

STYLE  AFRICA



Trends Analysis

The Current State of Culture, Legacy
Brands and the Beauty Economy

2026

Executive Overview

A generational canned fish brand stepped into a beauty trend and sparked a national conversation.

The phrase “eat your skincare” did not originate in FMCG. It emerged on social platforms, where food, wellness and beauty content now coexist seamlessly. TikTok and Instagram have accelerated the blending of these categories, shifting culture from product silos to lifestyle ecosystems.

Everyday items are no longer marketed purely for function. They are styled as aesthetic symbols embedded within rituals of self-care and self-optimisation. This shift can be described as the aestheticisation of function. Products once confined to pantry shelves or bathroom cabinets are now presented using the visual codes of prestige. Lighting is softer. Textures are amplified. Composition is deliberate. The product becomes part of identity rather than a standalone utility.

Within this environment, “eat your skincare” has become cultural shorthand for the growing discourse linking nutrition to visible beauty outcomes. Salmon is framed as glow-supportive. Avocado is positioned as hydrating. Collagen powders and biotin gummies are marketed as beauty-from-within solutions. The suggestion is not that food replaces skincare, but that skincare begins internally.

South Africa’s digital landscape amplifies this shift. With approximately 26 million social media users as of early 2024, platforms have become central to brand discovery and debate. This creates fertile ground for category crossover, but also intensifies scrutiny.

The conversation that followed raised deeper questions. How should African legacy brands modernise? When does elevation become aesthetic borrowing? Why do generations decode the same execution differently?

And how does this cultural moment intersect with the scientific realities shaping skincare in 2026?

It is into this environment that Lucky Star entered. This report examines the moment objectively.

Source: [DataReportal, Digital 2024 South Africa](#)





Where Did This Trend Originate?

The roots of this moment can be traced to three overlapping developments.

Firstly, the expansion of the global wellness economy has reshaped consumer expectations. According to the Global Wellness Institute, the wellness economy reached approximately 5.6 trillion US dollars in 2022 and continues to grow across sectors, including beauty, nutrition and preventative health. Consumers increasingly approach self-care holistically rather than categorically.

Secondly, social media platforms such as TikTok and Instagram have collapsed category boundaries. In South Africa alone, there are approximately 26 million social media users, and digital discovery increasingly shapes purchase behaviour. On a single feed, consumers encounter skincare tutorials, supplement advice, grocery hauls and lifestyle vlogs in rapid succession. This algorithmic proximity has blurred distinctions between food, beauty and wellness.

Thirdly, influencer culture has normalised ritual-based content formats. One of the most recognisable is the “coffee tray” aesthetic, in which creators curate trays featuring coffee, candles, skincare products and supplements to signal intentional living. The tray is less about coffee and more about identity. It communicates discipline, aspiration and self-investment.

When a product is placed within that format, it inherits those symbolic meanings.

The Cultural Shift: Beauty, Wellness and the Algorithm

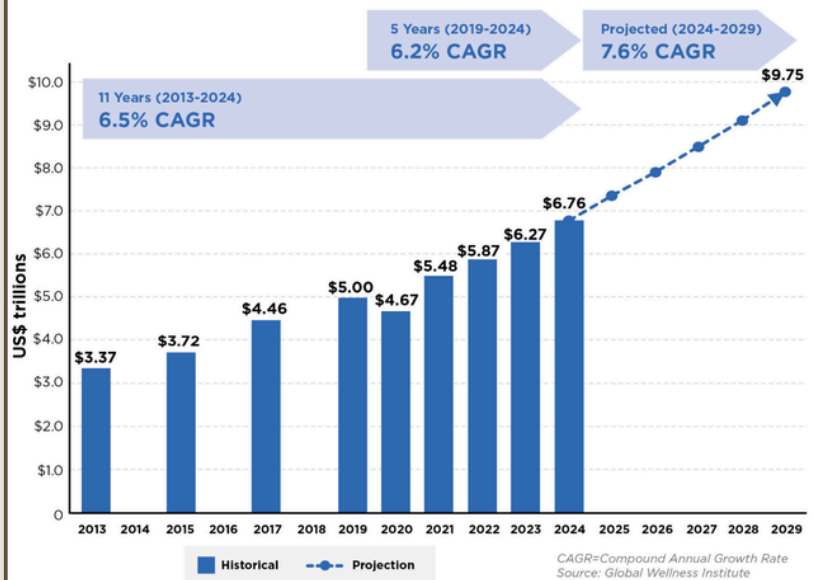
Social media has collapsed traditional category boundaries. Morning skincare routines sit alongside gut health explainers, supplement stacks and grocery hauls. Consumers increasingly view beauty as part of a broader optimisation lifestyle.

This shift aligns with global wellness growth. The global wellness economy reached an estimated \$5.6 trillion in 2022 and continues to expand. Beauty and personal care sit within that ecosystem.

In parallel, cost-of-living pressure is reshaping purchasing decisions in South Africa. Consumers are trading down, substituting products and prioritising perceived value. The Competition Commission's Essential Food Pricing Monitoring report has highlighted substitution patterns in protein consumption, including increased reliance on canned fish during price pressure cycles.

There has also been reporting that canned pilchards overtook chicken in certain periods as a preferred protein choice amid affordability constraints.

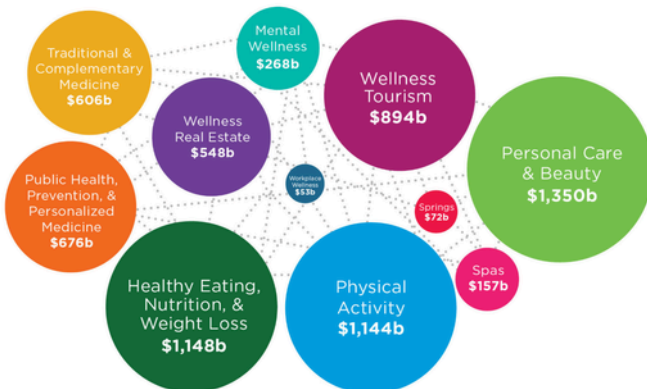
Global Wellness Economy Market Size and Growth Projections, 2013-2029



GLOBAL WELLNESS INSTITUTE™

Source: Global Wellness Institute

GLOBAL WELLNESS ECONOMY:
\$6.8 trillion in 2024



GLOBAL WELLNESS INSTITUTE™

Source: Global Wellness Institute

Within this economic and digital context, “eat your skincare” resonates. It reframes affordable pantry items as supportive of glow and well-being. It democratises aspiration. However, while culture simplifies beauty, the industry itself is evolving in a different direction.

Who Is Driving This Shift?

Older generations, particularly those with lived memory of legacy brands, may interpret the same execution through heritage and emotional association rather than trend fluency. For them, products such as Lucky Star carry narratives of affordability, resilience and shared meals. This explains why reactions to the campaign were polarised.

This moment is primarily driven by digitally native audiences, particularly Gen Z and younger Millennials, who are highly fluent in trend-coded visual language. These audiences are comfortable with metaphor, irony and aesthetic play. They understand that “eat your skincare” is a reframing device rather than a literal dermatological instruction.

However, generational decoding differs significantly. Research in South Africa indicates that 71% of consumers aged 18 to 34 prefer seeing real-looking people in advertising. At the same time, trust in traditional advertising formats is declining among Millennials, with social platforms playing a stronger role in shaping perception.

Cultural Tension

Every meaningful trend sits in tension.

In this case, the tension is between aspiration and affordability. Skincare is increasingly premiumised. Ingredient education has become complex. Routines have become layered. Yet disposable income has not increased at the same pace. Consumers still want glow. They simply do not want to feel excluded from achieving it.

“Eat your skincare” resolves that tension by offering agency. It suggests that elements of luxury are already within reach. That glow can be supported through everyday choices. That empowerment does not require elite access.

There is also a second tension at play: belief versus scepticism. Consumers are wellness curious but not naive. Comment sections are filled with debates. One creator claims sardines boost glow. Another questions bioavailability. A dermatologist enters the conversation. This friction is not negative. It is engagement fuel.

For brands, understanding and navigating this tension is critical. Overclaiming risks backlash. Under engaging risks irrelevance.



Trend Definition and Why Now?



At its core, “eat your skincare” represents the collapse of three previously separate territories: beauty, wellness and everyday ritual.

Historically, skincare lived in the bathroom cabinet. Wellness lived in health aisles. Food lived in the pantry. Social media has dissolved those boundaries. On a single feed, consumers move from a morning routine video to a gut health explainer to a grocery haul without perceiving category separation.

The algorithm has trained audiences to see lifestyle holistically. The timing is not accidental. Several forces are converging:

- Economic pressure is forcing consumers to reassess value.
- Wellness literacy is rising among Gen Z and young Millennials.
- Social media aesthetics are driving ritual-based self-presentation.
- Trust in traditional advertising is declining, while peer-driven narratives are strengthening.

Consumers are no longer asking, “What serum should I buy?” They are asking, “How do I optimise myself?” That broader framing allows food brands, supplement brands and skincare brands to compete in the same mental territory.

This is not a micro trend. It reflects a macro behavioural shift towards preventative, holistic self-care.



Lucky Star's recent campaign provides a compelling demonstration of how brands can navigate cultural shifts with strategic intent.

The execution placed sardines within the now familiar coffee tray aesthetic, a format widely associated with curated morning rituals and skincare routines. Through soft lighting, clean composition and careful styling, the tin was presented not as a commodity, but as an object worthy of attention.

Strategically, the brand translated existing nutritional facts into the language of beauty. High protein content was positioned as supportive of collagen. Omega-3 was linked to glow. Vitamin D was framed within a narrative of radiance. These were not invented claims; they were reframed truths grounded in nutritional science. By retaining cues such as flavour variants like peri peri and smoked, the campaign injected humour and relatability, signalling that the brand was not abandoning its everyday identity but expanding it into lifestyle territory.

From a marketing perspective, this was perception engineering executed with discipline. By adopting the visual codes of prestige skincare, Lucky Star elevated its cultural positioning without altering its price point. Premium became a matter of presentation and fluency rather than cost.

However, it is precisely this aesthetic elevation that sparked divided responses.

Case Study: Lucky Star and Social-First Modernisation

While some audiences praised the brand for trend fluency and bold repositioning, others questioned whether the execution fully aligned with the product's lived heritage. For a generational pantry staple associated with family meals and affordability, the hyper-polished beauty framing felt, to some, disconnected from its cultural memory.

The critique was not solely about the concept, but about coherence. Certain visual choices, including heavily retouched skin and stylised consumption cues, were perceived as overly glossy or artificial. This response is not isolated.

Among South Africans aged 18 to 34, 71% report preferring real-looking people in advertisements. In that context, aesthetic over-polishing can weaken authenticity signals, particularly for younger audiences who are highly sensitive to visual credibility.

The result is a campaign that sits at an intersection. It demonstrates how effectively a legacy brand can enter a contemporary cultural conversation. At the same time, it reveals the fine line between elevating perception and stretching identity.

In other words, the same strategic move that modernised the brand also exposed the tension between aspiration and authenticity and that tension is what makes the moment worth analysing.

Source: How South African youth are shaping the future of marketing

Life Stage	Recommended Amount of ALA
Birth to 12 months*	0.5 g
Children 1–3 years	0.7 g
Children 4–8 years	0.9 g
Boys 9–13 years	1.2 g
Girls 9–13 years	1.0 g
Teen boys 14–18 years	1.6 g
Teen girls 14–18 years	1.1 g
Men	1.6 g
Women	1.1 g
Pregnant teens and women	1.4 g
Breastfeeding teens and women	1.3 g

How many omega-3s do I need?



Why Does This Trend Resonate Now?

The cultural appeal of “eat your skincare” cannot be separated from economic reality. Premium skincare has become increasingly expensive and complex. Multi-step routines are normalised. Ingredient literacy is expected. Yet cost-of-living pressures continue to affect households.



In this environment, the idea that everyday food can support glow feels empowering. It democratises aspiration. It reframes accessibility as intelligence rather than compromise.

Simultaneously, consumers are adopting preventative mindsets. They are interested in long-term skin health rather than short-term correction. This aligns with the rise of barrier-first skincare systems and microbiome-supporting ingredients within the formal beauty industry.

However, while culture simplifies beauty into edible metaphors, skincare manufacturing in 2026 is becoming more scientifically precise. Ingredient innovation is driven by bio-engineered actives, encapsulation technologies and global regulatory compliance. The industry is investing in measurable efficacy and defensible claims.

This creates a dual narrative. Culture says simplify and humanise, while industry says optimise and regulate. Brands operating at the intersection must understand both.

The Skincare Industry Reality in 2026

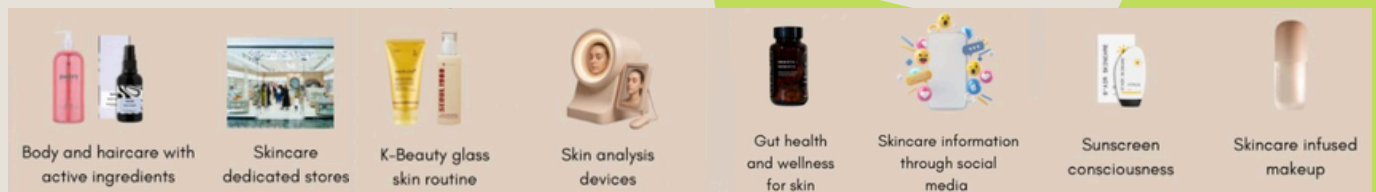
Ingredient innovation in 2026 is not trend-driven. It is performance-driven. Manufacturing trends shaping skincare include:

2016 VS 2026 SKINCARE

2016



2026



Source: *Beauty on TApp*



Bio-engineered and lab-optimised actives

- Precision fermentation and bio-identical peptides are increasingly used to ensure stability, consistency and sustainability.



Barrier-first systems

- Ceramides and microbiome-supporting formulations are central to preventative skincare.



Encapsulation technologies

- Micro-encapsulation allows stronger actives with reduced irritation.



Regulatory readiness

- Global compliance across EU, US, UK and Middle Eastern markets is driving conservative claim language and formulation discipline.

This matters because while cultural narratives suggest that glow can be supported through food metaphors, the industry is investing in precision, delivery systems and compliance frameworks. The two conversations operate in parallel but not at the same depth of efficacy.

How Did Lucky Star Engage the Trend?

Lucky Star positioned itself within the “eat your skincare” discourse using beauty-coded visual language. The campaign placed sardines within a coffee tray aesthetic associated with curated self-care rituals. Through soft lighting, clean composition and polished styling, the tin was presented not merely as food but as an object within a lifestyle narrative.

Strategically, the brand translated existing nutritional facts into the language of beauty. Sardines were framed as protein-rich and omega-3 supportive, aligning with known nutritional science regarding fatty acids and overall skin health. Importantly, these claims were reframed truths rather than fabricated ones. The campaign also retained product authenticity by referencing flavour variants such as peri peri and smoked, signalling that the brand was expanding its narrative rather than abandoning its roots.

BENEFITS OF SARDINES

+ PROTEIN: COLLAGEN HACK

+ VITAMIN D: RADIANT BOOST

+ B12: BRIGHT EYES

+ SELENIUM: NATURAL FILTER

+ OMEGA-3: DEWY SKIN

+ CALCIUM: STRONG NAILS



From a marketing perspective, this repositioned Lucky Star within lifestyle territory. Premium became a matter of context and cultural fluency rather than price. However, the execution sparked divided responses. Some audiences praised the brand for participating intelligently in a relevant trend. Others questioned narrative coherence, visual authenticity and whether the aesthetic gloss aligned with the product's generational heritage. Concerns were raised around over-retouching and the perceived disconnect between hyper-polished imagery and the lived reality of the product.

These reactions do not invalidate the strategy. They illuminate its tension.



The Rise of Social First Campaign Architecture

The success of this campaign also reflects a structural shift in how marketing is developed. Social media is no longer simply an amplification channel. It is increasingly the origin point of creative strategy.

The coffee tray format, benefit overlays and ritual framing were native to platform behaviour. They were not repurposed assets from traditional campaigns. This signals a broader truth: brands must now design for culture rather than adapt to it.

Campaign architecture begins with observation. It requires continuous listening to understand how audiences are speaking, styling and sharing. Brands that build within these behaviours are more likely to generate organic engagement and sustained relevance.

The Cost of Glow and the Democratisation of Luxury

Skincare has steadily evolved into a high-investment category. Complex ingredient combinations and layered routines have become the norm rather than the exception.

For many consumers, particularly in price-sensitive markets, this creates friction. Aspiration remains high, but accessibility becomes constrained. “Eat your skincare” emerges precisely within this gap.

The concept allows consumers to feel proactive without feeling excluded. It suggests that elements of glow and wellbeing are already present in everyday life. The pantry becomes an unexpected site of self-care. In markets such as South Africa, where pantry staples are culturally universal, this narrative carries even more weight. It restores dignity to affordability. Luxury, in this context, is no longer defined solely by price. It is defined by framing, ritual and perception.



Parallel Case Study

EDIBLE BEAUTY AND THE TRUST ECONOMY



This convergence between food and skincare is not isolated to FMCG brands entering beauty discourse. Ewurafua Addo Atuah, Strategy and Insights leader from Accra, Ghana, has observed how Skin Gourmet positions its body butters as clean and pure enough to eat. The message is symbolic rather than literal. It communicates ingredient transparency and safety.

Similarly, Vaseline's 2025 Verified platform responded to the proliferation of social beauty hacks by validating what is safe and clarifying misconceptions. Rather than distancing itself from user behaviour, the brand engaged directly with it. This reinforced authority while remaining culturally connected.

Across these examples, trust emerges as the underlying driver. Consumers are not only seeking efficacy. They are seeking reassurance.

Ewurafua Addo-Atuah  • 2nd

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Strategy & Insights Leader || Brand Owner || Commerci...

This is amazing. Skin Gourmet in Ghana also communicates its body butters that are clean and good enough to eat

What Does This Mean for Brands?

This moment reveals that modernisation is no longer optional for legacy brands, but neither is heritage disposable. Brands seeking to operate within this space must balance five elements:

**Clarity of
product
truth**

**Cultural
fluency**

**Visual
credibility**

**Regulatory
discipline**

**Respect for
brand
memory**

Sensory marketing and ritual formats can elevate perception without altering price. However, elevation must not become erasure. Health-adjacent narratives must remain within supportive territory rather than implying medical substitution. In regulated industries, the distinction between support and solution is commercially critical.

Ultimately, the “eat your skincare” moment is not about replacing serums with sardines. It is about how brands communicate value in a world where aesthetics, economics and identity intersect.

Conversation Map

This moment reveals that modernisation is no longer optional for legacy brands, but neither is heritage disposable. Brands seeking to operate within this space must balance five elements:

Affordability and access

Audiences frequently reference the cost of skincare. There is a visible appetite for hacks that feel intelligent rather than desperate. Language often includes “budget-friendly”, “natural alternative” and “do not waste your money”.

Before and after expectations

Visual proof remains powerful. Transformation culture still drives attention, even when claims are moderated.

Credibility battles

The so-called “doctor in the comments” phenomenon reflects a desire for validation. Experts, both qualified and self-appointed, shape perception rapidly.

Scepticism versus belief

Consumers debate whether nutritional benefits meaningfully impact skin. This includes side-by-side comparisons, expert stitches and myth-busting.

Nostalgia and pantry staples

Everyday products gain renewed appreciation when reframed. Cultural familiarity increases receptivity.

Mapping these conversations allows brands to anticipate objections and craft informed responses rather than reactive ones.

Modernising African Brands: Elevation or Erasure?

A central critique in the creative community asks whether modernisation requires adopting global aesthetics, or whether it should elevate local truth. Legacy African brands carry generational equity. They represent shared meals, affordability and resilience. Brand equity theory suggests that consistency and authenticity are key to long-term trust.

When brands reposition, they must balance:



Relevance



Credibility



Heritage



Cultural sensitivity

This is not a uniquely South African debate. Global research increasingly highlights consumer preference for authenticity over perfection. For example, [Edelman's Trust Barometer](#) consistently shows that trust in institutions is fragile and authenticity plays a central role in consumer brand perception.



Measurement

Finally, leadership will ask the only question that truly matters: Does it drive growth?

Measurement must extend beyond vanity metrics. Talkability indicators such as share rate, save rate, and qualitative comment sentiment reveal cultural traction. Creator-assisted reach and earned media coverage demonstrate narrative expansion.



Brand search lift indicates increased curiosity and intent. Most importantly, retail uplift, basket attachment and repeat purchase provide commercial validation.

The objective is not simply to join the conversation. It is to translate conversation into conversion.



The Current State



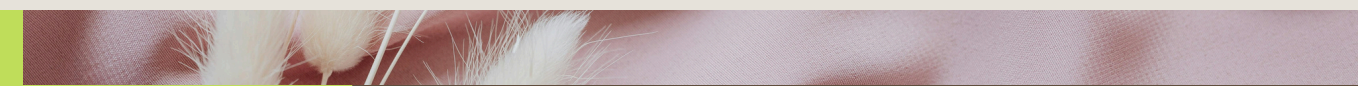
We are witnessing a marketplace negotiating identity in real time.

- 1 Consumers are seeking accessible optimisation.**
- 2 Legacy brands are seeking contemporary relevance.**
- 3 The beauty industry is prioritising scientific precision.**
- 4 Audiences are demanding authenticity and transparency.**



The debate itself is evidence of engagement. The brands that will build durable equity in 2026 are not necessarily those that move fastest into trend culture. They are those who move with coherence, credibility and cultural grounding.

The conversation is not closed. It is evolving and that is precisely why it matters.



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