

Nicola Cooper – The rise of African music and fashion globally continues

 By [Danette Breitenbach](#)

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This exclusive #BizTrends2024 interview is with the award-winning strategic forecaster, Nicola Cooper.

In this interview with *Bizcommunity* Marketing & Media editor, Danette Breitenbach, Cooper shares trends on the future of fashion, society, and technology as well as retail from her new exclusive insights report .

A golden thread throughout the interview is the impact of the trend of the continuing rapid advancement of technology, with tools such as ChatGPT, in the case of Africa, taking its pop and youth culture to the world.

Bizcommunity · #BizTrends2024: Nicola Cooper

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Africa rising - but not how we thought

The rise of African music and fashion in the rest of the world is an ongoing and growing trend.

She cites Beyoncé as an example. “Beyoncé delved into African culture, collaborating with African artists, and utilising African designers and filmmakers. This is more about collaboration than cultural appropriation.”

So, while we still look to Westernised cultures, she says there is a growing appreciation for contemporary African aesthetics and sounds.

“This has led to us, as Africans, not only recognising our value, but also allowing us to understand that our unique voices are relevant not just to Africans, but to the global audience,” says Cooper.

This has elevated our confidence and the value we bring globally. “It only takes one African person to break through this invisible wall, opening the path for many to follow.”

She adds that a few years ago, people talked about “Africa Rising,” and it felt like it never really happened.

But she says perhaps we weren’t looking at it the right way.

“It is more of a pop culture movement, taking African culture and stories to the world.”



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Technology: opening geographical boundaries

Driving this is technology.

Africa is a technologically savvy continent with one of the largest mobile media markets in the world.

“Literally,” she states, “Technology has opened geographical boundaries allowing people access to trends in real time.

“This has opened the world to us and other communities for support, dialogue, and sharing ideas.

She adds that the minute you go online, you are international. “This is especially inspiring for young people on a continent where traditional jobs are lacking, and there’s quite a bit of unemployment.”

This has driven young people to side hustles that could grow into fully-fledged businesses, while global brands are innovating with young African people.

“ At the end of the day, the recipient is a real human being ”

Technology's crucial role in retail

The knock-on effect of this is on retail brands.

She says a dynamic shift in how products are produced is taking place, with investment in localised products with increased localised collaborations.

“Retailers need to understand their consumers' everyday needs, aspirations, and goals. On the other hand, the introduction of platforms such as Amazon in South Africa also opens new consumer opportunities,” states Cooper.

That takes us back to technology and how it is shaping retail.

“Understanding that each platform has its own language and visual language is key,” says Cooper.

As retailers start to use chatbots, AI, and sizing systems where needed, data will help them understand consumers and their needs better.

But, she says, it's critical to humanise data. “At the end of the day, the recipient is a real human being.”

Consumer centric

Cooper's most important message to businesses is to be consumer-centric.

“Understand your consumers based on clear evidence, statistics, and learnings. It's no longer just about products and price, but also the values of a brand, its ethos, transparency, and how it reflects its consumers.”

She adds that retailers must invest in understanding their consumers' aspirations and societal positioning.

Nicola Cooper is an award-winning strategic forecaster, in-house trends analyst, and cultural strategist at 99c Communications. She's also the founder of her consultancy, specialising in the fields of fashion, lifestyle, and pop culture, particularly for retail and FMCG brands on the African continent and worldwide.

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ABOUT DANETTE BREITENBACH

Danette Breitenbach is a marketing & media editor at Bizcommunity.com. Previously she freelanced in the marketing and media sector, including for Bizcommunity. She was editor and publisher of AdVantage, the publication that served the marketing, media and advertising industry in southern Africa. She has worked extensively in print media, mainly B2B. She has a Masters in Financial Journalism from Wits.

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