



# Cultural Codes: South Africa through Russian Eyes



**Nadya Surikova & Rowan Leibbrandt**  
**Spirits Entrepreneurs**





## Who we are

- A South African and a Russian.
- Husband & wife.
- Spirits entrepreneurs.
- Founders of premium spirits companies in South Africa (Truman & Orange) and Nigeria (Monument Distillers).

## NADYA

Studied Journalism in MSU. Worked in PR & Marcom Agencies. Co-managed PRT together with Gleb Sakhray. Met Rowan. Moved to London → Cape Town. Started their own spirits company.

## ROWAN

Studied Bio-Chem in UCT. Worked in Ogilvy CT. Moved to London and then Moscow; worked for spirits multinationals. Met Nadya. Moved back to London → Cape Town. Started their own spirits company.



# A Marriage of two cultures

## The Russian Kitchen Table

The smell of dill and Borodinsky bread, grandmother's crystal glasses brought out of the cupboard, the teakettle always on, three types of salads.

Guests arrive and are taken straight to the kitchen.

The kitchen table is where Russia lives.















## The South African Braai

Your neighbour arrives unannounced with boerewors and a six-pack. Two hours later the garden is full of people speaking three languages around a fire.

You don't need an invitation — you need a fire.

The braai is where South Africa lives.

# Countries Cultural comparisons

| DIMENSION             | SA  | RU   | INSIGHT  |
|-----------------------|---|--|--|
| Power Distance        |  49 |  93 | SA egalitarian · Russia strongly hierarchical                |
| Individualism         |  23 |  46 | Both collectivist · SA markedly more so                      |
| Masculinity           |  63 |  36 | SA achievement-driven · Russia values care & quality of life |
| Uncertainty Avoidance |  49 |  95 | SA tolerates ambiguity · Russia craves certainty             |
| Long-Term Orientation |  18 |  58 | SA present-focused · Russia future-oriented & pragmatic      |
| Indulgence            |  63 |  20 | SA permits gratification · Russia practises restraint        |

South Africa

Russia

# South Africa - consumer

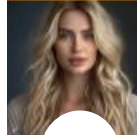
90s



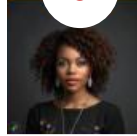
Urban

Now...

Greater female participation



3



1

Emergence of mid/upper-income consumer



Peri-urban/  
township



2

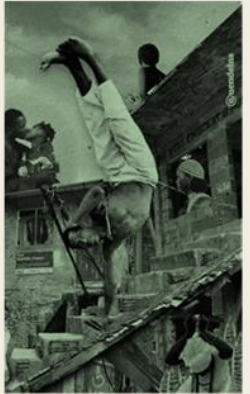
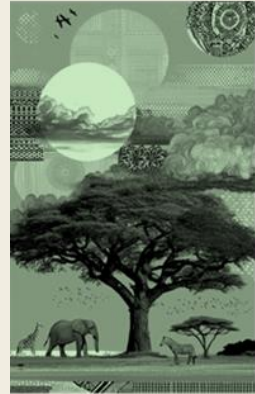
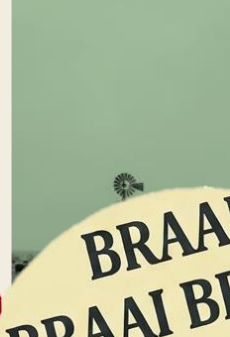


Shift from rural to peri-urban/township



Rural





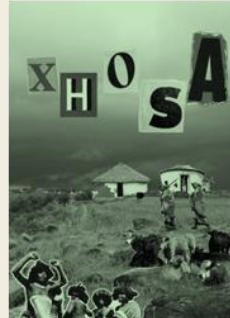
UBUNTU U  
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 UBUNTU

BRAAI  
 BRAAI BRAAI  
 BRAAI BRAAI  
 BRAAI BRAAI

RUGBY  
 RUGBY  
 RUGBY  
 RUGBY  
 RUGBY

RAINBOW  
 NATION  
 RAINBOW  
 NATION

RESILIENCE  
 RESILIENCE  
 RESILIENCE  
 RESILIENCE

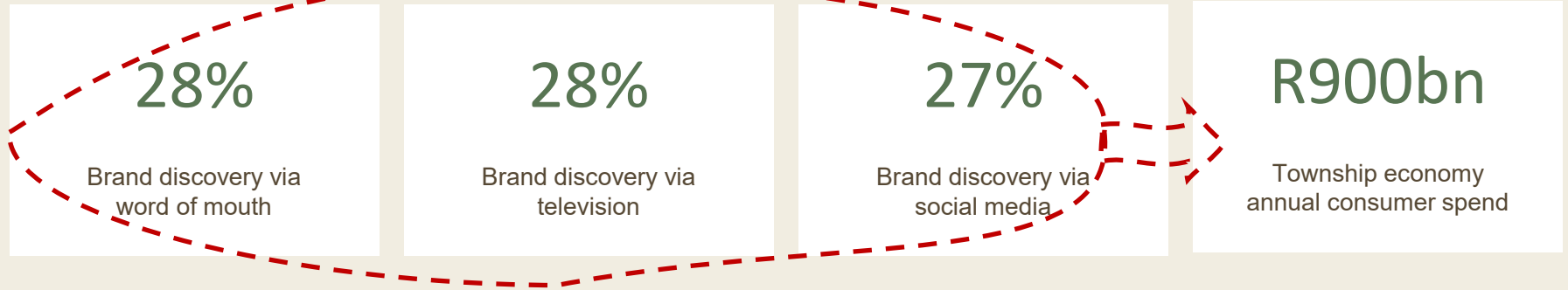


DURBAN  
 SOUTH AFRICA

ONLY GOD KNOWS GROCERY  
 NO BOX IS KEVIN  
 BIG POWER  
 SOUTH AFRICA

# Code 1: Ubuntu

*'I Am Because We Are' — The Operating System of South African Social Life*



A philosophy of collective responsibility, communal accountability, social justice, and reciprocity

Ubuntu means that trust is the currency of the South African economy

Brands that look to engage, learn from local businesses and that integrate; that resonate with daily realities and cultural identity, succeed

# CODE 1: Ubuntu in Numbers

## SOUTH AFRICA

**51.7 million**

Internet users 2025 (79.6% penetration)

**26.7 million**

Social media users 2025 (41.5% penetration)

**3h 36 min**

Daily Social media use 2025 (one of the highest globally)

**93.8%**

WhatsApp penetration among social users 2025

**\$1.9 billion**

Digital market value proj. 2026 (\$1.2 billion in Social)

**33.6%**

Follow influencers 2025 (vs 22% global avg)

**+34% YoY**

TikTok growth 2025 (5.93M new users)

## RUSSIA

**133 million**

Internet users 2025 (92.2% penetration)

**106 million**

Social media users (73.4% penetration)

**2h 23 min**

Daily Social media use

**83-87%%**

Vkontakte penetration among social users

**\$6.2 billion**

Digital market value 2024 (\$1.6 billion in Social)

# CODE 1: Ubuntu Lives in us all



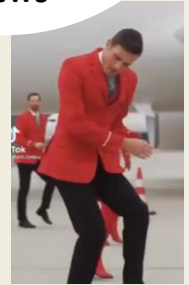
50

countries

~1,5

billion

views



# Code 2: The Braai

*Fire as Social Equaliser — Crossing Every Class, Race, and Geography*

No.1

Most Unifying  
Cultural Tradition  
in South Africa

Cooking

Ranked above dining  
out  
among SA consumer

Braai

Used & Understood  
In 11 languages

23%

South African braai  
weekly

Highest-value consumption moment  
in SA.

Brands that earn a place at the braai  
earn a place in the family.

The braai is not an occasion. It is a  
cultural institution. Products  
associated with it carry emotional  
weight that no campaign budget can  
replicate.



# Code 3: RUGBY

70%

South Africans like rugby

~1500

Rugby clubs around the country (largest player base in the world)

Springboks

Won Rugby world cup more than any other national team in the world

SA's Rugby Commercial rights:

**\$375 m**

\*expected to double in 2027



It's been a wild season.

# Code 4: RAINBOW NATION

*“...In peace with itself and the world”*

11

Official Languages

17%

Households in Gauteng speak more than 1 language at home

A market where localization is emotional, not logistical.

For marketers, this means the same product often needs multiple creative executions, each calibrated to the demographic, linguistic, and cultural context of a specific community. The reward for getting it right is fierce loyalty.



# Code 5: Resilience

*Turning 'Eish' into action since forever*

1,4-1,8%%  
GDP (2025-26)

Despite continuous  
shocks  
(from -6,4% in 2020)

3.2% Inflation

Lowest in 21 years

31.4%  
Unemployment

Lowest in 21 years

**South Africans 'maak 'n plan':**

Load shedding, water cuts,  
potholes – and still the braai  
starts at 6.



Watch until the end...



I love 🇿🇦 and all its humour

# Still Wondering What South Africa is?

