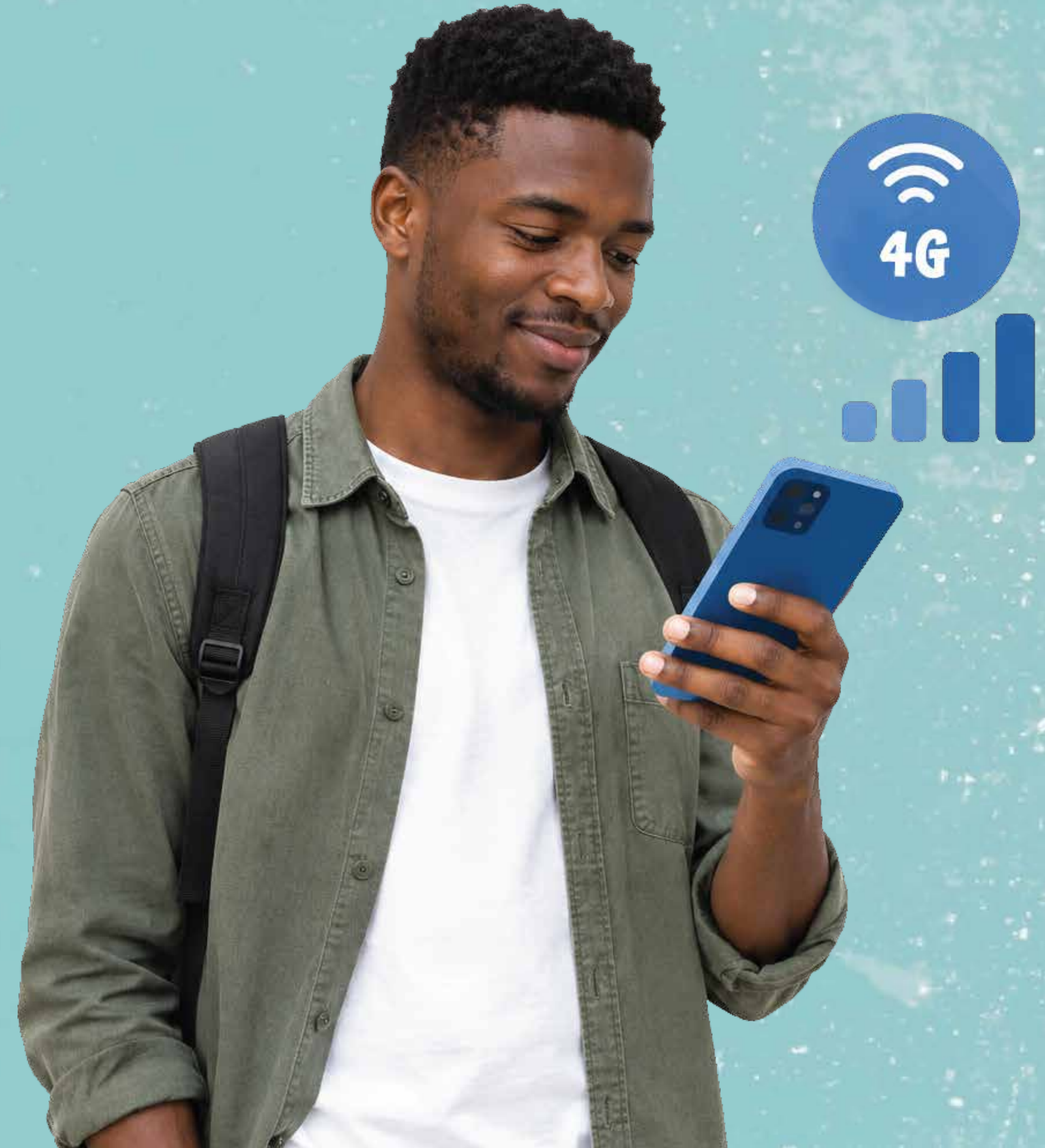
When Digital Earns Its Data

WHEN DIGITAL EARNs ITS DATA

Earlier editions of the Township CX Report tracked the effects of data costs, unreliable access and household finances on township residents' ability to participate online. The 2026 findings take this further by showing how connectivity has become part of everyday commerce, work, education and problem-solving. Although access removes some barriers, households must still decide whether the data and time spent online will return something useful.

South Africa's connected population is constantly growing and township residents are taking full advantage of what this access offers. Statistics South Africa reported that 85% of households had some form of internet access in 2025, while 78% could connect through mobile devices.¹⁹ Although these household measures are not directly comparable with our survey of individual residents, they confirm the importance of the phone as a gateway to the internet.

¹⁹ StatsSA, General Household Survey 2025: <https://jo.my/ghs-25>



AFFORDABILITY INFLUENCES ACCESS

Our survey found that 66% of township respondents are online throughout the day. The remaining 33% experience more conditional connectivity, with 21% going online when they can afford data.

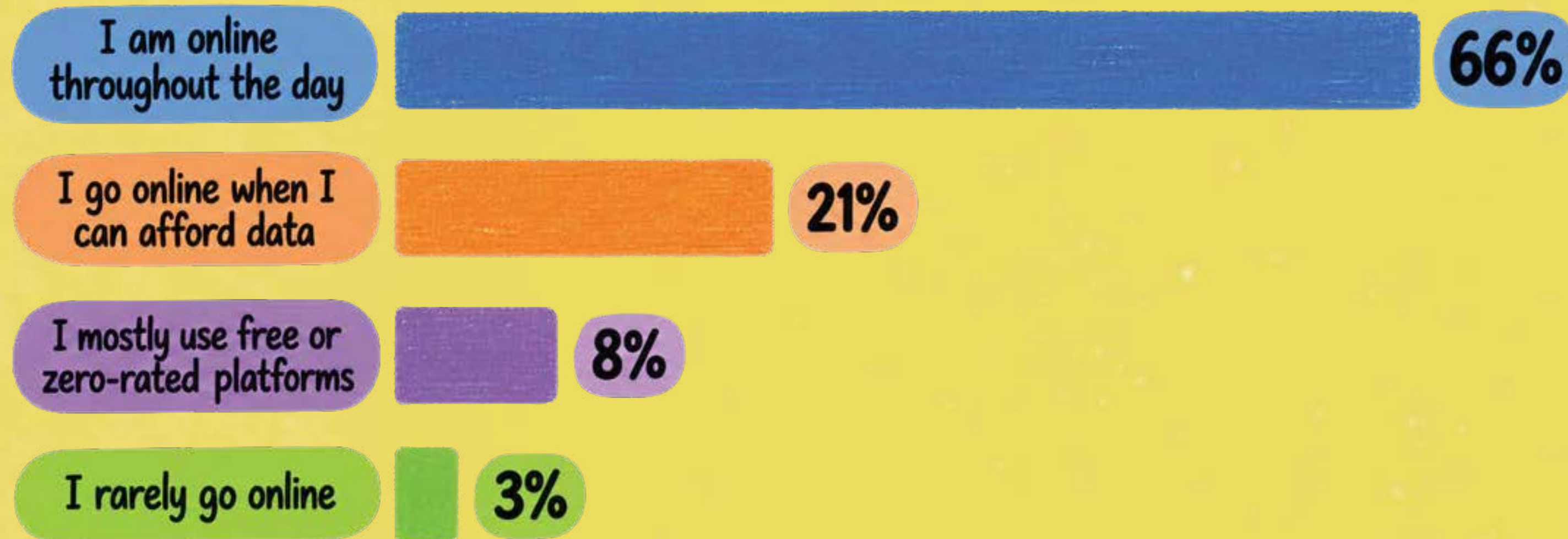
For households and individuals who must make every gigabyte count, engaging with brands competes with messaging family, applying for work, completing schoolwork, banking and comparing the prices of household essentials. A brand interaction may be available, but it is unlikely to be the first priority unless it offers a clear reason to spend that data.

As we delve more into the demographics, age changes this picture materially. Continuous access reaches 93% among residents aged 18-24 but falls to 40% among those aged 55-64. Affordability influences access among 5% of the younger group and 26% of those aged 55-64. The township market may be highly connected overall, but the intensity and reliability of that connection differ substantially between generations.

5G



Which of the following best describes your access to the internet?



Bongani Soko has seen conversations about connectivity move from why households should connect and which provider they should choose, to how connectivity can pay for itself. Residents increasingly expect internet access to support income generation, career development, children's education and the resolution of everyday problems.

This shift is taking place within households that already grapple with several forms of instability. Chapter 1, The Customer Journey Starts at Home, found that 79% experience electricity outages at least once a month. A power interruption can leave a phone uncharged, disconnect a router or stop a payment before it is completed. In this context, residents measure the value of connectivity against more than the price of data, factoring in the time and effort lost when an interrupted journey has to be restarted.

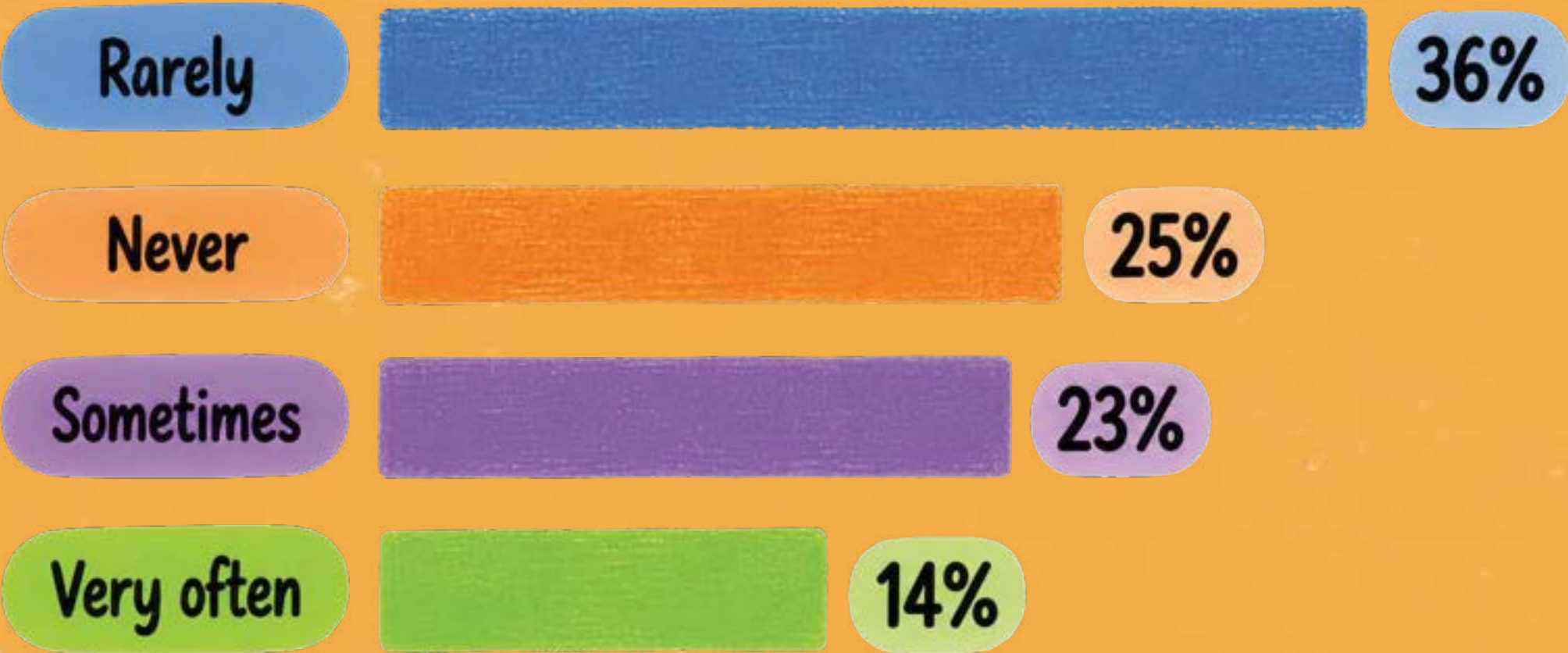


FAST CONNECTIVITY VS FASTER HUMAN CONNECTIONS

Data costs sometimes, or very often, prevent 37% of residents from engaging with brands online. The effect is not uniform across the country: 46% of respondents in North West say costs stop them sometimes, or very often, compared with 35% in the Western Cape. This does not necessarily describe complete digital exclusion. It describes customers making selective decisions about which interactions deserve the data available to them.

An abandoned product page does not always mean that the customer has rejected the offer. Slow loading, heavy images or several steps before the price and availability appear can make the interaction more expensive than expected. Brands may add stages to avoid creating a purely transactional relationship, but township residents also move at the speed of digital word-of-mouth. While a website requests registration or an app download, a grocery stokvel WhatsApp group may already be circulating that day's deals to the same customer. Each additional step must justify the data and attention it consumes.

How often do data costs stop you from engaging with brands online?



“Data costs sometimes, or often, stop 37% of residents from engaging with brands online.”

Residents indicate that familiar, lighter formats would make engagement easier, with 49% selecting promotions shared through WhatsApp. Their preferences favour communication that reaches them within channels they already use, without requiring a separate digital environment for every brand.

Which brand actions make it easier for you to engage online? (Select all that apply)



This aligns with the calculations explored in Chapter 2, Stretching Meals Further than the Rand. Residents consider the full expense required to realise the value of a deal, whether that expense takes the form of additional travel, mobile data or time. A discount becomes less useful when the customer must download an app, watch a video or navigate several screens before seeing its price, availability and conditions.

Concise communication does not have to reduce the relationship to a sale. A short, relevant and transparent message can build confidence precisely because it respects the customer's circumstances. Adding more content does not automatically create more value; the interaction becomes worthwhile when it helps someone decide, save or act with less effort.

Charné Munien, Strategy Director at Rogerwilco, recalls how a simple WhatsApp stokvel rewards programme nearly a decade ago showed that familiar, low-data channels could generate meaningful returns. She sees conversational AI as the next opportunity, using WhatsApp to extend the convenience of advanced digital services to people who may otherwise be priced out while helping to address local-language and literacy barriers.

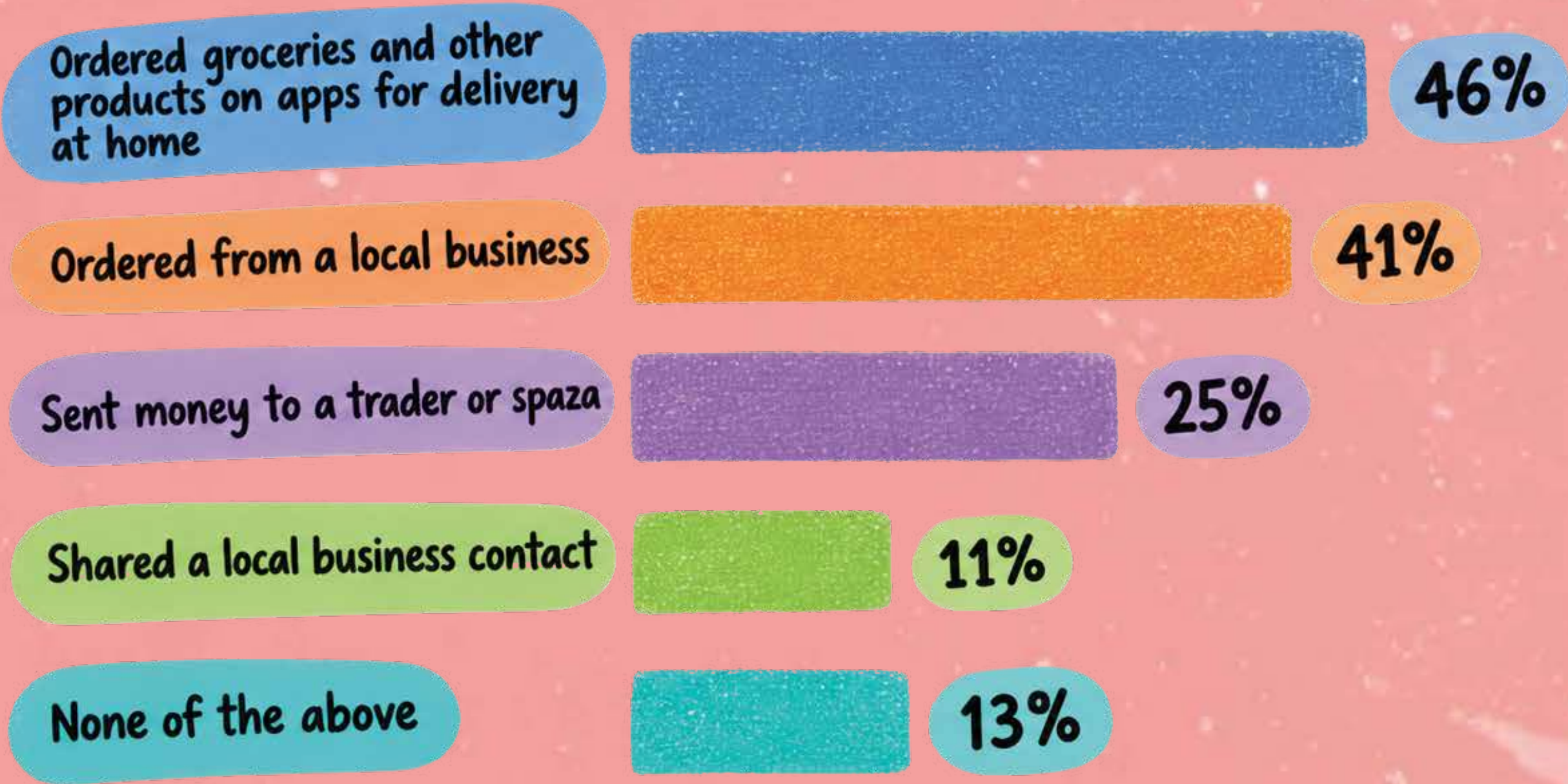
The strategic advantage comes from understanding the constraints shaping people's choices and designing around them. As Munien explains, "Real brand growth in the township economy isn't about shiny innovation, it's about replacing assumptions with data and solving real constraints."

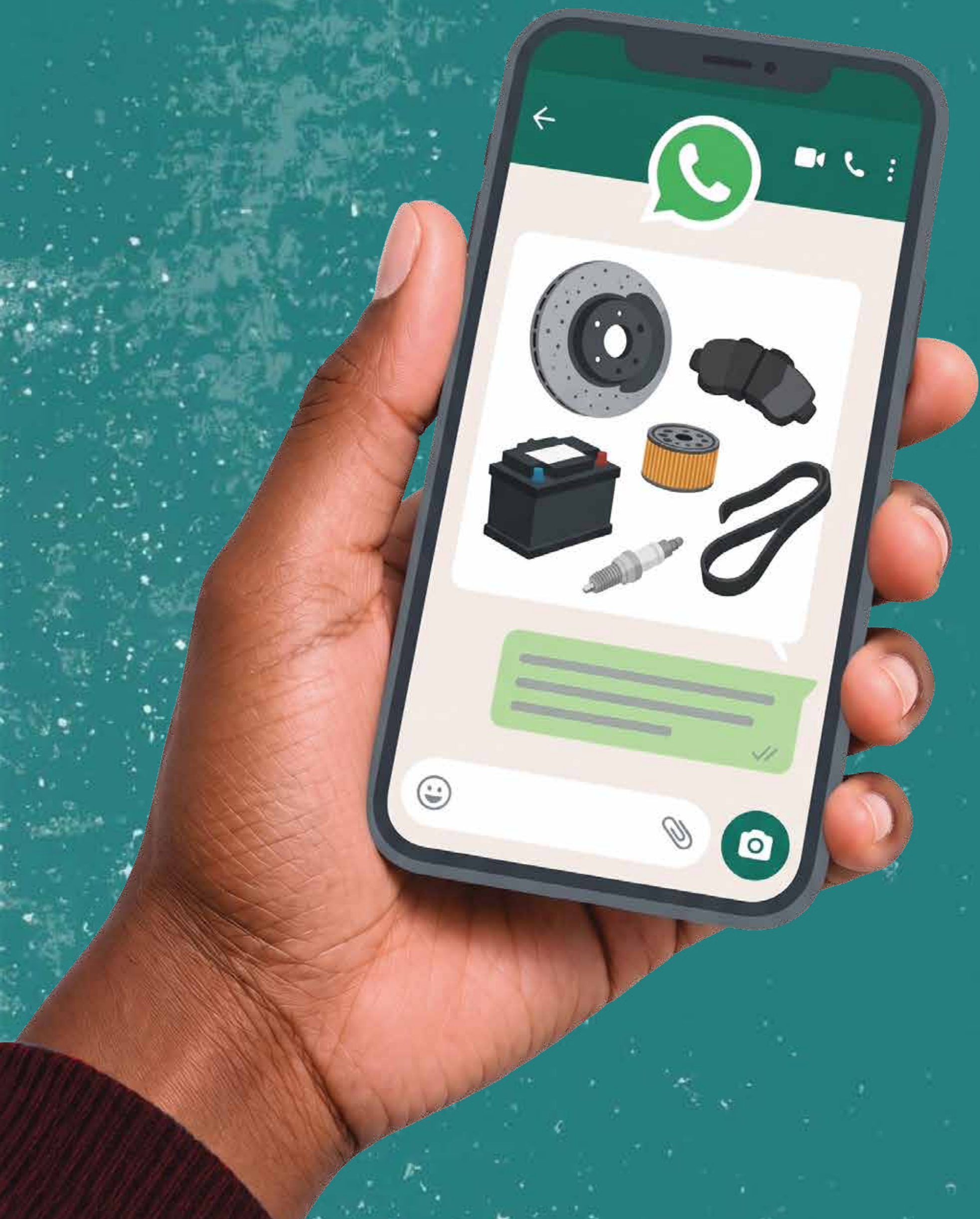
ONE PHONE, MANY ROUTES TO MARKET

Township residents use their phones within e-commerce and wider commercial ecosystems that include national retailers, delivery services, local businesses and informal traders. Our survey found that 46% have ordered groceries or other products through mobile apps for home delivery, while 41% have ordered from a local business and 25% have sent money to a trader or spaza shop. These are not separate commercial worlds. The same resident may compare prices through a retailer’s app, ask a local business about stock on WhatsApp and pay a trader from the same device.



Which of the following have you done using your phone? (Select all that apply)





Evidence from township businesses reflects this combination of formal and informal trade. A 2025 Township Informal Economy Report by Standard Bank found that 74% of surveyed township businesses use WhatsApp to reach customers, compared with 47% using Instagram, while websites and dedicated business apps remain less common.²⁰ This aligns with our finding that residents favour familiar, affordable channels, while more specialised digital environments need to offer a clear benefit before people or businesses have reason to adopt them.

The commercial benefit is visible in the automotive sector among township entrepreneurs who leverage connectivity. Associated Press reported that a collective of township mechanics uses WhatsApp to combine orders, secure better prices and receive authentic vehicle parts within 24 hours.²¹ This reduces time spent travelling and queuing for stock that may be unavailable. Mechanic, Themba Maseko, described the value directly, “I don’t have to go stand in queue and waste time. Plus, it’s at a cheaper price.” Connectivity pays for itself when it protects productive time as well as reducing the cost of doing business.

²⁰ Standard Bank, *Township Informal Economy Report*: <https://jo.my/w1v25>

²¹ Associated Press, “Township mechanics in South Africa unite to turbocharge their small businesses”: <https://jo.my/qrm3px>

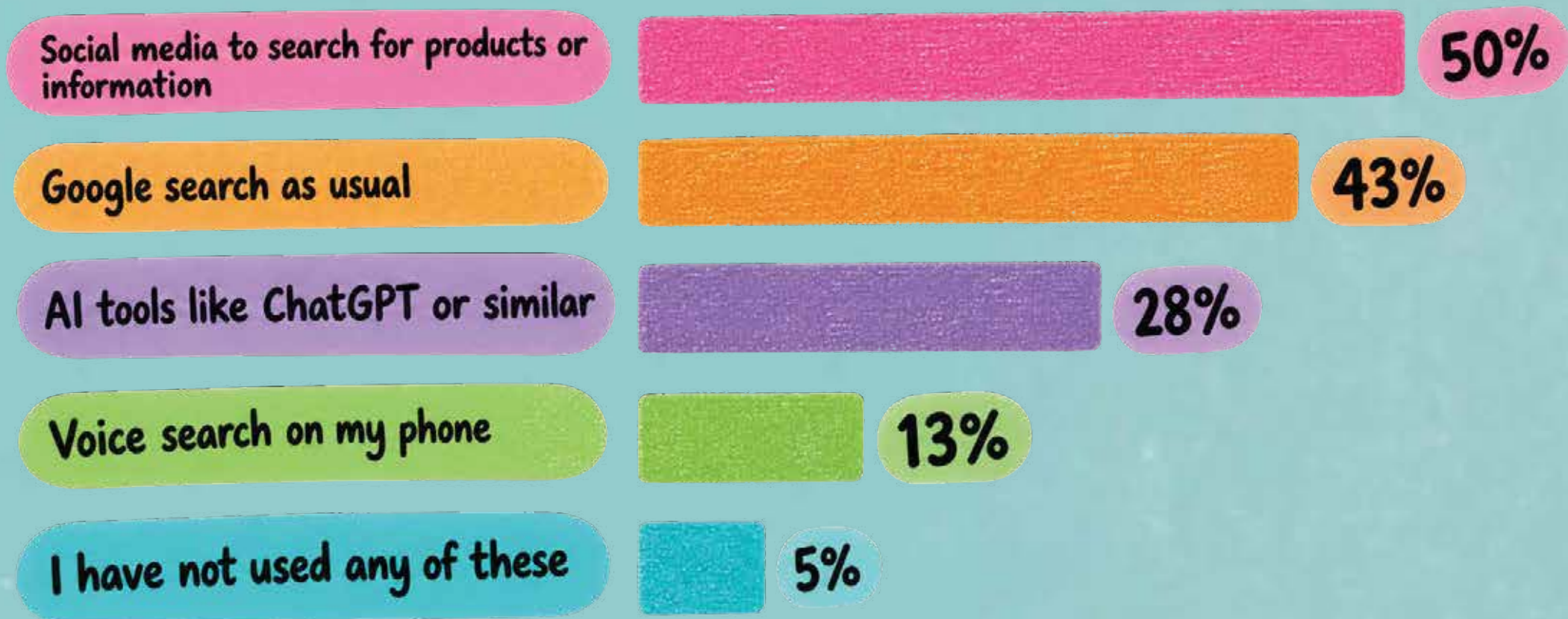
DISCOVERY ISN'T TRUST

Product discovery now takes place through a combination of social platforms, search engines, generative tools and conversations between people. Social media leads at 50%, while the 13% using voice search indicate that typing is not the only way residents are navigating digital information.

The more revealing divide is generational, with generative engine tools used to find new brands and products by 46% of respondents aged 18-24 and 43% of those aged 25-34. Usage falls to 19% among those aged 35-44 and 10% among residents aged 55-64. Marketers are therefore dealing with different discovery habits inside the township market, rather than one uniformly digital audience.

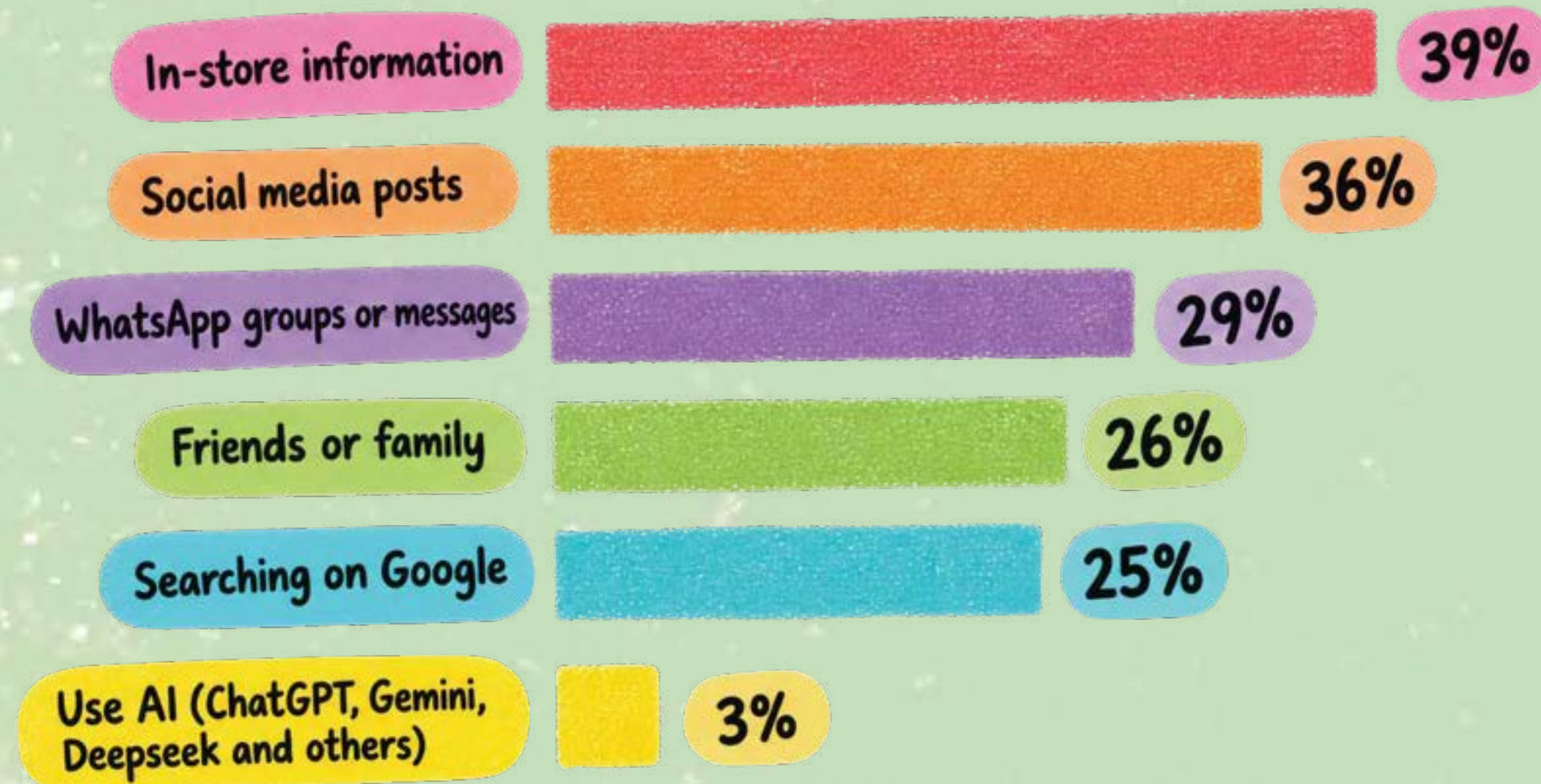


In the past 12 months, which of the following have you used to find new brands and products? (select all that apply)



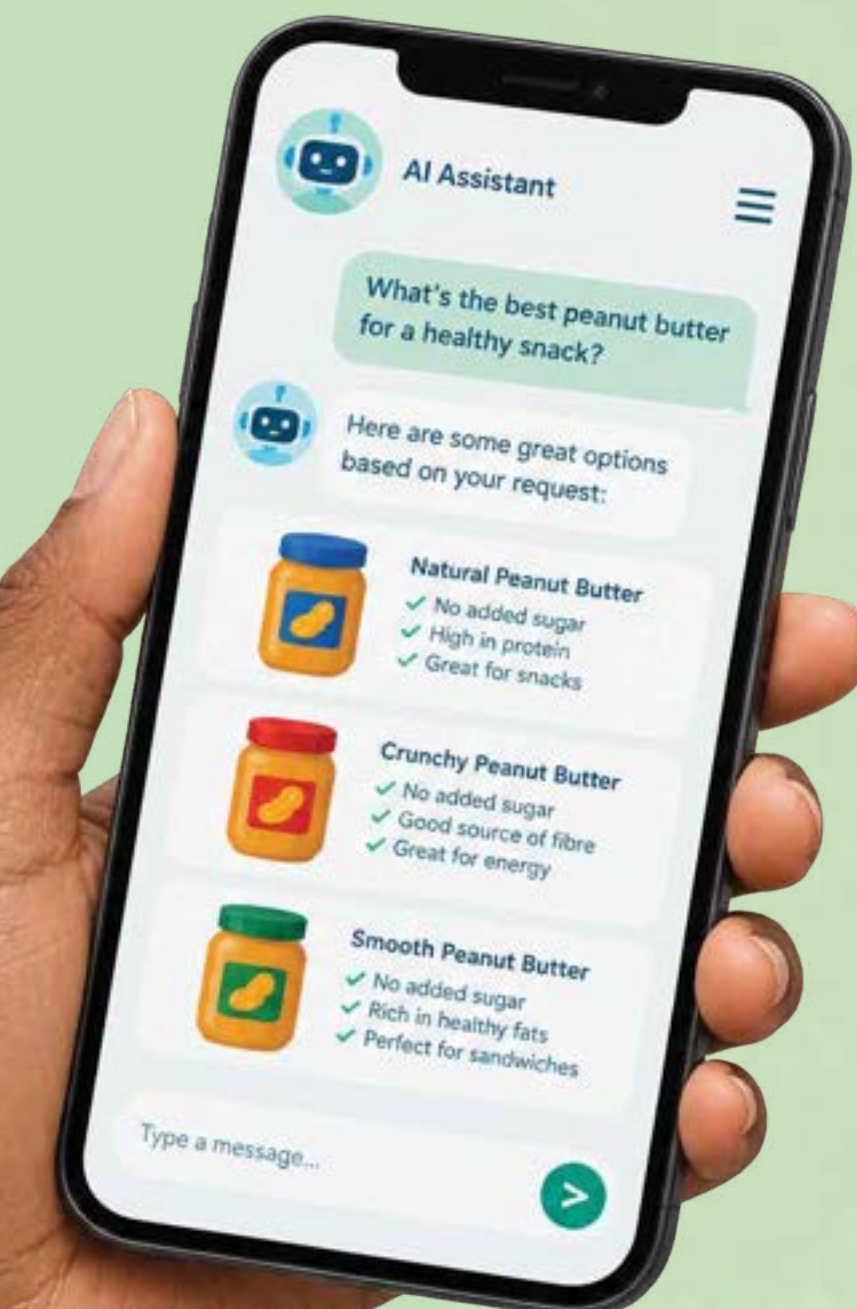
Reach through digital channels should not be mistaken for authority, when it can mainly be about convenience. In-store information remains the most trusted source for product and price information at 39%, and its importance increases with age, from 34% among respondents aged 18-24 to 47% among those aged 55-64. Social media, WhatsApp and recommendations from friends or family contribute differently, allowing residents to compare brand claims with information they receive from people they trust, retailers and physical stores.

Which of these do you trust most for information about products or prices? (Select up to two)



The difference between the 28% who use generative tools for product discovery and the 3% who rank them among their most trusted sources is especially important. The 2026 South African Customer Experience Report similarly found that 23% of respondents nationally use generative search when researching purchases, up from 12% in 2025.²² Although the samples and questions differ, both reports show adoption moving faster than trust.

A product may first appear on social media, be compared through search or a generative tool, discussed in a WhatsApp group and verified in-store. Price, availability and product claims must remain consistent throughout this journey, because the credibility of one channel can be tested immediately against another.



²² 2026 South African Customer Experience Report: <https://jo.my/cx-2026>

USEFUL TECHNOLOGY STARTS WITH A REAL TASK

The survey found that 57% of township residents use generative tools sometimes or often for everyday tasks. The gender difference is narrow, at 58% among women and 56% among men, while the age divide is far more pronounced. Usage sometimes, or often, reaches 95% among residents aged 18-24 and 89% among those aged 25-34, compared with 44% among those aged 35-44 and 12% among those aged 55-64.

Interest concentrates on applications that address recognisable needs, with 50% believing AI could help people learn new skills or find work. Health or emergency information follows at 39%, education and schoolwork at 38%, government or community information at 36% and support for small or informal businesses at 33%, suggesting that residents judge new technology by its practical contribution rather than its novelty.

Support for small or informal businesses connects directly with the work of Miles Kubheka, CEO of Wakanda and Gcwalisa, who describes DIME, the Digital Innovation for Modernising the Independent Economy initiative, and Spazamisa as “putting practical tools directly into the hands of spaza shop owners”. Instead of waiting for an inspector to identify a problem, AI can enable a trader to photograph products, shelves or storage areas using a phone and immediately identify potential food-safety risks, expired products, poor storage practices or compliance issues. Kubheka says this “effectively gives every trader access to a digital health and safety assistant”.



This changes the model from compliance being something “done to” informal retailers to something they can actively manage themselves. Kubheka is clear that “AI does not replace environmental health practitioners or regulators”, but creates “an additional, scalable layer of prevention and self-compliance between inspections”.

Kubheka measures the usefulness of the technology through what it enables the trader to prevent, explaining: “For me, that is where AI earns its data. If a spaza owner can use technology themselves to identify a risk before an unsafe product reaches a child, protect their customers and ultimately protect their own business, then AI has moved beyond being a trend and has become useful infrastructure for the township economy.”

Meaningful digital participation depends on more than access, because residents move between data constraints, trusted human networks, physical stores and emerging tools according to the value each route provides. Sophistication matters less than whether the technology reduces costs, saves time, improves a decision or expands what someone can earn and learn. Brands earn a place in that journey when the return is visible to the person using it, because digital earns its data only when the experience gives back more than it asks people to spend.



KEY INSIGHTS



- 1. Design for interrupted user journeys.**
With 21% going online when they can afford data, digital journeys should preserve progress, resume easily and make essential information accessible without another download.
- 2. Read drop-off in context.**
For 37% of residents, data costs sometimes, or very often, stop them from engaging with brands, so an abandoned page may reflect loading time or hidden information rather than weak demand.
- 3. Plan by digital generation.**
The share of people connected online throughout the day falls from 93% among ages 18-24 to 40% among ages 55-64, making age an important guide to channel, format and content choices.
- 4. Separate discovery from trust.**
AI helps 28% find products but is trusted most by 3%, while in-store information leads at 39%. Align prices, availability and product details wherever people check an offer.
- 5. Start AI with a useful task.**
Work and skills lead at 50%, showing that useful AI begins with a recognisable task and should be judged by the outcome it improves.

CONCLUSION

Reducing the Cost of Coping

The strongest brands reduce the effort required to choose, buy and use them, especially in township communities where price and quality are weighed against time, transport, data, risk and household trade-offs. The value of an experience depends on how well it works within these conditions.

Frequent adaptation changes how value is judged because a service interruption can change the meal, a saving can disappear into transport, a promotion can be unavailable in store, and a digital journey can consume data before revealing the price. Each failure adds cost beyond the advertised price and shapes whether the brand remains worth choosing.

In this context, customer experience extends beyond the store, the screen and the till. It begins with access and affordability, then continues through storage, preparation and performance. A lower price is not full value if someone must make another trip, buy additional ingredients or lose part of the product during an outage.

Rigid customer categories miss how people manage pressure. A resident may stay loyal to a product while switching retailers, save through a stokvel while gambling, remain online while rationing data, or discover a product through AI before verifying it in a store. Context explains these choices and gives marketers a more reliable basis for strategy.

That context prevents brands from reading constraint as preference, because store switching can reflect transport costs or availability as well as price, an abandoned page can reflect data cost or delayed information, and a smaller pack can protect today's cash without lowering expectations of quality. Strategy improves when the pressure behind every action informs the product, message and experience that follow.

Expectations also point to a clear role for business. While 91% of residents believe companies should play some role when public services fail, only 20% feel brands help with daily challenges. The opportunity is to apply existing capabilities more closely to the conditions surrounding the purchase.

Credibility is built through a commercial offer shaped around the way people live, including products that keep for longer, pack sizes that protect cash flow, meal combinations that reflect what households cook and stock that is available where advertised. The same principle applies to digital channels that reveal essential information before consuming unnecessary data, reduce steps that add no value, and introduce safeguards before a harmful transaction escalates.

Creative, media and digital channels should make that value easy to recognise and access. Reach without relevance adds another claim on attention, personalisation without empathy can optimise the wrong signals, and technology that wastes data weakens trust. Stronger brand building connects human insight to the complete experience, from discovery and decision-making to purchase and usage.

For marketers, the question is what becomes easier, safer, more affordable or more possible because the brand is there. **USEFUL BRANDS LEAVE VALUE** through time saved, avoided wastage, clearer decisions, stronger local businesses and opportunities opened.

Brands earn lasting trust and growth when human insight reduces effort, removes friction and creates more room for people to live, plan and progress.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

At Rogerwilco, we help brands forge meaningful connections with their customers by crafting digital experiences that deliver measurable results. As Africa's largest B Corp-certified digital agency, we go beyond conventional metrics, ensuring our work drives impact for clients, communities and the planet.

Our industry reports equip marketers with insights that reveal what truly resonates with audiences. Our B Corp certification reflects our commitment to governance, sustainability and ethics, reinforcing our dedication to business as a force for good.

We partner with brands that see marketing as a platform for building trust, creating value and driving impact. Our approach is rooted in insights that help brands connect with their audiences in meaningful ways. Through our industry reports, we break down the trends shaping consumer behaviour, giving marketers a clear understanding of what drives engagement, sales and loyalty.

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THE TOWNSHIP CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE REPORT

2026

Rogerwilco

