

Imagining the possibilities of an Africanised Black Friday

By [Vincent Magwenya](#)

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Black Friday has come and gone, with popular consumer products ranging from food items and electronic devices to furniture items flying off the shelves at bargain prices.



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The retail phenomenon traces its growing popularity to the United States merchants of the 1980s, who recorded their sales profits accrued on the day after Thanksgiving, by highlighting them in black ink which contrasted the red ink that was used to show financial losses that were often suffered throughout the whole year until the beginning of the holiday season. Thus, Black Friday marked the beginning of the period retailers will no longer be in the red.

Cultural relevance

Again, this year, savings experts warned against unchecked consumer spending ahead of another season of Christmas shopping. And social commentators lamented Black Friday's lack of cultural relevance to our country, bemoaning the insatiable appetite of South Africans for everything that originates from the United States in popular culture consumption, instead of embracing indigenous, homegrown creations. Others have gone as far as sounding the alarm bells that South Africa will soon adopt America's Independence Day on 4 July and Thanksgiving Day on the fourth Thursday of November.

However, the reality is the world has always been small and open to influences that transcend borders. American popular culture – from music, movies to clothing – has always featured prominently in our cultural DNA. A sign of this cultural dominance is always witnessed when old and new American musicians continue to fill up our entertainment venues whenever they visit our shores. Social media has made the world even smaller – friendships are orchestrated without physical introductions. Social trends are shared in seconds of viral content exchanged in billions of mega bites of data a day.

Driving African economic benefits

Recognising the strong lure of global culture and phenomenon's such as Black Friday, the question is, do we have an opportunity to derive more economic benefits against our own prevailing conditions of a stagnant economy and rising unemployment? Do we have a unique value proposition that we can offer to Africa's growing and increasingly mobile consumers, wherein we Africanise Black Friday and accrue more value than a once-a-year shopping spree?

The answer to both questions is a resounding 'yes', if we can disrupt ourselves from lethargic process-driven thinking to creative and coordinated execution that can deliver tangible economic benefits. I am in no way suggesting this to be a panacea to our economic troubles, but it will certainly be the beginning of inculcating a business unusual, can-do attitude, that also rallies society broadly.

Imagine a scenario, where at all relevant levels of leadership in both the public and private sectors, we redefine Black Friday to increase the number of shopping tourists to South Africa. We have unrivalled capacity to offer the best shopping experience on the African continent. Instead of a single Black Friday day, we can create 'Black Friday Week' where we execute a series of decisions, actions and events with coordinated precision across the board:

- South African consulates across Africa, in applicable countries, discount visas by 30% for all visitors coming to South Africa during our 'Black Friday Week'.
- Home Affairs adds additional staff to expedite quick processing at all our points of entry, with visas being issued on arrival for those unable to be processed via consulates.
- Public transport providers like the Gautrain, Uber, BRT, Taxis, Taxify, Good Fellas and others operate on discounted rates.
- Hotels, B&Bs and restaurants join the party with their own specials.
- SAPS and other law enforcement agencies increase their presence and guard our continental and local shoppers, very much like we did during the World Cup in 2010.
- Entertainment venues from movie cinemas, to music halls and performance theatres, line up a series of festivals, turning South Africa into a party mecca of shopping, entertainment and memorable tourism experiences.
- Musicians launch their new albums with discounted launch shows.
- Product retailers launch their products and sell them at discounts.
- SARS to offer incentives to taxpayers that submit their tax returns during the week.
- Municipalities, where applicable, offer electricity and water rebates to retailers and the hospitality industry to reduce costs of running their stores and facilities for longer hours.
- Access to sporting events during Black Friday Week sold at discounts from regular pricing, with some international sporting events like boxing being scheduled around this time, including international conferences to attract more visitors.
- Advertising, media buying and media houses run their own special rates. This last Friday, I even offered via Twitter a discount to Takealot for Issue and Crisis Management following their bizarrely explained IT system collapse, just to get into the spirit and score some business.

I am certain there are more and better ideas. The 2010 Fifa World Cup gave us something positive to anticipate; we united, we visualised the possibilities, we lived the dream and felt better about ourselves as a people united behind a purpose. Today we are losing our shine in the world, which was recently underscored by our loss of the hosting rights of the 2023 Rugby World Cup, no less after the recommendation that followed an intensive evaluation.

We are more divided in our consumption of challenges that face us. We can lift ourselves up to reach our dream by collectively realising opportunities where none seem to exist. Just imagine the temporary and permanent job opportunities that will be created in gearing up for our own homegrown version of Black Friday.

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