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# Summer 2026–27 in South Africa: five themes shaping how customers choose accessories, jewellery and beauty

*Read category by category, South African trends look like a list. Read together, they reveal a consistent customer: deliberate in spending, demanding on proof, shaped by the southern sun, eager for self-expression and proud of African provenance. These five themes cut across skincare, fragrance, jewellery and accessories alike.*

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## A growing market, spending deliberately

The South African cosmetics and personal-care market is valued at US$4.2 billion and is expected to reach US$5.58 billion by 2031 [1]. Retailers across formats, from department stores to clothing chains and supermarkets, are giving beauty more space because it keeps growing when other categories stall [2]. Textiles, clothing, footwear and leather goods are among the retail categories expected to grow fastest between 2026 and 2028, according to Unisa's Bureau of Market Research [3].

The same research sets the tone for the season. Value-seeking is the dominant consumer theme of 2026, and value is defined broadly: quality, trust, usefulness and convenience as much as price. Spending is becoming, in the researchers' words, "increasingly deliberate, value-driven and experience-focused" [3]. Five themes follow from this, and they apply as much to a serum as to a pendant.

## 1. Fewer pieces, chosen to last

The South African customer buys less on impulse and more for the long term. In jewellery, the industry's own council reports that buyers are turning to timeless or investment-worthy pieces, to silver and lighter gold after record gold prices, and to pre-owned luxury that holds its value [4]. In skincare, the same logic produces shorter routines: Korean beauty's South African audience now favours fewer, multi-benefit products over long rituals [1].

The pressure of dupes sharpens the point. Smell-alike fragrances sold as “inspired by” famous scents are increasingly accepted by younger consumers as legitimate alternatives [5]. When a cheaper version is a click away, an original must justify every rand: through its materials, its story and its durability. For a brand, the answer is often a well-chosen entry point into its universe, a pendant, a charm or a smaller format, rather than a lower price on its core pieces.

## 2. Proof before promise

The second theme is an informed customer. At Takealot’s House of Beauty in April 2026, most brands presented three to five serums, each targeting a single concern and built around named actives such as niacinamide, ceramides, hyaluronic acid, retinol and vitamin C; visitors asked for personalised advice and shade matching [1]. The same observers flagged products sold with Korean-only ingredient lists as a barrier for South African buyers who want to know what they are applying [1].

Local brands have built their success on this demand for transparency, promising honest formulas without unnecessary fillers at accessible prices; one of them, Swiitch, co-creates its products with its followers [6]. The expectation extends beyond beauty. A customer who reads an ingredient list also wants to know what a jewel is made of and where an accessory comes from. Clear labelling in English, verifiable claims and visible craftsmanship are no longer extras; they are the price of entry.

## 3. Designed for the southern sun

Summer in South Africa is lived outdoors, under strong sun, and the season’s trends follow. GLAMOUR South Africa puts “advanced SPF” at the top of its list: protection built into serums, tints, powders and setting sprays that also hydrate or brighten [7]. Hyperpigmentation is addressed explicitly, as L’Oréal Paris showed by presenting its Melasyl molecule to South African consumers [1]. Complexions move towards “cloud skin”, a soft finish between matte and dewy [7].

The same climate shapes fragrance and accessories. Portable formats such as solid jelly-balm perfumes appeal to Gen Z and millennial customers [1]. Scarves and bandanas, worn at the neck or in the hair, return as practical and decorative pieces, alongside a relaxed boho mood of shells, beads and semi-precious stones [8].

## 4. Self-expression through layering

If the customer is careful with money, she is not discreet in style. South African Fashion Week’s spring–summer 2026 collections were dominated by 1980s maximalism, dramatic accessories and layering, with dark chocolate brown presented as “the new black” alongside bold primaries and all-pink looks [9]. The same spirit of accumulation runs through every category: stacked bracelets mixing metals and beads, charms layered on chains and on bags, sculptural or asymmetric earrings [8]; colour-drenched make-up in a single pastel, mascara and liner in burgundy or emerald [7].

Hair is part of the accessory story in South Africa in a way it rarely is in Europe. GLAMOUR South Africa lists braids stacked with clear, metallic or wooden beads, and locs styled with accessories, among the season's looks [7]. For jewellery and accessory brands, this opens a field of products, hair cuffs, clips, beads and pins, that European ranges seldom consider.

## 5. African provenance, global standards

The last theme is pride. Local skincare brands are winning customers with African botanicals combined with science: Lelive uses rooibos, Kalahari melon, marula and mongongo oils, and Silki's bakuchiol booster has been recognised as a leading retinol alternative [6]. Large retailers have followed: Woolworths develops ranges with African botanicals, and shea, baobab and marula remain sought-after ingredients [10]. On the runway, South African designers are defining a direction of their own [9].

For a foreign brand, this does not mean pretending to be local. It means respecting local codes, showing that its products have been chosen for South African skin, climate and style, and offering something that local brands cannot: a heritage, a savoir-faire, a distinct aesthetic.

## From trend to range

Each of these themes is easy to describe and hard to apply. A European range has to be re-read through South African eyes: which references justify their price in a value-driven market, which claims hold for local skin tones, which formats survive the summer, which pieces can be layered, and how to speak to a customer proud of local alternatives. Getting this selection wrong means arriving with the right brand and the wrong products.

> **THE FIRST EDIT AFRICA APPROACH**
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> *This translation from a European collection to a South African selection is where First Edit Africa starts. We review each brand's range against these themes and select, for every Edit14 drop, the references most likely to convince South African customers in that season. During the three months of sale, online and in our Cape Town showroom, we record what sells, at what price and to which customer profile, and we collect customer feedback directly through our WhatsApp service. The brand leaves the drop with more than a trend report: a South African range validated by its own customers, and the evidence needed to brief future partners.*

## Sources


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*This insight is provided for general information only. Trends and market data change; verify the current position before acting.*