

edges

backslash

39 CULTURAL SHIFTS SHAPING OUR WORLD

2025

A ROADMAP OUT OF CULTURE ROT

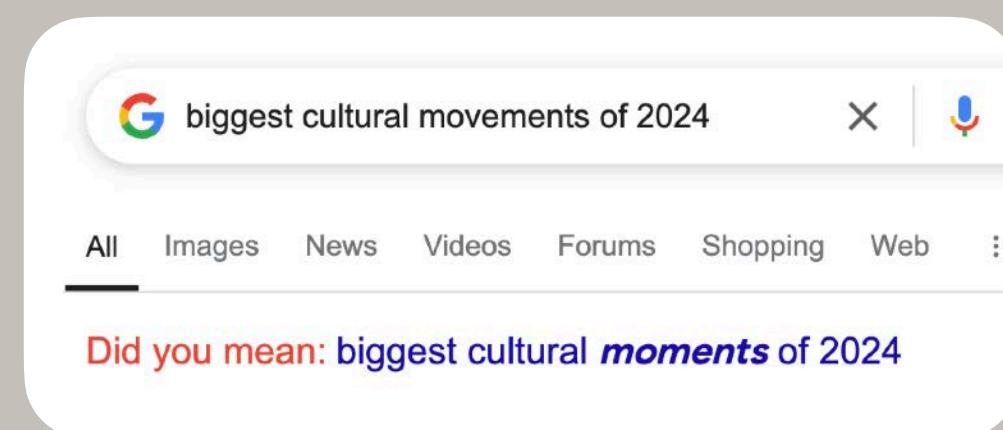
It's nearly impossible to find a brand today that isn't striving to be culturally relevant. What's even harder, though, is to think of ones that have actually succeeded. We're not talking about brands that started saying "very demure" or that turned their logos brat green. There are plenty of those. Rather, we're talking about brands that are actually adding to culture—not simply mimicking it.

The reality is that most marketers and journalists who obsessively track "culture" are actually tracking a deluge of aesthetics, buzzwords and micro-trends that live and die online in a matter of weeks. These fads are motivated by virality more often than values. And in most cases, they're written about and reposted more than they're actually practiced IRL. Cultural movements have devolved into mere moments.

Although the attention economy has dominated the internet for more than a decade now, it's never felt quite so central to our lives. Every brand and every individual has turned into a content machine—frantically churning out posts in an attempt to profit from relevance, no matter how short-lived. But the dopamine hit we've been promised hasn't hit at all. In fact, it's done the opposite, leaving us overstimulated and underwhelmed, incessantly tuned in and solemnly tuned out.

This feeling is underscored by the 2024 words of the year. Oxford landed on "brain rot"—a symptom of infinite mindless scrolling that's making us dumber. Macquarie Dictionary gave the crown to "enshittification"—referring to platform decay as a result of companies prioritizing profits over the user experience. And the Washington Post argues that the real winner should be "slop"—a term for the weird AI-generated images that have taken over social media (like shrimp Jesus).

That's because culture has mistakenly become conflated with content.



The consensus? The internet—and therefore our "culture"—is turning rancid.

While this might all feel rather depressing, the fact that the culture rot is being called out is actually a promising sign that we're ready to do something about it. Society has grown increasingly tired of the copy-and-paste, the digital pacifiers, the hollow distractions. In 2025, people will be craving a kind of culture that can't be commodified.



This is the opportunity for every brand in 2025: to focus less on re-creating the meme of the moment, and more on creating original things and movements that are worthy of being talked about in their own right.

Signs of the reversal are already manifesting. Gen Z and millennials are finding community in old-fashioned chess, mahjong and backgammon groups. Young men are returning to centuries-old Freemasonry clubs. Small town life is feeling more aspirational than ever. Trends like de-influencing and underconsumption core are urging people to get off the consumerism hamster wheel. And governments are restricting or outright banning social media access for kids.

The evidence is clear: people want more full-fat versions of culture. They want fewer distractions and deeper enrichment. To feel rooted in things that matter and will last. And above all, they want to be part of a culture that amounts to more than a blurry series of online catchphrases.

This is the opportunity for every brand in 2025. To focus less on re-creating the meme of the moment and more on creating original things and movements that are worthy of being talked about in their own right. In other words, stop trying to please the algorithm and start adding to the human experience.

The hard truth is that there's no shortcut to cultural relevance. Truly relevant brands don't flex to whatever aesthetic or buzzword will get attention on a given week. They provide inspiration rather than seeking it out. They choose a mission and stick with it at all costs. And they build for their most obsessive fans rather than for shareholders.

Edges were born for this exact mission. In this year's glossary, you'll find 39 cultural shifts that can help brands become relevant with a capital "R." They're not temporary fads or flash-in-the-pan trends, but fresh manifestations of the biggest and most relevant cultural conversations taking place around the globe—from gender roles to generative AI, sustainability to survivalism. Most crucially, Edges are rooted in human values and recognizable through actual behaviors, not just through stuff on a screen. By choosing one or two of these shifts to own and invest in for the long term, brands can do their part to stop the rot and bring some much-needed life and soul back into culture. The call for disruption—and the cost of not disrupting—has never been greater.

WHAT IS AN EDGE?

edge / 'eɪdʒ / noun

—
A meaningful cultural shift that has the scale and longevity to propel a brand toward a greater share of the future.

01

Edges must be rooted in human values, be recognizable through consumer behaviors, and lead to clear business implications.

02

Cultural shifts must have sustained relevance for over a year before being declared an edge, and should continue to matter for the foreseeable future.

03

Edges must be globally relevant, manifesting in over half of backslash-designated regions.

2025 EDGE MAP

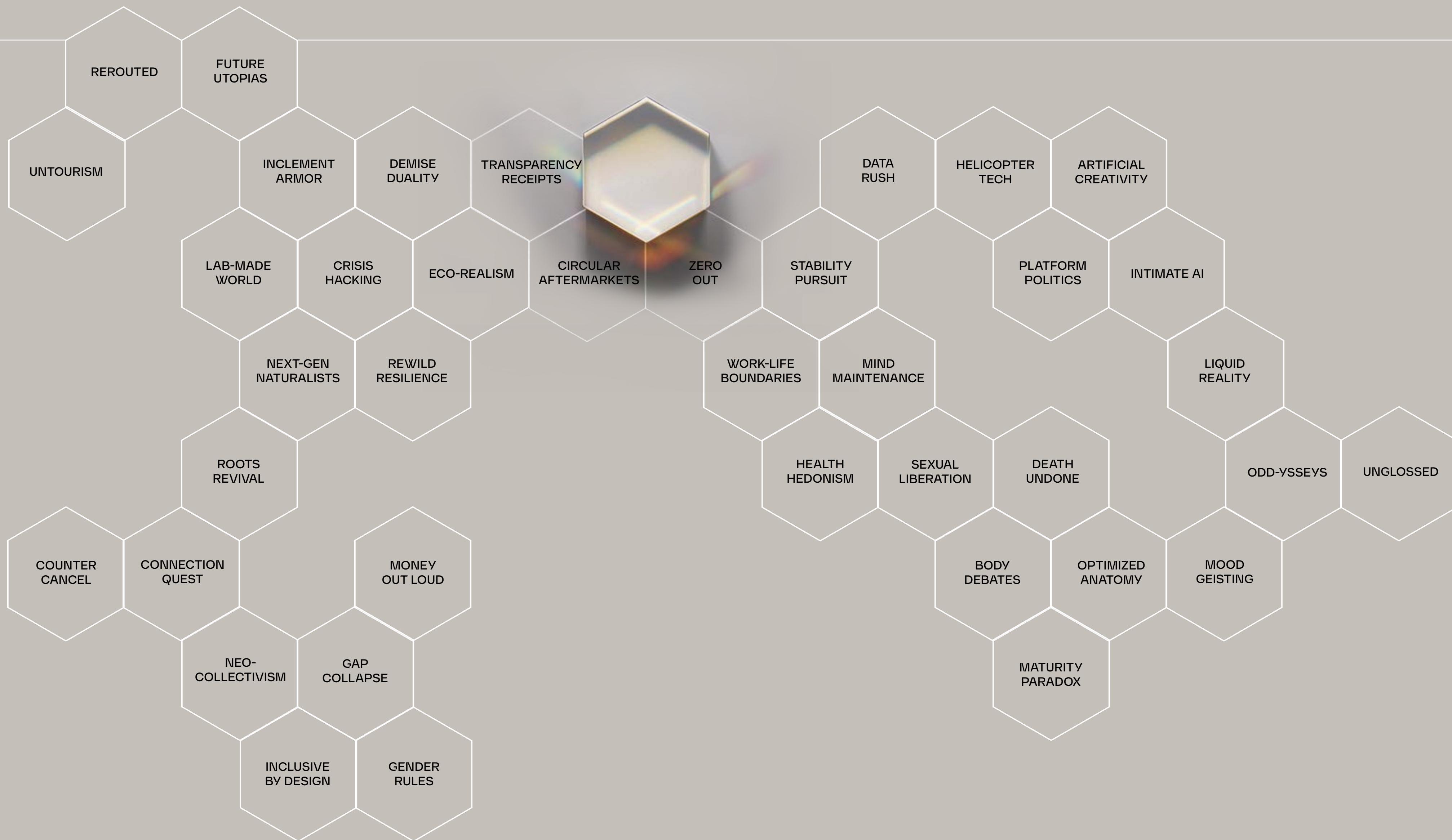


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ARTIFICIAL CREATIVITY



01

Ideas around what and who can be creative are being challenged at an unprecedented rate. As AI-powered tools enable the masses to become makers, matters of ownership, job displacement, and the preciousness of the creative process will come into question.

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AI ART MUSEUM

Los Angeles will soon be home to the world's first [AI art museum](#). The museum, dubbed Dataland, is set to launch late 2025 in a new space next to the Museum of Contemporary Art. It is being built courtesy of Refik Anadol, a 38-year-old AI artist who has pledged to only use "ethically collected" or open-source datasets. The museum marks an interesting next step for the legitimization of AI art, which has been met with skepticism ever since going mainstream about two years ago. As for the criticism, Anadol insists that Dataland is utopian, not dystopian, and that it will highlight the "intersection of human imagination and the creative potential of machines." Given an AI robot's painting of Alan Turing recently sold for [\\$1.08 million](#), it's clear that Anadol isn't the only one who believes in the value of AI-made art.

CLONING CREATIVITY

At 79 years old, famed fashion designer Kamali is thinking about how the company she built from scratch will carry on when she passes. The solution she has come up with is to teach AI to replicate her style—or, as she puts it, "[downloading my brain](#)"—so that her creative legacy can live on. To make it happen, she's been working with Maison Meta to feed thousands of images from the brand's archive into a custom AI model that can generate new designs based on her creative DNA. The intent isn't to replace human designers altogether, but rather to allow her team to draw on her style and maintain a consistent look long after she's gone.

ANTI-AI SOCIAL

After it was revealed that Meta was quietly training its generative AI tool on Instagram posts, artists began ditching the platform in droves and heading to a lesser-known app called [Cara](#) in order to protect their work. Cara is a social networking app where artists can share their work and be discovered by companies. The app's UI isn't too different from Instagram or X, but it is unique in that it bans AI-generated content and the use of artwork for AI training. In just a few weeks, it grew from 40,000 users to nearly 900,000—climbing to a top-five spot on the App Store. "Words can't describe how dehumanizing it is to see my name used 20,000+ times in MidJourney," Cara's founder, Jingna Zhang wrote in an Instagram post. "My life's work and who I am—reduced to meaningless fodder for a commercial image slot machine." Although unlikely to make a dent in Instagram's overall user base, Cara's fame is certainly adding to the pressure for social media giants to put artist protections in place.



VIEWERS-TURNED-PRODUCERS

New AI-powered streaming platforms are giving viewers a hands-on role as producers and creative directors. [Showrunner](#), the first streaming service to feature exclusively AI-generated content, allows users to direct original scenes through written prompts. If a user's work is chosen to be officially added to the platform, they could earn a lump sum, a share of the revenue, and even an IMDb credit. Similarly, [DreamFlare AI](#) allows users to "choose their own adventure," with options ranging from murder mysteries to VR Viking conquests. The platform's ultimate goal is to bridge the gap between elite Hollywood professionals and emerging AI creators, enabling new projects to be developed without traditional studio backing or industry connections. These emerging platforms are blurring the line between creator and viewer, bringing forth a new era of co-created media.

ELVIS ACT

While the broader music industry is still fiercely debating how to regulate the use of AI in music, the state of Tennessee has already taken a clear stance. Last year, it became the first U.S. state to pass a law—called the "[ELVIS Act](#)"—that protects musicians from having their voice and likeness replicated by AI without consent. This issue gained widespread attention when rapper Drake used a [voice synthesizer](#) to recreate deceased-rapper Tupac's voice, prompting Tupac's estate to issue a cease-and-desist. Looking forward, the ELVIS Act could serve as a model for other states, countries, and forms of entertainment.

DEAD INTERNET THEORY

Shrimp Jesus, autofilled product descriptions on Amazon, and countless comments from porn bots are all signs that the [Dead Internet Theory](#) could be coming true. The theory suggests that the internet has been almost entirely taken over by AI. It's been floating around for about seven years now, before the commercial release of ChatGPT, but has recently resurfaced among both trolls and true believers due to an explosion of AI-generated sludge. While some of this content is clearly fake, like the viral image of Jesus as a shrimp, others are slightly more convincing—and older users tend to be the target. According to cybersecurity firm Imperva, bots account for around half of all internet traffic. Another report from Europol predicts that as much as 90% of online content may be synthetically generated by 2026. To prevent the internet from becoming a total wasteland, social platforms will likely start experimenting with things like account verification and de-emphasizing AI content in people's feed. In the meantime, we could see a growing number of users escape the mess by flocking to smaller, more private online communities such as Discord or Bluesky.

CONTENT PROVENANCE STANDARDS

With AI-generated imagery making up a growing percentage of online content, it's only getting harder to tell what's real. In an effort to eliminate the uncertainty and combat misinformation, tech giants like Adobe, Microsoft and Intel are following technical standards set by the Coalition for Content Provenance and Authenticity (C2PA). C2PA aims to create an open-source, standardized system for tracing the origins of digital media, which is achieved by embedding cryptographic signatures into media files to authenticate them. Google now uses C2PA standards to flag AI-generated or edited images across its search and ad services. And on YouTube, videos that comply with C2PA can be labeled as "[captured with a camera](#)." Even camera manufacturers like [Sony](#) and [Leica](#) are embracing C2PA via firmware updates, ensuring that photos are verified as real from the moment they're taken. Some critics say that more effort should be put into developing AI detection tools instead of just labeling content. But as AI imagery continues looking more and more realistic, detecting it will only get harder.

59% of global marketing professionals say AI will boost creativity, but one in three say it will negatively impact self-esteem.

Filestage ['Impact of AI' report](#), November 2024



WHAT'S NEXT

CALL IT OUT:

The use of watermarks, disclaimers, and labels will be essential to clearly differentiating AI-made outputs from human-made ones.

EMBRACE CO-CREATION:

Invite fans to leverage AI to come up with your next product design, campaign, or out-of-the-box idea.

GET THE BAD IDEAS OUT OF THE WAY:

Use AI to uncover the convention, then use your own imagination to come up with something never before seen.

NEXT TECHNOLOGIES: < >

AI Agents
Avatar Identities
Generative AI
Extended Reality

BODY DEBATES

02



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Our bodies are officially up for discussion—and there's little consensus on what's right. As conversations around everything from drugs to diets escalate, once-personal decisions will move to the center of very public debates around the right to bodily autonomy vs. the need for regulation.

STEROID OLYMPICS

With the 2024 Summer Olympics behind us, a much smaller group of billionaires is setting their sights on a different kind of sports competition—one where athletes will dope “out in the open and honestly.” The man behind the Enhanced Games, Dr. Aron D’Souza, argues that the absence of drug testing will actually level the playing field by removing the potential for cheating and allowing athletes who “didn’t win the genetic lottery” to experiment with new scientific advantages. But not everyone is convinced. Several critics have spoken out against the Enhanced Games, arguing that it puts athletes’ health at risk and undermines the integrity and fairness of sporting competition.

→ For more, watch Backslash’s episode of Life on the Edge: The Doping Divide



PLAYING CUPID

The Tokyo government is taking on Tinder with its very own dating app. “We learned that 70% of people who want to get married aren’t actively joining events or apps to look for a partner,” a Tokyo government official in charge of the new app said. “We want to give them a gentle push to find one.” This “gentle push” comes as marriage declines and the nation’s birth rate hits a record low. Last year, Japan recorded more than twice as many deaths as new babies. If trends continue, its population will decline by about 30% to 87 million by 2070, with four out of every 10 people aged 65 or older. With two-thirds of the world’s countries having birth rates below the replacement rate, we can expect more countries to play the role of matchmaker in the future. However, these pronatalist agendas also raise another question: whether encouraging people to have more children should be a policy goal in the first place.

INFERTILITY INFLUENCERS

Influencers on TikTok are convincing people to donate their eggs for quick cash. Some creators are even glamorizing this practice, flaunting payments of up to \$25,000 for multiple donations and showcasing how the money is funding their luxurious vacations. What’s not so openly shared, however, are the associated health risks. Influencers tend to downplay the potential harms, with some even comparing the procedure to a “med spa day.” In reality, however, the in vitro fertilization (IVF) and assisted reproductive technology (ART) industry is largely unregulated worldwide, which often leads to the exploitation of low-income women. Advocates like comedian Laura High are now using their platform to raise awareness about the potential dangers. As more women share their personal stories of fertility fraud, we could see tighter regulations and stricter oversight come about.



JUNK FOOD-FREE SCHOOLS

With about one-third of Mexico’s children overweight or obese, the country is getting serious about its health problems. Starting April 2025, Mexican schools will need to implement a government-sponsored ban on junk food or else face heavy fines up to \$5,450. Under the new rules, any food containing at least one front-of-packaging health warning will be phased out from snack stands. Sugary drinks, chips, candy, artificial pork rinds and soy-encased peanuts will be prime targets. With rates of obesity and diet-related diseases rising around the world, lawmakers are taking bigger, bolder steps to defend the health of their most vulnerable citizens: children. But beyond just banning the bad stuff, government assistance with the implementation of water fountains and more nutritious snacks will be key to success.

ASSISTED SUICIDE CAPSULE

A 3D-printed assisted suicide capsule is at the center of legal debates in Switzerland. The capsule was first introduced in 2019, but was used for the first time in September 2024 by a 64-year-old American woman in Switzerland. This event led to legal scrutiny, with Swiss authorities investigating whether the device complies with Swiss assisted suicide laws and product safety regulations. Under Swiss law, anyone can assist in a suicide so long as it is not performed for “selfish motives,” meaning it is illegal to assist out of malice or for profit. The law, in effect since the early ’40s, has allowed a handful of assisted suicide clinics to operate in the country, and has led to an increasing number of “suicide tourists” who visit the country to end their lives. Those in support of the Sarco capsule, like right-to-die group Coöperatie Laatste Wil, say it gives people a dignified and painless way to end their life on their own terms. Critics, on the other hand, say the pod’s sleek design glamorizes suicide and worry that it could lead to suicide contagion.

RIGHT TO COMPETE

Whether trans athletes should be allowed to compete as equals is a question that continues to confuse society's notion of fairness. On the one hand, a sense of sporting fairness is strained by the idea of one group having a natural physical advantage. On the other hand, our instincts on inclusion mean banning transgender athletes feels inherently wrong. This ongoing tension is highlighted by recent legislative decisions. In March 2023, World Athletics banned male-to-female transgender athletes from women's elite competitions (including the Paris 2024 Olympics) if they have undergone "male puberty." The governing body of World Cycling has also ruled that transgender women will be banned from competing in women's cycling events, and the NCAA is under pressure to follow suit. Pro-trans advocates take issue with the fact that many of these blanket bans fail to accommodate any nuance. As the debates rage on and individuals and organizations become more educated on the complexities of gender transition, sports governing bodies are likely to develop more comprehensive policies grounded in scientific research. This could involve creating specific criteria around hormone levels, transition timelines, or other aspects to ensure fair competition while still honoring athletes' identity.

ANTI-ADDITIVES

Knowing if your products contain unsafe ingredients is becoming more and more difficult. To help fill the gap in government regulation, product scanning app Yuka has introduced a "call-out" feature that empowers users to challenge brands over their use of potentially harmful additives in food and cosmetics. By scanning a product, users can send pre-drafted messages to manufacturers via email or X for items containing any of 81 high-risk additives identified by the company, backed by scientific research. These additives, while legally permitted, are linked to health risks such as cancer, cardiovascular disease, and diabetes. Yuka also plans to update users on product reformulations that result from their actions, showing how collective power can drive real change. This feature coincides with growing proof that microplastics are present in our blood, lungs, and reproductive organs, sparking major consumer skepticism. Rather than waiting to be called out, brands should be auditing their ingredients and making improvements proactively.



WHAT'S NEXT

UNPACK THE TENSION:

What the science says isn't always in alignment with what society believes. Openly acknowledging the tensions is the first step to bridging the gap.

AUDIT YOUR INGREDIENTS:

Food, beverage, and beauty brands—inspect your ingredients and rethink your packaging. With an overload of buzzwords and a lack of regulation, clear, informative labeling will be a must.

LOOK OUT FOR YOUR EMPLOYEES:

Where governments take away rights or fail to provide resources, employers can—and will be expected to—step in and support.

NEXT TECHNOLOGIES:

Assistive Robotics
Avatar Identities
Lo-Fi Design
Neural Control

CIRCULAR AFTERMARKETS



03

At the intersection of sustainability, scarcity, and hype culture lies a booming aftermarket economy. Old products are being recycled, repaired, and resold, while new products are being created with end-of-life options built in. From modular tech to food waste fashion, the shift to circularity is unlocking ample opportunities for post-sale profits.

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RESPONSIBLE TEXTILE RECOVERY ACT

In September 2024, California passed a [landmark](#) bill that requires clothing and textile companies to implement and fund a statewide reuse, repair and recycling program for their products. This means that Californians will be able to bring unwanted and even damaged apparel and household textiles to thrift stores, charities and other accessible collection sites throughout the state for sorting and recycling. In the current system, manufacturers have no incentive to minimize the waste they create—they are only incentivized to grow their profits. But with The Responsible Textile Recovery Act, companies will be held financially responsible for what happens to their products after they're used.

UNSOLD FLOWERS TO FRAGRANCES

Odds are the scent of your floral body wash comes from petrochemicals—not real flowers. Unilever is looking to change that. The consumer goods giant has [partnered](#) with scientists at the University of Nottingham and Bridge Farm Group to scent its products with essential oils from petunias, roses and marigolds that would otherwise go to waste—helping save some of the 990 million tons of flowers that are thrown out annually. If large-scale production is proven to be economically feasible, these oils could be used in a wide range of home and personal care products going forward, including shampoos, cleaning sprays, and more.

NFC-CHIPPED DENIMIS

Wrangler is collaborating with vintage brand MNTGE to create a blockchain-integrated line of [vintage clothing](#) for NFT holders. Garments include scannable NFC tags that direct you to a website featuring exclusive content on Wrangler's rich 77-year history. The blockchain tech also enables traceability, with the NFC tag updating itself every time the item has been scanned, resold, or passed down to another owner. By unlocking access to exclusive content and enabling deeper storytelling, blockchain tech is boosting the value of pre-loved pieces.

ELECTRIFYING CLASSIC CARS

As the automotive industry shifts toward electric vehicles to meet stricter emissions regulations, some enthusiasts are opting to "upcycle" their classic cars rather than purchase new ones. Companies like [Everrati](#) are removing the engines from iconic vehicles and replacing them with electric motors—preserving their design and performance while reducing environmental harms. Each car is custom-built and restored to showroom condition, catering to wealthy buyers who value both heritage and sustainability. As demand for sustainable luxury grows, Everrati's approach could inspire a larger trend, aligning automotive history with a greener future.

REPAIR KOPITIAMS

"Repair kopitiams," where volunteers help fix broken household items for free, have become a [hot hangout spot](#) in Singapore. The term "kopitiam" refers to a traditional Southeast Asian café that's known for its casual, community atmosphere, making it a fitting name for these gatherings that promote collaboration and learning. At these monthly events, participants bring broken electronics, fabrics, or other mechanical items, and volunteer coaches guide them through the repair process. This initiative is part of a much larger push to challenge throwaway culture by extending product lifespans. Brands can join the movement by offering in-store repairs, providing simple repair guides, and selling official replacements parts before pushing people to buy new.



UPCYCLED EATS

Food waste is no longer destined for the trash bin. Instead, it's inspiring the creation of tasty new products. New Zealand-based [EatKinda](#) is turning imperfect cauliflower into vegan ice cream; Aldi UK is [selling](#) beers made from wonky fruits and unsold bread; and Michelin-starred chefs like [Rasmus Munk](#) are creating innovative food labs where upcycling is front and center. These anti-waste creations aren't just keeping food out of landfills, they're also helping companies save money. Altogether, the upcycled food market is expected to grow from \$53.7 billion in 2021 to an impressive [\\$97 billion](#) by 2031.

"The circular economy has reached megatrend status, with the volume of discussions, debates and articles on the concept nearly tripling over the past five years. At the same time, however, global circularity is still in decline and consumption continues to accelerate."

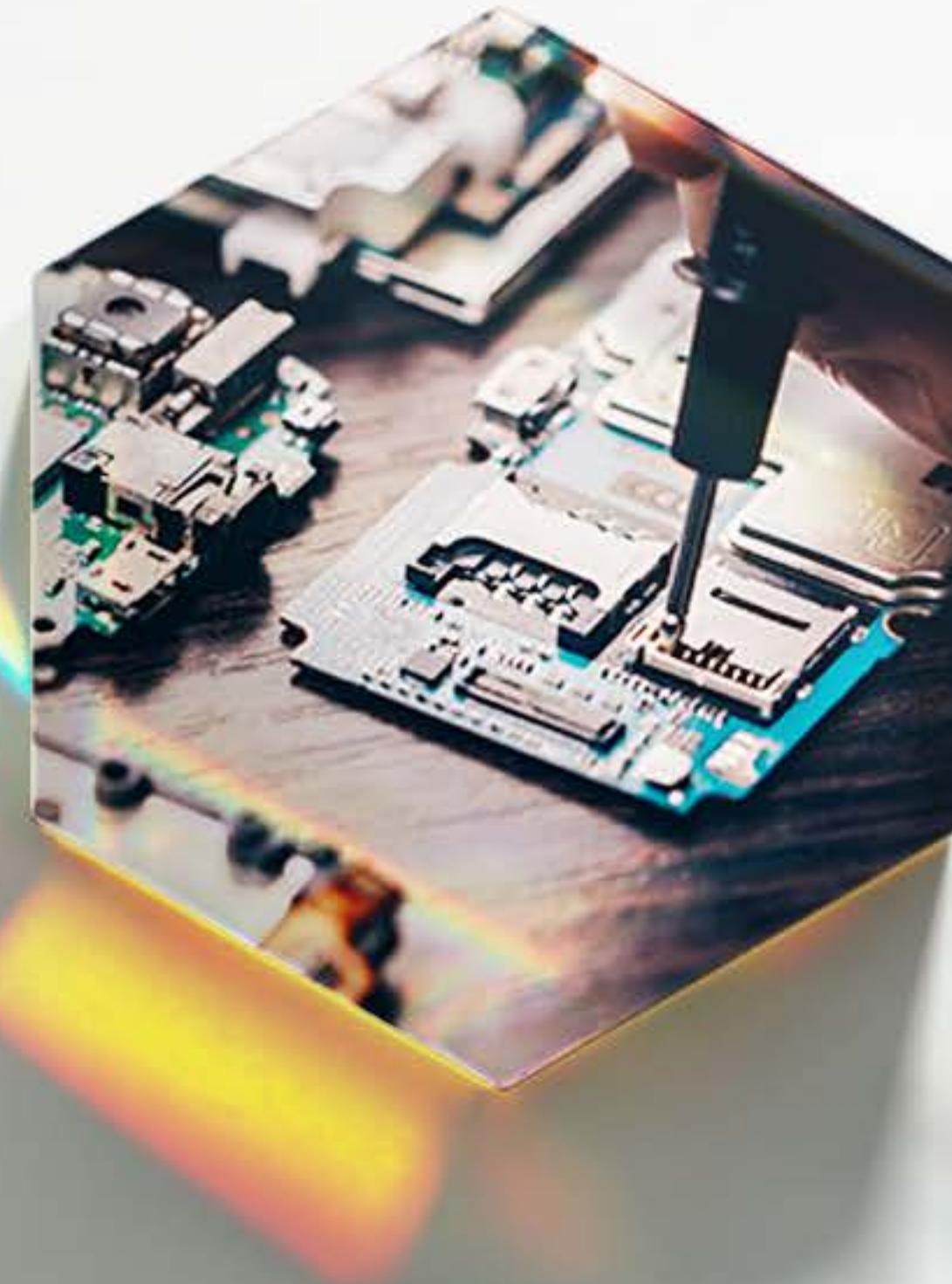
◆ Circle Economy, [The Circularity Gap Report 2024](#)

AI-POWERED RESALE

One significant barrier to resale is the time it takes to list items online. Hoping to make things a bit easier is AI startup Truss, which is developing a system that helps independent sellers streamline the resale of clothing, shoes and accessories. Image-recognition technology identifies fashion items from photos, automatically provides detailed product information, and then pulls from historical data to suggest pricing. Truss is supported by a £1 million grant from the UK government as well as partnerships with Depop and Selfridges. It aims to reduce the amount of manual labor required in listing items for resale, thus improving operational costs and fueling the growth of circular fashion.

MCDONALD'S CIRCULAR MAKEOVER

In partnership with design studio WeWantMore, McDonald's is giving its restaurants in Belgium and France a circular makeover. Each location is anchored by a partition wall made of energy-efficient LED tubes; 100% of the plastic used in the stools, tables, and chairs is from recycled content; 80% of the wood used is PEFC certified; and the McCafé tabletops are made with recycled coffee grounds. Most importantly, the decor for the restaurants was designed for disassembly using mechanical fixings instead of glue, so local teams can more effectively break down the features to streamline reuse and recycling. If applied to even a small percentage of McDonald's 40,000+ locations, the pilot program could result in significant resource savings.



WHAT'S NEXT

◆ RETHINK YOUR PHYSICAL FOOTPRINT:

What if stores stopped selling new products altogether? Serving instead as destinations for upcycling, secondhand swaps, and repairs.

◆ TELL A STORY:

Consider how the backstories of pre-loved items could add value and boost emotional appeal.

◆ EXPLORE UNEXPECTED PARTNERSHIPS:

How can your company's waste become another company's resource? Or vice versa?

◆ EMBRACE ORGANIC NICHES:

This trend is pioneered by obsessive collectors, creators, and thrifters. Involve them in your mission and reward their efforts.

NEXT TECHNOLOGIES: < >

Bio-Materials

Community Commerce

Modular Design

Non-Fungible Everything (NFTs)

CONNECTION QUEST

04



We're simultaneously more connected and more isolated than ever before. With our world no longer built to facilitate face-to-face interaction, new social spaces, apps, and business models are stepping in to fill the void. The connection economy is booming, and it might just heal our collective well-being.

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FRIENDS FOR HIRE

A unique business model has emerged in China: [friends-for-hire](#). These services cater to a range of needs, from emotional support to companionship at social events, often facilitated through digital platforms like Xiaohongshu. The friend-for-hire phenomenon coincides with rising loneliness in China, driven by rapid urbanization, increased work pressure, and migration to new cities. But while the idea of companionship-on-demand might seem convenient, it's also highly transactional—highlighting a serious need for meaningful, mutually beneficial relationships that don't come with a price tag.



GOVERNMENTS GET INVOLVED

It's been over a year since the World Health Organization (WHO) declared loneliness a [global health concern](#). Since then, governments have responded by putting big money behind the problem. England launched the £30 million "Know Your Neighbourhood Fund," encouraging volunteering and community connections in underserved areas. Germany introduced the "Loneliness Barometer," leveraging 30 years of data to inform policies, expand support services, and raise public awareness. And in October, South Korea unveiled its 451.3 billion won (\$327 million) "Loneliness-Free Seoul" plan, which will create hotlines, mental health services, and community counseling hubs over the next five years. Where governments haven't stepped up, brands can step in. Imagine retail stores that double as community centers, or local meetups for specific groups, like the elderly or new dads.



DINING WITH STRANGERS

The latest solution to the loneliness epidemic? Apps that match you with strangers for a meal. Platforms leading the way include [Timeleft](#), [The Breakfast](#), and [Creative Lunch Club](#), all of which are gaining traction among remote workers, gig workers, and urban residents alike. Unlike dating apps, these solutions prioritize community building and meaningful, platonic connections. The Breakfast app, for instance, intentionally pairs people from different backgrounds in order to foster deep conversation. Meanwhile, Creative Lunch Club focuses on bringing together professionals from similar industries, offering a more relaxed alternative to traditional networking events.

THE END OF SWIPE CULTURE

Fed up with swiping right, young singles are looking for romance IRL again. According to an [Eventbrite report](#), attendance at dating events for millennials and Gen Z has increased by 49% from 2023 to 2024. This shift back toward face-to-face connections is also supported by a [decline](#) in the number of paying users on dating apps like Tinder. As singles ditch the apps in search of something more genuine, in-person meetups like [run clubs](#) and late-night chess clubs are becoming an increasingly popular way to meet your match.

Even as the world's overall emotional health rebounded in 2023, Gallup's 2024 measure of global loneliness shows over one in five people worldwide (23%) felt loneliness "a lot of the day yesterday."

Gallup, 2024

FREEMASONRY REVIVAL

Freemasonry, which began as a medieval stonemason's guild, is gaining [fresh appeal](#) among young men looking for community and purpose outside of social media. To become one of the 6 million members worldwide, applicants must first pass a "vibe check" that focuses on trustworthiness and openness. Once accepted, they can enjoy social events like barbecues, baseball games, and casual hangouts. Some have also turned to the fraternity for emotional support during personal challenges like career changes or losses. This growing interest in Freemasonry coincides with rising reports of [male loneliness](#), demonstrating demand for social outlets that blend structured fellowship with personal development.

HAPPY TO CHAT BENCHES

"Happy to Chat" benches are becoming an increasingly common way to encourage social interaction. These benches, which features a sign that reads "Sit here if you don't mind someone stopping to say hello," were first introduced in the U.K. and have since spread globally due to their effectiveness. At the Rowley library in Massachusetts, over 135 conversations took place at the benches in just 27 hours during a community event. Similarly, "Happy to Chat" benches in Norfolk have been proven to spur greater social involvement—leading people to join activities like knitting groups. With third spaces in decline, these benches are giving people the nudge they need to strike up a casual conversation with strangers.

MUJI HOUSING RENOVATIONS

Japan recently passed new laws that allow businesses to enter danchis (housing complexes for low-income individuals). One brand taking advantage is Muji, which is giving the apartments a full-blown makeover in order to foster community and inspire cross-generational connections. "Our previous project had a focus on upgrading each unit to attract young people," said Teruhito Toyoda, senior architect at Muji House. "Now Muji wants to reinvigorate the whole danchi by helping those young residents form a community with existing elderly residents through repairing infrastructure and hosting social events." While several other companies have tried to combat loneliness by hosting one-off events or creating yet another app, Muji's move shows how brands can play a meaningful role in improving social infrastructure at scale.



"Despite a consumer economy that seems optimized for introverted behavior, we would have happier days, years, and lives if we resisted the undertow of the convenience curse—if we talked with more strangers, belonged to more groups, and left the house for more activities."

—Derek Thompson, The Atlantic

WHAT'S NEXT

① QUALITY OVER QUANTITY:

We're done resting our laurels on how many likes, matches, and followers we rack up. Individuals are desperate for interpersonal relationships that bring substance and depth.

② CREATE COMMON GROUND:

Break people out of filter bubbles based solely on similar interests. How can you bring people together who would have otherwise never met?

③ EXPERIMENT WITH FORMATS:

Go beyond talking, texting, and typing, and find more immersive ways to connect people.

⟨ NEXT TECHNOLOGIES: ⟩

Avatar Identities
Community Commerce
Decentralized Social
Third Place Gaming

COUNTER CANCEL



05

A hyperpolarized society is ready to trade toxic intolerance for a commitment to progress. As the war on “wokeness” rages on, a growing group of people are refusing to participate in a divided world. The Counter Cancel movement will call people in to learn rather than calling them out—trading public shaming for healthy, nuanced conversation.

edges

FINDING COMMON GROUND

"We're asking people to do something that they've never done before: talk to a stranger across the political divides at this toxic moment in the country." That's a [quote](#) from Dave Isay, the founder of U.S. nonprofit StoryCorps. Through an initiative called [One Small Step](#), StoryCorps is pairing up people with opposing political views and asking them to have a civil conversation—not to debate politics, but simply to get to know each other as people. StoryCorps has conducted over 3,000 moderated interviews since 2018. Now, they're opening the One Small Step program up to anyone through a new website that facilitates video calls. According to the team's survey findings, the conversations are successful in making liberals more empathetic toward their conservative counterparts, and vice versa. And though it won't end polarization once and for all, it's an important first step toward building the culture of respect that's needed to get to actual solutions.

BIAS METER

Los Angeles Times owner Patrick Soon-Shiong is planning to add an AI-powered "[bias meter](#)" to the paper's news and opinion articles. With the meter, readers would be able to simply press a button and get both sides of the story before adding their own comments. Soon-Shiong says that major publishers have so far failed to adequately separate news and opinion, and that he is aiming to "actually create some level of balance." As part of his strategy, he's also restructuring the newspaper's editorial board by adding more conservative and centrist voices. While some see the shift towards neutrality as a good thing, critics warn that Soon-Shiong's move is just another example of how media outlets are catering to Donald Trump. The bias meter was announced just a few days before Merriam-Webster declared 'polarization' the 2024 word of the year. While it remains to be seen if the meter actually promotes more nuanced conversation, the reactions to it thus far have only further stoked division.



"EXTREMELY INAPPROPRIATE"

A hit TV series in Japan is sparking lively debate about whether society has become too sanitized. The show, called "[Extremely Inappropriate](#)," stars a PE teacher from the 1980s who is transported to 2024 and left shocked by the state of the world's "wokeness." The show explores topics like cancel culture, sexual harassment, work-life boundaries, and gender roles. The show's writers, who are part of Gen X, infused the series with nostalgia for older viewers, but many Gen Z viewers were left wondering if it was actually more freeing to live in the '80s. Critics, on the other hand, say the show romanticizes inappropriate behavior that should stay in the past. In the end, the main character eventually evolves to become more considerate and mindful, showing that it's possible to adapt and that cultural norms have indeed changed for the better.

AI-ASSISTED AGREEMENTS

Google DeepMind is exploring whether AI can help people reach agreements more effectively than human moderators. The company's researchers are developing a tool called the "[Habermas Machine](#)," which is designed to summarize group discussions by capturing both majority and minority perspectives, and then provide a more balanced output. In trials with over 5,700 participants, 56% preferred the AI-generated summaries to ones written by human mediators, proving AI's potential as a decision-making aid. This technology could be especially useful in politics, where opinions are polarizing and opposing sides often refuse to compromise. While the AI seems promising, it still lacks key features such as fact-checking and the ability to moderate discussions. But even if it is never released publicly, the Habermas Machine is offering a glimpse into a future where AI—which has the benefit of not being emotionally attached to one outcome or another—can help us find common ground in the most heated debates.



"Robust debate is the best thing in the world, but intolerance of opposing opinions has wiped out any margin for error. We're all talking about inclusivity and favoring difference... and that's all great, but that's not how we're living. We've become massively intolerant and quick to blame, which has nothing to do with understanding how other human beings operate.

◆ Dawn French, actress and comedian

BOLD BRANDS

When brands find themselves in hot water, it can be tempting to immediately shift gears or go back on your word in order to de-escalate the situation as quickly as possible. But playing it safe isn't always the best move. When done thoughtfully, there's real value in boldly standing by your beliefs. Take two polar opposite examples: Etsy and Tractor Supply. Etsy's chief human resource officer Toni Thompson recently declared that her company's employee benefits approach emphasizes inclusion and social impact—proudly signaling Etsy's values without reservation. Tractor Supply made the opposite choice. In summer 2024, the company eliminated its inclusion and impact goals and ceased sponsorship of "non-business activities" such as pride festivals and voting campaigns in order to align with its core customer base, which is rural and conservative. Even after facing backlash from the opposite ends of the political aisle, both brands stood firm in their statements, demonstrating the value of a strong brand identity.

GRANDPARENTS FOR TRUTH

Over 4,000 books were banned across 23 U.S. states between July and December 2023. Many of these books addressed topics like sexual identity, sexual violence, race theory, and evolution—subjects that help students understand systemic racism and combat prejudice from an early age. One group aiming to stop the censorship is Grandparents for Truth, a fiery crew of retired teachers and grandparents who are organizing rallies, collaborating with other anti-censorship groups, and speaking out at school board meetings and community events. With basic freedoms under threat, Grandparents for Truth is refusing to sit back. "I want to make sure my grandchildren grow up in a world where they can read and form opinions based on knowledge, not on a narrow truth," says Ruth Littner, one of the group's earliest members.



WHAT'S NEXT

- ◆ **BREAK THE ECHO CHAMBER:** Cultivate platforms, features, and in-person experiences that expose people to diverse viewpoints and foster open, respectful dialogue.
- ◆ **BE THOUGHTFUL, NOT REACTIVE:** Before rushing to weigh in on every tragedy, brands would be wise to do thorough research, consider the issue from various perspectives, and craft a meaningful plan of action. Oftentimes, being effective is more beneficial than being first.
- ◆ **OWN YOUR MISTAKES:** Brands, don't be afraid to acknowledge your past wrongdoings in the pursuit of a better way forward. Taking accountability requires full transparency.

NEXT TECHNOLOGIES:

Decentralized Social
Generative AI

CRISIS HACKING

06



A world trapped in permacrisis is determined to find its way out. In the face of war, resource scarcity, and ongoing inflation, people are embracing lo-fi hacks that make the most of the limitations. As we learn to live without abundance, human ingenuity will elevate and endure.

edges

EV POWER DONATIONS

When bushfire season hit Australia, the country's electric vehicle (EV) owners were met with a unique request: to donate their car's battery power in the event of a natural disaster. The plea came from Mycar, a company that sells car tires, servicing and repairs. Through their new "[Mycar Chargers](#)" program, volunteer EV owners will be called on to drive their cars to areas where the grid is down and help power kettles, microwave ovens, refrigerators and medical equipment for those in need. The cars must have vehicle-to-load (V2L) capabilities to qualify, which allows power to be exported and essentially turns the EV into a mobile generator. Mycar's initiative represents a clever solution to what's sure to be a growing problem. As climate-fueled disasters become even more common across the globe, experts say bidirectional charging technology could revolutionize the power grid for the better.

SOLAR PRICEBOARD

With global energy shortages on the rise, brands are turning to crafty solutions to stay functional. In Pakistan, where frequent power outages disrupt daily life, ice cream brand Wall's introduced [solar-powered price boards](#) that keep their freezers running so the products don't melt during blackouts. The Solar Priceboard, now in its prototype phase, is expected to be integrated into existing solar-powered initiatives at various sales points such as beaches, parks and ice cream carts.

TRADING COWS FOR CAMELS

In light of changing climate patterns in Kenya, a growing number of herders are [substituting cows for camels](#). Camels produce milk, are more capable of withstanding droughts, and require less feed and water than cows—making them a more climate-resilient alternative. This is especially important in Samburu, a Kenyan community that was heavily affected by a prolonged three-year drought. The government has launched a camel distribution program aimed at mitigating the effects on Samburu residents—many of whom suffered from malnutrition during the extended drought period. While rich nations are eyeing lab-grown meat, undeveloped nations are prioritizing climate-resistant animals to ensure survival.

OLD COOKBOOK REVIVAL

A Country Women's Association (CWA) branch in Australia is [reviving vintage recipes](#) to help families manage rising food costs. These old-school recipes, which often use common ingredients you'd find in a kitchen pantry, are being shared by CWA members online to inspire people to make the most of inexpensive ingredients. Some recipes include "broken glass jelly" and "Weet-Bix slice," which appear in cookbooks from half a century ago or more. This initiative started during the COVID-19 pandemic, but has since gained even more attention as families continue to struggle with inflation. As an added bonus, the throwback recipes are also rekindling younger generations' interest in Australia's culinary history.

MOBILE CRISIS CONSTRUCTION

In the three years since Russia invaded Ukraine, hundreds of thousands of buildings have been destroyed. A new machine inside a shipping container will soon begin turning some of that rubble into building blocks. This is all being made possible thanks to Australian nonprofit [Mobile Crisis Construction](#). Their equipment grinds up old walls, glass, and debris into a fine material that's mixed with a small amount of clay, cement, and water. The machine then presses it all into blocks that can be stacked together without mortar, meaning buildings can be put together with very little training. A single machine can make up to 8,000 bricks per day, which is enough to construct 10 homes every three days. The first machine is already starting to rebuild several townhouses in an area outside Kiev. Eventually, the nonprofit hopes to become part of the standard post-disaster response all around the world.

BRIKOOLE

Recognizing that air conditioning is both expensive and bad for our planet, Malaysian university students set out to find a better way forward. Their solution is a brick system called "[Brikoole](#)" that can passively cool homes without electricity. Taking cues from ancient wisdom, the bricks use ventilation holes, a honeycomb mesh, and a built-in water system to cool incoming air naturally—reducing temperatures by up to 6°C. After winning Malaysia's James Dyson Award, the students are now looking to begin real-world testing in the tropics.



HUMIDITY TO H2O

Dubai's Roads and Transport Authority (RTA) has launched water dispensers that convert humidity into drinking water for delivery drivers. The dispensers are located at driver rest areas, and are able to produce 100 liters of safe drinking water a day by extracting and purifying moisture directly from the air. This initiative comes as rising temperatures pose an increasingly dangerous threat to outdoor workers, serving as an example of how to combat extreme heat without further contributing to the climate problem.

MODULAR HOMES

New South Wales is tackling the ongoing housing crisis with pre-built modular homes. These homes are constructed off-site and then assembled at the intended location, which reduces the overall construction time by an impressive 20% compared to traditional building methods. The trial marks a notable step toward revolutionizing public housing delivery, providing sustainable, quality housing to the people who need it most. Experts predict that over 20% of new homes being planned in Australia won't be completed within the next five years—making the need for fast, scalable solutions especially urgent.



“We need to encourage ‘innovation of the people, by the people, for the people.’ That’s the only way to fight the sense of powerlessness and inertia that people experience worldwide.”

— Navi Radjou, innovation thinker

WHAT'S NEXT

PLAY WITHIN CONSTRAINTS:

Limitations can fuel creativity and spark ingenuity. Start by reimagining what your product or experience would look like if it used as few resources as possible.

UNLOCK DIY SOLUTIONS:

Give consumers the tips and tools to use less—from simple ways to cut back their energy consumption to make-your-own product guides.

ENABLE AID:

Explore how your company's resources or technologies could serve as a lifeline in times of need.

NEXT TECHNOLOGIES:

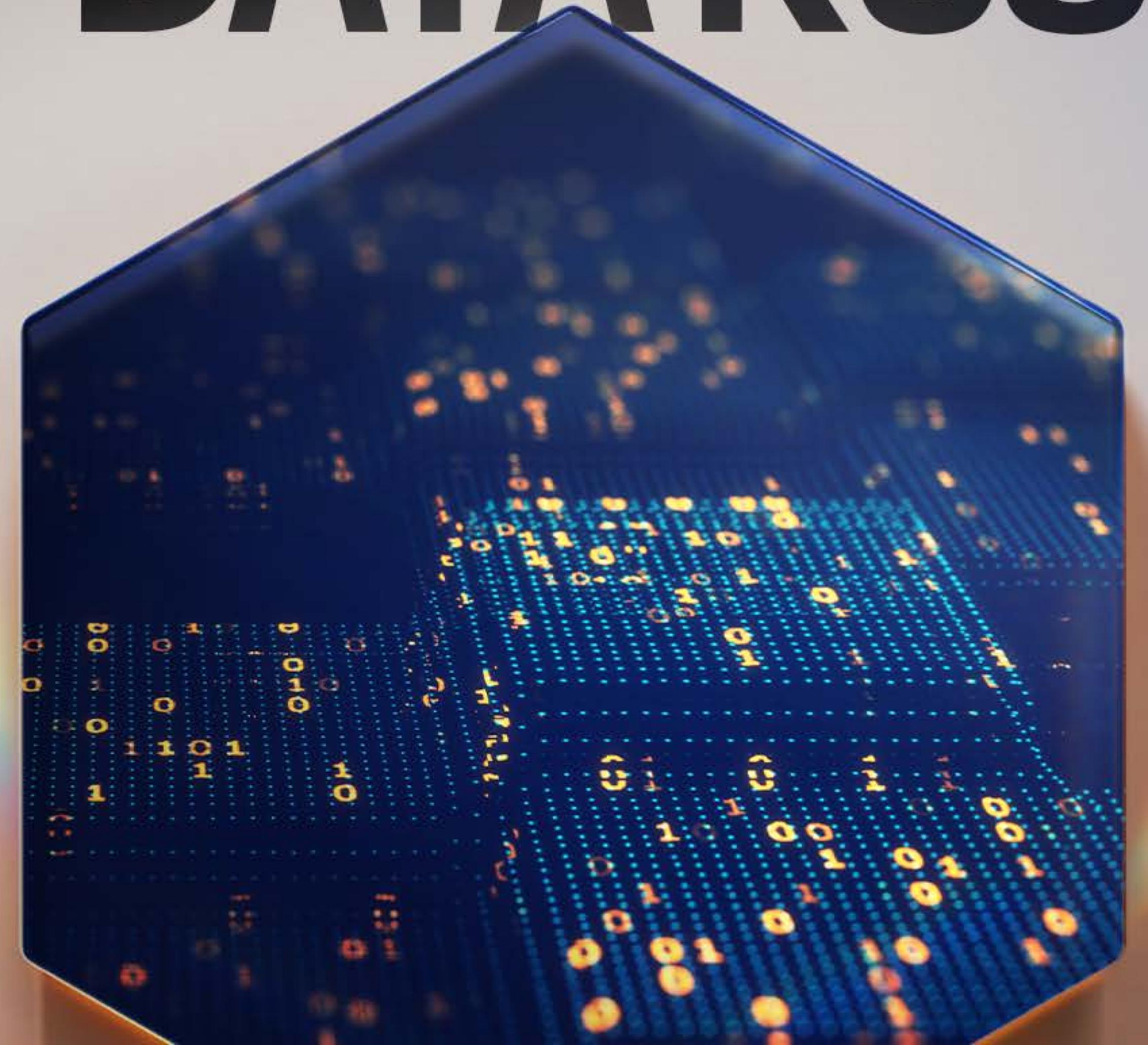
AI Agents
Bio-Materials
Lo-Fi Design
Modular Design

DATA RUSH

07

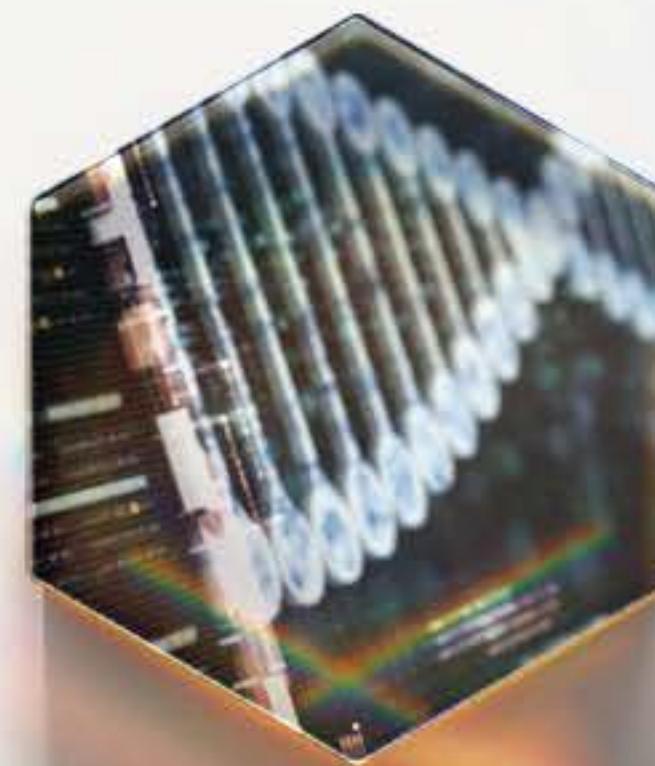
The days of data free-for-alls are coming to a close. As regulation tightens and power shifts in favor of users, we'll see the end of vague privacy policies and the start of a more formalized data exchange economy. One where privacy is enabled by default, and where individuals own their data from the start.

edges



23andMe DATA DEBACLE

With 23andMe's downfall looming amid financial struggles, a big question hangs in the balance: what will happen to the DNA data of its 14 million customers? Since 23andMe is not governed by HIPAA, it is exempt from the federal regulations that protect sensitive health information, leaving its customers' data potentially vulnerable to third-party access. Genetic data holds immense value, and with limited regulation, control could easily shift from customers to companies or insurers, who might use it to set premiums based on genetic risk or run targeted ads for specific medications. And according to one article, this kind of genetic discrimination is already happening. Until stronger privacy laws are in place, the risk of exploitation could seriously deter people from participating in genetic testing.



DATA TRADE-INS

A growing crop of startups are allowing people to trade their data for cash, discounts, or other perks. These include Tapestri, which pays people about \$8 to \$25 a month for sharing their location; Invisibly, which offers access to paywalled news articles in exchange for demographic and behavioral data; and Datacy, which lets users collect their browsing data, aggregate it with data from other users, and then sell it to the highest bidder. An especially unique proposition comes from an app called Caden. Caden helps users download their data from apps like Amazon and Netflix and put it into a "vault." Users who agree to share that data for advertising purposes can then earn a cut of the revenue that the app generates from it, which could be up to \$50 a month. But reactions to these new business models are mixed. While some argue that they're allowing users to profit from data they otherwise would be giving away for free, others say the lack of standardization makes it impossible for consumers to know if they're getting a fair deal.

PLAYING DEFENSE AGAINST AI

As people become more aware that their digital content—such as social media posts—are being used to train AI models, many are looking for ways to restrict access to their data. AI systems like ChatGPT, Google Gemini, and Meta AI all draw on user data—and while opting out is possible, the process is often complex or unavailable by default. Privacy advocates argue that these limitations demonstrate an urgent need for stronger data protection laws, ensuring that users can freely use the internet without having to worry that their online output is benefitting Big Tech. Without comprehensive legislation, sensitive information could be easily accessed by companies or advertisers, amplifying public calls for broader data control measures.

SURVEILLANCE PRICING INVESTIGATION

The U.S. Federal Trade Commission (FTC) has launched an inquiry into "surveillance pricing," a tactic where the price fluctuates based on a shopper's personal data—including location, purchase habits, and even browsing history. This method, powered by AI, is being examined across eight major companies, including Mastercard, McKinsey, Home Depot, and more—all of which use advanced data analytics to personalize prices for individual customers. According to the FTC, this practice is an evolution from older data-tracking practices where household radio or TV habits are tracked. By scrutinizing how these companies gather and use consumer information, the FTC aims to shed light on potential privacy risks and ensure fair treatment for consumers in an increasingly data-driven market.



GIG WORKER DATA GRABS

For gig workers, finding a spot to use the restroom and charge your phone can be a struggle. An Argentine startup called Nippy has built an entire business around this need—but with a twist. The company rents out small storefronts where gig workers can stop by for coffee and bathroom access, both of which are free so long as they download Nippy's app. Nippy then sells anonymized data generated from the app to brands they partner with, who in turn offer workers their services—sometimes at a discount. Nippy has over 35,000 users across Argentina, Mexico, and the Dominican Republic. Several of these Nippy users say they weren't aware their data was being sold. What's more interesting, though, is that they don't really mind. This says a lot not only about the lack of resources available to gig workers, but also about the lack of consensus around how much personal data is actually worth.

BRAINWAVE PROTECTIONS

When it comes to personal data, brain activity—the electrical signals underlying our thoughts, feelings and intentions—is about as personal as it gets. Thankfully, more governments are putting protections in place. Colorado and California became the first U.S. states to classify neural data as sensitive personal data last year, meaning companies developing consumer neurotechnologies will have to get people's consent before using such information to identify them. These protections come as quick advances in neurotech make scanning, analyzing and selling mental data increasingly more possible and profitable. Several countries, including Chile, Brazil, Spain, Mexico and Uruguay, have either already set protections on brain-related data or taken steps toward doing so.

"We shouldn't even be calling it data anymore, we should be calling it our personhood. We're giving up our personhood to these large platforms, and that's the problem that needs to be fixed."

Frank McCourt, Chairman of McCourt Global and founder of Project Liberty



WHAT'S NEXT

ENABLE EXCHANGES:

When users own their data, it'll be up to them how they spend it. Prepare to give people the option to monetize their data, exchange it for discounts, or even donate it to a good cause.

BE TRANSPARENT:

Consumers may be willing to trade their data for a more personalized experience, but only if you're upfront about the benefits and implications.

INNOVATE WISELY:

Develop privacy solutions for the most vulnerable citizens first.

NEXT TECHNOLOGIES: < >

AI Agents
Connected Objects
Decentralized Social
Generative AI
Neural Control
Non-Fungible Everything (NFTs)

DEATH UNDONE

08



The push to die better is forcing an antiquated end-of-life industry to change its tune. Unsatisfied with current limitations, society is breaking the taboo and ushering in a more proactive, personalized, and experimental approach. The reexamination of death is just beginning.

edges

DEATH PLANNING PARTIES

One way to make end-of-life planning feel less daunting? Turn it into a party. At [death planning parties](#), attendees gather to discuss the nitty gritty details around end-of-life care, from what they want to happen to their body to what they want their funeral to look like. The idea is that not only does this spare loved ones from future stress, it also forces people to confront their own mortality and think about how they want to be remembered—turning a dreaded topic into a more positive, communal experience.



HIP FUNERAL HOMES

Stuffy beige funeral homes are beginning to look more like spas and art galleries. Leading the movement are businesses like [Poppy's](#) and [Exit Here](#) in London, [Sparrow](#) in New York, and [Altilma](#) in Spain. Their hip aesthetic upgrades—think colorful coffins, velvet upholstery, and burning incense—are a reflection of a much larger push to modernize the end-of-life industry. Other notable changes include the use of upbeat language like “celebration rooms” to refer to memorial spaces, and the addition of nontraditional services. Sparrow hosts grief circles and death-themed comedy shows, for instance, while Co-Op Funeralcare in the U.K. offers unusual hearse options like a fire truck or double-decker red bus. By taking cues from the hospitality sector, these contemporary funeral homes are aiming to bring a new level of warmth and personalization to a traditionally stale industry.

DIGITAL RESURRECTION

A growing crop of startups are making it possible to continue [interacting](#) with your loved ones long after they're gone. A digital version of them, that is. This includes companies like [Replika](#), [HereAfter AI](#), [StoryFile](#), and [Seance AI](#), whose offerings range from audio legacies, to interactive video conversations with the dead, to chatbot “companions” that you can text back and forth with. But while some welcome the opportunity to keep the conversation going, others argue that it's just allowing people to avoid the very human, and very necessary, process of grieving.

AI-ASSISTED BEREAVEMENT CARE

In addition to the heavy emotional toll that death takes, loved ones are also left dealing with a dizzying number of logistical tasks. An Israeli startup called Empathy wants to make the process easier—and it's using AI to do it. The Empathy platform incorporates a mix of AI and human guides to help people with all of the different aspects of the bereavement process, from counseling services, to writing obituaries, to shutting down the dozens of cloud services that the deceased might have used, to settling complex financial affairs. With a fresh [\\$47 million in funding](#) and over 40 million users, Empathy is now building out more AI-powered tools to help guide people through the question of “what next” throughout the organizing process.

EMBRACING MORTALITY

What if confronting your death could help you live a better life? That's the idea behind Mujo Inc., a Japanese company offering a service where people can lay in a coffin and visualize their own funeral. The intent isn't to spark fear, but rather to encourage people to reassess their priorities and reflect on what kind of legacy they want to leave behind. This kind of death acceptance is especially important in a country like Japan, which has the oldest population in the world combined with a rapidly declining birth rate. → For more, watch Backslash's episode of [Life of the Edge: Embracing Mortality](#)

AUGMENTED REALITY GRAVEYARD

A former golf course in Quebec has been transformed into a [futuristic forest cemetery](#). At this cemetery, you won't find the usual gravestones and plaques. Instead, visitors use an app to locate their loved one's tree, then scan the surrounding landscape with their phone camera to unlock a virtual chest filled with digital memorabilia like photos, videos, and even recipes belonging to the deceased. As calls to boost biodiversity grow louder, the Second Life Forest is demonstrating how cemeteries can make better use of the land while using tech to offer a sentimental and emotionally fulfilling experience.



“Death is no longer a taboo subject. Mortality has entered the realm of polite conversation and even popular culture.”

■ Alix Strauss, [The New York Post](#)

GRIEF RETREATS

Once seen as private, solitary experiences, the loss of a loved one is now driving a new type of travel trend: grief retreats. These immersive getaways combine therapy with healing activities like surfing or art, helping people confront their grief outside of their daily routine. Travel expert Stephanie De Santi-Davis explains that “[They] offer a supportive environment where people can share their experiences, their emotions, and coping strategies with others who understand the pain.” With Google searches for “grief retreats near me” up 23% over the past year, it’s no wonder why *Condé Nast Traveler* named grief-related wellness a top travel trend for 2024.

UNDERWATER CEMETERY

About 40 feet underwater in Biscayne Bay, Florida, lies the world’s first underwater cemetery. Customers’ cremated remains are mixed with water and turned into “placements” at the man-made reef, which can take the form of road columns, arches or sculptures of local sea life. As such, the Neptune Memorial Reef is a huge boon for the local marine environment, providing hard surfaces that help coral thrive and offering nooks where small fish can hide from predators. In addition to benefiting sea life, the reef provides a creative solution to a very real problem: the fact that traditional cemeteries are unsustainable. Not only do they take up a lot of precious land, but they can pollute groundwater and soil—hence the recent rise in other eco-friendly options like tree burials and biodegradable urns. By reimagining where human remains are located, we’ll open the door to entirely new end-of-life traditions that honor the individual while also giving back to the Earth.



WHAT'S NEXT

○ START THE CONVERSATION:

Reframing death in a realistic yet approachable light will turn avoidance into action. Brands can help by creating moments for open discussion and uniting unlikely partners to jump-start the planning process (think financial advisors X death doulas).

○ MANDATORY DEATH SETTINGS:

What if declaring your post-death wishes was a mandatory part of every online sign-up process—from cloud storage services to social media profiles? Ensuring that digital inheritance was never an afterthought.

◀ NEXT TECHNOLOGIES: ▶

AI Agents
Avatar Identities
Bio-Materials
Extended Reality

DEMISE DUALITY



09

Is humanity doomed? Projections for a bleak future are leading a growing group of people to say “yes.” As end-of-times thinking takes root, a feeling of collective indifference will threaten the path to progress. To reignite a sense of individual responsibility, we’ll need to convert nihilists into optimists.

edges

CLIMATE CAFES

Climate cafes are aiming to ease anxieties around the environmental crisis. These grassroots groups convene either online or in person, where people meet up to openly discuss their grief and greatest fears related to climate change. Some gatherings are primarily focused on expressing emotion, while others concentrate on translating those feelings into action—whether through composting, facilitating clothing swaps, pushing for certain legislation, or even going back to school to learn about sustainable solutions. As climate doom begins to dominate the media, these cafes play an integral role in instilling hope. “The dread, the hopelessness is getting exiled in all of us, and that’s why we’re not talking about it, because it’s too painful,” says Lauren Bondy, a cafe participant. “If we can’t heal what we’re all feeling, we can’t heal our planet either.”



EVERYTHING MUST GO

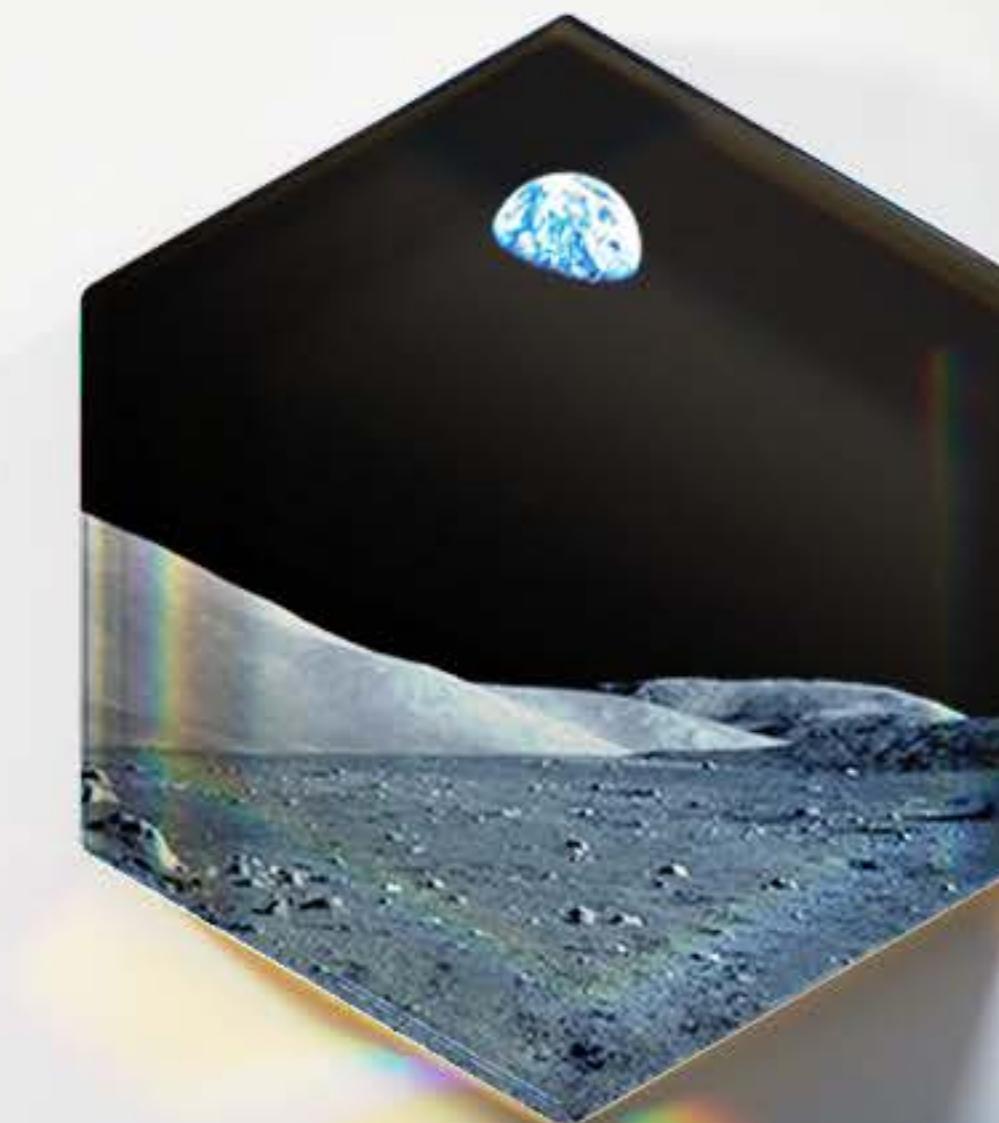
In a new book called *Everything Must Go*, author Dorian Lynskey asks a big question: why does every generation seem to think they’re witnessing the end of the world as we know it? The book brilliantly unpacks humanity’s ongoing obsession with the apocalypse, showing how culture has played a role in fueling our fears—from biblical visions of divine wrath to movies about nuclear annihilation. Lynskey dismantles the idea of the “good old days,” arguing that apocalyptic fears stem from a longing for meaning, not historical reality. Even as humanity persists through countless doomsday predictions, these narratives have continued on, serving as a reminder that the world has always felt on the brink—yet continues to move forward.

“More than ever, the surest way to be praised for speaking to the times is to say that the times are awful. It can seem almost unserious to believe that things are not getting irreversibly worse.”

◆ Dorian Lynskey, *Everything Must Go: The Stories We Tell About the End of the World*

AI DOOMISM

While the idea of AI taking over the world has been a popular movie plot for decades, many would say it’s been feeling closer and closer to reality. Former OpenAI researcher Daniel Kokotajlo estimates a 70% chance of catastrophic harm, and a recent Yale survey revealed that 42% of CEOs believe AI could destroy humanity within five to ten years. As generative AI advances and humanoid robots get even more human-like, calls for oversight are growing increasingly urgent. A 2024 report commissioned by the U.S. State Department flatly states that the most advanced AI systems could, in a worst case, “pose an extinction-level threat to the human species.” The report calls for dramatic new steps aimed at confronting this threat, including launching a new AI agency, imposing “emergency” regulatory safeguards and limits on how much computer power can be used to train AI models. Looking forward, clear ethical guidelines will be key to combating the fear and balancing innovation with responsibility.



A VAULT ON THE MOON

With thousands of species at risk of extinction, scientists are proposing a radical plan: a vault on the moon that’s filled with preserved samples of Earth’s most important and vulnerable creatures. The idea is that a cryogenic biorepository of preserved cells could be used to boost genetic diversity in small populations of endangered species, or to clone and create new individuals in the worst-case scenario of extinction. A disaster-proof repository is not a new idea. The most famous example is the Global Seed Vault in Norway’s Arctic, which stores more than a million seed varieties in an effort to safeguard food crops. With so much of the proposal still in the realm of science fiction, it would likely be decades before the lunar vault comes to fruition—if ever. But in the short term, the scientists behind the paper say their goal is to generate awareness around the immediate need for extreme conservation efforts before it really is too late.

ANTINATALISM

Is it morally sound to bring children into a world that seems to be crumbling? According to a growing number of people, the answer is no. Once considered fringe, antinatalism—the view that it's morally impermissible to bring a child into existence—is moving into mainstream discussions. Some antinatalists point to climate change, others point to the threat of societal collapse, but all agree that the best way to do right by future generations is to not create them. With 60% of the world's population living in countries where fertility rates are dropping, governments are doubling down on pronatalist policies in response. → For more, watch Backslash's episode of [Life on the Edge: Antinatalism](#)

CATAN: NEW ENERGIES

Thirty years after the launch of Catan, the son of the board game's creator is releasing an updated version inspired by our current environmental realities. In "Catan: New Energies," players will be tasked with deciding whether to build fossil fuel power plants quickly and cheaply—which also increases pollution—or invest more slowly in renewables. The most eco-friendly player won't necessarily always win, but if pollution rises past a certain level, the game ends for everyone and the player who prioritized sustainability comes out on top. While it might sound a bit heavy for a board game, the intent is to inspire hope by showing what can be achieved when everyone does their part. With climate doom proven to lead to apathy, this more entertaining and solution-oriented approach could serve as a more effective entry point into an intimidating topic.

56% of people ages 16 to 25 globally agree with the statement "Humanity is doomed."

● [Lancet Planetary Health, 2021](#)



WHAT'S NEXT

REINSPIRE HOPE:

In a sea of tragic headlines, a little practical optimism can go a long way toward motivating people to take action.

GIVE EVERYONE A ROLE:

Not knowing where to start often prevents people from starting at all. By offering clear direction, brands can make it easier for people to do their part to improve our world.

NEXT TECHNOLOGIES:

AI Agents
Assistive Robotics

ECO-REALISM

10

Visions of a green utopia are maturing into a more pragmatic approach. As governments and corporations look to balance environmental needs with economic and social realities, fanciful ambitions will be outshined by affordable, scalable, and readily-available solutions. It's out with the flashy distractions, in with the practical improvements.

edges



ENVIRONMENTAL PLEDGES SCALE BACK

Lofty sustainability goals are being scaled back, with several major companies retreating from their previous ambitions. Companies like Unilever and Coca-Cola are walking back on their promises to cut plastics. Canada's six largest oil and gas companies have wiped their websites clean of their decarbonization goals. And Nike has laid off dozens of sustainability managers in a bid to cut costs.

These changes come as shareholders dial up pressures to prioritize short-term financial results over long-term green investments. But just because this reversal is becoming more common doesn't mean it's without consequences. To earn back trust, businesses will need to replace unrealistic environmental targets with immediate action plans that detail the what, why, when, and—most importantly—the how.

FAST FASHION TAX

It's no secret that high price tags are a barrier to sustainable clothing. But what if fast fashion's cost actually reflected its heavy environmental toll? That's the future being explored by France, where a recently approved bill is aiming to impose serious penalties on fast fashion companies. If the bill becomes law, brands like Shein and Boohoo would be subject to a fee of up to €10 per item sold, or up to 50% of the selling price, by 2030. Proceeds from the charge would be used to subsidize producers of sustainable clothes, allowing them to compete more easily in a tough financial landscape.



HYBRID COMPROMISES

The shift toward sustainability is no longer all or nothing. In many cases, a hybrid approach can help bridge the gap between current habits and future environmental goals—ultimately getting more people to take a step in a greener direction. A case in point is German supermarket chain Lidl's recent launch of a partially plant-based ground meat. The industry-first product is made of 60% beef and 40% pea protein, boasting a 37.5% lower carbon footprint at a 33% lower price point than regular ground beef. For meat-eaters who still want the familiar taste of real beef with less environmental guilt, the new product gives Lidl the opportunity to influence the protein ratio in a subtle but effective way. A similar approach is also being deployed in the automotive sector with extended-range electric vehicles (EREVs). EREVs, which can be charged with a gas-powered generator, address common complaints about range anxiety while still offering environment-friendly advantages over internal combustion engine vehicles. They're quickly gaining traction in China, meaning it may not be long before the rest of the world catches on.

"We have housing insulation, we have electric vehicles, we have renewables, we have batteries. Scaling them up is not trivial, but we don't need a magical new technology for the first 90% of this problem. We need to phase out fossil fuels, period."

◆ Pierre Friedlingstein, climate researcher at the University of Exeter

ANTI-COP

Before world leaders and diplomats made their way to Azerbaijan for the 2024 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP29), a less formal kind of climate event took place in Oaxaca, Mexico. Dubbed an "anti-COP," this challenger event was specifically for frontline activists who lack fancy titles but are united in their commitment to protect our planet. Participants—many of whom belong to Indigenous communities or marginalized groups—describe the event as both a response and an antidote to COP gatherings, which they say often prioritize money, power, and fossil fuel interests over human life. The anti-COP signals a much larger push for practical, inclusive, and human-centric climate solutions that protect the masses over the privileged few.

OUR COW ANGUS

MSCHF's latest stunt is challenging consumers to choose between buying a burger or sparing the life of a calf. The studio purchased a calf named Angus and is using its likeness to both educate and sway people away from beef. When visiting the website, customers can pre-order Angus as meat patties or handbags. The company then ships "Angus Tokens" that contain a scratchable code that can be used to cancel the preorder. If 51% of customers opt to cancel their order via the "Remorse Portal," MSCHF will save Angus and send him to a Home for Happy Cows. The project is pushing people to wrestle with the idea that every day, we trade the well-being of our planet for our own. MSCHF is calling society out on its own bluff—addressing the angel on our shoulder with its latent guilt of consuming meat, while also tempting the devil on our shoulder that might want to taste that burger drop or acquire one of three bespoke handbags.

HIGH-CARBON AD BAN

The Hague is betting that fewer ads for heavily polluting products and services will result in decreased demand. Last year, the Dutch city became the first in the world to ban public ads for fossil fuels and other high-carbon offerings like flights and cruises. The decision follows a [call by the UN chief](#) for governments and media to outlaw ads that normalize unsustainable behaviors, just as they have done with tobacco.

THOUGHTFUL TWEAKS

While major overhauls tend to get most of the attention, more companies are proving that small sustainability tweaks can be mighty too. Book publishing giant HarperCollins, for instance, is [saving paper](#) by making minor adjustments to fonts, page layouts, and even the ink used. Over the past three years, these subtle tweaks have saved 245.6 million pages, which is equivalent to 5,618 trees.

THE RECYCLING DREAM IS DEAD

Remember when recycling was thought to be the panacea for all our environmental problems? Well, that was on purpose. Recent research has revealed that plastic producers have known for decades that plastic recycling is too cumbersome and expensive to ever become a feasible waste management solution, yet they [promoted it to the public anyway](#). Now, people want justice to be served. [New polling](#) shows that a majority of American voters, including 54% of Republicans, [support](#) legal efforts to hold the sectors accountable. As more instances of deception are called out around everything from tree planting programs to carbon offsetting schemes, the skepticism will only intensify. For businesses that have made missteps in the past, coming clean now is the best bet at avoiding backlash down the line.

“What we’ve begun to see in a handful of cases is a quiet reframing of sustainability commitments to make them less ambitious — and in some ways, more realistic.”

◆ Sarah Kent, Sustainability Correspondent, Business of Fashion



WHAT'S NEXT

◆ GO HYBRID:

Rather than expecting people to radically change their habits all at once, offer in-between solutions that take it one step at a time.

◆ ADMIT MISTAKES:

Even the best-intentioned pursuits fail sometimes. Publicizing where climate initiatives went wrong not only helps others learn from your mistakes, it builds long-term trust.

◆ PRIORITIZE SIMPLE SOLUTIONS:

Is there a cheaper, easier, or more scalable way to achieve the same results? Have you explored all-natural solutions before turning to tech?

◀ NEXT TECHNOLOGIES: ▶

Bio-Materials
Lo-Fi Design
Modular Design
Community Commerce

FUTURE UTOPIAS

11



edges

With today's cities clearly not serving us or the planet, urban planners are dreaming up wildly different futures. These ambitious experiments will bring a mix of old and new ideas, and a fresh appreciation for greener, more resilient designs. Expect future-proof cities to redefine aspirational living.

ELLINIKON

In a bold vision for urban innovation, Greece is converting the former Ellinikon Airport into Europe's largest smart city, spanning a vast 6,200 acres. Slated for completion by 2037, the Ellinikon project aims to blend luxury with sustainability, featuring high-end residences, green spaces, and advanced energy systems. This future-focused city is projected to generate 80,000 jobs and attract a million tourists annually, infusing billions into Greece's economy. As nations race to build sustainable, forward-thinking urban spaces, Ellinikon stands as a monumental example of how future cities could combine technology, ecological resilience, and urban elegance to redefine modern living.



WELLNESS UTOPIAS

The race to build the world's healthiest city is on. Real estate developer Gurner Group has officially received approval to build a \$1.7 billion "wellness and anti-aging utopia" in Melbourne's waterside Docklands area. The project, called Elysium Fields, will come to life as a futuristic biosphere-like dome covering 27K square meters. In it will be about 1.7K homes, two high-end hotels, a plethora of green space, and a pedestrian-focused "path of life" for running, yoga, recovery, and meditation. Gurner says Elysium Fields will be akin to a "utopian community where residents can access the world's best reverse-aging and health treatments," including cryotherapy, IV infusions, full-body MRIs, infrared saunas, red light therapy, PEMF beds, and more.

Elysium Fields is far from the only wellness city on the horizon. Saudi Arabia's heavily hyped NEOM project will create a mega-city centered around integrated health; Bhutan is building a Mindfulness City that will be bigger than Singapore; and on the Honduran island of Roatán, a startup city called St. John's Bay is aiming to push the limits of human advancement. These next-gen environments are further evidence of our cultural obsession with achieving optimal health. And while they could certainly boost well-being for their residents, the significant funding required is raising bigger questions over who gets access and how much it will cost.



Today, more than half the world's population lives in cities—a figure expected to grow by 2.4 billion by 2050.

UN News

NETWORK STATES

What if startups replaced countries and you could choose your nationality just like how you choose your internet provider? That's the future being imagined by a group of tech entrepreneurs led by venture capitalist Balaji Srinivasan. This would all be made possible through "network states"—autonomous communities governed by corporate interests rather than elected officials, with cryptocurrencies facilitating the shift. One example includes "Praxis," a proposed project that promises to establish a blockchain-governed city-state in the Mediterranean by 2026. Currently, the community only exists online, leaving many skeptical about the feasibility of bringing it into the real world. Critics also warn this model could lead to corporate dictatorships that prioritize shareholder interests over public welfare. Whether or not these network states ever come to life, they serve as a fascinating reflection of the dissatisfaction with current methods of governance. Their core belief? Anything governments can do, tech companies can do better.

HOTEL IN NATURE

In Singapore, a 461-foot-tall "hotel in nature" was recently named the world's best new high-rise by the Council on Tall Buildings and Urban Habitat. It's called the Pan Pacific Orchard, and it's divided into unique terraces that are designed to resemble natural landscapes like forests, beaches, and gardens. The building features cascading greenery, open-air spaces, and rooftop solar panels that create a self-sustaining retreat amid Singapore's bustling Orchard district. With nearly three times the amount of green space that's required by local building codes, the Pan Pacific Orchard showcases how skyscrapers can act as "green lungs" within densely populated urban areas, combining urban luxury with environmental resilience.

TOYOTA'S LIVING LABORATORY

Four years after announcing plans to build a “smart city” near Mount Fuji in Japan, Toyota has announced that the city is planning to welcome its first residents. This futuristic 708,000-square-meter smart city is divided into zones for autonomous vehicles, active travel, and pedestrian-only areas, showcasing Toyota’s vision of sustainable urban mobility. It also features eco-friendly homes powered by hydrogen and equipped with solar panels, offering a real-world testing ground for innovations in AI, robotics, and energy. This venture highlights a growing trend of brands building entire cities where they can experiment freely, potentially paving the way for future brand-owned urban spaces that shape how we live, move, and connect in the years ahead.

SILVER CITIES

As the global population ages, developments like Sun City offer a glimpse into how future cities might better accommodate senior citizens. This sprawling 5,421-acre community in Georgetown, Texas, is designed specifically for residents over 55, complete with fitness centers, theaters, and dedicated spaces for popular activities like pickleball and dancing. It also emphasizes accessible home layouts and has nearby healthcare facilities to accommodate medical needs. With a median age of 73, Georgetown has become the [fastest-growing city in the U.S.](#), reflecting the economic and social benefits that can be gained by catering to active older adults.

Cities are at the heart of humanity’s future, but they are also ground zero for some of our biggest challenges: climate change, social inequality, and economic fragility.

—Anacláudia Rossbach, *TIME*



WHAT'S NEXT

PROTOTYPE AND TEST:

Use this as an opportunity to trial new technologies and ways of living. From smart appliances to disaster-proof building materials, the time to shape the next era of urban planning is now.

EXPAND THE ROLE OF YOUR PHYSICAL FOOTPRINT:

As citizens strive for a happier, more sustainable way of life, businesses should reevaluate which emerging needs their stores and office spaces can fulfill.

GO LOCAL:

Consider smaller store formats closer to places of residence—reducing the need for transportation.

REFURBISH FIRST:

Rather than automatically tearing down and rebuilding from scratch, businesses can save resources by giving existing builds a new lease on life.

NEXT TECHNOLOGIES:

AI Agents
Bio-Materials
Connected Objects
Modular Design
Worldbuilding

GAP COLLAPSE

12

The fight against inequality is growing more nuanced. No longer just a wealth gap—the climate gap, health gap, education gap, and digital divide are exposing the very real consequences of rising inequality. In the race to rebalance the scales, unlocking access is the next big market opportunity.

edges



EXTREME HEAT WIDENS THE EDUCATION GAP

In April and May of last year, more than 40 million students across parts of Asia and North Africa were shut out of classrooms due to extreme heat—pointing to a worrisome future where climate change deepens existing educational divides. In Bangladesh, for example, some schools were closed for three to four weeks due to weather, compared to about six days the year before. Looking ahead, the forecast isn't any cooler. With climate change fueling more frequent and intense heat waves, the pressure on education systems is only set to rise. But there's hope on the horizon. By investing in climate-resilient infrastructure and implementing adaptive educational strategies like flexible scheduling, we can begin to close the learning gap before things heat up even more.

CUTTING TIES

California has banned legacy preferences at private universities, marking a significant step toward making college admissions more equitable and reflective of merit. With affirmative action struck down nationally, removing legacy preferences demonstrates a commitment to equity, balancing the loss of race-conscious admissions policies. Its ripple effects could reshape admissions practices nationwide, increasing inclusion, challenging privilege, and reinforcing the role of higher education in fostering social mobility.

FAVELAS 20

Before world leaders gathered at G20, a premier global forum for discussing economic issues, representatives from Brazil's low-income communities gathered in Rio as part of a separate initiative called Favelas 20 (F20). Organized by local leaders and organizations, F20 seeks to amplify the voices of favela residents in international policy debates, ensuring that their unique challenges and solutions are represented. The launch event served as a platform for community representatives to discuss and advocate for policies addressing social, environmental, and economic inequalities among historically marginalized communities. While global summits are typically attended by the privileged and powerful, F20 is giving the poorest members of society a voice through direct engagement.

WEALTH-FLAUNTING BAN

China is cracking down on wealth-flaunting influencers. In May of last year, Weibo said it was removing “undesirable value-orientated content”, including over 1,100 posts “showing off wealth and worshiping money.” Social media giants Douyin and Xiaohongshu shared similar updates. Instead of posting luxury cars and extravagant mansions, the platforms encouraged users to share more truthful and positive content. It's all part of the Chinese authorities' nationwide campaign to “purify the internet cultural environment,” which began back in 2016. Unfortunately, however, removing the posts doesn't make the growing divide between rich and poor disappear. Data released from China's National Bureau of Statistics showed the 2023 income gap in Beijing has reached its greatest value since data collection began in 1985—making what happens offline much more critical than what's portrayed online.

CITY-RUN GROCERY STORE

The recent closure of several major grocery chains in Chicago has left low-income communities with limited access to fresh food. The city is now looking to fill this gap with a city-run grocery store, which would make Chicago the first major U.S. city to do so. While conventional grocery stores are beholden to shareholder demands and must be profitable to stay afloat, a community-run store would be immune to these financial pressures as success would be measured by resident welfare instead of sales. Similar to other public utilities, this approach aims to provide essential services in lieu of private businesses, ensuring all residents have access to fresh food, regardless of income.



BABYSITTING VOUCHERS

Brussels has introduced a [free babysitting service](#) to support the growing number of single-parent families, which now represents one-third of households in the area. The service provides up to 20 hours of free babysitting annually to help ease the social and economic strain on parents. Combined with other support measures, such as free schooling, reduced holiday activities, and tutoring centers, the program demonstrates a strong commitment to addressing the unique challenges that single-parent families face, recognizing that their well-being is key to a thriving community.



ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH ASSESSMENTS

As extreme weather events become more frequent, more children are left vulnerable to the effects of heat and cold. More frequent wildfires, for instance, can result in more children growing up with asthma, while less biodiversity can lead to more allergies. In response, leading pediatrician Dr. Ahdoot is [advocating](#) for environmental health assessments to be integrated into regular healthcare practices at no added cost. With the poorest communities most vulnerable to the negative health effects of climate change, tackling these issues proactively will be key to preventing even worse disparities down the line.



WHAT'S NEXT

UNLOCK ACCESS TO THE ESSENTIALS:

Health, food, education, finance, energy, and telecom brands, listen up. As inequality worsens, businesses will increasingly be expected to make up for gaps in government services.

THINK BEYOND ONE-TIME AID:

What kind of tools and resources will continue to provide and protect for the long term?

OPEN-SOURCE GENEROSITY:

In addition to spreading physical resources, businesses can spread intel and ideas in order to solve shared problems.

NEXT TECHNOLOGIES:

AI Agents
Assistive Robotics
Decentralized Social
Lo-Fi Design

GENDER RULES



12

Our gender no longer defines us—and we don't want it to. From work to family dynamics, we're unraveling the roles that gender boxed us into and reclaiming masculine and feminine traits on our own terms. As we move past male/female stereotypes, we'll lean into new identity markers that transcend our physical sex.

edges

TANALAND

In [Tanaland](#), the flag is pink, the motto is “Liberty, Equality, Tenacity,” and the number-one rule is that no men are allowed. This fictional country was founded by French women on social media who are fed up with misogyny. It all started with an insult, “tana,” a term that was popularized by rapper Niska and comes from the Spanish word “putana,” which means “whore” in French. Now, women who have ever been called a “tana” are packing their imaginary bags and relocating to Tanaland. According to the number of #Tanaland videos on TikTok and Instagram, the country has already attracted several million female inhabitants. While it may have started as a joke, Tanaland has evolved into a very real symbol of sisterly resistance against ingrained prejudice. For women, it’s a creative way to reclaim a derogatory term and regain a sense of control.



MANNING UP

What does it mean to “be a man” in 2025? While much has been said about where old-school definitions of manliness went wrong, far less has been done to recreate a more positive model for men today. And with male loneliness skyrocketing across the globe, calls for a more new approach are becoming increasingly urgent. One such solution comes in the form of retreats like [EVRYMAN](#) and [Junto](#), where men from all walks of life come together to unlearn stoicism and embrace vulnerability. Over in Australia, authorities are looking to intervene even earlier on. Through a newly launched \$23 million [three-year program](#), the government will offer trauma-informed support services, including counseling and youth mentoring, for 12 to 18-year-old boys who’ve experienced family and domestic violence.

→ For more, watch Backslash’s episode of [Life of the Edge: Manning Up](#)

DUAL SURNAMES

Japan is the only nation in the world where married couples must still use the same surname—a rule that has been in place for over a century in an effort to preserve family unity. But with the recent appointment of Shigeru Ishiba as Prime Minister, that could soon be changing. Ishiba voiced [his support](#) for changing the law in his election run, demonstrating alignment with the two-thirds of the public who agreed. The issue is currently being reviewed by the U.N. Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, meaning change could be coming soon. Besides representing a win for gender equality, changing the law also has a more practical purpose. One [study](#) found that everyone in Japan will have the same surname by 2531 if dual surnames are not allowed.

TOO FAR? OR NOT FAR ENOUGH?

According to a recent [global survey](#) from Ipsos and the Global Institute for Women’s Leadership at King’s College London, more than half of people (54%) think that when it comes to giving women equal rights with men, things have gone far enough. Globally, 48% of people also agree with the statement: “we have gone so far in promoting women’s equality that we are discriminating against men.” This research underscores just how complicated—and polarizing—matters of gender have become. Despite the sentiment, the reality is that we have yet to achieve a level playing field. The gender pay gap sits at 20% worldwide, and women still enjoy less than two-thirds of the legal rights available to men, not to mention the ongoing crisis of gender-based violence and daily discrimination. Looking ahead, bridging this gap between perception and reality will require a mutually respectful, empathetic, and nuanced dialogue. One that empowers women without tearing down men, and that puts our shared humanity before our different genders.



LGBTQIA+ CENSUS COUNT

In a significant step toward inclusivity, Australia is introducing a [new census topic](#) in 2026 that includes questions on gender identity and sexual orientation. This addition follows [public outcry](#) over the initial decision to exclude these questions, and reflects a commitment to fully representing LGBTQ+ Australians with more accurate data on diverse gender identities. The move also coincides with the launch of *The Unsaid Says A Lot* campaign—an Australian-first initiative in Victoria which highlights the often-overlooked discrimination faced by trans and gender-diverse communities. The campaign uses everyday scenarios to illustrate the power of non-verbal cues and gestures, encouraging audiences to recognize the impact of allyship.

WOMEN IN RAMPAGE

The “toughest” sports are finally welcoming in women. At last year’s Red Bull Rampage, considered the biggest and gnarliest mountain-bike competition in the world, women were [allowed to compete](#) for the first time since the event began in 2001. “It’s 2024,” said Canadian mountain biker Georgia Astle. “And the stigma of girls doing the most extreme sports is a thing of the past.” Parallels can also be found in [surfing](#), where the best female surfers are now competing alongside men on the world’s most dangerous waves, and at the high school level, where girls’ wrestling has emerged as the [fastest-growing](#) high school sport in the U.S.

RELIGIOUS DIVIDES

For the first time in modern American history, young men are now more likely to identify as religious than their female peers. According to new research from the Survey Center on American Life, almost 40% of Gen Z women in the U.S. now describe themselves as religiously unaffiliated, compared with 34% of men.

In every other age group, men were more likely to be unaffiliated. Though young women are still spiritual and seeking, their coming of age during the #MeToo movement and, more recently, the overturning of Roe v. Wade, is compelling them to ask bigger questions about gender-based abuse and women's rights. At the same time, several Christian institutions continue to promote rigid gender roles that stand in sharp contrast to the modern feminist movement, as seen with two-thirds of women ages 18 to 29 saying that "most churches and religious congregations" do not treat men and women equally. This gender divide has implications not just for religion, but also for the future of family life and American politics.

THE ORDINARY DAD

While there are plenty of support groups for new moms, ones for new dads are harder to come by—even as the number of stay-at-home fathers continues to rise. In Singapore, a group called *The Ordinary Dad* is aiming to fill the gap in community support. The group helps stay-at-home dads connect, openly share their challenges, and redefine fatherhood. The community's growth reflects a broader movement toward diverse family dynamics, where caregiving roles are defined by choice rather than by gender.

Over 50% of Gen Z feel gender does not define roles, and 43% say media content has helped drive their acceptance of others' gender identities and sexualities.

SEEHER and Horowitz Research,
["Passing the Gender Equality Vibe Check with Gen Z"](#)



WHAT'S NEXT

CHECK YOURSELF:

Are you categorizing products "for men" or "for women" in a way that's limiting? Is your branding or packaging reinforcing outdated gender ideals?

BREAK THE BIAS:

Host experiences that cross gender lines and prove stereotypes wrong. A lived experience can be more powerful than a digital message.

SHOW THE FULL SPECTRUM:

Rather than reinforcing extremes, show how someone can flex a range of both masculine and feminine traits.

NEXT TECHNOLOGIES:

Avatar Identities
Third Place Gaming

HEALTH HEDONISM

13

A once-sterile healthcare industry is taking cues from the pleasurable parts of wellness, ushering in a more holistic and hyper-personalized approach. As wellness becomes both a lifestyle and a belief system, everyday rituals will get a self-care makeover. Who says the journey to better health can't be enjoyable?

edges



WELLNESS BACHELORETTE PARTIES

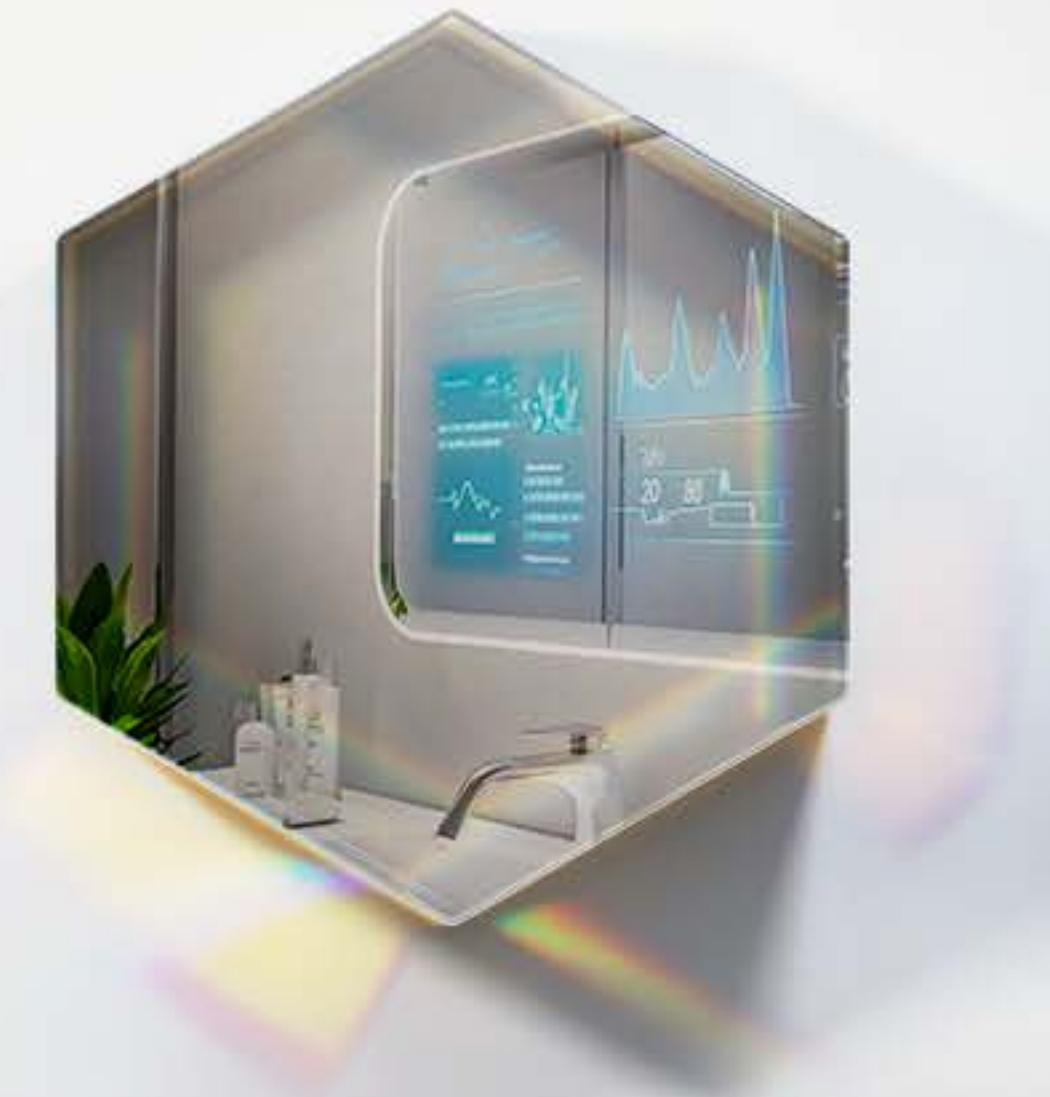
Bachelorette parties—once marked by boozy nights out—are beginning to look much more tame. Several wellness spa managers across the U.S. say they've seen an increase in bachelorette party bookings in the past year, and three out of five people attending bachelor and bachelorette parties chose "a tranquil wellness retreat" when asked about their location preferences in a recent survey. These wellness-inspired "parties" often include hiking, yoga, massages, spiritual ceremonies, and healthy farm-to-table-style menus. Even gift bags are now being stuffed with supplements and natural skincare products instead of hangover essentials. All of this speaks to wellness becoming increasingly aspirational. While young people once used big milestones as an excuse to get wild, they're now using it as a chance to unwind and indulge in some self-care.

MEDSPA BATHROOMS

Your future home bathroom might function more like a high-end medspa, with brands like Withings, Kohler, and BBalance transforming everyday fixtures into proactive health tools. French company Withings sells \$500 pods that sit inside toilet bowls and detect vitamin levels, glucose levels and ovulation timing; Kohler offers smart mirrors that identify potential skin conditions and suggest tailored skincare routines; and BBalance's smart bath mats can measure your weight and body composition, and even detect posture and balance to predict risk of neurodegenerative disease by using thousands of sensors to assess how a user stands and walks. This trend not only empowers individuals to take control of their wellness at home, but also signals a broader shift toward preventive healthcare, transforming everyday spaces into dynamic centers for self-optimization.

KINDERSPITAL

Sterile, stark white hospitals are becoming more like inviting retreats. Zurich's new "Kinderspital" embodies this shift, reimagining the children's hospital as a vibrant, kid-centric space focused on joy and comfort. It features chalet-style "cottages," interactive walls and playful nooks, therapeutic light installations, and lots of greenery—demonstrating how thoughtful design can lift spirits and play a role in the healing process. The hospital balances style and functionality, creating a warm, approachable environment at no extra cost. Hospitals around the world would do well to learn from the Kinderspital approach.



IN WELLNESS WE TRUST

With church pews sitting empty and workout studios more packed than ever, a growing number of faith-based organizations are taking cues from wellness. One such church is "The Well" in NYC, where Sunday sermons are followed by 10-minute meditation and prayer teams are accompanied by an in-house health coach. Another example is F3 (faith, fitness, fellowship)—a fast-growing network of free men's workouts that combine outdoor exercise with religious support. If you search online, you'll also find plenty of offerings for Ramadan bootcamps, Jewish Sabbath service hikes, Christian Pilates classes, Muslim fitness YouTube channels, and more. This merging of faith and wellness comes as nearly all religions continue to see declines in attendance. For many, wellness offers a similar sense of community, wisdom, and guidance that has long been promised by religion—hence why it's been said that wellness has become a kind of new age faith.

IN-FLIGHT UPGRADES

Flights—notorious for taking a harsh toll on the body—are getting a much-needed wellness upgrade. Qantas' A350 now includes a Wellbeing Zone where travelers across all classes can move, stretch, and enjoy healthy refreshments. Similarly, TUI Airways teamed up with HelloFresh to offer a "Meals Against Jet Lag" program complete with pre-flight nutrition plans specifically designed to help travelers adjust to new time zones. With more health-conscious amenities like these in place, travelers will be able to arrive at their destination feeling less fatigued and ready to make the most of their trip.

SUPER GYMS

The high-end gyms that we know today are evolving into massive, multifunctional spaces that feature hotel rooms, co-working spaces, child care facilities, social amenities and more. Chelsea Piers in New York, for example, features a sports and entertainment complex along with a co-working space that overlooks the Hudson River. Meanwhile, another gym called Life Time poses as a "country club" version of a health club—offering private offices and desks with cafes, bars, and of course, pickleball courts. These new supergyms are on the rise thanks to the growing number of retail spaces that have been left empty by the closure of department stores and offices. While shopping centers once served as the primary social hubs, fitness and wellness destinations are now taking on that role.



HEALTHWEAR

Biotech company Clothing 2.0 is redefining self-care with its “HealthWear” clothing line. The concept involves garments infused with vitamins and over-the-counter medications that deliver benefits directly through the skin. The company uses a patented technology to embed ingredients like menthol for pain relief or salicylic acid for skincare into fibers, which become activated by body heat and moisture. With each piece machine-washable up to 15 times, HealthWear offers a new alternative to creams and patches, making wellness as easy as getting dressed.

ELEVATED MENOPAUSE CARE

Hollywood actress Naomi Watts is tackling the menopause taboo head-on with Stripes Beauty, her science-backed wellness brand that offers “menopause solutions from scalp to vag.” These products include vaginal hydration gel, facial moisturizers, and supplements to fight brain fog. Two years after launching, Stripes was recently acquired by L Catterton, the consumer-facing private equity firm cofounded by LVMH. This acquisition by a luxury firm marks a significant shift from the days when menopause products were hidden at the back of a drugstore. With Stripes, Watts aims to break the stigma by creating elevated products that make women feel cared for. “There’s just this idea that menopause makes women irrelevant,” says Whitney Casey, a partner at L Catterton. “But the products you use during this time can be beautiful and luxurious.”



Approximately 20% of consumers in the U.K. and the U.S. and 30% in China look for personalized wellness products and services that use biometric data to provide recommendations.

McKinsey Future of Wellness Survey

WHAT'S NEXT

UNLOCK PRECISION:

Pair wearables with generative AI to provide greater customization, like personalized workout plans based on someone’s fitness data.

AVOID ELITISM:

To shed its exclusionary reputation, health and wellness brands will need to unlock affordable forms of self-care for the masses.

PROVIDE PROOF:

When everything is being sold as “wellness,” the word can quickly lose its meaning. Brands can gain credibility by partnering with medical professionals and backing up their claims with clear scientific evidence.

NEXT TECHNOLOGIES:

AI Agents
Assistive Robotics
Connected Objects
Neural Control

HELICOPTER TECH



15

Governments and brands are monitoring our every move. Whether via smart devices in our homes or cameras on street corners, surveillance is being normalized both with and without our consent. But while 24/7 tracking is becoming the price of admission into modern society, the fight for privacy isn't over just yet.

edges

I-XRAY

Two Harvard students are demonstrating just how dangerous smart glasses could be when put in the wrong hands. The students created a project named I-XRAY for Meta's Ray-Ban smart glasses, which uses the built-in cameras to run facial recognition software through an accompanying app. When walking past strangers on the street, the glasses were able to immediately display a person's name and cross-reference websites to find their address, LinkedIn profile, and other personal details on the spot. While the glasses do have a privacy light that glows when the camera is active, it's quite difficult to notice in-person, meaning people can easily be recorded without their knowledge. With smart glasses still in their early stages, this project is calling for proper protections to be put in place before things get out of hand.



PRIVACY-PRESERVING CAMERAS

Australian researchers may have cracked the code to protecting privacy in smart home devices: a groundbreaking camera that never captures full images. The camera is designed for devices like robot vacuums, delivery drones, and smart fridges. Unlike traditional systems, which process detailed images that can be hacked or leaked, this innovation collects only the essential data—such as light patterns or object shapes—needed to complete tasks. This development follows high-profile breaches, including a 2022 incident where a robot vacuum captured and leaked an image of a woman in her bathroom. With growing global privacy concerns and regulations like the EU's AI Act, this design could revolutionize the Internet of Things as we know it. The research team is now seeking industry partners to bring the technology to market within the next few years.

STRAVA LEAKS

A recent investigation from French newspaper *Le Monde* found that world leaders' locations can be inadvertently exposed by their bodyguards through Strava fitness data. By analyzing the public activity logs of security teams, *Le Monde* traced the whereabouts of leaders like Emmanuel Macron, Donald Trump, Joe Biden, and more. In several cases, bodyguards' jogging routes near hotels and secret meeting sites were easy to find, potentially compromising the safety of the people they're meant to protect. This exposure highlights how apps and wearables are constantly tracking and sharing our personal information—bringing forth a major conversation about the need for vigilance over our digital footprints.

MICROSOFT RECALL

Microsoft's new "Recall" feature for Windows 11 is sparking serious privacy concerns. The feature continuously captures snapshots of a user's screen, logging every activity, app, and site visited. The intent is for users to ask the built-in AI questions based on this usage—such as when a file was last opened. The feature was originally set to launch in mid-2024, but was delayed after security researchers flagged vulnerabilities, including a lack of encryption that makes the data potentially accessible to malware. Microsoft has since restructured Recall as an opt-in feature with encryption and Windows Hello authentication, but it still remains controversial. The feature showcases yet another way users can be tracked through their devices, reinforcing growing concerns about just how much surveillance is embedded in our digital lives.

SURVEILLANCE-FREE DAYCARE

Hanau has become the first German city to forbid wearables and tracking tech in kindergartens. As of December 2024, use of GPS trackers, smartwatches, and phones for children have been banned in all daycare centers. The mayor justified the ban by pointing out that constant monitoring contradicts the goal of fostering children's autonomy and independence. "Every child has the right to self-determination and to explore their environment freely and without constant surveillance," he said. This decision reflects a growing tension around parental control in a hyper-connected age. By limiting surveillance, Hanau advocates for trust in human relationships and the preservation of spaces where children can grow independently, underscoring a broader cultural push against excessive monitoring among parents.



"I have never seen a broader and more heterogeneous coalition looking at the deep dangers of pooling surveillance data on every person on earth and putting it in the hands of a few companies. No one is championing those things, no one is pretending this is okay. And so that is the opportunity and the invitation for change."

■ Meredith Whittaker, President of the Signal Foundation

FACIAL RECOGNITION ROLBACKS

In response to rising privacy concerns, China has ordered all hotels to stop using facial recognition technology to confirm guest identities. While facial recognition is still common in many public areas across China, from crosswalks to public restrooms, citizens are increasingly uneasy about its reach into private spaces. This rollback comes as other major corporations make similar efforts in favor of privacy—signaling a larger move away from normalized surveillance. Airbnb banned indoor security cameras last year, for instance, while Amazon has decided to cut its Just Walk Out technology in response to customer feedback.



INSURANCE SPIES

Insurance companies are increasingly leveraging surveillance technology to monitor and assess risk, using aerial images of homes and data from connected cars in order to justify higher premiums or even dropping “risky” clients. Companies now deploy drones, satellite imagery, and vehicle tracking through partnerships with data brokers like LexisNexis, which generates risk profiles based on driving habits and even home conditions. These practices are often unknown to consumers and can lead to premium hikes or policy non-renewals based on AI-driven assessments. This expansion of monitoring highlights how digital footprints, from driving habits to home maintenance, are becoming accessible to insurers worldwide, raising pressing questions around transparency and privacy in an era of near-constant surveillance.

WHAT'S NEXT

○ PRACTICE RADICAL TRANSPARENCY:

Don’t collect or leverage people’s personal information in ways that you wouldn’t be proud to advertise.

○ GIVE OPTIONS:

While some people may choose to opt in to tracking in exchange for convenience or personalization, others won’t be so willing. Present customers with clear choices, or be prepared for them to go elsewhere.

◀ NEXT TECHNOLOGIES: ▶

AI Agents
Ambient Interfaces
Connected Objects
Neural Control

INCLUSIVE BY DESIGN



16

Inclusivity isn't a checkbox, it's a form of design thinking. As expectations around inclusivity skyrocket, savvy consumers will sniff out tokenism and expose empty promises. Genuine inclusion requires an entirely new blueprint—building laws, spaces, products, and experiences to be accessible from the bottom up.

edges

FEEL THE MUSIC

Music festivals and events are becoming increasingly accessible for those who are deaf or hard of hearing. In Shanghai, the Transparent Afternoon collective hosts events specifically designed for the deaf community, where attendees can experience performances by a deaf rapper in sign language, complemented by stunning visuals and bass-heavy music that fills the room with vibrations. Another inclusive solution is being deployed at Mexico's Pa'l Norte Sustentable festival, where deaf attendees are given vibrating vests that allow them to collectively feel the rhythm of the music. These events go beyond just providing LSM interpreters—they're taking extra steps to bring the music experience closer to what hearing attendees enjoy.

PHOENIX RISING

Spain's Fenix FC soccer team is making history as the first all-transgender group on the field. Drawing inspiration from the mythical phoenix, the team's name symbolizes a rebirth of inclusivity and participation in sports. This group's inception was born out of Hugo Martinez, who himself has faced discrimination as he underwent his transition. While debates still continue in the world of sports over trans athletes, the official standing of Fenix FC proves that the needle is being pushed toward a more inclusive and diverse future where athletes can show up and play without prejudice.

Companies in the top quartile of racial inclusion are 39% more likely to perform better than those in the bottom quartile.

McKinsey, Diversity Matters Even More, 2023



INCLUSIVE PLAY

Mattel is continuing its mission to make play more inclusive for kids of all abilities. The toy giant is enhancing games like Uno and Blokus with symbols and patterns for colorblind accessibility, part of its goal to make 80% of its portfolio colorblind accessible by 2025. Additionally, Mattel's Braille Hot Wheels cars, co-designed with the National Federation of the Blind, provide tactile details for visually impaired children, and the Flippin' Fast die-cast car, made with the Autistic Self Advocacy Network, offers sensory-friendly play for children on the autism spectrum. While other companies experiment with one-off inclusive innovations, Mattel is committed to making inclusive design a company standard.

SENIOR-FRIENDLY NEIGHBORHOODS

Singapore's Silver Upgrading Program (SUP) is redesigning neighborhoods to better meet the needs of seniors. The program will add features like therapeutic gardens, fitness trails, and anti-slip pathways, thus increasing accessibility and reducing reliance on caretakers. The project will roll out from 2025 to 2029, and is supported by the Age Well SG initiative, which is backed by \$600 million in funding. It aims to foster intergenerational connections by encouraging residents to share ideas for inclusive spaces, such as three-generation playgrounds that support family bonding and make neighborhoods more welcoming for all. Efforts like SUP signal a shift toward inclusive urban design, setting a new standard for senior-friendly cities that support independence while fostering deeper community connections.

FOSTERING AUTISTIC TALENT

Japanese animation studio Shake Hands is embracing neurodiversity by creating a supportive environment for employees with autism and ADHD. With features like partitioned desks for focus, flexible work hours, and digital communication, the studio allows individuals to work in ways that fit their unique needs. This tailored approach empowers neurodivergent talent to thrive in the animation industry, proving that thoughtfully designed environments can boost creativity and productivity—benefiting both individuals and the industry.

Research from Rokk Solutions found that about half of both U.S. Democrats and Republicans believed inclusion and impact programs “were for show” or failed to actually increase inclusion, highlighting the need for impact-driven narratives.

◆ [Rokk Solutions, 2024](#)

SOCCER EMBRACES RAMADAN

The world of professional soccer is becoming more welcoming to Muslim players who fast during Ramadan. In the past, some players have gone on record to say they've faked injuries or quietly consumed food and drink in order to keep up with their peers. But now, soccer leagues in Europe are taking steps toward inclusion. This means Muslim players in Europe now benefit from fast-friendly practice schedules, bespoke nutrition plans before and during the month long holiday, and even league-approved stoppages in play that let them break their fasts on the field during matches.



WHAT'S NEXT

◆ START SMALL:

Address practical and functional accessibility issues first. To do so, work hand-in-hand with the community you're designing for to identify the problems and prototype solutions.

◆ DESIGN FOR ONE, SCALE TO MANY:

Unlock innovation by optimizing places, products, services, and communications for specific users with specific needs.

◆ BE CONSISTENT:

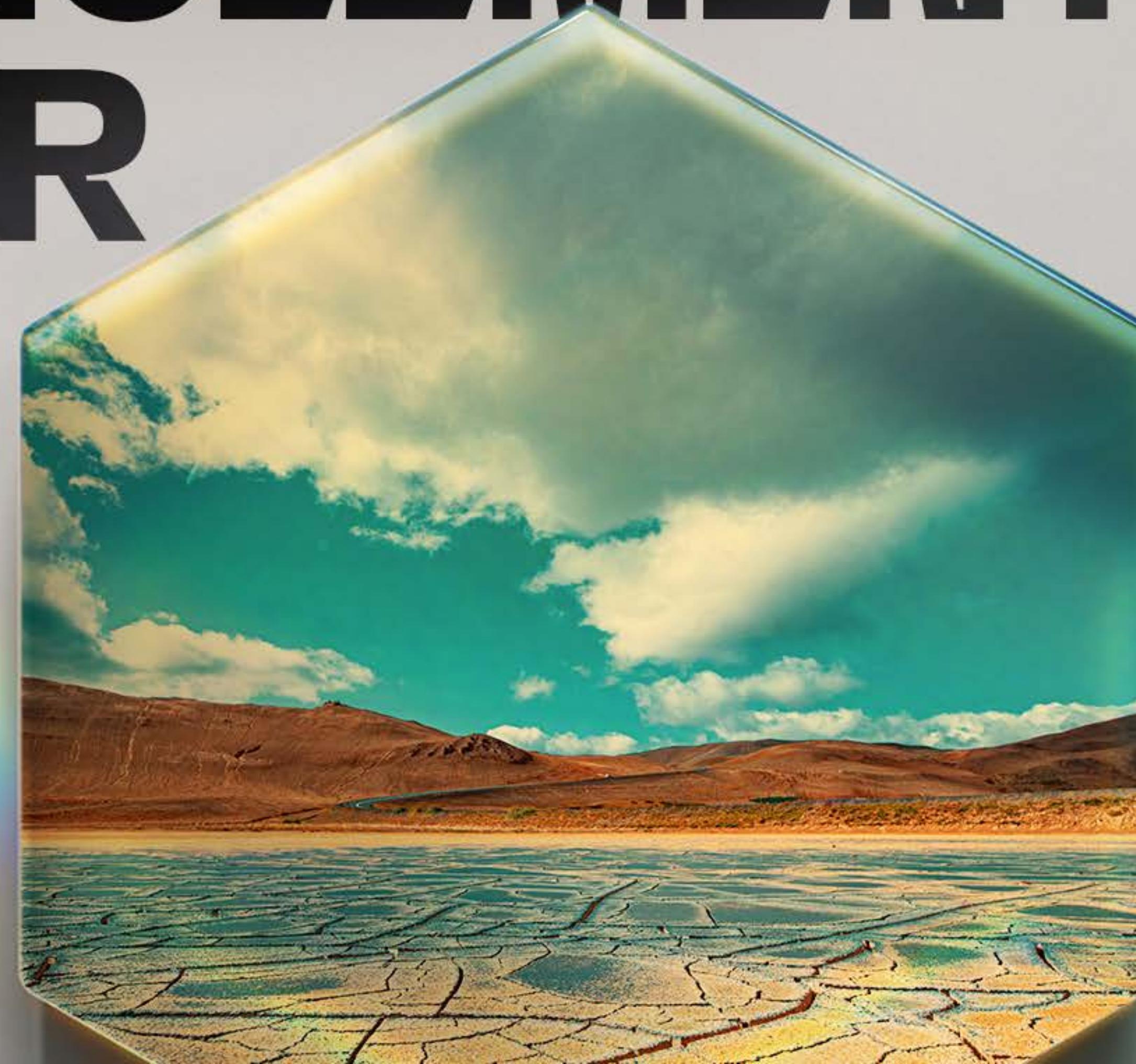
Instead of changing their inclusion and impact stance with the political winds, companies would be wise to stick to long-term programs and policies that reflect their core values.

◀ NEXT TECHNOLOGIES: ▶

Assistive Robotics
Modular Design
Tactile Haptics
Untethered Audio

INCLEMENT ARMOR

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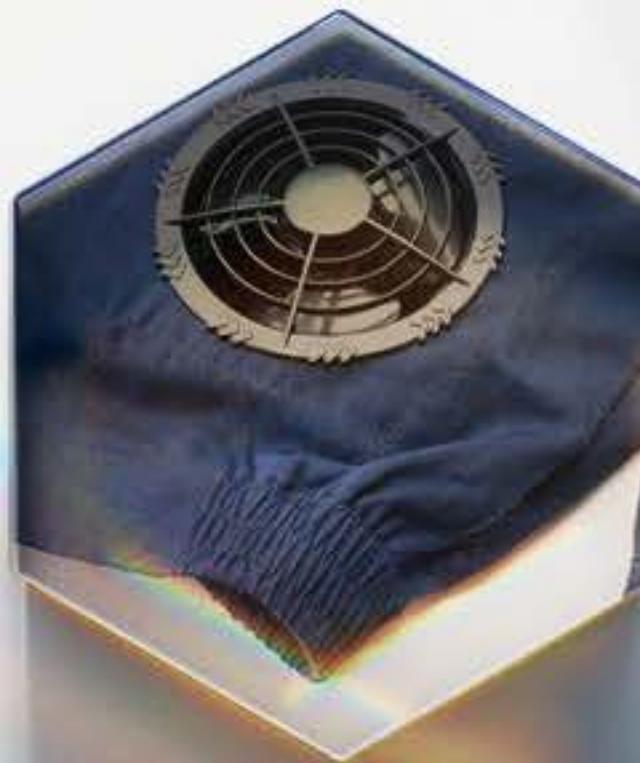


Extreme weather is no longer extreme—it's our new normal. As we acclimate to a future of record-breaking temperatures and frequent natural disasters, the need for protections will reshape everything from what we wear to how we work. Weather-proof armor is becoming an essential shield from a world that feels out of our control.

edges

AIR-CONDITIONED CLOTHING

At Paris Fashion Week this season, something unfamiliar hit the runway: a line of inflatable nylon clothes powered by electric fans. The collection, appropriately named "Wind," came from Japan-based ANREALAGE in collaboration with air-conditioned workwear manufacturer Kuchofuku. Besides being incredibly eye-catching, the avant-garde outfits served a larger, more practical purpose: to keep wearers cool in a changing climate. This kind of air-conditioned garb isn't entirely new. In fact, it's been popular among Japan's blue-collar workers for several years, serving as a necessary solution to the scorching summer months. But as the planet gets even hotter, ANREALAGE's collection is the latest sign that cooling clothes are moving outside of the workwear category and into everyday fashion.



WEATHERED REAL ESTATE

Zillow has introduced a new feature that displays climate risk information on property listings—showing the potential for floods, wildfires, extreme heat, high winds, and air quality, with each area color-coded by severity. According to a recent Zillow survey, over 80% of buyers take climate risks into account when purchasing a home, an unsurprising statistic given the rising frequency of natural disasters worldwide. For instance, in August 2024, Zillow found that 16.7% of new listings carried a high wildfire risk, while 12.8% faced major flooding risks. As climate change continues to impact property values and insurance costs, this kind of transparency will be essential to making informed purchase decisions.

NOCTURNAL LIVING

Climate change is forcing a shift in daily schedules. Some schools in India are revising class schedules to start earlier in the morning, dinner reservations and sporting events are moving to later in the evening, and midnight ocean dips are becoming an increasingly popular way to cool down. Though this is already standard in hotter regions, avoiding afternoon activities could end up becoming the global norm as temperatures continue to climb. For brands, this serves as a push to rethink the timing of your offerings and offer solutions to help people beat the midday heat.

PREDICTING AIR POLLUTION

In Africa, up to 1.1 million premature deaths have been associated with air pollution. While Africa has taken steps to monitor pollution levels, the lack of accurate air quality monitoring systems has made it difficult to implement the right interventions at the right time. That's where modern technology can help. A team of researchers in Uganda has developed a pollution monitoring system called AirQo that predicts pollution patterns. AirQo deploys sensors on buildings and motorbike taxis throughout the country's capital, gathering live data on pollution levels across the city. This data is then accessed by policymakers and private organizations through cloud-based software, allowing them to come up with effective interventions such as health policies and clean-air campaigns. AirQo's solar-powered design also allows it to function in off-grid areas, addressing limitations in conventional air monitoring systems.

HURRICANE-READY HOMES

As extreme weather intensifies globally, hurricane-resistant homes are gaining popularity for their durability. These homes are typically shaped like rounded domes, allowing them to withstand high winds up to 190 miles-per-hour. One leading company in the space, Deltec, has constructed homes across more than 30 countries and says demand has increased in the last few years. Looking ahead, we can expect disaster-proof design principles to influence widespread housing standards, giving homeowners peace of mind in the face of unpredictable weather.



WORKER HEAT PROTECTIONS

More than 2.4 billion workers per year, representing 70% of the global workforce, are exposed to excessive heat during their work. This is even more extreme in Africa, where nearly 93% of the workforce is exposed to extreme heat, and on the Arabian Peninsula, where over 83% of workers are at risk. In response, The International Labor Organization has announced a new global campaign to expand policy exchanges and support research on best practices for protecting workers from heat stress. Some future changes might include mandatory breaks in shaded or air-conditioned areas, training people to look out for signs of heat stress in their coworkers, and most importantly, coming up with a contingency plan for the growing number of days when it will simply be too hot to work. → For more, watch Backslash's episode of [Life on the Edge: Worker Heat Protections](#).

BLUE-GREEN ROOFS

You may have heard of green roofs—a term to describe roofs that are either partially or completely covered in living plants—but what about [blue-green roofs](#)? Beyond just supporting plant life, blue-green roofs capture and manage rainwater for building use, such as flushing toilets and watering plants. They include layered infrastructure that can store and release water based on weather forecasts, helping to prevent urban flooding while providing cooling effects for buildings. This hybrid solution is being deployed in Amsterdam, where the city's Resilience Network of Smart Innovative Climate-Adaptive Rooftops (RESILIO) has already outfitted over 100,000 square feet of social housing with blue-green roofs. The practice is catching on globally as well, especially in drought-prone areas like southern Europe, as cities recognize the potential for blue-green roofs to transform stormwater management and reduce reliance on municipal water systems.



Nearly three in four of us will face extreme weather changes within the next two decades.

— CICERO Center for International Climate Research, 2024

WHAT'S NEXT

ADDRESS THE UNDERLYING PROBLEM:

While cooling clothes and warning systems offer an immediate fix, we can't overlook the root cause of extreme weather. Any companies offering band-aid solutions should also be prepared to address how they're tackling climate change for the long term.

CLOSE THE GAP:

Protection shouldn't be a privilege. Prioritize low-cost solutions that can be made available to the most at-risk groups first.

NEXT TECHNOLOGIES:

AI Agents
Assistive Robotics
Connected Objects
Lo-Fi Design

INTIMATE AI



18

AI is getting deeply personal. While we've come to accept that AI has the potential to solve humanity's biggest challenges, the next step is normalizing its role as a sidekick in our daily lives. Whether treated as a companion, teacher, or administrative assistant, new AI tools will free people from time-intensive tasks and elevate habitual actions into special moments.

edges

AI WORK CLONES

Imagine sending a digital clone to your afternoon meetings so you can head to the beach instead. That's the pitch from Zoom CEO Erin Yuan, who believes we're headed toward a future where every employee has an AI-powered avatar that can perform work tasks on their behalf. This includes reading and replying to emails, taking phone calls, managing projects, and even deciding which meetings it can attend for you. For this to be possible, everyone would need to have their own custom language learning model (LLM) that's trained on their personal data. In other words, these AI clones would be as unique as we are—mimicking our individual strengths and working styles. According to Yuan, this future is just five or six years away. He wants to make it clear, however, that in-person interaction isn't going anywhere. "If I stop by your office, let's say I give you a hug, you shake my hand, right? I think AI cannot replace that."

AI WASHING

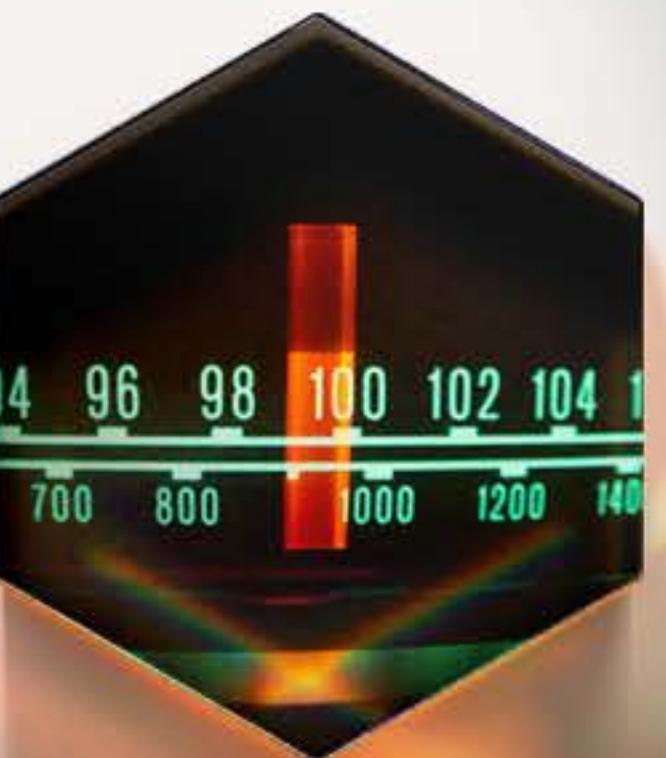
Attention, all brands: utilizing or re-skinning ChatGPT does not make your company on the cutting edge of AI advancement. Last year, the U.S. Securities and Exchange Committee fined two organizations for "AI washing," or falsely marketing their AI capabilities. More specifically, marketing agencies, ad-tech companies, and brands have been touting services as "AI-powered", when in reality they're just ChatGPT with a few extra capabilities built on top. Akin to greenwashing, brands should champion transparency around the use of AI by clearly breaking down how it's used and what its strengths and limitations are. Giving people a peek behind the curtain will be essential to building trust.

HYPER-PERSONALIZED HEALTH COACH

OpenAI and Thrive Global are teaming up to fund an AI health coach called Thrive AI Health. The chatbot will be designed to offer personalized health advice based on user-provided data and peer-reviewed science. By doing so, the bot can provide valuable information to individuals with limited access to health resources. For example, a single mother with a gluten-free child can ask the bot for quick meal ideas, while an immunocompromised person can ask the bot for lifestyle tips between doctor appointments. While there are some concerns about data privacy and the risk of misinformation, these AI coaches could fill a big gap in medical care for those who lack the time or money to see professionals regularly.

CHARACTER.AI LAWSUIT

A mother is suing Character.AI, a messaging platform that lets users interact with custom AI characters, claiming that the AI her son was engaging with contributed to his decision to take his own life. The son, Sewell Setzer III, became deeply attached to a chatbot that he named "Dany." Sewell was diagnosed with anxiety and disruptive mood dysregulation disorder, and relied on Dany for comfort—often engaging in lengthy and intimate conversations about mental health struggles. In many instances, the chatbot responded in ways that reinforced Sewell's emotional connection, even expressing affection and validating his distress. While Sewell's story is not typical of every young user of these apps, his experience of getting emotionally attached to a chatbot is becoming increasingly common. As the technology improves and becomes even more widespread, this case is raising serious concerns about the potential for vulnerable users to become dependent on AI instead of getting the offline help they need.



EMPATHIC VOICE INTERFACE

Imagine sharing your frustrations or joys with an AI that truly "gets you." In other words, it responds with empathy, adapts its tone to your emotions, and offers more than just robotic replies. Hume AI's new Empathic Voice Interface (EVI) does just that, enabling conversational AI to interpret and respond to users' emotional cues. By analyzing vocal tones and indicators like "determination" or "anxiety," the EVI provides a nuanced experience that feels deeply personalized to your unique emotions. This opens the door to more meaningful AI-human interactions, setting the stage for a future where AI isn't just a practical tool but a trusted companion. With this, however, comes much greater responsibilities around preventing unhealthy emotional attachment by putting proper boundaries in place.

RAIDIOf.YI

Rapper and entrepreneur Will.i.am is pioneering a new kind of media experience with an AI-powered interactive radio platform called RAIDIOf.YI. The platform allows users to have real-time conversations with AI hosts, who can answer questions and chat back and forth about topics like sports, politics, and pop culture. Stations are created using "mega prompts" filled with content, and users can personalize their listening experience based on their specific interests. The app also features location-based assistance and AI personas that reflect different cultures. As a next step, Will.i.am envisions partnerships with creators across the entertainment and media industries. Eventually, a similar interactive model could also be applied to learning for tutors, books for authors, or podcast segments—potentially marking the end of one-way entertainment.

GENERATIVE INTERFACES

Imagine if apps and websites automatically adapted to your unique needs. That's the future thanks to generative interfaces—a new class of digital experiences where the layout, functionality, and content are dynamically generated based on real-time user interactions. For example, imagine you're exploring the NASA app and reading about the discovery of water on another planet. If you want to know how far away this planet is, you simply long-press on the content and verbally ask, "Where is this?" The written answer then appears directly in your current article, informing without breaking your flow. The use cases are infinite, and can make everything from online shopping to vacation planning much more personalized and efficient. For brands, this presents a huge opportunity to reimagine rigid online experiences as fluid interactions that feel more like a two-way conversation.

AI-ENABLED TEXTBOOKS

Controversy has been brewing ever since South Korea announced plans to introduce AI-enabled digital textbooks. The textbooks will adapt to each individual student's learning speed and provide teachers with real-time performance data in a dashboard—which in theory could be more personalized than the current one-size-fits-all approach. However, this decision has been met with strong skepticism from parents who fear that adding more screen time will harm mental health and make it harder for kids to concentrate. From the introduction of hybrid learning via laptops, to remote learning, the education system has gone through several transformations over the last few years. Looking forward, the challenge will be striking the right balance between in-person guidance and tech-enabled personalization.



Deloitte predicts that in 2025, 25% of companies that use GenAI will launch agentic AI pilots or proofs of concept, growing to 50% in 2027.

Deloitte, State of Generative AI in the Enterprise

WHAT'S NEXT

GO DEEPER:

AI will allow brands to extend their role further into the product experience—suggesting different ways to enjoy it, personalize it, and repair it.

EXPLORE NEW WAYS TO STAND OUT:

What if your brand's most distinctive asset was its voice and personality?

CONSIDER TAKING AN ANTI-AI STANCE:

As AI is integrated into anything and everything, some people will inevitably crave a return to more human, manual, and offline experiences. Brands who counter the trend will serve as a refreshing escape from tech overload.

NEXT TECHNOLOGIES:

AI Agents
Assistive Robotics
Connected Objects
Generative AI

LAB-MADE WORLD



19

Food, gems, textiles: the future is being grown in a lab. While “all-natural” has long been positioned as the superior choice, our current environmental reality calls for a different approach. One that starts with science. As resources run out and supply chains fall under scrutiny, “lab-made” will go from sterile and apologetic to responsible and aspirational.

edges

LAB-GROWN STEM CELLS

Lab-grown blood stem cells could one day make cancer treatment safer and more accessible by reducing reliance on donor stem cells. This new method allows scientists to create stem cells from a patient's own blood or skin, which could prevent transplant rejection and solve supply issues.

When tested in mice, the lab-grown cells acted just like healthy human bone marrow. If this approach works in human trials, it could become a game-changer for treating cancers like leukemia and lymphoma, offering a steady and personalized source of cells for recovery.



LAB-MADE KIBBLE

In a European first, British startup Meatly has been granted approval to sell pet food made from lab-cultivated chicken cells. This development could play a significant role in addressing climate concerns, as cats and dogs consume an estimated 9% of livestock raised for meat globally. By turning to a lab-grown alternative, Meatly aims to offer a more sustainable way to meet pets' nutritional needs without the heavy environmental toll of traditional meat production. With lab-made proteins still facing mixed opinions for human diets, introducing it through pet food could help pave the way for broader acceptance, reshaping how we think about sustainable food options in everyday life.

HALAL CULTIVATED MEAT

Singapore's Islamic Council (MUIS) has officially ruled that lab-made meat can be considered halal as long as certain conditions are met. To pass the test, the meat cells must be sourced from animals that are permissible and the cell-culture medium must only contain halal ingredients. "Incorporating novel foods into our diets, especially those cultivated through environmentally sustainable methods, harmonizes with the fundamental Islamic principle of stewardship (Maqṣid al-Istikhlāf) over the Earth," reads MUIS's paper. MUIS's ruling will also encourage producers to seek religious certifications. With halal consumers representing 25% of the population, the seal of approval marks a significant step forward for the lab-made meat market.

"For many of us, meat carries memories. It's Thanksgiving turkey. Biryani for Eid. But we are now confronting nature's limits. There simply isn't enough land or water on Earth for the world's 8 billion people to eat meat like Americans. That reality is crashing against our love of flesh, and it's going to force us to reconsider our relationship to it once again."

◆ Somini Sengupta, The New York Times

ALTERNATIVE TEXTILES

Lab-grown textiles are transforming the fashion landscape, offering sustainable alternatives to popular materials like cotton, leather, and wool. As concerns over water usage, pesticides, and animal welfare grow, these science-driven innovations provide a path forward for eco-conscious fashion. This shift is exemplified by Burberry's stylish B Shield Scarf made with lab-grown Brewed Protein, as well as Galy's lab-grown cotton alternative, which uses 99% less water and 97% less land than traditional cotton. Similarly, UK-based 3DBT's lab-grown leather promises a consistent, cruelty-free material without the ecological toll of traditional tanning processes. But beyond just convincing consumers that these lab-made materials are as high quality as what they're used to, these companies face significant hurdles in scaling up production at an industrial scale. For now, these cultivated textiles remain a rare luxury rather than a widely available option.



LAB-MADE TESTICLES

Researchers have developed lab-grown testicle organoids from neonatal mouse cells, opening up promising new paths in reproductive health. These miniature, lab-grown organs mimic the intricate structure and function of natural testicles, offering a valuable model for studying reproductive disorders and exploring potential treatments.

By creating a system that may support both personalized treatments and fertility preservation, scientists are now closer to real-world health solutions that could significantly improve the lives of cancer patients, men facing infertility, and others impacted by reproductive challenges.



DE BEERS BACKTRACKS

While companies like Pandora are going all in on lab-grown gems, De Beers is going the opposite direction. The company first started selling lab-grown diamonds back in 2018, but recently announced that they will be halting production due to a significant drop in sales. The company is instead introducing a new line called "Origins" that it will promote by leaning into the unique attributes of natural diamonds, such as scarcity and decades of history. The hope is not to eliminate the competition from lab-grown diamonds, but rather to get consumers to think about the two differently. To even further differentiate them, De Beers is rolling out a verification instrument that can distinguish between mined and man-made diamonds, and plans to use blockchain to show buyers exactly where their stone came from. Despite De Beers' move, the lab-made jewelry market is experiencing solid growth among cost-conscious and eco-conscious consumers. The global market for man-made diamonds was worth \$13 billion in 2023, and is poised to reach \$22 billion by 2030.

CO2 FOODS

Companies are reimagining the future of food by turning one of the planet's greatest challenges—carbon dioxide—into a solution. Savor, a company backed by Bill Gates, is creating creamy butter directly from CO2, offering a rich, dairy-free alternative that mimics the texture and flavor of traditional butter while drastically reducing the environmental footprint of dairy production. Similarly, Finland's Solar Foods has launched Europe's first factory producing Solein, a protein made from air, water, and nutrients. This innovative ingredient is designed to enhance meat alternatives, pasta, and other everyday foods, requiring no farmland and emitting far fewer greenhouse gases. These breakthroughs in CO2-based foods could revolutionize the global food system by reducing the reliance on agriculture and conserving natural resources. The next big hurdle, however, will be making these high-tech foods accessible, affordable, and appealing to consumers worldwide.



WHAT'S NEXT

AUDIT YOUR MANUFACTURING PROCESS:

Is the creation of your product contributing to resource depletion? How might you reduce your impact with lab-made materials?

FIGHT SKEPTICISM WITH EDUCATION:

To scale up demand for lab-made alternatives, businesses will need to address any misconceptions head-on. Think public lab tours, full transparency into the production process, and endorsements from trusted third parties

NEXT TECHNOLOGIES:

Bio-Materials
Generative AI

LIQUID REALITY



20

It's the end of reality as we know it. From synthetic media to the rise of virtual everything, immersive technologies are ushering in a heightened era of on/offline blur. As the limits of our physical world are shattered, new possibilities for self-expression and deeper engagement abound.

edges

NAUSEA-FREE VR

The race to solve VR's motion sickness problem is on. One promising solution on the way is the [\\$800 Roto VR Explorer chair](#), which looks like an office chair and automatically rotates left and right to match the head turns of a user wearing a VR headset. So if you turn your head quickly, the chair will accelerate at the same speed and in the same direction to make the experience less disorienting. A competing device is the [Omni One VR treadmill](#) from Virtuix. After more than a decade of development, the treadmill will finally launch last year with a price tag of \$2,595. Rather than relying on a mechanical system, the 360° treadmill works passively by moving with the user's feet—allowing them to walk, run, crouch, kneel and jump freely in VR. Considering the vast majority (up to 70%) of people experience nausea and dizziness after just 15 minutes in VR, these devices could be the game changer that the market needs to truly take off.



CHINA'S AI HOSPITAL TOWN

At the world's first [AI hospital town](#) in China, patients are treated in a virtual world by AI-generated doctors. Tsinghua University researchers created the "Agent Hospital" to enable real doctors to treat virtual patients while also providing medical students with a simulated training environment. The AI doctors can treat 10,000 patients in just a few days, a task that would take human doctors at least two years. What's most impressive is that the system achieved an accuracy rate of 93%. But while the AI hospital offers a future model for affordable and efficient healthcare services, it likely won't ever be able to replace the care and compassion provided by living, breathing medical professionals.

ADIDAS'S \$20,000 VIRTUAL NECKLACE

Adidas is stepping into the future of fashion where digital wardrobes could be just as impressive as physical ones. The brand recently teamed up with Roblox creator WhoseTrade to debut a line of virtual gear, featuring a [\\$20,000 digital necklace](#) that sold out in minutes—marking the most expensive user-generated, limited-edition item ever sold on the channel. This venture goes beyond gaming—it's a bold move to connect with younger fans by merging iconic branding with modern avenues for self-expression. As digital fashion items become defining symbols of identity, brands are shaping a landscape where virtual and physical styles intertwine, allowing people to express themselves in ways previously limited to the real world.

POSTMORTEM DEEPFAKES

AI is being used to digitally resurrect deceased public figures, raising complex ethical questions in the process. In India, politicians are leveraging AI-generated ["soft fakes"](#) of late leaders to influence voters and endorse certain candidates, sparking debate over the morality of using someone's voice, image, and likeness without their consent. This practice, also seen globally in advertising, film, and music, brings up concerns about ownership and authenticity. While proponents view AI as a way to continue someone's legacy, critics emphasize cultural sensitivities around honoring the deceased and the potential for manipulating public opinion. As this practice becomes more common, it prompts crucial questions about who should control a person's image and legacy in our digital age.

FLOATING WORKSPACES

Extended reality is revolutionizing how we interact with digital workspaces, with products like Sightful's [Spacetop G1](#), Apple's [Vision Pro](#), and Meta's [Quest Pro](#) leading the way. Instead of a traditional laptop screen, Spacetop G1 projects multiple floating screens up to 100 inches wide through AR glasses, creating an expansive virtual workspace wherever the user happens to be. Likewise, Apple Vision Pro and Meta Quest Pro headsets are merging physical and virtual spaces, offering immersive environments that make it possible to work, create, and connect without physical screens. These devices embody a future where expansive digital workspaces are accessible anywhere, combining spatial computing with on-demand adaptability—no bulky monitors or fixed setups needed.



SURFACE HAPTICS

Imagine being able to feel the roughness of sand or the softness of a sweater through your smartphone. That's the goal of Northwestern University engineers who say they've built a "touchscreen that touches you back"—allowing users to feel a variety of sensations like fuzzy, rough, or sticky. The technology making this possible isn't entirely new. It's just a more advanced version of surface haptics, which is the same tech that makes your phone vibrate when you touch a button or creates a sense of friction in gaming apps. But what exactly would this be used for? In e-commerce, it could allow shoppers to feel the texture of a shirt or rug before they buy it. In car touchscreens, it could help drivers keep their eyes on the road when they adjust their seats or change the music. And it could even allow you to remotely "touch" someone online. Although still too costly to implement in screens everywhere, surface haptics are demonstrating what a more tactile internet could one day feel like. Similar to attempts to create lickable TV screens or bring smell to virtual environments, a new generation of multi-sensory tech is upon us.

MISS AI BEAUTY PAGEANT

In July 2024, the first AI beauty pageant crowned its winner: Kenza Layli, a Moroccan AI-generated influencer dedicated to promoting inclusivity in the virtual world. Layli was created by the Phoenix AI agency, and was selected from 1,500 entries based on her beauty, use of AI tools, and her influence on social media. The competition represents a new chapter for digital self-expression, yet it also raises ethical dilemmas. Critics argue that these stylized AI characters introduce an even more impossible beauty standard, driving women to compare themselves to an AI-generated ideal. As one potential solution, some suggest integrating more diverse and realistic representations of women in the design and selection criteria, ultimately using the contest as a way to contribute to a more inclusive digital landscape.

Global shipments for augmented and virtual reality head-sets are expected to grow 41.4% in 2025, powered by more affordable devices and addition of AI features.

IDC Research, 2024

WHAT'S NEXT

EMBRACE UNREALITY:

Don't just replicate our physical reality—create worlds, characters, and narratives that push beyond the bounds of what we can experience IRL.

GIVE PEOPLE A REALITY CHECK:

It's easy to get carried away when you're immersed in a virtual world. But online actions (such as spending money in a video game or engaging in toxic behavior) can have very real consequences. Brands can keep people in check with real-time nudges and intentional points of friction.

CONNECT IRL TO URL:

As our online and offline lives blur, people will look for tangible connections between the two worlds.

NEXT TECHNOLOGIES: < >

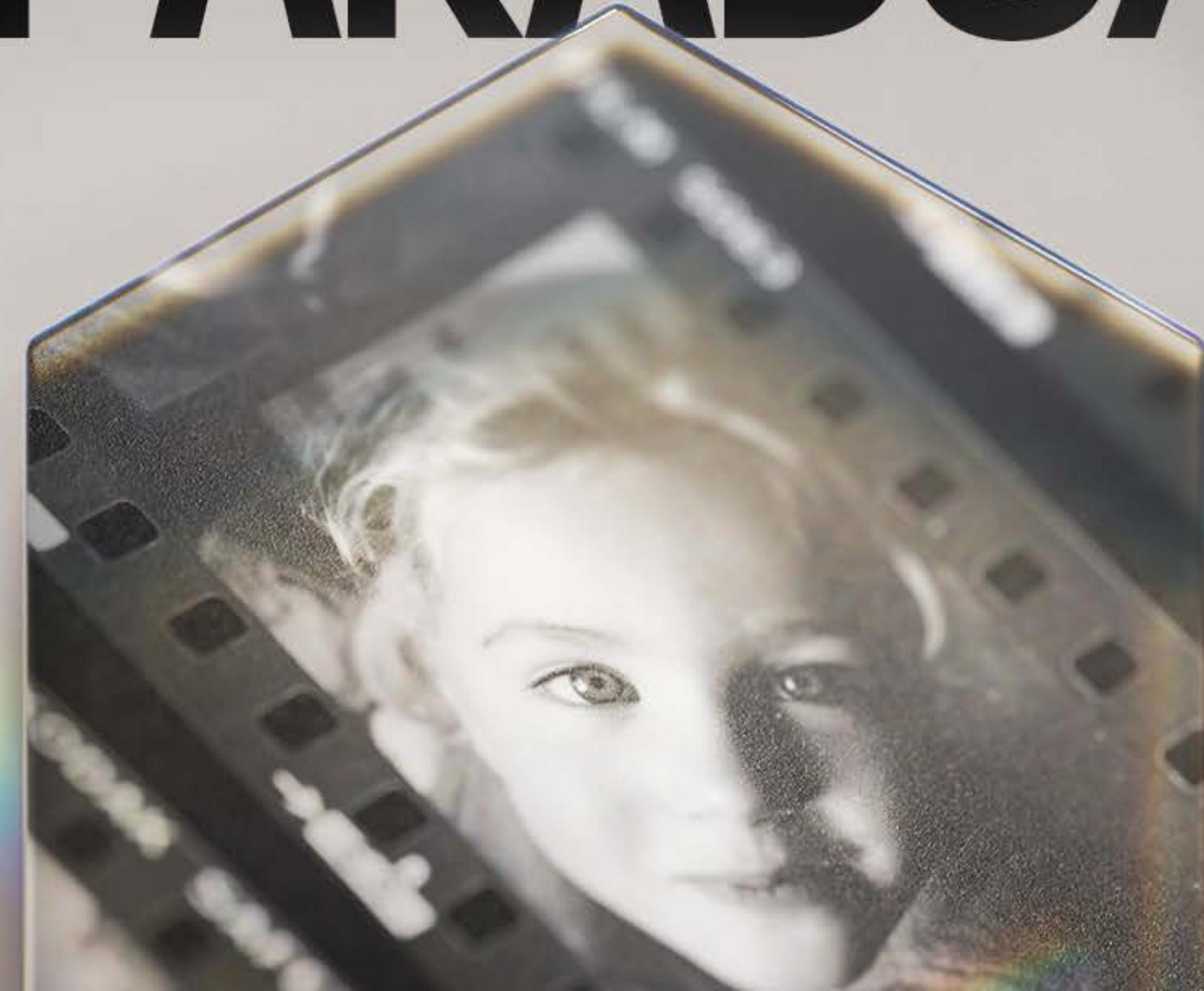
Ambient Interfaces
Avatar Identities
Extended Reality
Spatial Computing
Tactile Haptics
Third Place Gaming
Worldbuilding

MATURITY PARADOX

21

Age and maturity are no longer directly correlated. With today's kids growing up faster and adults holding on to their youth for longer, behaviors and expectations tied to certain age groups will be turned upside down or dissolved entirely. In this era of fluid aging, we'll both enjoy new freedoms and encounter unfamiliar constraints.

edges



SEPHORA TWEENS

Inspired by endless “Get ready with me” videos and elaborate 10-step skincare routines on social media, kids as young as 10 years old are stocking up on expensive adult skincare products from the likes of Drunk Elephant and Laneige. This rise in “Sephora kids” is leaving some concerned, with experts pointing out that many of the products being used by Gen Alpha contain harsh anti-aging ingredients that aren’t meant for young skin. But the even bigger question is whether we should be pushing beauty products on youth at all. Given the growing pressures being put on kids today, many argue that they could benefit from playing more in the dirt and worrying less about their pores.

“In an age where so much agency has been taken away from young adults, when they face futures saddled with debt, unable to access the basic material trappings of adulthood, which in turn delays entry into emotional adulthood indefinitely, a retreat into the dubious comforts of a pseudo-childhood will have its pull.”

Professor Josh Cohen, psycho-analyst and author of *How to Live, What to Do*

KIDLUTS

A generation of adults under pressure is granting itself permission to play—turning juvenile hobbies and old-school comforts into cheerful acts of resistance against grown-up rules. This growing “kidult” market is great news for toymakers. U.S. adults tallied more than \$7 billion in toy purchases in the 12 months ending June 2024, and Spanish toymaker Cefa Toys says adults now account for 26% of their total sales. As stressed-out adults look to connect with their inner child, expect to see a rise in nostalgia-fueled collectibles and playful experiences that offer an escape from grown-up responsibilities.



ELDERLY HEDONISTS

Turning 65 is no longer the beginning of the end. As global life expectancy increases, studies show that people’s perception of what age is considered “old” has gone up over time, and seniors are acting accordingly. *Wild old Bunch*, a ski group for those 80+, now has around 115 members and counting; popular shows like *The Golden Bachelor* are proving that it’s never too late to find love (or lust); and TikTok accounts like *The Muthership* are breaking down the A to Z of content creation for older audiences looking to become influencers. As culture comes around to the idea that ambitions and pleasures don’t have an expiration date, we’ll see once-youthful pursuits be reclaimed by silver communities.

NOT-SO REBELLIOUS TEENS

The stereotype of the wild, rebellious teenager is fading as studies paint today’s adolescents as more cautious and responsible than previous generations were at their age. This is evident in declining consumption of alcohol, cannabis and tobacco among high-schoolers, as well as in the fact that young people are now less likely to have casual sex. They aren’t as eager for freedom as they once were, either, with teens in the U.S. waiting longer to get their driver’s license. Experts attribute these changes to a blend of societal pressures, safety-conscious parenting, and access to more information about potential dangers. The more they know about the adverse health effects of alcohol, for instance, the less appealing getting wasted may seem. In a world that demands maturity earlier than ever, today’s teens aren’t diving into their experimental phase headfirst—they’re dipping a toe in the water and carefully weighing the consequences.



LATE ADULTHOOD

As 100-year life spans become more common, the time has come to rethink traditional life stages. If 80 is the new 60, many experts argue, then we need a new category reflecting the fact that longevity is inserting one, two, or even three decades between middle age and old age. This category is being called “late adulthood,” referring to the stage where you’re neither fully retired nor conventionally employed—an enriching phase when you can seek new pursuits, take more relaxed part-time jobs, and give back to your community. Andrew J. Scott, the author of *The Longevity Imperative: How to Build a Healthier and More Productive Society to Support Our Longer Lives*, agrees that the ‘60s model of aging and retirement needs updating. “Debate about an aging society rarely goes beyond mention of spiraling health costs, a pensions crisis, dementia and care homes. It is never seen as exciting, challenging or interesting,” he writes. “The key is to see aging as a state of flux involving us all and not an event or a state that segregates one group from another.” As this mindset takes hold, the three-stage structure of life will be replaced with something much more fluid and much less limiting.

EXECUTIVE FUNCTION COACHES FOR KIDS

Overstimulated and over-scheduled, today’s kids are receiving guidance from a new resource: the executive function coach. These coaches teach skills like time management, organization, impulse control (like not opening TikTok every 10 minutes), and focus—things once assumed to be picked up naturally over time as kids mature. EF coaches say that just five years ago, demand was predominantly for students with learning differences. Now, their services are being commonly requested for neurotypical students, with many saying they can’t keep up with the number of inquiries. Coaches attribute the rising interest to a combination of more demanding schedules plus distracting technologies that are fragmenting kids’ attention. Other psychologists, however, say the problem isn’t so much children’s executive function skills as adults’ expectations. EF coaches are highlighting how the path to adult responsibilities is accelerating—leading some to call for a return to more carefree childhoods.

INFANTILIZED

In his new book, *Infantilized: How Our Culture Killed Adulthood*, Dr. Keith Hayward argues that Western culture is stopping people from growing up. To make his case, he points to the dramatic delay in the traditional markers of adulthood like leaving home, becoming financially independent, getting married, and having kids. In Britain, for instance, the median age for a first marriage, at 33 for men and 31 for women, is a decade higher than it was in the early 1960s. In 2016, a Pew study found that for the first time in 130 years, American 18-34-year-olds were more likely to be living with their parents than with a partner somewhere else. Dr. Hayward blames this partly on pop culture, which he says celebrates immaturity, and partly on the education system, which he believes shields students from upsetting ideas and fills their head with false empowerments like “You can be anything you want to be.” Though critics have poked holes in Dr. Hayward’s argument, his perspective has resonated among those who feel that gentle parenting and a softening society aren’t adequately preparing kids for the real world.

WHAT'S NEXT

EMBRACE PLAY:

Opportunities for lighthearted fun will be welcomed at any age. Brands can deliver by building moments of joyful escapism into everything from store layouts to user interfaces.

OFFER ASSISTANCE:

As age-related blueprints are thrown out, resources that guide people through the in-between stages of life will be increasingly welcomed.

BREAK AGE SILOS:

Rather than designing for a certain age group, design for common values and a shared mindset.

PROVIDE GUARDRAILS:

Throwing out every age-related rule can end up hindering growth. Instead, honor their age while still giving them the resources needed to exceed expectations.

NEXT TECHNOLOGIES:

Avatar Identities
Generative AI
Third Place Gaming
Worldbuilding



MIND MAINTENANCE



22

Once-invisible mental health struggles are moving center stage. As the stigma is broken, mental healthcare will go from reactive to proactive, from a nice-to-have to a need-to-have. But while widening access to treatment remains the priority, experts warn of the dangers of taking awareness too far and unintentionally inflating our troubles.

edges

THERAPY-SPEAK EXPLODES

Therapy speak has officially moved out of the psychologist's office and into our films, songs, and everyday conversations. For proof, just look to [Ariana Grande's](#) latest *Saturn Return* album *eternal sunshine*, on which she sings about "codependency," "therapy" and "self-soothe" in the same verse. Or, listen to "[Growing Sideways](#)" by Noah Kahan, where he sings: "So I took my medication, and I poured my trauma out." This kind of terminology isn't just popular in music, it's also all over TikTok. On the app, videos teaching people about boundaries, emotional labor, gaslighting, and everything in between have become more and more popular, to the point where some say it has backfired and is now being used in inaccurate or manipulative ways. Rather than working through tensions or simply taking some space, for instance, people are becoming quicker to [cut friends out of their lives](#) altogether in the name of "boundaries." While therapy becoming less stigmatized is a good thing, there's a growing call to ensure that things aren't taken too far. Looking forward, providing nuance and avoiding extreme oversimplification will be key to achieving a healthy balance.

NONINVASIVE NEUROTECH

[Wearable neurotech](#) is transforming mental healthcare, with noninvasive devices targeting common conditions. One big promise of noninvasive neurotech is that it could offer an alternative treatment for conditions like depression that don't always respond well to drugs. But how can an electronic device have a therapeutic effect on the human brain? The basic theory is that stimulating the brain's activity in a targeted way can influence how a person feels by changing the electric signals that brain cells use to talk to each other. [Flow](#), for instance, offers a 459€ headset that's designed to treat depression using a form of electrical brain stimulation. Another Belfast-based startup called [Neurovalens](#) now has two head-mounted treatment devices approved for prescription by doctors in the U.S.: one to treat generalized anxiety disorder and another targeting insomnia. These technologies provide a welcome alternatives to pills, enabling users to self-administer treatment from the comfort of their home.



SELF-DIAGNOSES SURGE

Teens are increasingly turning to social media to [self-diagnose](#) mental health issues. A recent survey revealed that [55% of students](#) use platforms like TikTok and Instagram for self-diagnosis, with educators observing widespread misinformation influencing both self-perception and peer interactions. Diagnoses like ADHD, multiple personality disorder, depression, and autism have been heavily generalized, even becoming talking points or "[fashion statements](#)" in social settings. While this openness to discussing mental health is positive, experts warn that amateur diagnoses can lead to mislabeling, inappropriate treatments, and psychological harm. And once teens engage with this mental health content, the algorithm will keep them hooked—potentially leading to an unhealthy obsession. As long as this type of content is left unregulated, it'll be up to parents and teachers to guide teens toward more accurate professional resources.

SELF-CARE STARBUCKS

Starbucks' first "Community Store" in Singapore blends coffee culture with a mission to [promote mental wellness](#), responding to a rise in mental health issues among young Singaporeans. The store partners with MINDSET Care Limited and Gardens by the Bay to fund workshops, activities, and community programs, with a portion of beverage sales going toward mental health initiatives. The shop is designed as a nurturing space, featuring self-care resources, art decor that celebrates connection, and tranquil surroundings to encourage mindfulness. For brands, this highlights an opportunity to create meaningful spaces that address community needs, demonstrating that aligning business with social impact can foster both loyalty and positive change.

DIGITAL THERAPEUTICS

2024 marked a turning point for mental health treatment. In March, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration [approved](#) Rejoyn, the first digital therapeutic for major depressive disorder, signaling a breakthrough in how mental health care is delivered. Rejoyn empowers users to actively manage their mental health through a smartphone app. The app prompts users to remember emotions depicted on people's faces, which requires them to use both the emotional and cognitive processing centers of their brain. In studies, people who used Rejoyn for six weeks showed more balanced activity in these brain centers and had fewer depression symptoms. That "rewiring" may make people more responsive to traditional treatments like cognitive behavior therapy or antidepressants. Rejoyn's approval paves the way for a new era of accessible, tech-driven mental health solutions, potentially reducing reliance on overburdened healthcare professionals.

ATHLETES OWN THEIR STRUGGLES

Under pressure to show no signs of weakness, many athletes have long suffered through mental health struggles in silence, often with tragic consequences. But things are changing as a global mental health movement makes athletes more comfortable sharing their vulnerabilities. One athlete leading the charge is NBA star DeMar DeRozan. Inspired by his own battle with depression, DeRozan has started his own YouTube series called “[Dinners with DeMar](#)” where he chats openly with fellow athletes about their mental health struggles. Brands are also playing a role by supporting athletes on their journey. Adidas is doing this through their latest global campaign called “[You Got This](#),” which uses neuroscience to figure out how and why negative pressure hinders play, then offers guidance around how athletes at all levels can disarm this feeling.

MINDFUL AI TOYS

Inspired by NHS data stating that one in five young people have a mental health disorder, London-based design agency Morrama has created a line of [AI-powered toys](#) designed to help kids manage their emotions. There are four concept products, whose first letter all begins with letter C: Calm, Comfort, Create, and Connect. Calm is a fidget spinner with embedded motion and heart rate sensors that deliver health data back to parents; Comfort is a small projector that displays images and sounds in response to the children’s requests; Create is a tube-like device that generates line drawing in response to spoken prompts; and Connect is a robotic sunflower companion that facilitates conversation between the parent and child. These toys all leverage AI as an alternative to talk therapies, demonstrating how play can become a tool for mindfulness at a young age.



“It’s sort of a double-edged sword. We want people to talk about [mental health] more, but we don’t want that to lead to overdiagnosis or incorrect diagnosis or overtreatment. We want it to lead to normalizing of having feelings.”

Dr. Jessica Gold, chief wellness officer for the University of Tennessee

WHAT'S NEXT

CHECK IN:

How can your brand not only break down barriers to mental healthcare, but actively check on people who are typically alienated from the conversation?

AVOID UNHEALTHY EXTREMES:

With the TikTok-ification of therapy-speak, positive progress risks being counteracted by an unintended culture of victimhood. Rather than contributing to the weaponization of therapy terms, brands can encourage healthy dialogue and point people back to true professionals.

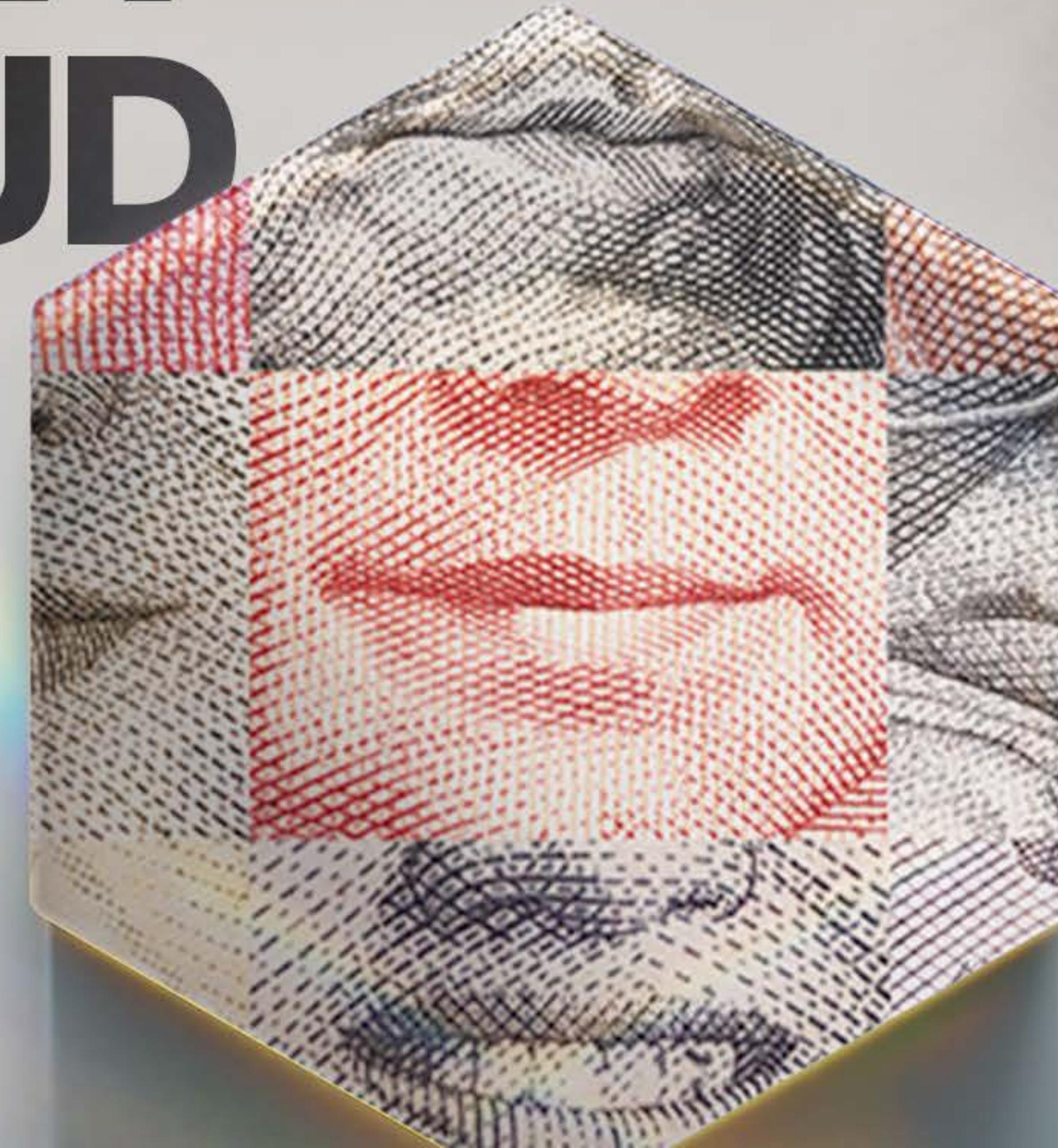
MINDFUL DESIGN:

From UX design to office design, online and offline experiences will increasingly be built with mental health in mind.

NEXT TECHNOLOGIES:

Connected Objects
Neural Control
Third Place Gaming
Untethered Audio

MONEY OUT LOUD



23

Money is being taken off the do-not-discuss list. From salary transparency to financial therapy, culture is getting candid about the role money plays in our lives. The end of secrecy will mark the start of a more honest, equal, and human approach to all things finance.

edges

MONEY DYSMORPHIA

TikTok is creating a disconnect between how well off young adults actually are and how they think they're doing, giving rise to what experts are calling "money dysmorphia." This is attributed to two very different extremes being portrayed on social media. On one hand, young people are seeing posts about how no one in their generation will be able to buy a house, food prices are out of control, and credit-card debt is unavoidable. But on the other hand, they're also being exposed to influencers pushing expensive products and saying that a \$4,000 bag is this season's "must have." The end result is confusion with a side of doom. Some people use this doomism as an excuse to spend money and enjoy life while they're still young, while others are going the complete opposite direction and stockpiling their cash out of anxiety. Both of these responses have negative consequences, exposing a serious need for more balanced narratives that encourage responsible behaviors without exacerbating fears.

FEEL-GOOD CREDIT CARD REWARDS

What if doing yourself and the planet a favor also did your wallet a favor? That's the premise of Wells Fargo's new Attune credit card that offers unlimited 4% cash rewards on purchases related to fitness and wellness (like gym memberships and spas), recreation and entertainment (like amusement parks and sporting events), and sustainability (like public transit and thrift stores). Though Wells Fargo isn't the first finance company to incentivize healthy or eco-friendly behaviors, it is one of the biggest. Until now, similar efforts have largely been limited to niche fintechs like US-based Ness—a card that rewarded self-care spending but shut down in 2023 due to a lack of funding. As we begin to pay closer attention to which types of spending make us feel good, we'll see the once-stuffy world of finance get a more personal, values-based rewrite.

'EFFING RICH' APP

The Frich (short for "Effing Rich") app is redefining how Gen Z navigates finances, creating a safe space for users to compare spending habits, seek advice, and explore resources without any competitive pressure. This peer-driven app allows young adults to drop the act and get real, giving them a space to anonymously ask questions like "how much are people my age actually investing?" or "what percentage of your paycheck do you put into savings?" With unrealistic portrayals of success all over social media, Frich is bridging the gap between reality and expectation, helping Gen Z access authentic insights so they can make smarter decisions.

SCRIPTED SAVINGS

Saving isn't just a practical habit—it's now a story you can follow through Alipay's Scripted Savings game. Users dive into AI-generated storylines—with genres ranging from romcoms to workplace dramas—and complete specific tasks in order to unlock subsequent chapters. For example, a user following a romcom script will be asked to choose a gift for their fictional date. The amount corresponding to the selected gift price will then be credited to their Little Purse account—motivating them to set aside savings IRL. The initiative was partly inspired by a social media phenomenon called "Pretend and Save," where people create imaginary scripts to motivate themselves to save money. With over 400,000 active users, Scripted Savings is tapping into growing demand for financial tools that transform money management from a chore to an interactive form of entertainment.



FINANCIAL THERAPY

Despite being around since 2008, financial therapy has remained relatively niche. One emerging player trying to make it mainstream is Stackin, a different kind of personal finance app that relies more on research from cognitive behavioral therapists and less on spreadsheets. It asks you about your financial intentions, has you rate your spending habits based on how you feel, and conducts daily check-ins so you can reflect on your relationship with money. It's important to note that the app is powered by real human coaches—not some sort of AI chatbot—who help you navigate the different emotions that come with spending, such as guilt, joy, or anxiety.



CREDIT SCORE COMPATIBILITY

Last year, a temporary dating app called Score set out to raise awareness about the importance of discussing finances in relationships—a historically uncomfortable topic that typically comes up far too late into dating (or even marriage). Users had to have a credit score of 675 or higher to sign up, but their exact score wasn't visible on their profile. If they didn't pass the credit check, the app offered tips on how to boost their score. The app started as a marketing play by fintech Neon Money Club, but it ended up receiving so much traction that the company decided to keep it open for twice as long as they initially planned. Interestingly, credit score transparency is becoming a bigger trend outside of Score as well, with more singles now including screenshots of their credit score in their dating app profiles. As the next generation seeks stability in both life and love, once-taboo topics will become standard first date conversation.

REVENGE SAVING

Faced with economic uncertainty and a high unemployment rate, young Chinese are saying “no” to excess spending and “yes” to revenge saving. This trend has youth setting extreme monthly savings targets, which can be achieved by dining at budget-friendly community canteens for the elderly or teaming up with “savings partners” online for accountability, proving that saving doesn't have to be a solo, anti-social pursuit. This collective shift toward practicality suggests a growing focus on financial resilience, disproving the common stereotype that young people prioritize short-term splurges over long-term targets.



“More than half (56%) of adults say their parents never discussed money with them, yet the majority (81%) would have benefited from financial education at an earlier age. Encouragingly, most adults today are changing course, with two-thirds actively engaging the young people in their lives in conversations about money.”

◆ Fidelity Investments State of Wealth Mobility study, 2024

WHAT'S NEXT

LEAD THE MOVEMENT:

Practice salary transparency in your own organization first.

DROP THE JARGON:

Take the intimidation out of finance by using clear language that everyone can understand. Or, try explaining complex concepts through the lens of pop culture.

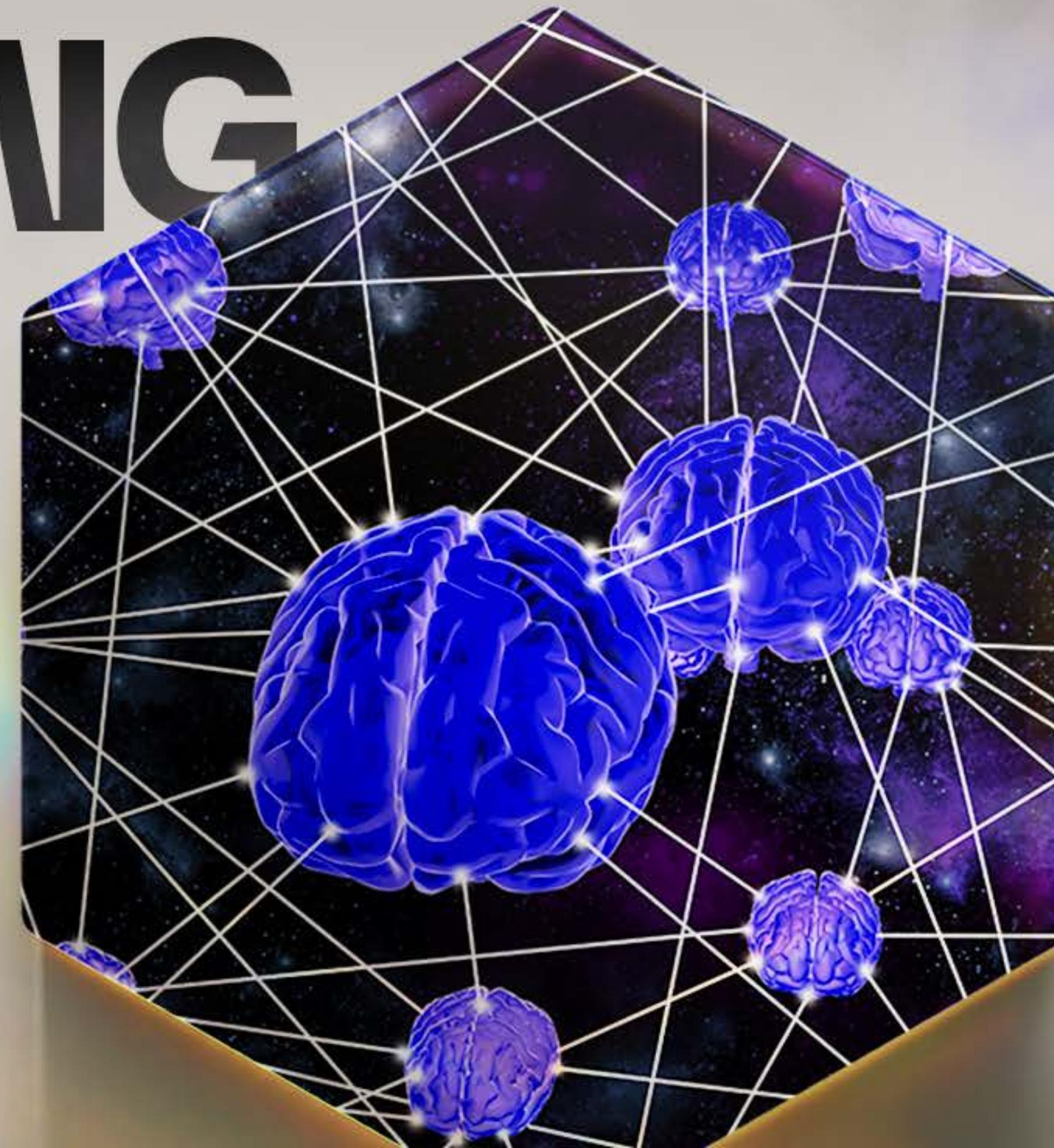
TAP INTO PSYCHOLOGY:

Unpacking the emotional drivers behind how and why we spend can help people build a healthier relationship with money for the long haul.

NEXT TECHNOLOGIES: < >

Community Commerce
Non-Fungible Everything (NFTs)

MOOD GEISTING



24

Human emotions are being analyzed and enhanced in entirely new ways. A modern wave of mood-boosting products are promising to make us calmer, happier, or even euphoric. And the emerging field of emotion AI is giving us—and the brands we buy from—advanced insight into how we feel. The market for mood modulation is booming.

edges

DRIVER STRESS DETECTION

Future cars could autonomously adapt your mood as you drive. GM is looking to patent a system that can monitor a driver's well-being using data from onboard sensors. If the car detects that someone is driving unsafely due to stress, for instance, it can decide to take control of the car. This is determined by monitoring things like excessive use of horns, frequency of stopping and starting, braking pressure, and how hard you're gripping the steering wheel. Based on its evaluation, the system would also be able to suggest mental health exercises like pulling over and taking a break or contacting a friend or therapist. While it's unclear whether this technology will ever come to fruition, it does show what's possible when companies have insight into our emotions. Beyond just tracking stress, imagine a car that adjusts the lighting, temperature, and music to create the perfect vibe based on your real-time mood.

DOPAMINE MENUS

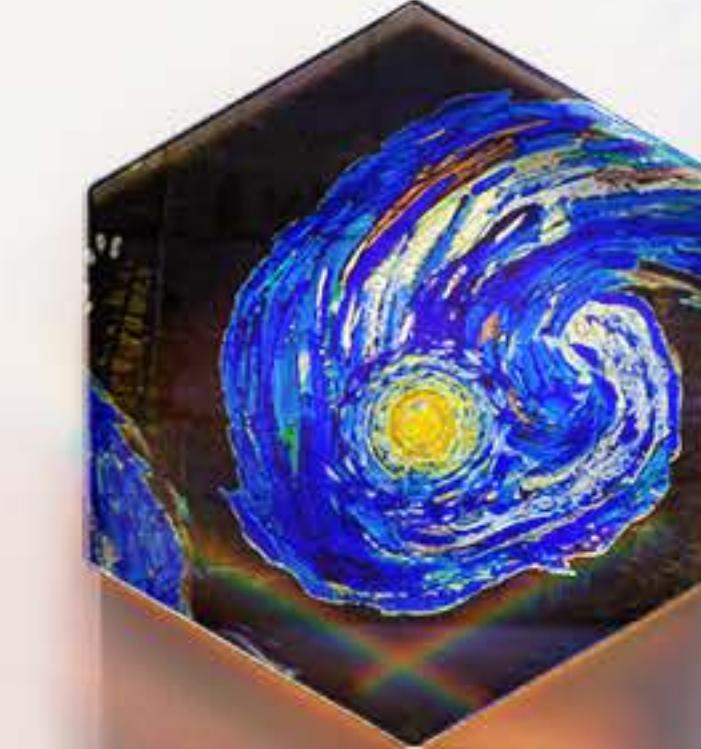
Feeling down? Perhaps look to TikTok's "dopamine menu" trend where joy is served one bite-sized mood boost at a time. Designed as a personal mix of things that enhance daily joy, dopamine menus break down activities into "starters," "mains," "sides," and "specials" based on time and impact, allowing users to easily choose between mood-enhancing options like dancing, journaling, or enjoying a coffee. The trend was initially popularized by ADHD advocates as a way to manage dopamine levels, but has since gained widespread popularity due to its simplicity and effectiveness. Brands can join in by offering easy ways to spark happiness, whether through an app notification or at-home routine.

EMOTIONALLY INTELLIGENT COMPUTERS

Finnish researchers have developed a new model that allows computers to "understand" and predict human emotions using principles of mathematical psychology. They say the new model can acknowledge if the user is experiencing feelings of happiness, boredom, irritation, rage, despair and anxiety. This would allow computers to adapt their responses based on how someone is feeling. So if a user appears frustrated, for example, it might give them simpler instructions or redirect the interaction. In turn, our devices could become more empathetic, but also more intrusive.

MOODY PRODUCTS

Brands are tapping into our feel-good desires with mood-based product lines. On the food front, Magnum is boosting its premium portfolio with a trio of mood-inspired flavors. These include Magnum Euphoria, Magnum Wonder, and Magnum Chill, each one promising a new sensation with every bite. Meanwhile, in the world of fragrance, Charlotte Tilbury's very first perfume collection is "all about capturing feeling, so that you can spray on your emotions and be the architect of your day," as Tilbury puts it. The Fragrance Collection of Emotions consists of "Love Frequency," "More Sex," "Joyphoria," "Magic Energy," "Calm Bliss," and "Cosmic Power." Each scent was created based on 40 years of neuroscience research from International Flavors & Fragrances Inc. This kind of mood-based marketing gives products a higher purpose, elevating them from simple pleasures to essential tools for emotional well-being.



SUBMERSIVE SPA

A trippy new spa concept called Submersive is using immersive art, 360° video, AI, and lasers to elevate people's state of mind. It's being created by Corvas Brinkerhoff, co-founder of entertainment firm Meow Wolf, who plans to open the spa in Texas in 2026. It will feature 12 rooms with their own unique vibe—from a neon pink techno-esque atmosphere to a calming blue pool. As visitors move through these rooms, they'll experience a variety of temperatures, sounds, steam levels, and water buoyancy. Brinkerhoff's ultimate goal is to elicit states of awe and euphoria. To make that happen, the team plans to recruit volunteers to travel through the spa with wearable devices—including mobile EEGs and heart monitors—that measure their vitals. This data will help them figure out which aspects of the experience are most stimulating or most relaxing, and then be able to suggest specific rooms based on someone's desired state of mind. The spa offers a glimpse into how entertainment and wellness will continue to merge in the future, using biometric data and neuroaesthetics to curate the perfect mood.

SENSE GLASSES

Emteq Labs, a pioneer in wearable tech, has launched a new pair of smart glasses designed to track emotions and eating habits by monitoring facial movements in real time. Unlike most smart glasses, which have outward-facing cameras, the Sense glasses focus inward, collecting data about the wearer's emotional and physical state as they eat. Sensors built into the frames capture subtle facial expressions—monitoring chewing patterns and tracking movements in the eyebrows, cheeks, and jaw to detect emotions like happiness or stress. As one example, if you eat too quickly you could see an alert telling you that's a habit consistent with overconsumption. Combine that with snapshots of how you're feeling at the time, and Emteq is hoping to paint a picture of which dietary habits do or don't work for someone. The glasses are raising questions about privacy rights and just how credible emotion-recognition tech really is. And while there are certainly positive use cases, experts emphasize that it's important to encourage personal reflection above over-reliance on tech.

NEUROCOSMETICS

The mood-boosting beauty trend is getting a scientific upgrade as brands like Neuraé explore "neurocosmetics"—a field focused on how emotions impact skin health. Using ingredients that regulate the skin's nervous system, Neuraé's products aim to reduce inflammation and enhance radiance, giving "look good, feel good" a whole new meaning. According to Spherical Insights, the global neurocosmetics market is expected to grow from \$1.42 billion in 2023 to over \$3 billion by 2033. While some users report visible improvements, critics question whether neurocosmetics can actually deliver results beyond those of traditional skincare, with some calling it false advertising. To combat skepticism, brands venturing into this space should prioritize transparency and lead with the science, offering clear explanations of each ingredient and its proven benefits.



Vibes, for so long a fundamentally unserious shorthand for '60s nostalgia, are now taken very seriously indeed. Instead of being hedonism-coded, fuzzy through a cloud of smoke, the vibe is now item number one on boardroom agendas worldwide.

— Jess Cartner-Morley, *The Guardian*

WHAT'S NEXT

ALLOW FOR SENSORY SHIFTS:

Give users the ability to tap into different moods and modes—from totally zen to totally hyped.

MAKE IT PERSONAL, NOT PROMOTIONAL:

While emotion recognition tech can unlock a new level of personalization, it can also easily lead to foul play. Brands that use mood data to manipulate or emotionally profile people will quickly lose trust.

GET GRANULAR:

Review every brand touch point through a new lens. Does this action spark the desired vibe?

NEXT TECHNOLOGIES: < >

Connected Objects
Generative AI
Neural Control
Tactile Haptics

NEO- COLLECTIVISM



25

A renewed emphasis on collectivism is redistributing power at scale. Realizing that individualism can only get us so far, brands and organizations are relinquishing control and inviting participation in the form of decentralization, crowdsourcing, and co-creation. The future belongs to all of us.

edges

COLLECTIVE WEALTH REDISTRIBUTION

As countries grapple with how to tax billionaires fairly, some ultra-rich egalitarians are making their own rules. One woman doing things her own way is 31-year-old Austrian heiress Marlene Engelhorn. When Marlene came into more than €25 million (\$27 million) from her late billionaire grandmother in 2022, she had a radical idea: let random people decide how to give it all away. The project was announced in January 2024, when 10,000 invitations were sent to randomly selected people all over Austria. Of the 10,000 people the invitation was sent to, 1,424 registered to participate, and 50 were ultimately selected to sit on the council. After six weeks of deliberation, the group ultimately chose 77 organizations that would receive money from Ms. Engelhorn's fortune. With most of her fortune given away, Ms. Engelhorn is now planning to enter the workforce, pay taxes, and most importantly, continue the fight for more fair and equal distribution of wealth in her country.



FAN-OWNED SPORTS TEAMS

Beyond just owning merch or trading cards, today's sports fans are being given the opportunity to own entire clubs—taking back control from billionaire owners and restoring a sense of community and grassroots connection. While not uncommon in the international sports world, these cooperative ownership models are only growing. International sailing competition SailGP is launching its first-ever fan-owned team that grants owners equity, voting rights and exclusive member benefits; a group of about 140 people in the U.S. recently pooled their cash to buy a struggling Danish soccer team called Akademisk Boldklub; and DAOs like CO92 are giving everyday fans the chance to own a stake in professional sports. These efforts are being fueled by frustration with financial failures as well as a much larger push to democratize sports ownership. For fans, it also represents the ultimate badge of honor—a kind of social proof that you care enough about a team to invest your own time and money into its success.

GENETIC ENGINEERING FOR THE MASSES

Sebastian Cocioba, a self-taught plant biotechnologist, is democratizing genetic engineering by transforming his Long Island home into a DIY lab where he creates novel flowers through gene editing. Using self-built devices and affordable equipment sourced from eBay, he shares his experimental processes openly online, providing free access to his methodologies and selling plant DNA plasmids so that others can take part in plant transformation. Cocioba's approach challenges the exclusivity of traditional scientific research, empowering amateur scientists to participate in biotech innovation. His work reflects a broader movement toward open-source science, reminiscent of the collaborative spirit of 19th-century amateur plant breeders.



CARTIER'S LUMINARY THINKERS

While luxury brands have historically been reluctant to invite people behind the scenes, Cartier is championing a more open approach to innovation with the formation of a new social ideas platform. The platform, called RedBoxMe, brings together a global community of thinkers, scientists, creatives and innovators for meaningful conversation on topics ranging from sustainable design, to philanthropy, to the future of AI. All 22 of these "Luminary Thinkers" were hand-selected by the CEO to help dream up the future of Cartier and beyond—creating a collaborative space for ideas to flourish. Looking ahead, these kinds of committees could become a more common way for brands to tap into diverse perspectives and tackle their biggest challenges.

K-POP FAN ACTIVISM

As the old saying goes, "there's power in numbers." And no one puts this into practice quite like K-pop fans. In recent years, these passionate fan groups have rallied on behalf of the planet, using their collective influence to push brands toward greener practices. An especially impressive group is Kpop4Planet, which has gathered over 10,000 signatures to convince Hyundai to end an aluminum supply deal linked to coal power. The same group was also responsible for convincing South Korea's biggest streaming platform, Melon, to commit to 100% renewable energy by 2030. Brands can take inspiration by giving their own fans the platform and resources needed to reach a common goal.

COMMUNITY-DRIVEN COMMERCE

Try Your Best is shaking up the business-to-consumer relationship. Through the Web3 platform, brand fans are able to speak directly with companies, provide real-time product feedback, ideate on future products, and share thoughts on the overall brand direction. In exchange, customers are awarded with NFTs and brand coins that can be used toward future purchases. "The idea is that brands and fans build together, and the concept is to share value with those who create it," explains founder Ty Haney. This more collaborative, two-way conversation is a far departure from the typical loyalty programs where sales are rewarded with fleeting perks. Glossier, Rare Beauty, Urban Outfitters, Cult Gaia, and Ouai are just some of the brands that have bought in since the platform launched in 2022.

ROBLOX'S OPEN-SOURCE 3D AI MODEL

Roblox is advancing its AI capabilities with the 3D Foundational Model, a new open-source tool designed to create or modify intricate 3D objects and scenes. This move taps into a growing industry trend. In 2023, 65.7% of new foundation models were open-source, a rise from 44.4% in 2022 and 33.3% in 2021. By joining the open-source movement, Roblox aims to empower developers to adapt and expand the tool, promoting innovation and collaboration within gaming communities. This approach not only streamlines game development, but also boosts creative freedom by giving creators the tools to build more immersive, dynamic worlds at scale.



WHAT'S NEXT

BUILD COMMUNITY:

Give people a reason to connect and work toward a common goal.

BE OPEN:

Open source your ideas and invite fans to access the exclusive parts of your brand—empowering others to solve problems on your behalf.

BE EGALITARIAN:

Align on shared community values and allow for autonomous decision-making.

NEXT TECHNOLOGIES:

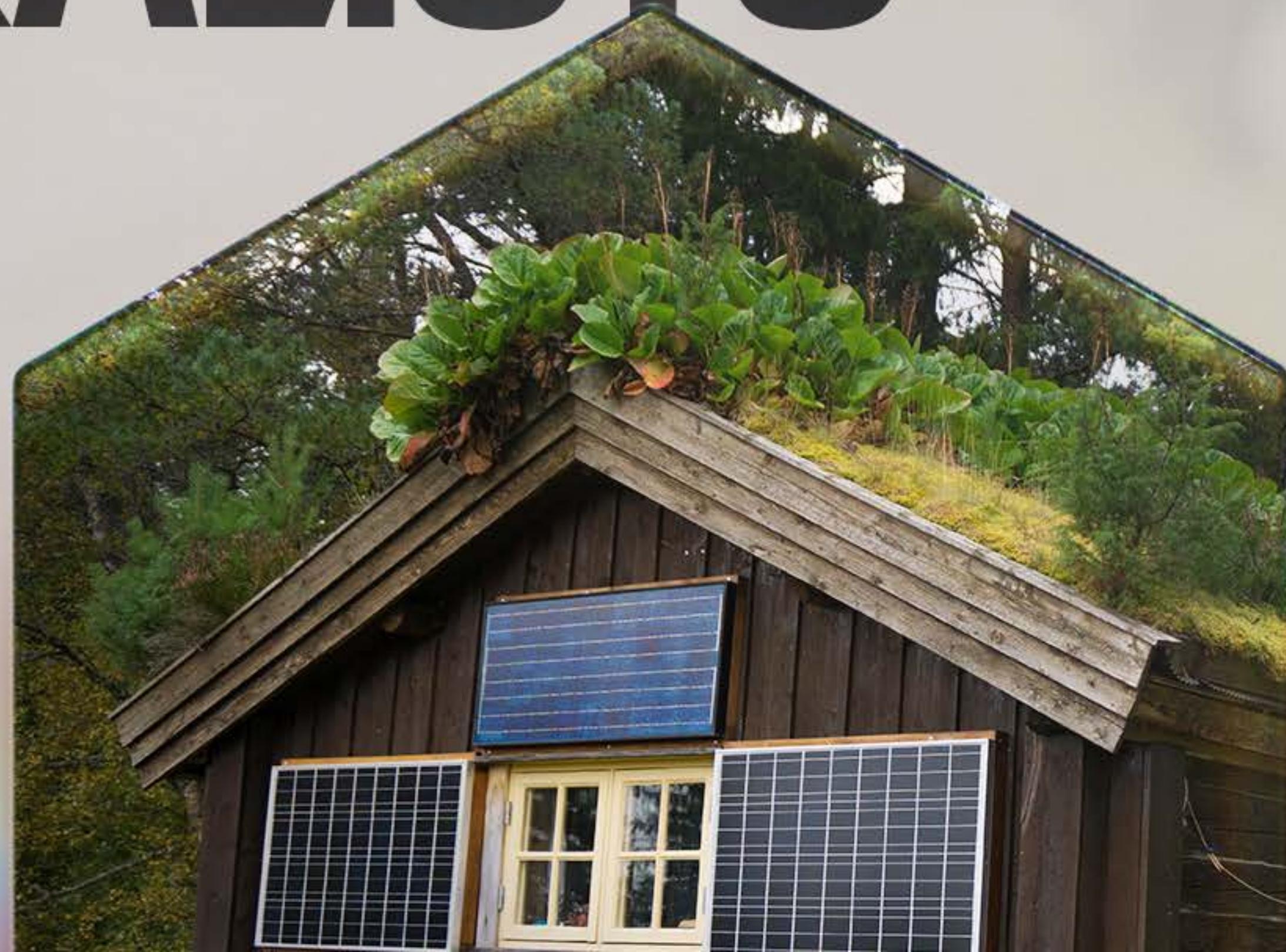
Community Commerce
Decentralized Social
Non-Fungible Everything (NFTs)
Third Place Gaming

NEXT-GEN NATURALISTS

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Self-sufficiency is modern-day survival. As the fragility of our planet and the economy becomes impossible to ignore, more people are realizing that the systems they've come to depend on are highly vulnerable. Now, with nature as their teacher and ancient practices as their inspiration, next-gen naturalists are placing new value on forgotten skills.

edges



DESERT ISLAND TOURISM

Itching to live out your Man vs. Wild dreams? Desert island tourism could be for you. One leader in the space is Docastaway, a travel company that brings people to remote, uninhabited islands so they can “feel like a castaway.” Clients can choose between Survival Mode, where they get dropped off on the island with barely anything (in some cases, just a machete or spear gun) and have to figure out the rest on their own, or Comfort Mode, where they have a crew on standby with food, water, shelter, and other necessities. Though not new (the company was founded in 2010), Docastaway says that Survival Mode has become an increasingly popular option as people look to put their self-reliance to the test. UK-based competitor Desert Island Survival—which offers five days of hands-on survival training before leaving clients to fend for themselves for three days—has also seen a recent uptick in interest among people who want to be prepared for an uncertain future.

LEARNING WATER RESILIENCY

As droughts intensify in Oaxaca, indigenous Zapotec women are turning back to ancestral techniques to preserve water and grow climate-resilient crops. Through community-based programs like Grupedsac, they’re learning how to construct low-cost water tanks, use biofilters, and employ ancient irrigation methods. Beyond survival, these efforts foster economic independence and challenge gender norms, as women in these programs gain a say in family finances and take on community leadership roles. Brands and organizations can support similar initiatives by offering resources that promote self-sufficiency and build resilience.

EARTHSHIPS

Off-the-grid homes made from tires, dirt, and garbage are more desirable than you might think. Otherwise known as “Earthships,” these self-reliant homes are capable of water collection, solar-powered temperature regulation, and crop harvesting—producing anywhere from 25-50% of the food that a resident would need. Once thought to be reserved for extreme survivalists and hippies, these “living vessels” are experiencing a spike in global demand due to climate concerns, housing shortages, and rising energy costs. The movement is also spreading thanks to the Earthship Academy, which teaches Earthship design principles, construction methods and overall philosophies for future-proof living.

→ For more, watch Backslash’s episode of Life on the Edge: Earthships

Pinterest searches for ‘self-sufficient garden’ were up 55% from 2022 to 2024.

Filestage ‘Impact of AI’ report, November 2024

SURVIVAL SCHOOL

Faced with an uncertain future, more people are turning to wilderness survival courses to learn lost skills. Programs such as California Survival School, Earth Native in Texas, and Guido Camia’s Alpine workshops equip participants with a mix of modern military tactics and ancient methods, including insect foraging and stone-tool techniques. Attendees range from tech workers to families, but all are motivated by a desire to gain peace of mind through greater independence—whether to prepare for emergencies or to escape the grip of modern comforts. “The way the world is today, it seems to me it’s just logical. I’m sure it is only a matter of time before conflicts are in our faces — and not just on the news,” says one participant of her reasons for signing up for a survival course. A similar anxiety has informed a number of recent books, including “How Civil Wars Start” by Barbara F. Walter and “The Next Civil War” by Stephen Marche. It also underlies the recent Netflix hit “Leave the World Behind,” which ends with images of Manhattan under attack. Rather than adding to the paranoia, brands can step in by offering practical skills that promote safety and independence.

AGRITOURISM SOARS

Agritourism is fast becoming the go-to choice for those looking to reconnect with the land. From beekeeping to gathering crops, these rural experiences offer more than relaxation—they bring travelers back to the basics, letting them actively engage with age-old principles of sustainable living. Recognizing the growing popularity of back-to-the-land aspirations, Japan’s and farm Co., Ltd. has launched “and farm Kleingarten.” The concept combines a shared vacation home with a farming experience, giving travelers access to individual vegetable gardens and gardening workshops. For a fixed monthly fee, city dwellers are invited to slow down and enjoy the fruits of their labor in the countryside. Not only does this help revitalize a rural area, it gives travelers a chance to gain timeless skills that will long outlast their vacation.



HOMESTEADING INFLUENCERS

Homesteading influencers are inspiring online audiences to live off the grid. One such creator is [Nate Petroski](#), who shares his rugged lifestyle with millions of followers—teaching them how to build rainwater collection systems, raise animals, live off solar power, and cook in an outdoor kitchen. The wide appeal of this movement is reflected in the [homesteading subreddit](#), which ranks among Reddit's top one percent of communities—just behind Taylor Swift's fan base and ahead of fantasy football. Driven by motivations to live more sustainably and quell economic and environmental worries, homesteading unites the growing number of people seeking control over their resources.



In 2024, 43% of adults said they feel more anxious than they did the previous year, up from 37% in 2023 and 32% in 2022. They're particularly worried about the economy (77%), keeping themselves or their families safe (68%), their health (63%) and climate change (57%)

 American Psychiatric Association's [annual mental health poll](#), 2024

MUSHROOM MANIA

Mushroom foraging is taking over the internet in China, with young enthusiasts [competing](#) to find rare fungi and sharing their colorful harvests on platforms like Xiaohongshu. Morels, termite mushrooms, and the highly sought-after matsutake are among the prized finds in biodiverse areas like Yunnan, where ideal growing conditions have fueled both excitement and high prices, with some varieties fetching up to \$70 a pound. The trend reflects a larger embrace of wild foods, with the mushroom market alone projected to reach [\\$110 billion by 2030](#). This growth has even inspired a rise in mushroom-themed travel packages and guided foraging tours. As consumers turn from passive buyers to active participants in sourcing their food, brands have a unique opportunity to inspire curiosity, offering education and resources that empower people to safely explore the natural ingredients around them.



WHAT'S NEXT

UPLIFT OUTSIDE VOICES:

Indigenous communities, farmers, and elderly populations are experts in self-sufficiency. Rather than trying to be the hero, give them a platform to share their wisdom with the world.

"DO IT YOURSELF":

With less emphasis on consumption, people are learning how to create and fix things themselves. Brands can support by providing the know-how while still allowing people to flex their skills.

INSPIRE NO-FRILLS WELLNESS:

As we say goodbye to woo-woo wellness, brands can help us get back to basics. Think homegrown produce kits, experiences that teach you how to live off the land, and all-natural health remedies.

NEXT TECHNOLOGIES: < >

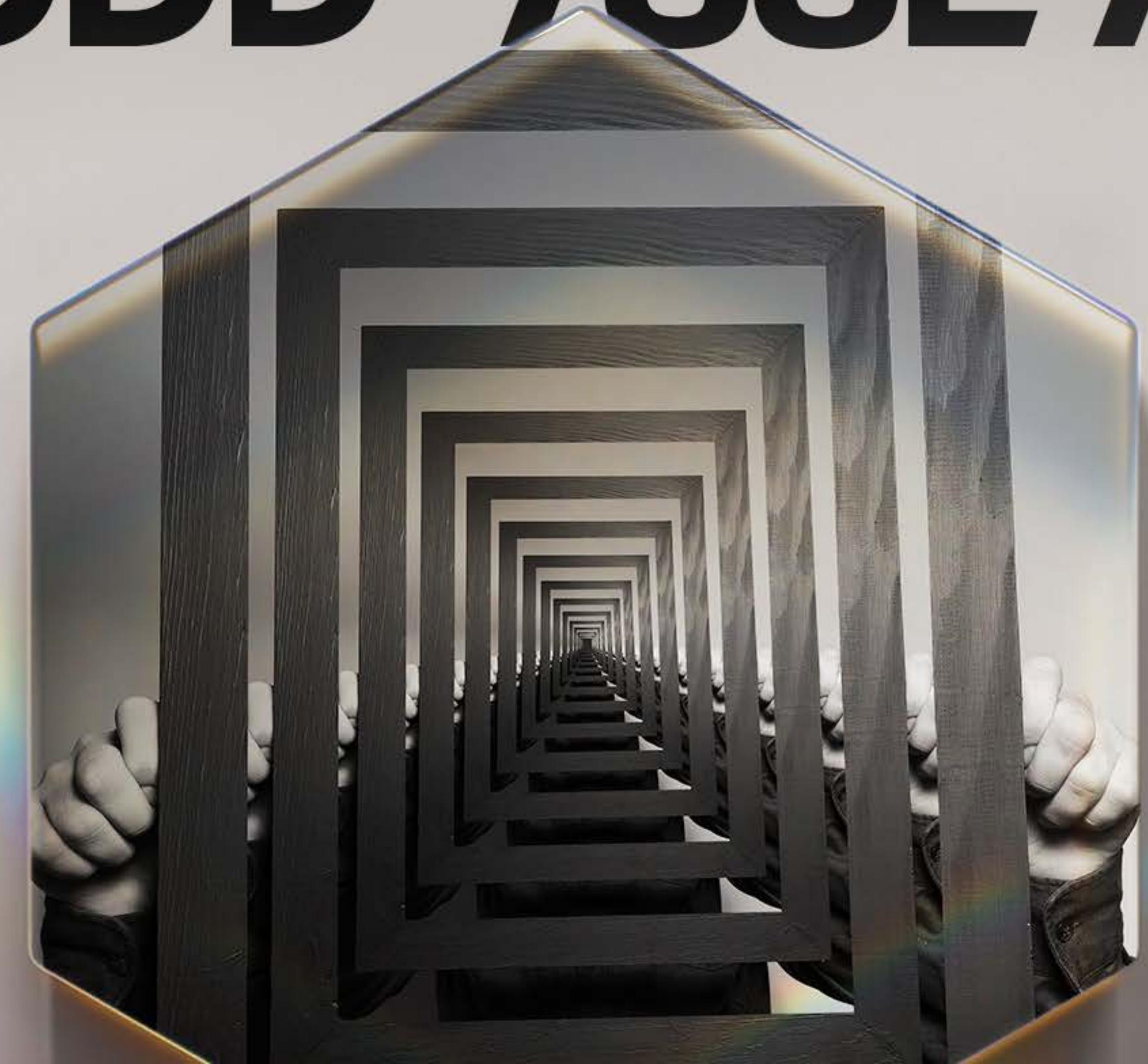
Bio-Materials
Lo-Fi Design

ODD-YSSSEYS

27

A world exhausted by rationality is finding delight in the discomfort zone. With so few roads left untraveled and questions left unanswered, alternate realities and out-of-this-world adventures will feed our hunger for escapism. It's time to revive our sense of wonder.

edges



THE LUXURIOUS MARBLE CIRCUS

Described as “a bazaar with a dash of the bizarre,” the Luxurious Marble Circus in South Africa is bringing an unconventional twist to the festival scene. Attendees of the two-day event are invited to visit interactive art installations like the Uncaged Carousel bar, explore surreal spaces such as the Fantastical Forest, see live music performances, and indulge in gourmet meals that tell a story. Guests are also encouraged to wear their boldest attire and bring their wildest imagination, setting the stage for a one-of-a-kind escape. With culture craving a break from the mundane, events like the Luxurious Marble Circus will allow people to tap out of their everyday routines and tap into something far more fantastical.



TRANSFORMATIVE TRAVEL

In a time when flights are getting progressively cheaper and the same predictable copy-and-paste travel itineraries are flooding Instagram, luxury travelers are looking for something that the masses can't touch. This desire for out-there experiences is being fulfilled in a number of creative ways. Black Tomato offers a program called “Get Lost” that challenges travelers to go phone-free and find their way out of unknown destinations; a company called Pelorus has pulled off faux kidnappings as well as treasure-hunting yacht adventures; and UK company Based on a True Story offers quests and expeditions that come with their own characters, unique twists, and entire fantasy worlds, essentially making travelers the star of their own hero’s journey. These premium experiences are proving that for the truly affluent, indulgence isn’t necessarily about relaxing. It’s about the thrill of the unknown and the luxury of immersion into a world that feels entirely unfamiliar. The more obscure, the more brag-worthy.

→ For more, watch Backslash’s episode of Life on the Edge: Transformative Travel



REALITY SHIFTING

Reality shifting is taking over social media, where people are invited to escape material life by immersing themselves in alternate realities. Shifting offers a form of escapism that blends meditation and imagination, guiding users into “desired realities” with specific characters and plot lines. Inspired by pop culture fandoms and cosmic spiritualism, the trend suggests that reality is fluid, allowing users to enter multiverses just by opening an app. This practice is rooted in meditation techniques, appealing to a generation that’s worn out by unattainable societal expectations and nonstop digital engagement.



PROJECT SKYDROP

In September of 2024, video game designers Jason Rohrer and Tom Bailey set out to bring the awe and mystery of gaming into the physical world with a real-life treasure hunt called Project Skydrop. Somewhere in a 500-mile circle in western Massachusetts, a 10-ounce, 24-karat gold statue worth nearly \$30,000 was placed on the forest floor. Each day, participants who paid the \$20 entry fee were emailed clues in the form of satellite images of the treasure location. The diameter of the circle shrunk every day, and whoever found the treasure got to keep it along with the access code to a bitcoin wallet worth more than \$70,000. Over seven thousand people took part in the search, and after two weeks, the treasure was eventually found by a meteorologist. Project Skydrop was a rare example of a quest simply for the sake of it rather than a stunt meant to promote something else. And based on the interest it gained, it seems there’s a strong appetite to create more of these playful pursuits in the future.

THE XYDROBE

A physical portal called The Xydrobe is taking brand activations to the next level. The company started out with a private one-person VR unit in the shape of a pod, which launched in 2023. Their latest concept is called The Xydrobe Cinema, which is described as “an immersive 4D cinema where extraordinary brand experiences come to life.” For the inaugural brand experience, Harrods partnered with Swiss watchmaker Vacheron Constantin to offer ‘The Exceptional Voyage.’ The exhibition took guests on a 10-minute multi-sensory VR journey that explored Harrods’ history through the lens of watchmakers, enhanced by 4D storytelling technology that included scent, sound, wind and temperature. Through a unique mix of fantasy and reality, the film transported people to actual locations as well as imaginary places like red lunar deserts and far-flung galaxies. For businesses, this poses an interesting question: what does your brand look, sound, smell, and feel like? How do you bring your vibe and values into an entirely new dimension—creating a lasting sensorial connection that supersedes logic?

INFLATABLE SPACE HABITATS

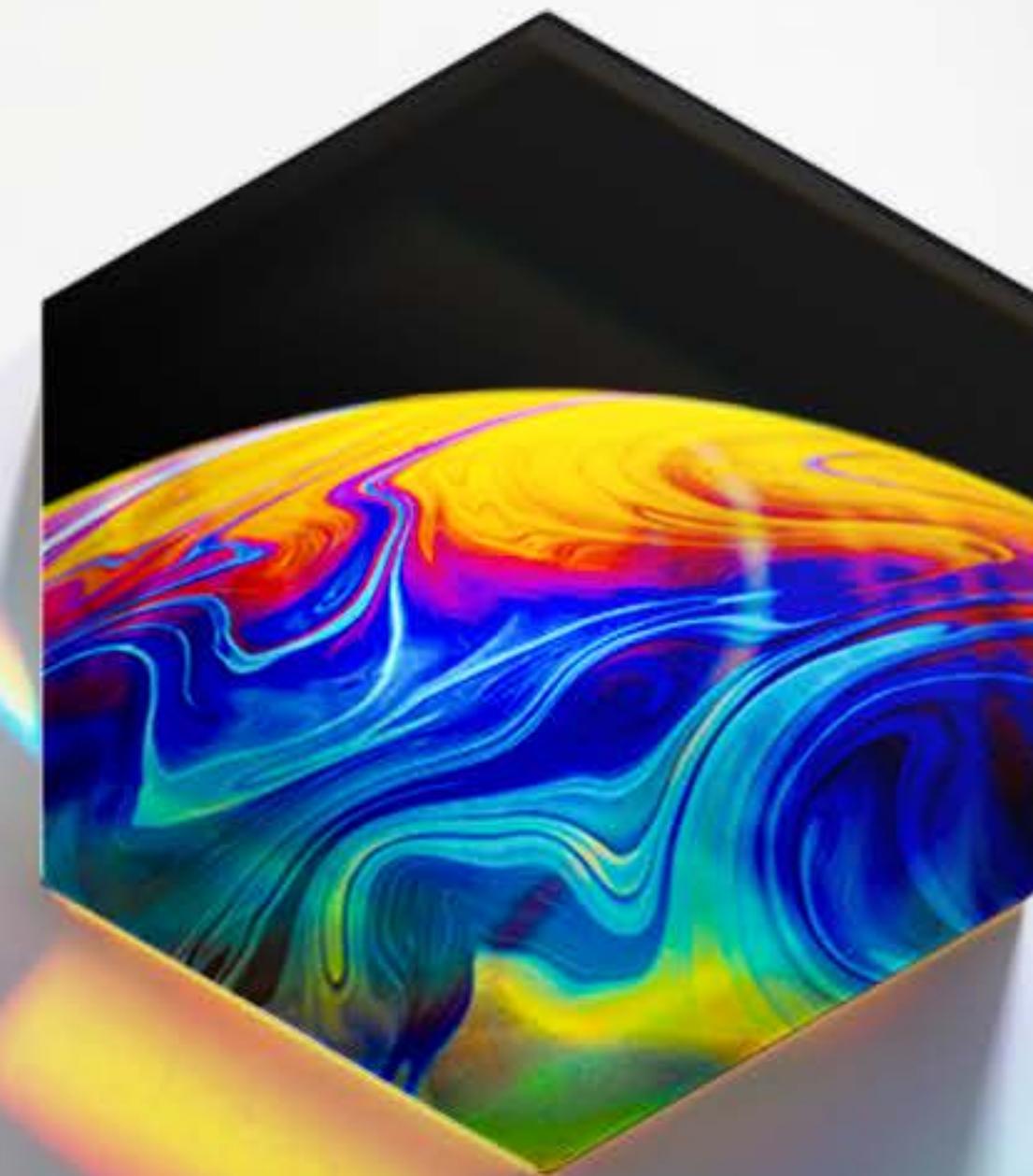
A startup called Max Space is aiming to launch expandable habitats into Earth's orbit by the end of the decade, hitching a ride via SpaceX rockets. These inflatable habitats are about the size of a stadium, and would be designed to maximize space while reducing the cost of launching payloads. The company envisions deploying these habitats not only in orbit, but also on the moon and Mars. The concept isn't entirely new, and in fact was originally created by another company called Bigelow Aerospace, but Max Space is looking to do things differently by focusing on longer-term living. While the ethics are still being debated, to push to colonize space is very much on. If successful, this expandable habitat technology could revolutionize the way humans live and work outside of Earth, opening up possibilities for long-duration missions, space tourism, and even the establishment of permanent settlements on celestial bodies.

FAR-OUT DINING

A growing number of startups are on a mission to make dinner time more interesting. They're largely doing this with the help of technology, reimagining regular old meals as entry points into wacky and immersive worlds. Aerobanquets RMX, for instance, is building "multisensorial, multicourse meals in mixed reality," while VR gastronomy startup Project Nourished is aiming to "maximize therapeutic qualities of food through digital simulation, augmentation and sensation." And if mixed reality dining isn't your thing, how about food that dances on your plate? This is being explored by scientists at Monash University's Exertion Games Lab in Australia. They've created a 3D-printed dining plate that's outfitted with a programmable electrode board, meaning sauces and condiments can be jolted across the plate in playful, choreographed patterns. The idea is that chefs will be able to construct storytelling symphonies through the movement of food, marking the potential start of a much more imaginative and entertaining future of dining.

"With endless rewarding stimulation a fingertip away, one would assume that boredom has become a rare experience. Yet, the reverse has happened... people are becoming increasingly bored."

— Katy Y. Y. Tam and Michael Inzlicht, Study: People are increasingly bored in our digital age



WHAT'S NEXT

ENABLE ESCAPISM:

Think like a worldbuilder or game designer to create immersive worlds that help people unplug from reality.

CO-CREATE:

Work with creators to tap into fringe subcultures and absurdist genres.

TURN YOUR BRAND INSIDE OUT:

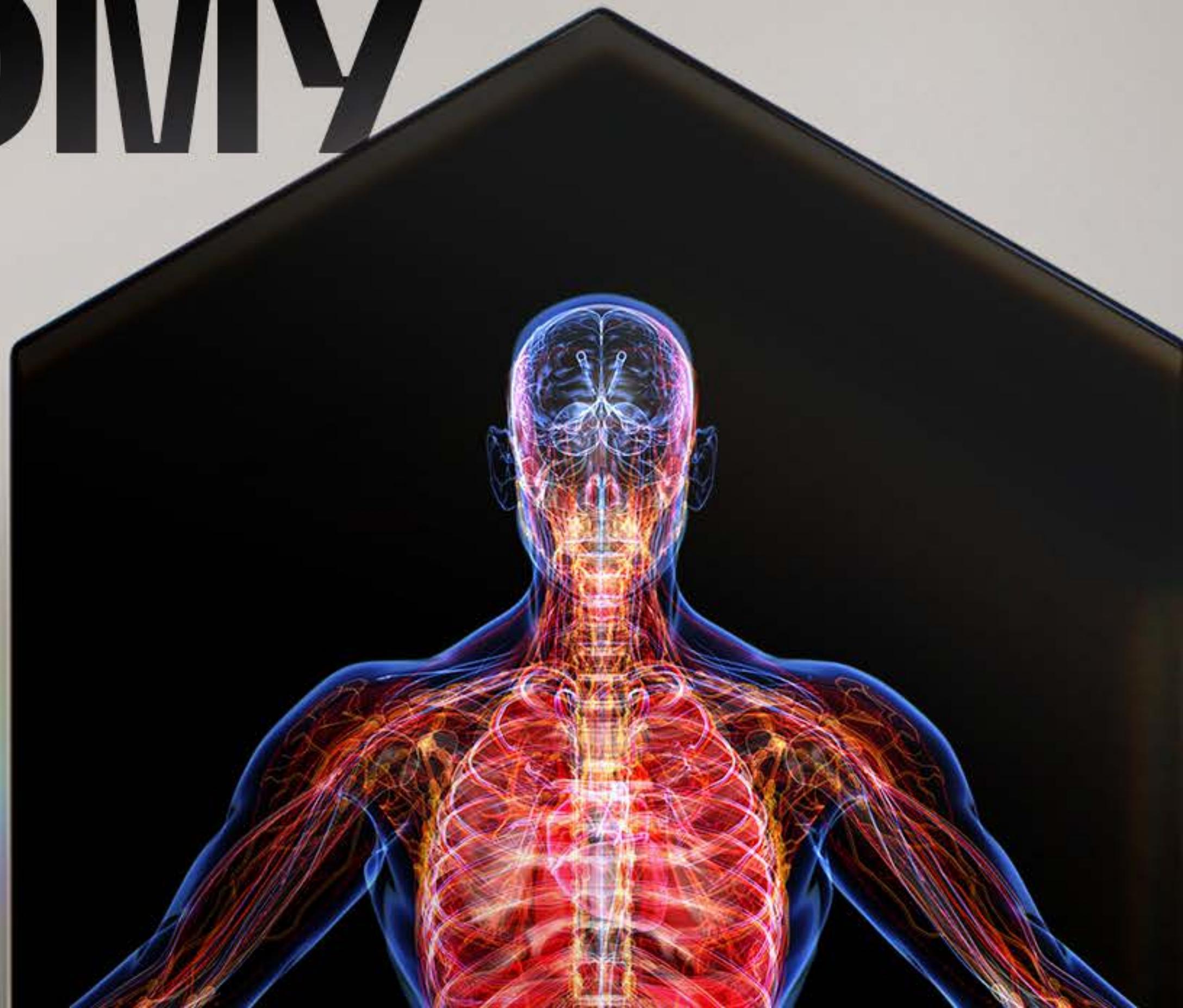
Nothing makes sense anymore. Just go with it.

NEXT TECHNOLOGIES:

Extended Reality
Generative AI
Third Place Gaming
Worldbuilding

OPTIMIZED ANATOMY

28



A desire for control has us taking biology into our own hands. From disease interventions to ultra high-tech tools, a growing category of treatments and products are helping people hack their way to a healthier, stronger, younger version of themselves. In the business of self-optimization, no upgrade is out of reach.

edges

OPTIMIZE BY EQUINOX

Equinox, the luxury gym known for its sky-high prices, is kicking things up a notch with a [personalized wellness program](#) that will run you \$40,000 a year. The program is called Optimize by Equinox, and it's entirely focused on improving longevity. Members will first be tested for over 100 biomarkers, from kidney health to cancer genes, and then will be given a detailed health plan based on their data. They'll also get access to one-on-one sessions with personal trainers, nutritionists, sleep coaches, and massage therapists—amounting to a total of 16 hours of coaching a month. Equinox's move is not surprising considering the growing obsession with healthspan, as seen through the rise in [conferences](#) and [retreats](#) promising to slow aging or help people cheat death altogether. But while it's well known that diet and exercise are key to living a longer, healthier life, experts say it's unclear how much of an edge these white-glove wellness services will actually give you. Regardless, some people are willing to pay big bucks to find out for themselves.

EVERYDAY EXOSKELETON

Exosuits could soon be a common sighting on hikes. Skip, a wearable tech startup born out of Google's innovation lab, has partnered with outdoor clothing company Arc'teryx to launch an [everyday](#) exoskeleton. The tech, called MO/GO (short for "mountain goat"), is a hybrid soft/rigid pair of pants designed to give hikers a boost as they trek up and down mountains. The wearable system provides a 40% energy assistance to the quadricep and hamstring, making the wearer feel 30 pounds lighter as they move upward. MO/GO isn't marketed as a medical device, but as a way to make challenging hikes more accessible for those who would otherwise struggle. Though exoskeletons have been around for years, MO/GO is one of the first to be used outside of the commercial and rehabilitation sectors—pointing to a future where exosuits are an everyday accessory for those who simply want to move more.



THE UNDETECTABLE ERA OF BEAUTY

After singer Christina Aguilera appeared on social media looking as if she were 20 again, WIRED declared we were entering the ["Undetectable Era"](#) of beauty where cosmetic procedures are virtually imperceptible. "This is the first time for me where I've seen work done and it's felt truly dystopian," says Ellen Atlanta, author of *Pixel Flesh*, a book investigating toxic beauty culture. Experts attribute Aguilera's appearance to new, minimally invasive procedures that use growth factors, DNA-based skin boosters, and other high-tech interventions for a naturally ageless look. The pop star's transformation has reignited debates around society's fixation on youthfulness—especially among women. As the bar for beauty continues to rise alongside the price of cosmetic treatments, some are calling for a return to natural aging.

TESTOSTERONE THERAPY

Testosterone replacement therapy (TRT) prescriptions [are surging](#) among young men in the US. Once primarily used by older men with severe deficiencies, TRT has evolved into a popular self-optimization tool marketed as a fix for common issues like fatigue and low libido. Direct-to-consumer clinics have fueled this trend by making TRT accessible to men of all ages through at-home test kits and telehealth services. However, experts warn that TRT is being prescribed to men who don't actually need it, which could lead to unintended side effects like infertility. This shift is the latest example of "medicalized masculinity," where men are going to great lengths to gain more energy, confidence, and control over their bodies.

GLP-1 BREAKTHROUGHS

No drugs have captured a bigger share of the market or of culture than appetite-blocking GLP-1s like Ozempic, Mounjaro and Wegovy. These medications, which are expected to make up a market worth [\\$130 billion](#) by 2030, have been celebrated for their effectiveness in treating diabetes and cardiovascular disease, helping people lose weight, and even in improving sleep apnea. But this is just the beginning. As sales soar, competing drugs are coming to market with even bigger ambitions and bolder promises, and reigning leader Novo Nordisk is feeling the pressure. To stay ahead, Novo is turning to a [hybrid offering](#) called CagriSema that combines semaglutide with cagrilintide. Novo is predicting that this new prospect will help patients lose at least 25% of their body weight—which would make it the most effective treatment yet. If successful, CagriSema could usher in a whole new class of weight-loss treatments that raise the bar even higher.

REVIVING FROZEN BODIES

Hibernation pods that freeze sick bodies and thaw them hundreds of years later when a cure to their disease is available sounds like a sci-fi movie we've already watched. But, it turns out, it's becoming very real thanks to Cradle Healthcare—a reversible cryonics technology company that recently raised \$48 million. CEO Laura Deming is a child prodigy in biotech and is aware of the skepticism, but remains confident in her mission. For now, the company is focusing on rodent brain slices, and has successfully cooled and warmed a sample while retaining the neurons' electrical activity. Some day, cryonics could change the way we view illness and our mortality—significantly extending our life expectancy and bringing hope to those with currently incurable conditions.

But not only is it highly ambitious, it's also pushing the boundaries of medical ethics.

DIGITAL TWIN TREATMENTS

Digital twins, which have been used in industries like engineering and construction for decades, are now being brought into healthcare thanks to investments from startups and government agencies. Researchers at Johns Hopkins University are putting the concept to the test with hearts. They start by creating virtual 3D models of hearts that mirror those of real patients with a potentially fatal arrhythmia (irregular heartbeat). They then conduct tests on the digital twin heart by poking it with a series of electrical signals and monitoring how the heartbeat is affected. This allows them to figure out the best location for treatment before surgery is actually carried out.

Looking forward, doctors envision a world where everyone has a digital twin not just of their heart, but of their entire body. These digital twins would be created by AI using data from medical exams and health wearables, which could help predict an individual's disease trajectory and run experiments with zero risk. In oncology, for instance, doctors would be able to safely trial different drugs on digital twins of cancer patients. And in obstetrics, digital twins of a patient's uterus and cervix could predict pregnancy outcomes. In this not-so-distant future, some of our most difficult medical questions will be answered more safely and precisely than has ever been possible.

A global survey of more than 40,000 consumers showed people are making intentional changes in pursuit of living healthier for longer. The majority (52%) believe they'll be healthier in the next few years than they are now because they're investing in "preventative, specialized solutions."

Euromonitor International's 'Top Global Consumer Trends 2025' report



WHAT'S NEXT

START NATURAL:

Think beyond prescription drugs and tech-heavy wearables. There are plenty of natural ways to boost performance of the mind and body.

BE REALISTIC:

Consumers will see through empty or exaggerated claims—gain trust by practicing full transparency.

SELF-EVALUATE:

Is your offering solving a real problem? Or just fueling unhealthy obsessions?

NEXT TECHNOLOGIES:

AI Agents
Assistive Robotics
Bio-Materials
Neural Control

PLATFORM POLITICS



29

The power of platforms is coming into question. High-profile battles against everything from misinformation to screen addiction are fueling the “techlash,” and Big Tech companies are public enemy number one. While established players are racing to rewrite their wrongs, a wave of ethical alternatives are coming to market with a clean slate and a shiny new halo. Self-regulate or be regulated.

edges

NO KIDS ALLOWED

Concerned about the dangers of harmful content and digital addiction, governments are enforcing age restrictions across social media. Australia passed a law banning children under 16 from accessing social media altogether, while Norway and France are raising age limits to 15. Instagram, meanwhile, is rolling out “Teen Accounts” that include the strictest privacy settings by default. Critics argue that enforcing these restrictions will be incredibly difficult, but supporters say these measures are needed in order to shield children from online risks. While platforms are being scrutinized, brands should also reflect on how they engage with minors online, ensuring their messaging fosters safe, supportive communities that prioritize mental health and well-being.

NOPLACE

A new MySpace-inspired platform called “noplace” is aiming to bring people back to the good old days of social media. It features personalized pages, a stream of casual updates from real-life friends, and most importantly: a greater focus on “social” rather than brands and affiliates. It’s also algorithm-free and instead uses AI to suggest content you might enjoy or summarize updates that you’ve missed. Nearly half a million people joined the waitlist before it launched, and the app quickly shot up to number one on the App Store upon release in July 2024—proving that the world is deeply nostalgic for the internet of yesteryear.

ADDICTED TO LOVE

As it turns out, dating apps might not actually be designed to be deleted as soon as possible. Critics claim popular platforms like Tinder, Hinge, and Bumble prioritize profit over human connection, overusing addictive features like swiping and paywalls. Match Group, which owns Tinder and Hinge, is even facing a class-action lawsuit alleging its apps use “gambling-like” tactics to keep users paying for upgrades, with some subscriptions costing up to £69.99 a month. Dating apps generate £150 million annually in the UK alone, with pop-up ads and boosts encouraging users to spend more in hopes of improving their chances at finding love. This exploitation highlights the importance of ethical design, especially in emotionally charged markets where feelings and personal relationships are at stake.

When asked if they wished certain social media platforms were never invented, 50% of Gen Z said they wish X didn’t exist and 47% said they wish TikTok didn’t exist. 43% said the same for Snapchat, followed by 37% for Facebook, and 34% for Instagram.

◆ The Harris Poll, 2024



SOCIAL MEDIA WARNING LABELS

The U.S. Surgeon General is calling for a warning label on social media, comparing its mental health risks to the dangers of tobacco. Studies show that teens spending more than three hours a day on social media are twice as likely to experience anxiety and depression, which is a serious cause for concern considering average daily use hovers around 4.8 hours a day. While companies claim to be improving safety measures for teens, the Surgeon General argues that it isn’t enough and is calling for robust legislation instead. Proposed measures include canceling addictive features like autoplay, enforcing transparency through independent audits, and shielding children from harmful content and invasive data practices.



LIFTING THE VEIL

Leading platforms, known for being shrouded in secrecy, are finally lifting the veil and inviting people behind the scenes. TikTok made the first move earlier last year when it formed a global Youth Council tasked with making the platform safer for its youngest users. The group is made up of 15 teens who will share their perspective on key issues directly with TikTok management—advising on safety policies, media literacy campaigns, new features, and the app's youth portal. Meanwhile, Instagram is making similar moves toward transparency by opening up its data to researchers. The pilot program, launched in partnership with the Center for Open Science (COS), could produce independent studies that offer insight into the relationship between social media and a teen's mental health. While it's not yet clear how much influence these outside parties will have, they signal the start of a more open and collaborative relationship between platforms, users, and outside researchers.

BLUESKY SURGE

Just one week after the U.S. presidential election, over 1.25 million users flocked to Bluesky, a decentralized alternative to X. Bluesky noted that the “majority” of these new users came from the U.S., indicating that Elon Musk’s support for President-elect Donald Trump fueled the migration. “It’s appalling that Elon Musk has transformed Twitter into a Trump propaganda machine, rife with disinformation and misinformation,” one user posted. News organizations quickly followed suit as well. One of the most notable organizations to leave X was the Guardian, which announced that its dozens of X accounts would be shutting down due to the platform’s promotion of “far-right conspiracy theories and racism.” Though Bluesky’s 27 million users are still just a fraction of the user bases of X and Threads, the pivot is proving that *where* you post now makes just as much of a statement as *what* you post.



FREE OUR FEEDS

As billionaires like Elon Musk and Mark Zuckerberg continue to tighten their grasp on the social media landscape, a new movement called Free Our Feeds is fighting to take some power back. The initiative aims to protect the technology that powers Bluesky, called the AT Protocol, and use it to create an open social media ecosystem that can’t be controlled by a single person or company—not even Bluesky itself. Free Our Feeds launched a week after Meta announced that it was dropping fact-checking and loosening its content moderation rules ahead of Trump’s presidency. The campaign is hoping to raise \$4 million initially, and expects to have the independent foundation overseeing AT Protocol set up by the end of 2025. Regardless of whether or not Free our Feeds reaches its end goal, it’s adding fuel to a fast-growing fire. People are becoming increasingly fed up with billionaires buying media outlets to boost their own agendas, spurring a migration to decentralized platforms with egalitarian values.

WHAT'S NEXT

GO BACKWARDS:

Growing calls for the “good old days of social media” could drive a return to chronological newsfeeds, retro interfaces, and algorithms that prioritize content from your real friends.

INVITE FEEDBACK:

What if platforms shared the inner workings of their algorithms and allowed users to give real-time feedback? Making algorithm reviews as common as restaurant reviews.

DESIGN FOR BOUNDARIES:

Even beyond social and gaming platforms, every brand with a digital presence should be exploring ways to foster healthier tech habits. Think self-imposed restrictions, intentional points of friction, and mindful notifications.

NEXT TECHNOLOGIES:

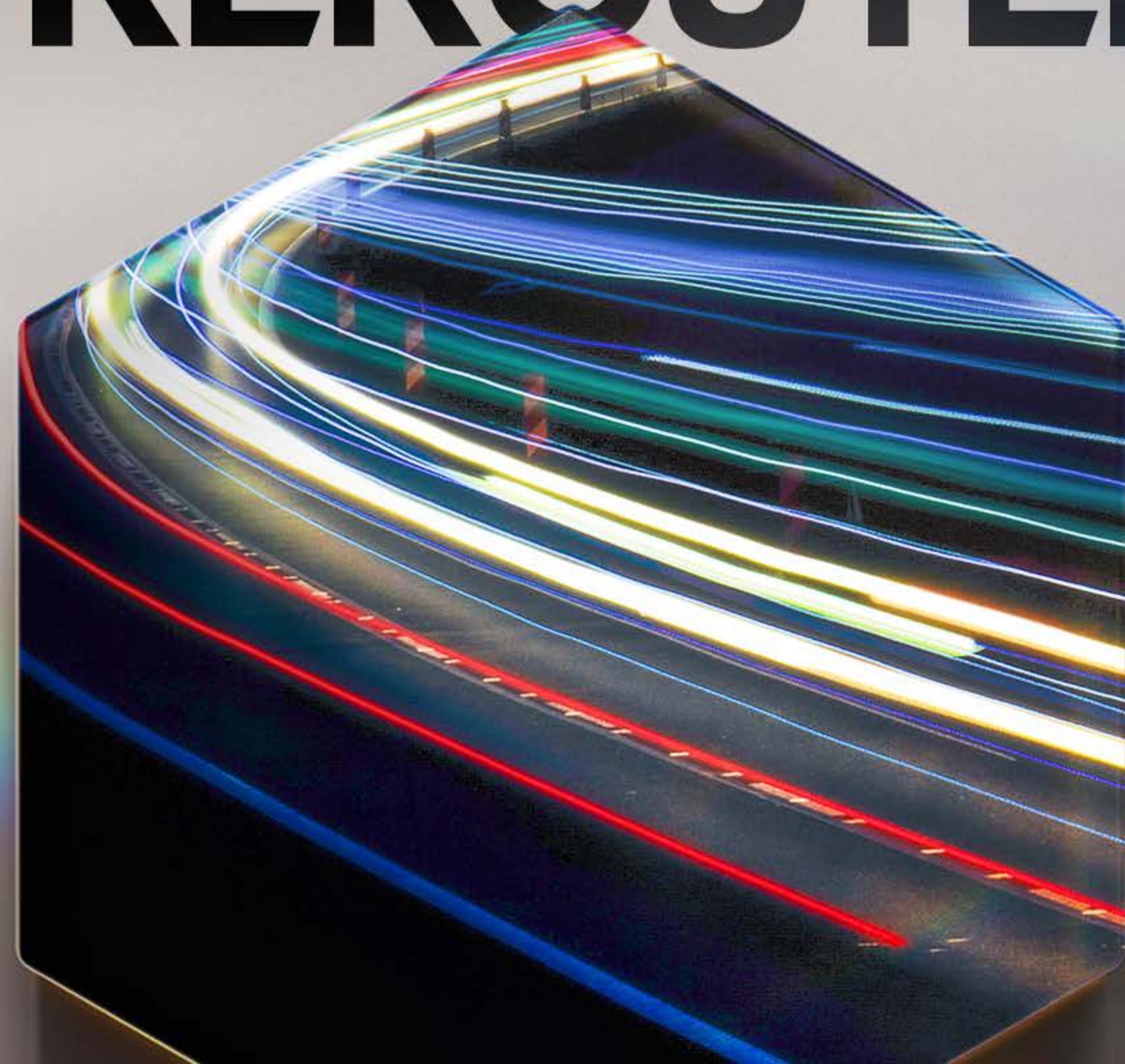
AI Agents
Community Commerce
Decentralized Social
Third Place Gaming

REROUTED

30

Society is being rerouted toward a greener, smarter era of mobility. To change how the masses move, vast infrastructure overhauls and enticing incentives will create better habits at scale. Enabling the conversion is the next big challenge.

edges



GREEN TRAVEL DISCOUNTS

Normandy's [Low Carbon Rate](#) initiative is encouraging sustainable travel by offering visitors a minimum 10% discount at over 70 cultural and tourist sites when they arrive by train, bus, or bicycle. To benefit, travelers simply present a dated public transport ticket or a photo of their bicycle at participating venues. This program aims to reduce the tourism sector's carbon footprint, acknowledging that 77% of its CO2 emissions are linked to traveler transportation. By incentivizing eco-friendly travel, Normandy demonstrates a commitment to responsible tourism and environmental consciousness.

HYPersonic TRAVEL

With over half a billion dollars invested in hypersonic aviation startups in the last two years, the sci-fi pipe dream of [hypersonic travel](#) is starting to feel closer and closer to reality. Hypersonic travel refers to transportation at speeds of Mach 5 or higher—five times the speed of sound, or approximately 3,800 miles per hour. At such speeds, a trip from New York to London could be made in under two hours. This is achieved through advanced propulsion systems, such as scramjets (supersonic combustion ramjets) or rocket engines. Although significant infrastructure challenges and environmental concerns remain, this technology highlights a growing interest in revolutionizing air travel. If successful in taking off, hypersonic travel could make ultra-remote destinations more accessible and open up possibilities for same-day international business trips—reshaping global transportation as we know it.



EV AMBITIONS BACKSLIDE

In September of last year, Volvo became the latest automaker to [scale back](#) its ambitious EV plans, following in the footsteps of other major competitors like Mercedes-Benz, Ford, and Volkswagen. Previously, Volvo planned to only sell EV vehicles by 2030. Now, however, the company is planning for plug-in hybrids to account for 90% of sales and mild hybrids to make up 10%. This change comes as demand for EVs slows in the U.S. due to reduced government incentives, tariffs, and a lack of charging infrastructure. Similar lessons are also being learned over in Ethiopia. After becoming the first country in the world to ban the sale of diesel and gas-powered cars at the start of last year, the country is now [struggling](#) with a lack of charging infrastructure and inadequate services to accommodate the shift. There's still a global consensus that everything will go electric, but these recent setbacks are raising questions about just how much time and money it's actually going to take.

DRONE DELIVERIES

Drone deliveries are revolutionizing logistics, promising faster, greener, and more efficient transportation of goods. In 2024, major players like [Amazon](#), [Zipline](#), and [Wing](#) all expanded their drone operations, with autonomous drones now delivering medical supplies, groceries, and e-commerce orders in both urban and rural areas. Advances in battery technology and AI-driven navigation have improved delivery range and precision, while regulatory progress, such as the FAA's Beyond Visual Line of Sight (BVLOS) approvals, has accelerated adoption in the U.S. and beyond. This marks an exciting shift toward a world where packages can be delivered precisely when and where we need them—whether that's our doorstep, a rooftop, or even a remote hiking trail.



FASTER TRAINS, HAPPIER FAMILIES

Faced with the world's lowest fertility rate, South Korea is hoping to boost birth rates in an interesting way: launching a [high-speed train service](#) with six new lines. The transit route will run in Seoul, the densest city facing a larger population deficit than the national average. The idea could work in two different ways. For one, younger couples could be enticed to move farther from central Seoul into larger, more affordable homes better suited for families. At the same time, the trains are expected to be one of the fastest in the world, which would shorten commute times so that parents could spend more time with their children before and after work. Governments have offered monetary compensation and improved support for families amid a population crisis, but it hasn't been enough. Now, city infrastructure is set to undergo massive changes in order to promote better family living conditions and ideally, happier couples.

RACE TO AUTONOMOUS

At the end of 2024, Waymo hit a major milestone by logging over [1 million autonomous miles](#) and providing 150,000 robotaxi rides weekly—helping to quell lingering doubts around the viability of fully autonomous vehicles. The company is now scaling across U.S. cities like Phoenix, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Austin and Atlanta, and also plans to source electric vehicles based on Hyundai's Ioniq 5 model for its growing fleet starting this year. The company's path toward profitability marks a major step forward for on-demand, self-driving cars. The more common these vehicles become, the more we can expect public trust to strengthen.

50 CENT PUBLIC TRANSPORT

All public transport rides in Queensland, regardless of trip length, will now cost just 50 cents. This includes busses, trains, trams, on-demand transport and ferries across the state. The ambitious move began as a six month trial that kicked off in August 2024, but it was so successful that the government is now making it permanent. Climate advocates have backed the announcement, hailing it as an opportunity to lower pollution by getting commuters off the road. But not everyone is convinced. Some experts say the \$150M would be better spent on improving the quality and accessibility of public transport—arguing that the reduced fares will overwhelmingly benefit people who already catch public transport because they live in wealthier areas with better services.

AIR TAXIS SOAR

The age of air taxis is quickly approaching, with cities and governments worldwide gearing up for their launch. The UK government is promising to bring air taxis to the skies by 2026, while Guangzhou, China has pledged \$1.4 billion to the "low-altitude economy" by 2027, adding over 100 takeoff and landing points to support piloted and autonomous air taxis. Meanwhile, in the U.S., the FAA recently cleared the path for eVTOL aircraft from leading companies like Joby and Archer, paving the way for the first commercial air taxi networks. One of the first big tests will take place in Los Angeles, which is implementing a network of vertiports to connect key city hubs ahead of major events like the 2026 World Cup and the 2028 Summer Olympics. Studies show that air taxis could be three to five times faster than today's driving options, turning what could take hours on the road into a short 30-minute trip through the sky. But in order to gain these efficiencies, major challenges in terms of infrastructure, safety regulations, cost, and noise control will need to be addressed first.

"The transition to sustainable transportation is not just a change in the mode of transport, but a transformation in the mindset and values surrounding how we move in our world."

TCI Transportation



WHAT'S NEXT

INNOVATE AROUND MOBILITY:

How we get from A to B has implications for every single industry. Drones will make it possible to deliver food on hikes or at the beach, EV charging stations will turn retail parking lots into hangout spots, and autonomous cars will open up new options for in-car entertainment.

MAKE ECO-FRIENDLY TRANSPORT THE OBVIOUS CHOICE:

Rewards, gamification, and financial incentives can give people the initial push needed to make lasting changes.

REINTRODUCE JOY:

Commutes don't have to be dreadful. Something as simple as an artful bus design or a new bike route can make the journey more enjoyable.

NEXT TECHNOLOGIES:

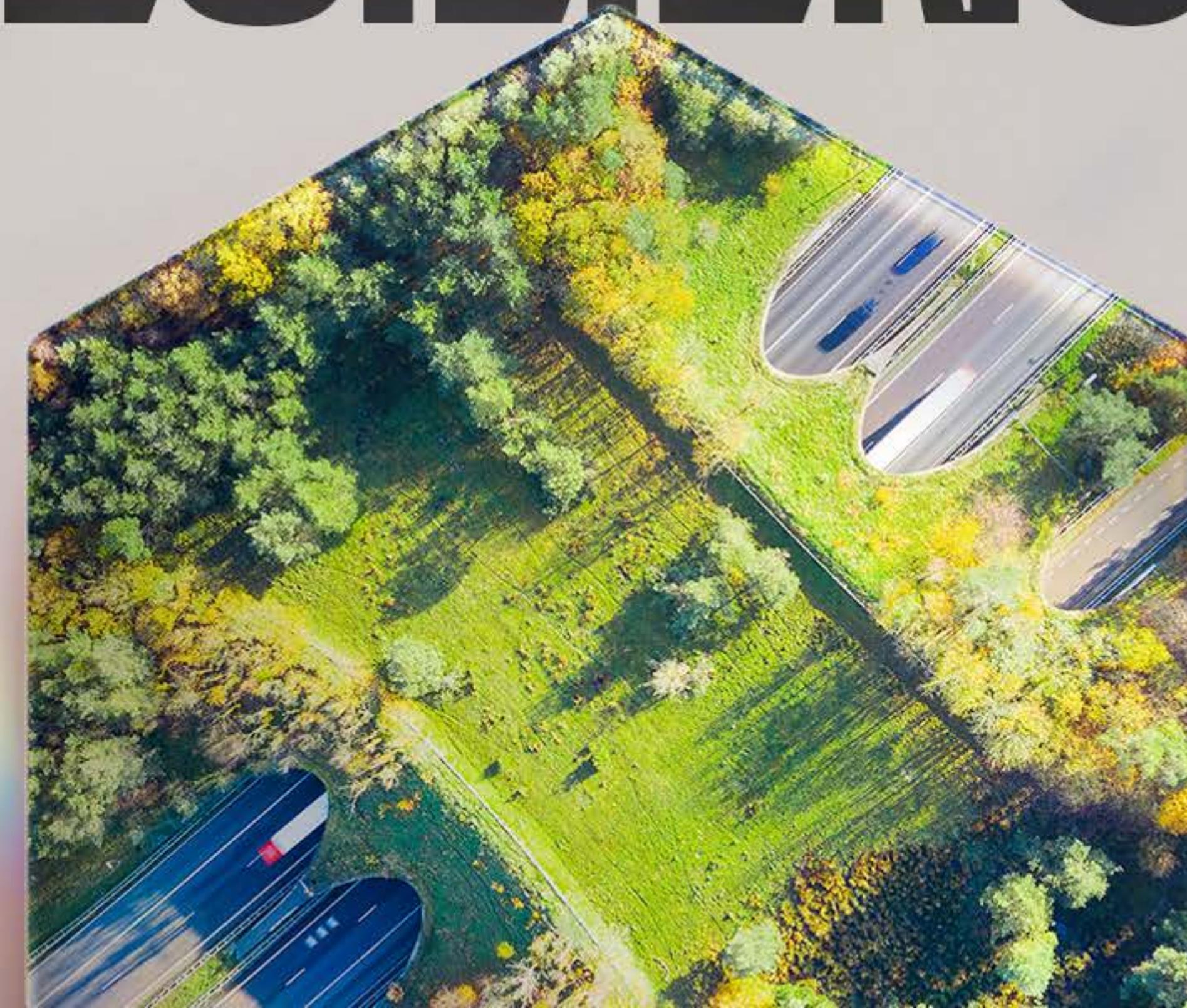
Assistive Robotics
Connected Objects

REWILD RESILIENCE

31

We're letting nature reclaim its place in our world. As we wake up to the fact that restoring biodiversity is key to our survival, we'll see rewilding become a common priority among lawmakers, businesses, and local residents. In the push to welcome back the wild, everyone has a role to play.

edges



MINI FOREST MOVEMENT

Tiny urban forests, like the soon-to-be-planted “Manhattan Healing Forest” on Roosevelt Island, are part of a global movement that uses the Miyawaki method to restore native ecosystems in small spaces. These dense patches of native plants, covering areas as small as a tennis court, are appearing worldwide—from the U.S. and Europe to Japan and India—bringing quick-growing benefits to urban landscapes. In addition to providing shelter for wildlife and pollinators, they help absorb CO₂, improve air quality, and reduce urban heat islands. Supporters highlight these forests’ role in reforestation strategies, potentially removing up to 10 gigatons of CO₂ by 2050. Although some experts caution that these urban forests cannot replace the carbon storage and biodiversity of larger, intact forests, they offer a practical, community-driven solution for cities to fight climate change and reconnect urbanites with nature.



ULTRAWILD

Steve Mashin’s new book *Ultrawild* reimagines urban spaces through the lens of the rewilding movement, offering a blend of science-backed and inventive, sometimes eccentric ideas. The more imaginative proposals include 3D-printed birds for early-stage habitats, river-cleaning submarines, and algae-based carbon capture. Though ambitious, these out-there ideas are grounded in a genuine desire to foster greater biodiversity in our cities. By approaching urgent environmental challenges with a mix of humor and rigor, Mashin’s book is getting more people to pay attention to climate crisis and encouraging them to dream up out-of-the-box solutions.

BRINGING BACK BISON

A herd of 170 bison has been reintroduced to Romania’s Tarcu mountains, helping to store CO₂ emissions equivalent to removing 43,000 cars from the road for a year. Once extinct here, the bison’s return shows how restoring native species can boost biodiversity by spreading seeds, enriching soil, and compacting grasslands to trap carbon. Their return has also inspired nature-based tourism and businesses around rewilding. The success of this initiative opens up a whole new array of options for policymakers around the world, demonstrating how nature restoration is key to stabilizing the global climate.

UNTAMED BACKYARDS

Perfectly manicured yards are out, all-natural and untamed is in. While large-scale rewilding projects tend to soak up most of the attention, there’s also a growing push to get homeowners to do their part by creating gardens that allow nature to flourish. This might mean creating habitats for bees and birds; adding a pond; refraining from use of chemicals or peat; planting native, nectar-rich plants and fruiting trees; or using hedges rather than fences.



INDIGENOUS GOVERNANCE

One of the biggest wins of the 16th Conference of Parties (COP16) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change was a historic decision to include Indigenous voices in future biodiversity decisions. This development recognizes the critical role of Indigenous communities—who manage around 80% of the world’s biodiversity—in preserving ecosystems and combating climate change. By honoring traditional knowledge systems, the decision underscores a growing recognition of the unique stewardship role that Indigenous communities play in protecting Earth’s natural resources.

"Biodiversity is not optional. Every time we force a species to extinction, we are encouraging our own demise."

— Doug Tallamy, wildlife ecologist and author

WILDLIFE CROSSING

Los Angeles is constructing the [world's largest wildlife crossing](#) to help animals like mountain lions, deer, and coyotes safely make their way across the 10-lane 101 Freeway. The plant-covered bridge will serve as a landmark solution to urban wildlife challenges, addressing the genetic isolation that's harming local mountain lion populations. Mountain lions typically have a territory of 150-200 miles but in Los Angeles, they have been restricted to a freeway-ringed "urban island," causing inbreeding. The crossing offers a hopeful example of how cities can support biodiversity amid urban growth. "We can coexist side by side with all kinds of wildlife instead of paving it over and choking it off," said philanthropist Wallis Annenberg. "It is about bringing more attention to an ingenious solution so urban wildlife and ecosystems like this one cannot only survive, but thrive."

DE-EXTINCTION DEBATES

Biotech company Colossal Biosciences and environmental conservation organization Re:wild are joining forces to [save endangered species](#) like Tasmanian devils and elephants, and even bring back extinct animals like the thylacine and dodo. Together, they aim to restore key habitats needed for rewilding. However, critics raise concerns around animal rights, risk of spreading disease, and disturbances to existing ecosystems, arguing that clear ethical guidelines are needed before moving forward. This raises an important question: should humans revive species they caused to go extinct, or are resources better spent on preventing further extinctions? While de-extinction holds scientific allure, the jury is still out on whether it's a worthwhile approach or an impractical, high-tech distraction.



WHAT'S NEXT

RESTORE NATURAL RESOURCES:

If your supply chain takes from the Earth, consider your brand responsible for giving back to it.

EMPOWER INDIVIDUAL ACTION:

Encourage everyone to get involved—whether by planting native species in their backyard or taking part in local volunteer programs.

EXAMINE YOUR FOOTPRINT:

Are your offices, retail spaces, or manufacturing facilities contributing to the destruction of nature? How can you scale back or rebuild in a way that supports biodiversity?

NEXT TECHNOLOGIES:

Bio-Materials
Lo-Fi Design

ROOTS REVIVAL



32

Globalization's fall from grace is allowing us to rediscover our roots. While being worldly was once a point of pride, we're now turning inward and getting in touch with our local and national heritage—gaining newfound appreciation for the people and traditions that came before us. To know who we are, we must first understand our history.

edges

AFRICAN ARCHITECTURE PRESERVATION

Northeastern University's [African Building Heritage Project](#) is preserving Benin's historic architecture through a robust digital archive. The interactive archive includes buildings that have been damaged by war or environmental issues, and most importantly, the stories behind them as told by real people. The researchers achieved this through a combination of traditional photography, drone-mounted geospatial scanning, virtual reality, and oral interviews with people in Benin. Jessica Parr, director of public history at Northeastern, says the project was born from a mission to make heritage preservation more inclusive, as the practice has historically emphasized Western architecture.



SAVING LOCAL DIALECT

Mandarin has been promoted as the official language of China since 1956—part of an effort to unify the country under a single standard. But while this policy has been successful in facilitating nationwide communication, it has also put many local dialects at risk of dying out. Now China's local governments are [stepping up their efforts](#) to revive these regional dialects. Nancheng County has launched language-focused after-school programs, formed dialect interest groups, and integrated dialect-based activities into the educational curriculum. Xiamen's education bureau is broadcasting dialect-specific radio programs, nursery rhymes, and cartoons in kindergartens. And similarly, Fujian's Putian City is sending experts to schools to lead dialect heritage activities. These efforts come as young Chinese express a growing interest to reconnect with their cultural roots, partly fueled by popular films like "B for Busy" and Wong Kar-wai's TV series "Blossoms Shanghai."

"When connections to the past are severed, we lose more than history—we lose inspiration, identity, and the ability to imagine a future rooted in shared humanity."

◆ Dulani Porter, [Adweek](#)

LOCALIZED PRODUCTION

The Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) is [requiring](#) online streaming services like Netflix, Spotify, and Max to contribute 5% of their revenues generated in Canada to support local content creation. The mandate is part of a larger effort to uplift Canadian productions, and is expected to generate \$200 million annually for local news, French-language content, Indigenous content, and content created by and for equity-deserving communities. Meanwhile, over in Australia, similar rules that would have required streaming platforms such as Netflix to produce Australian content have been [delayed indefinitely](#)—raising concerns about the representation of local, domestic culture in TV and film.



DIGITAL PRESERVATION

The Internet Archive, a nonprofit offering free access to collections of digitized materials, has become the [official custodian](#) of an entire nation's history for the first time. That nation is Aruba, and the collection comprises an impressive 101,376 historical items so far—including 40,000 documents, 60,000 images, 900 videos, 45 audio files, and seven 3D objects. Notable items include a map of Aruba from 1794, books about the nation's role in the slave trade, and a 1978 recording of the national hymn, "Aruba Dushi Tera." The Aruba project kicked off in 2018 when a digital archivist realized that the country's physical archives could be destroyed by extreme weather in an instant. Aruba's archivists hope other nations will follow in its digital footsteps, pointing out that the model could easily be applied to small islands and developing states, as well as bigger countries with limited means.

MUSICAL HERITAGE

The Philharmonic Society of Selangor's latest project, Lagu-Lagu Tanah Air, is reviving Malaysia's heritage songs for new generations. In an era when modern music often overshadows traditional music, this 70-member community choir is preserving classic songs like *Getaran Jiwa* and *Tanah Pusaka* to ensure they remain part of Malaysia's cultural history. Through performances and recorded archives, *Lagu-Lagu Tanah Air* invites Malaysians to rediscover these songs as living symbols of unity, identity, and pride. This initiative not only strengthens local heritage but also highlights the role of community groups in keeping cultural roots alive, encouraging brands and governments to support similar projects that celebrate and protect national history.

TALES OF REPATRIATION

Mati Diop's film *Dahomey* tells the story of 26 stolen artifacts from the Kingdom of Dahomey, now Benin, which were taken by French forces in the 19th century and returned over a century later. Through a mix of documentary footage, storytelling, and scenes of Beninese students debating the return, Diop shows that these artifacts are more than just objects—they represent a deep part of Benin's identity and resilience. By focusing on the emotional impact of reclaiming cultural treasures, the film aims to encourage other countries to seek the return of their own artifacts and push museums and governments to adopt clear policies on repatriation.



INDIGENOUS COLLABS

Arc'teryx's *Walk Gently* line is highlighting the artistry and history of Indigenous communities. The line was created in collaboration with Indigenous designer Cole Sparrow-Crawford, combining high-performance fabrics with Salish cultural motifs and Coast Salish weaving techniques. By working directly with Indigenous designers, Arc'teryx is setting an example of how brands can avoid cultural appropriation while drawing on authentic stories and most importantly, giving profits back to native peoples.

WHAT'S NEXT

REMIX IT:

Bring ancient traditions and stories to modern platforms—reaching younger generations by making the old feel new.

AVOID SMALL-WASHING:

To be truly local-led, work hand-in-hand with the residents and communities that came before you. Think regionally inspired store designs and partnerships with local makers and Indigenous peoples.

NEXT TECHNOLOGIES:

Extended Reality
Generative AI
Non-Fungible Everything (NFTs)
Worldbuilding

SEXUAL LIBERATION



33

It's time to bring sexy back. Blurred lines between objectification and empowerment have long complicated our relationship with sexuality, but a culture healing from the past is ready to get sexy again—no shame attached. Say hello to a new era of pleasure positivity.

edges

THE RETURN OF THE MALE CENTERFOLD

Cosmopolitan Australia is officially [bringing back](#) its iconic male centerfold, with actor and model Josh Heuston kicking things off. Cosmopolitan US made headlines by featuring Burt Reynolds as the first-ever male nude centerfold back in 1972, but it was phased out in the early '90s. Now, Cosmo Australia editor Tess Ogle says the time is right to bring the male centerfold back—not only because the cultural tide has shifted, but because female readers are asking for it. "The modern Cosmopolitan reader isn't just flipping through pages; she's making waves, breaking boundaries, and owning her desires," says Ogle.

FETISH CRUISE

In August 2024, Vancouver hosted its inaugural [fetish cruise](#), coinciding with the city's annual Fetish Weekend. The event attracted 350 participants, including former clergy members, dominatrices, and BDSM enthusiasts, who embarked on a three-hour voyage aboard a luxury yacht. The cruise featured various consensual activities, such as rope suspensions and impact play, all conducted under strict guidelines to ensure safety and respect. Organizers emphasized the importance of consent and community, creating a unique space for individuals to explore their kinks openly. This event highlights a growing trend of niche, adult-themed experiences in the tourism industry, reflecting a broader acceptance and celebration of diverse sexual expressions.

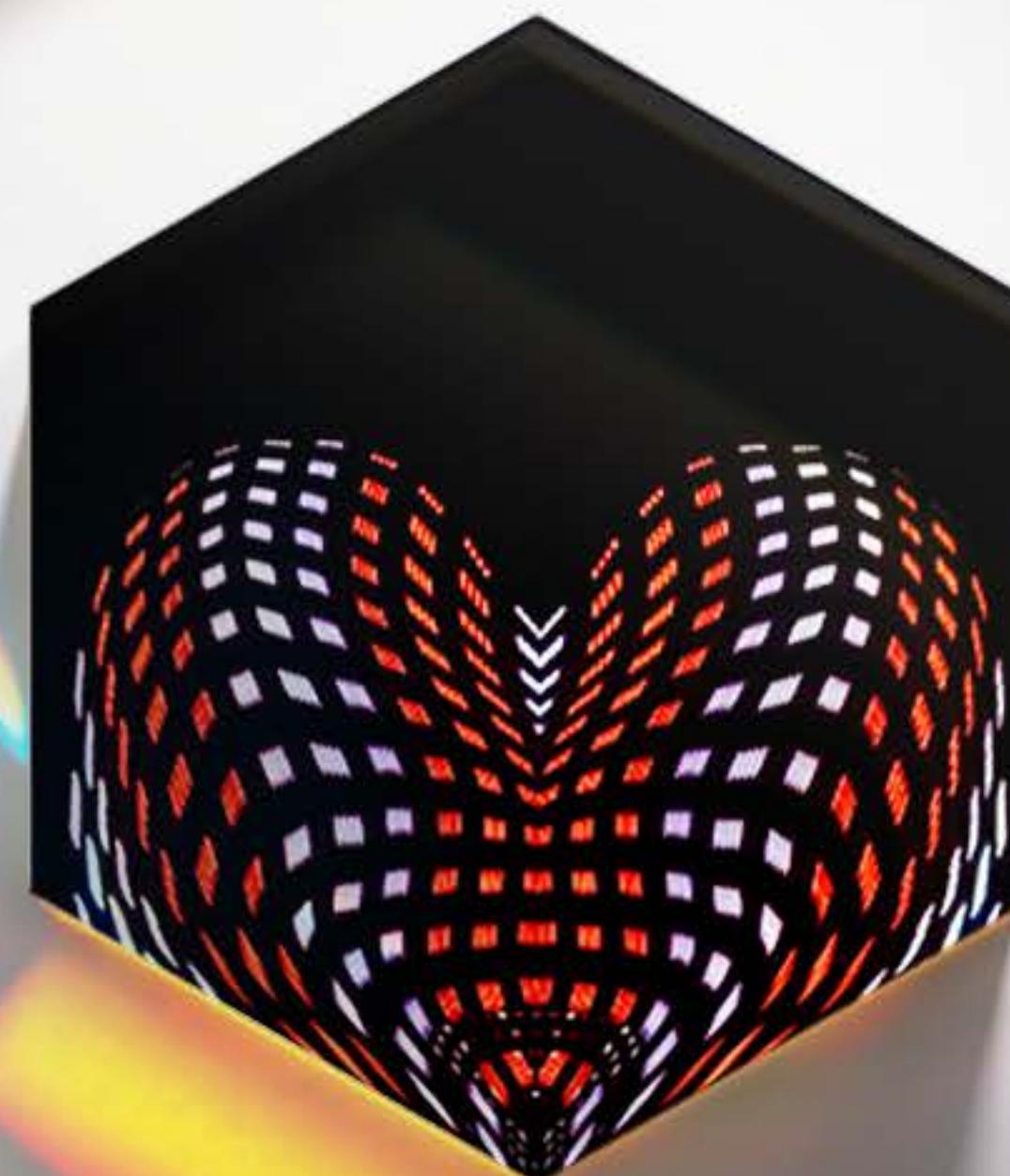


DOCTOR CLIMAX

In Thailand, where sex talk is still highly taboo, a TV series called [Doctor Climax: Puchapasio](#): is broaching the topic head-on. The story follows Dr. Nut, a dermatologist who leads a dual life—balancing traditional values with a hidden career as a sex columnist. The series uses a mix of comedy and drama to delve into sexual topics that are often left unspoken, from hidden desires in relationships to the pressures of conservative norms. Positive audience reactions indicate that Thailand is ready to trade outdated norms for more sex-positive narratives both on-screen and off.

COMFORTABLE IN MY SKIN

With labiaplasty now the [fastest-growing cosmetic surgery](#) in Australia, a new book called *Flip Through My Flaps* is aiming to normalize vulvas of all shapes and sizes. Through a collection of over 500 full-frontal photos, creator Ellie Sedgwick is educating people about vulva diversity and encouraging women to embrace every part of their body. Despite some negative reactions, Sedgwick has garnered strong support from advocates who see her work as a necessary way to combat body shame. A similar movement could benefit men as well, as male body image issues have fueled a [rise in cosmetic penis filler treatments](#).



SEX WORKER CLONES

The adult entertainment industry is getting an AI makeover as sex workers create [digital clones](#) of themselves. These clones are essentially AI chatbots, except they've been trained on a specific sex worker—so the messages sent are based on their unique personality and things the individual has actually said IRL. They can even send voice notes that mimic the person's tone and cadence. The idea is that these clones reduce sex workers' workload and maximize their profits, while still allowing them to have full control over their digital image. For example, adult film star Riley Reid created her own platform called Clona.ai, which allows her to set boundaries around things her AI clone won't respond to. While these sexting bots offer judgment-free spaces for intimate interactions, critics worry about the potential for non-consensual use of one's likeness and the proliferation of AI-generated explicit content without proper oversight.

SMUT-TOK

Sexually explicit books, better known as “smut,” have found a growing fan base on TikTok. [#SmutTok](#) now has over 1.1M posts and billions of views, with users—most of whom are female or queer—sharing unfiltered book reviews, talking about what turned them on the most, posting photos of their favorite pages, and offering cheat sheets for those looking to skip straight to the good stuff. The smut obsession is affecting real-life intimacy, too, with a study by Harold Leitenberg finding that readers of erotic fiction are up to 74% more sexually active. Many readers say the books serve as a less superficial entry point into desire compared to what’s found in mainstream movies and TV, highlighting the demand for more nuanced forms of erotic entertainment.

WANT

Gillian Anderson's *Want*, a collection of 174 anonymous sexual fantasies from women all around the world, is sparking conversations about female desire. Inspired by Nancy Friday's 1973 book *My Secret Garden*, Anderson's novel gives women a private, unfiltered space to reveal their most intimate thoughts. Despite living in a culture that's rich in overt sexual content, Anderson's collection reveals that many women still struggle with shame. Unlike explicit, often male-focused visual content, these written desires delve into unique, personal realms of vulnerability, yearning, and empowerment, highlighting how female-centric books can allow for judgment-free exploration. For many women, these stories aren't just pleasurable; they serve as a lifeline, affirming the depths of female sexuality and self-expression.

SIDESTEPPING CENSORSHIP

While gender-based censorship has been an ongoing issue, today's brands and creators are finding clever ways around it. In some Australian states, for instance, selling sex wellness products outside of adult stores is illegal—prompting Lovehoney to launch its cheeky “Not a Sex Toy” campaign. The campaign sidestepped ad restrictions by showcasing everyday items used for pleasure (like cucumbers, electric toothbrushes, and socks) instead of actual sex toys, along with a clear message: “Censorship might mean that we have to get creative, but you don't. You deserve better.” Meanwhile, on social media, creators are using replacement vocabulary like “seggs” to avoid platform censorship, a trend born on TikTok that has since spread offline. These examples all reflect a push to reclaim control, push back against restrictive norms, and celebrate pleasure unapologetically.



“Sexual liberation must mean freedom to enjoy sex on our terms, to say what we want, not what we are pressured or believe we are expected to want.”

—Gillian Anderson, author of *Want*

WHAT'S NEXT

❶ CHECK YOUR TONE:

Are you portraying sex in a healthy, positive manner? Brands can break the stigma by normalizing pleasure as an act of self-care and fostering a more open and honest sex conversation.

❷ OFFER RANGE:

Acknowledge that sexual liberation looks different for everyone. Are you being mindful of various relationship styles, comfort levels, and sexual preferences?

❸ NEXT TECHNOLOGIES:

Assistive Robotics
Avatar Identities
Tactile Haptics
Untethered Audio

STABILITY PURSUIT

34

With disruptive forces making it harder to predict the jobs of tomorrow, stability is in high demand. Workers are chasing companies that will invest in their future, while employers are aiming to attract and retain talent with practical perks and upskilling opportunities. The new dream job is the one that's future-proof.

edges



AI ELEVATES TRADE JOBS

For decades, a four-year degree has been hailed as a one-way ticket to success. But generative AI is changing that. In a recent survey of high school and college-age people by software company Jobber, the majority of respondents said they thought blue-collar jobs offered better job security than white-collar ones, given the growth of AI. Add in the fact that a shortage of skilled tradespeople is driving up pay rates, and jobs in fields like welding, carpentry, and construction have never looked better. With AI threatening a growing number of desk jobs, good old-fashioned trades are shedding their image as low-end work. Expect apprenticeships and trade programs to shine as young workers put stability first.

HUMANOID ROBOT FEARS

As robots become smarter and increasingly human-like, fears of job displacement are escalating. For example, Boston Dynamics' Atlas robot is already demonstrating fully autonomous functions in sorting and other tasks, while Tesla is investing in motion-capture data collection to refine its humanoid robot's movements. Elon Musk has even said that he expects lifelike robots to outnumber human workers as soon as 2040. With more of these robots making their way into manufacturing and retail operations, companies should proactively train people for the jobs that will be needed as manual roles decline.



ROBLOX RECRUITMENT

Ikea offered a glimpse at the future of metaverse recruiting when it hired ten Roblox players to work in its virtual store. "The Co-Worker Game" allowed players to explore Ikea jobs through interactive games, mimicking real-world roles like helping customers, serving up the famous Swedish meatballs, and organizing showrooms. Ten paid positions were available as well, offering £13.15 per hour. The move underscores Ikea's flexible career philosophy while joining brands like Forever 21 and Chipotle in leveraging Roblox to connect with younger audiences and reimagine workplace engagement. By meeting younger generations in the virtual spaces they hang out in, brands can turn the dreaded application process into a more immersive, low-pressure experience.

SINGAPORE'S FUTURE DESIGN SCHOOL

Faced with urgent challenges like climate change, the rapid rise of AI, and an aging population, Singapore's first national-level design education committee has come up with a new strategy. The result is a blueprint for a "future design school" that will put design thinking at the core of daily curriculum from the primary to tertiary levels, positioning it as a central life skill for all students. At the higher-education level, students will also collaborate with industry partners for longer work experiences under dedicated mentorship. As the workforce increasingly values adaptability and creative problem solving, brands and educators alike may look to Singapore's approach as a model for fostering future-ready talent.

TURNOVER PREDICTOR

Tokyo City University researchers have developed an AI tool that predicts when someone might quit by analyzing data such as attendance, age, and gender. Beyond forecasting employee turnover, the team is planning to upgrade the tool to recommend suitable job assignments for new employees based on their job interview data, characteristics, and personal backgrounds. In a tight labor market, tools such as this one could prove beneficial for both employees and employers—helping people find a job that suits their skills while also allowing companies to reduce turnover. At the same time, though, AI is somewhat limited in its analysis, and could match people with jobs based on their current capabilities rather than their future growth potential.

GIG WORKER RIGHTS

Mexico closed out 2024 by [signing a reform](#) that recognizes gig workers as employees for the first time. The historic legislation ensures that workers who earn at least a minimum wage through an app have the right to unionize and access to benefits such as social security, accident insurance, pensions, maternity leave, the right to receive company profits and a Christmas bonus. Workers earning under minimum wage do not have access to all the benefits but will be protected in case of work-related accidents. The reform adds Mexico to the ranks of countries such as Chile and Spain that already regulate work through digital platforms, marking a major win for the country's 600,000 app-based workers.

SEEKING GOVERNMENT JOBS

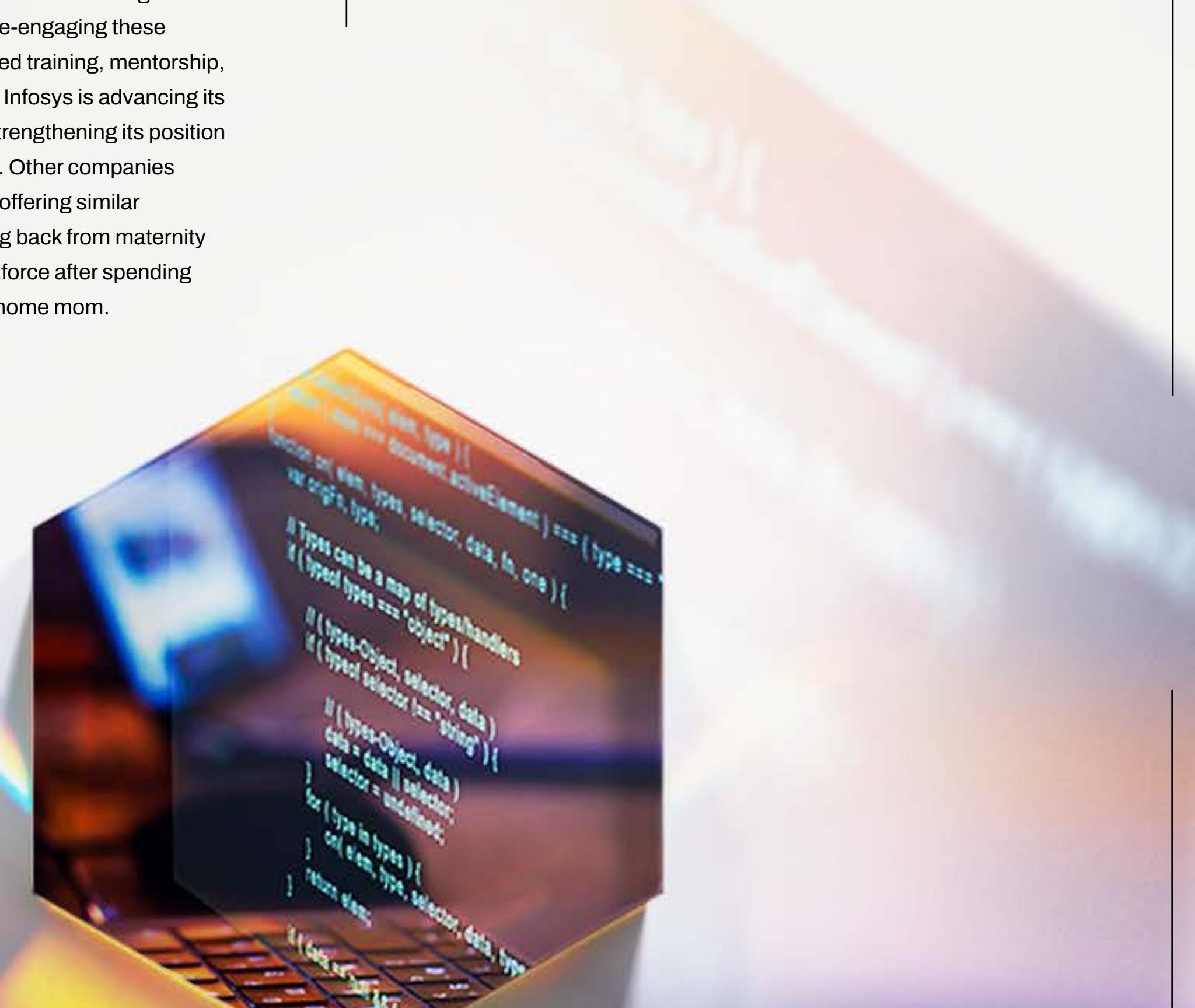
In times of economic uncertainty, government jobs are becoming more and more appealing to young workers seeking stability and solid benefits. In China, a weakened private sector has led graduates to pursue [secure civil service roles](#), signaling a new appreciation for traditional career values. Meanwhile, in the U.S., young professionals are prioritizing job security over the higher pay found in private roles. Platforms like TikTok are fueling this shift, with [influencers](#) and public-sector employees explaining how to enter government fields and highlighting benefits like pensions, loan forgiveness, and tuition support.

RESTART WITH INFOSYS

India-based IT company Infosys has launched a [specialized program](#) to help women reintegrate into the workforce after a career break. The program is part of the company's goal to reach 45% female representation by 2030, and focuses on women with at least two years of experience who've paused their careers for six months or more, offering roles across departments like automation testing and software development. By re-engaging these professionals through tailored training, mentorship, and live project experience, Infosys is advancing its inclusion goals while also strengthening its position as a leader in inclusive tech. Other companies would be wise to take note, offering similar programs for women coming back from maternity leave or reentering the workforce after spending years as a full-time stay-at-home mom.

60% of young people say they need to prioritize any job over their dream job at the moment.

■ ['Redefining 'Dream Jobs' report](#)



WHAT'S NEXT

INVEST IN UPSKILLING:

Build educational programs in-house or partner with universities to help current and prospective employees keep up with the latest skills.

LEVEL-UP BENEFITS:

As citizens strive for a happier, more sustainable way of life, businesses should reevaluate which emerging needs their stores and office spaces can fulfill.

LEND PROTECTIONS:

Brands can offer stability to their consumers through locked-in rates, safe investment options, and long-term promises.

NEXT TECHNOLOGIES:

AI Agents
Assistive Robotics
Generative AI
Spatial Computing

TRANSPARENCY RECEIPTS

35

Skeptical shoppers are demanding a peek behind the curtain. As radical transparency becomes a mandate, deceptive labels and vague marketing terms will be replaced with indisputable proof of a product's social and environmental impact. Brands that don't share the full story should prepare to be exposed.

edges



DIGITAL PRODUCT PASSPORTS

By 2030, every textile product for sale in the European Union will need a [digital product passport](#) (DPP). It will most likely take the form of a scannable QR code or some other tag, and will provide information about the product's origins, material composition, supply chain, sustainability, recyclability and much more—all gathered in one place from various approved sources. Though the majority of people say they're making an effort to shop more sustainably, the reality is that it takes a great deal of time-consuming research to figure out where things came from, how they impacted the Earth, and how they can be properly recycled. With DPPs, all of that information will be instantly accessible, making it easier for shoppers to cross-compare, and harder for companies to get away with greenwashing.

TRANSPARENT PRICING

Ever wonder why some skincare products cost 3x more than others? In many cases, there's no good reason at all. That's why some fairly priced brands are beginning to offer full transparency into their cost breakdowns—helping shoppers see that more expensive doesn't always equal better quality. One leader in transparency is [Dieux](#). On each of their product pages, you can see the landed cost (which includes formula, packaging, testing, payment processing, shipping and handling) alongside the mark-up (they mark products up by 2.78x compared to the industry average of 6-10x) and the cost the customer pays as a result. On the flip side, the same strategy could also help pricier but more ethical brands justify their higher price tag, showing that sustainable materials and fair worker wages are the reason for the upcharge.

NUTRI-GRADE LABELS

Deceptive packaging and vague marketing terms have made it harder to tell which foods are actually good for you and which are just junk foods in disguise. Chile, Mexico, Brazil and [dozens of other countries](#) have already addressed this deception by adding front-of-package nutrition labels that give packaged products a clear health score. The practice is now rapidly expanding across the globe. In Singapore, for example, following the success of Nutri-Grade labels that score beverages based on how much sugar they contain, the country [will start adding](#) similar A to D grades based on sodium and saturated fat. This will apply to popular products like soy sauce, chili sauce, cooking oil, instant noodles, and more. In addition to nudging shoppers to avoid highly processed foods, the scoring system has been proven to incentivize companies to produce healthier options.

CONSPIRACY OF CONSUMPTION

When it comes to overconsumption, consumers tend to take most of the blame. But a popular Netflix documentary called [Buy Now! The Shopping Conspiracy](#), doesn't necessarily think that's fair. Why should everyday people feel guilty, the film asks, when manufacturers and retail companies are doing everything within their power to ramp up the pace of consumption? The documentary exposes how corporations have designed products to break down quickly, promised that recycling would keep the planet clean even when they knew it wouldn't, and engineered their advertisements and marketplaces to make the shopping impulse irresistible—all while passing the environmental toll onto the public. [Buy Now!](#) makes the case for a different kind of system called the "polluter pays principle," which holds that companies—not the public—should be financially responsible for dealing with the waste they create. As shoppers become more aware of how they're being manipulated, we'll see growing calls for long-lasting, recyclable, and multifunctional designs that minimize waste. Brands that help people buy less and buy better will escape the scrutiny.

"People are sick of having things marketed to them where it's all spin. Honesty and integrity are the next big movement."

Charlie Denton, co-founder of Isla Beauty

FASHION FACTORY CONTENT

Videos giving people a behind-the-scenes look into clothing factories are [all the rage](#) on TikTok. One of the biggest creators behind the trend is Will Lasry of [Glass Factory](#), who takes viewers into the manufacturing facilities of popular brands like Supreme, Ralph Lauren, and Skims. Glass Factory's goal isn't to expose the worst offenders, but rather to shatter the stigmas around poor product quality and unfair working conditions in certain countries—showing that something "Made in Italy" isn't necessarily superior to something "Made in China." Their team vets manufacturers based on their certifications, management style, treatment of workers, and brands they work with. Looking forward, Lasry believes that not sharing supplier information will eventually "be like not having an Instagram account."



COMBATING COUNTERFEITS

It's estimated that counterfeit goods represent 2.5% of global trade, amounting to \$464 billion annually and doing serious damage to both profit and reputation. In turn, blockchain is becoming an increasingly popular way for brands to fight back. One of the most notable examples is the Aura Blockchain Consortium. Established by LVMH, Prada, and Cartier back in 2021, the nonprofit platform creates a "digital twin" for designer products so that customers can make sure their purchase is the real deal. Aura has since recorded over 50 million luxury goods on its private blockchain and counting. But this isn't just happening in fashion—even our food is now being verified by tech as well. Just look to how producers of Italy's renowned parmigiano reggiano, one of the most counterfeited cheeses in the world, have started adding scannable microchips to the cheese rinds so that customers can trace and authenticate its origins. Such practices are set to become the norm across the board, marking a future where the only counterfeits out there are those being purchased intentionally.



79% of customers want brands to go above and beyond what they are required to reveal and give more information, with two-thirds saying they would switch brands for deeper transparency.

◆ Nielsen IQ, 2022

ORIGIN TRACK

Troubled by the rampant suffering and slave labor in the cotton supply chain, DTC bedding brand Boll & Branch is giving shoppers in-depth insight into where their sheets come from. With the company's new OriginTrack feature, customers can input any product's "lot number" and trace its journey from farm to factory. In one example, a set of sheets begins in Odisha, in Northeast India, where the cotton is farmed and ginned. The cotton travels down the West coast of India until it reaches Tamil Nadu, where it is dyed in a family-run dying facility that employs 6,000 workers, the majority of whom are women. The final product is then cut and sewn in a female-founded, family-owned factory Madurai. When asked if customers actually care about this level of detail, Boll & Branch's co-founder Scott Tannen says it's up to brands to present the information in an engaging and visually immersive way. "We've invested a lot in storytelling, so customers can feel connected to the people who made their sheets," he says.

WHAT'S NEXT

- ◆ **AVOID VAGUE LANGUAGE:**
Swap meaningless terms like "clean" or "green" for credible certifications and clear numbers.
- ◆ **PRACTICE PRICE TRANSPARENCY:**
In a time when people are feeling the financial pinch of inflation, sharing the full breakdown of product cost vs. retail mark-up is a surefire way to gain trust.
- ◆ **MAKE IT INTERESTING:**
Don't just share your supply chain process like an instruction manual, turn it into a compelling visual story that people will want to follow.

◀ NEXT TECHNOLOGIES: ▶

Bio-Materials
Community Commerce

UNGLOSSED



An uptight world is ready to loosen up. Exhausted by impossible standards and bored of perfection, people are dropping the act and embracing the mess. Staged “authenticity” is out, genuinely unapologetic and unfiltered is in.

edges

RETURN OF INTERNET BANTER

Remember when the internet was fun? Hoping to offer a "break from all the heaviness, new online communities are bringing back the causal banter and unfiltered feedback that once ruled the web. One woman leading the charge is Delia Cai, who started a pop-up newsletter called Hate Reads where guest writers rag on everything from menswear to media parties. The series has been an instant hit, proving the appetite for piping hot takes. A similar—albeit more superficial—version of this is also shaking out on Chinese social media platform Xiaohongshu, where global users are inviting strangers to share blunt, unfiltered feedback on how to improve their appearance. The #tingquan hashtag, which translates to "listen to advice," has garnered over 500 million views so far. Even brands are participating, with food delivery company Zomato inviting stand up comedians to roast them for the company's anniversary. As people grow tired of highly sensitive media environments, this kind of unreserved candor is serving as a welcome throwback to simpler times.

BRACES, CROCS, AND PIMPLE PATCHES

As ultra-polished looks fall out of favor, quirky accessories are calling attention to flaws and giving people license to indulge in their weirder tastes. Youngsters are now embellishing their pimples with star-shaped rainbow patches rather than covering them with makeup. Ugly shoes like Crocs' Pringle boots and New Balance's "snoafers" are selling out among fashion enthusiasts. And young people and celebs are even rocking non-corrective dental braces—also known as "fashion braces"—for a nerdy-cool look. These trends reflect a desire to embrace the strange and imperfect, turning once-hidden quirks into bold statements of individuality.

"The more that we live in and through our screens, the more we are constantly trying to figure out who the real self is."

◆ Michael Serazio, author of *The Authenticity Industries: Keeping it "Real" in Media, Culture, and Politics*

ELUSIVE AUTHENTICITY

Does trying to appear authentic online automatically make you fake? With social media giving everyone and anyone a platform to create a personal brand, matters of authenticity and "realness" are becoming ever more fraught and confusing. Platforms like BeReal are selling the idea that a "realer" you can be unlocked. Celebrities are posting their tearful breakdowns and makeup-free faces in an effort to appear relatable. And brands are publicly backing social causes to prove that they care about the same things you do. But is any of this actually real? Or is it turning the very notion of authenticity into yet another kind of online performance? As more people poke holes in forced authenticity, we could see people move away from sharing their lives online altogether.



BRAT SUMMER

2024 will go down in history as the year of brat summer. It all started with Charli XCX's album *Brat*, which set the tone for a season of playful rebellion where conventions were cast aside. The movement quickly grew beyond music and fashion, especially when Charli herself declared "Kamala [Harris] IS brat" after Harris's explosive rise to the presidential ticket. Young women showed their support by flooding social media with brat-inspired content, celebrating a dirty, hedonistic, braless lifestyle that marked a refreshing departure from the "clean girl" aesthetic of years prior. The enthusiasm for brat summer is a strong signal that women are ready to leave the judgment behind and let their lime-green freak flag fly.

EMBRACING LOSERDOM

While social media is known for being a highlight reel, new trends are turning it into a place to flaunt your failures. On TikTok, the "Why I didn't make it to the Olympics" trend had users posting videos of their failed sports attempts, like clumsy dives or missed gymnastics landings, all set to a remixed national anthem. Similarly, Indonesian graduates are turning to TikTok to share their pivots to street vendor jobs after unsuccessful LinkedIn searches, while podcasts like "Hot Mess with Alix Earle" are normalizing unfiltered conversations about young women's struggles. This wave of sarcastic content reflects Gen Z's raw, often nihilistic sense of humor. Rather than sharing their vulnerabilities in a try-hard manner, people are putting their messiest selves forward to show that they're in on the joke.

INFLUENCER FATIGUE

We may be approaching peak influencer. When they first came onto the scene, influencers were a way for brands to sell their products through everyday people instead of celebrities. But now, an overload of sponsored content is starting to backfire. This became especially evident when makeup brand Tarte flew 30 influencers to Bora Bora via a private jet last year, where they indulged in champagne and caviar and were showered with gifts galore. The trip didn't quite spark positive envy as Tarte was hoping. Instead, people were quick to call the brand out for being tone deaf, criticizing the extravagant spending in a time of worsening inequality and expressing anger over the environmental impact of the yachts and private jets. Studies confirm that the tide is turning as well. The BoF-McKinsey State of Fashion 2024 Consumer Survey found that 65% of respondents rely less on fashion influencers compared to previous years, with respondents saying that they prefer quirky, offbeat personalities and less-polished aesthetics.

DITCHING TABLE MANNERS

Gen Z is reshaping the dining experience by embracing a more relaxed and communal approach to table manners. As strict, seemingly arbitrary rules begin to feel outdated, the focus is shifting from formality to genuine connection, with casual habits like leaning on the table or sharing bites becoming marks of enthusiasm rather than disrespect. According to a survey conducted by U.K. restaurant group Prezzo, 77% of Gen Z don't mind "incorrect" utensil use, and nearly 40% are unfazed by others sampling food from their plates. For restaurants, this creates an opportunity to rethink old-school dining and create an atmosphere that emphasizes comfort, share-ability, and messy joy.



GROSS WORK OUTFITS

Glamorous "Get Ready With Me" (GRWM) videos are facing new competition from "gross" work outfits. In China, young corporate employees are proudly posting pictures of themselves showing up to the office looking like they just rolled out of bed. Think flannel pajama pants, socks with sandals, and messy hair. The trend started when Douyin user "Kendou S—" posted a video showing off a mismatched outfit that her supervisor called "gross." The video took off and was shared more than 1.4 million times, inspiring tens of thousands of people to join in and compete to create the most repulsive outfit. These looks aren't just about being comfortable. Workers have turned their lackluster fashion choices into a form of rebellion against low pay, bad bosses, and long hours. It also reflects the fact that a life of ambition is losing its allure among China's youth. As the country's growth slows and good jobs become harder to find, more people are rejecting the rat race altogether and settling into a simpler life.

WHAT'S NEXT

TAKE PRIDE IN THE WORK-IN-PROGRESS:

Give customers a behind-the-scenes look at your brand (the good, the bad, the ugly), and be upfront about the things that still need improvement.

LOWER THE BAR:

Are your ads or product claims reinforcing unattainable ideals? Rewrite your language to be less about meeting societal expectations, and more about following your own happiness.

GET MESSY:

What is the raw, unfiltered, non-conformist version of your brand or product?

NEXT TECHNOLOGIES: < >

Avatar Identities
Lo-Fi Design

UNTOURISM

37

The days of limitless travel are coming to a close. Between overcrowded destinations and careless tourist behavior, a clear need for boundaries is giving rise to tighter regulations and more mindful business models. The shift from high-volume to high-value travel will forever change how we define a brag-worthy trip.

edges



RESPONSIBLE REGULATIONS

Once eager to attract as many tourists—and dollars—as possible, the world's most popular destinations are now putting limits in place for the sake of residents. Amsterdam has banned the construction of new hotels in order to combat overtourism. New Zealand is tripling its tourist fees in order to generate funds for local conservation and infrastructure projects. And Greece is planning to limit the number of cruise ship visits to popular Aegean Islands like Mykonos and Santorini. The Greek government has also vowed to fully protect 198 of its beaches from overtourism, meaning restaurants, bars, and large public gatherings will be banned, and the presence of sun loungers and umbrellas will be prohibited. These restrictions signal a necessary shift from tourist-first to resident-first thinking, ensuring that beloved cities remain livable for the long term.



PARTY CRACKDOWNS

From Ibiza to Prague, popular European destinations are cracking down on “party tourism” in a bid to minimize disturbances from rowdy visitors. Prague's recent ban on late-night pub crawls follows similar measures in Mallorca and Ibiza, where restrictions on public drinking and alcohol sales aim to end the city's reputation as a go-to party destination. Prague's deputy mayor, Jiri Pospisil, said the city wants to discourage tourists who come “for a short time only to get drunk” in favor of “a more cultured, wealthier tourist.”



RESTAURANT REDIRECT

Fed up with tourists taking over London's best restaurants, Redditors are banding together to redirect them to mediocre spots. It all started when one user on Reddit wrote about how Black Pig in Borough Market, once a hidden gem, was now being overrun with tourists and influencers. Others quickly chimed in and agreed, and slowly but surely started sarcastically pointing visitors to common chain restaurants like Angus Steakhouse. Their hope is that these posts will be pulled into Google's AI-generated summaries on Search, so anyone looking for good places to eat in London will be served up subpar recommendations instead. This lighthearted grassroots hack represents a much larger frustration with tourist-fueled overcrowding. A big part of the problem is that everyone is looking for recommendations in the same place, with 69% of Gen Z and millennials relying on social media for travel ideas. To help spread people out, travel brands should ditch copy-and-paste itineraries for more bespoke, unexpected recommendations.

GREEN TRAVEL REWARDS

Copenhagen, already known for its extensive cycling infrastructure and eco-certified hotels, is incentivizing tourists to consider the planet. Through a new initiative called CopenPay, visitors can pay for attractions with climate-friendly actions like cycling, joining trash cleanups, or volunteering. In return, they get access to cultural experiences like guided museum tours, free kayak rentals, and vegetarian lunches. By rewarding positive environmental actions, the city is doubling down on its green reputation and setting a higher standard for its visitors.

LAST-CHANCE TOURISM DEBATES

From the rapidly bleaching Great Barrier Reef to the melting ice sheets of Antarctica, travelers are racing to see parts of the world that are at risk of disappearing. While not a new phenomenon, last-chance tourism is gaining traction as the consequences of climate change become increasingly apparent. To put things into context, one study published in the journal *Science* last year found that around half of the world's glaciers will have melted by the end of this century. One such destination is Mer de Glace—the largest glacier in the French Alps—which recently opened a new lift in order to get travelers closer to the retreating ice. These kinds of efforts sit on a double-edged sword. On one side, people argue that visiting a fragile site can inspire the adoption of more sustainable behaviors. On the other end, though, the harsh reality is that the very presence of tourists only accelerates a destination's demise. The ethical questions at hand hold much larger implications for the future of travel. Will visitors to these sites be required to prove their sustainable credentials or offset their environmental impact going forward? Will climate change education become a mandatory part of these tours? And the biggest question of all: will the world's natural wonders eventually be closed to tourists altogether?

NO PAPARAZZI

Japan is cracking down on camera-happy tourists in unconventional ways. Last April, after years of complaints over growing buzz of photography, officials of Japan's popular Geisha district in Kyoto shut off access to "paparazzi" tourists who harass the women. In the same month, the small Japanese town of Fujikawaguchiko took aim at tourists by installing an eight-foot-tall and 65-foot-long mesh barrier to block its famous view of Mt. Fuji. The move was made in order to reduce the disruptive crowds that would form around Lawson convenience store—a popular site to snap pictures of the mountain. Looking ahead, we could see more camera-free zones as governments look to halt disrespectful behaviors.

AIRBNB-FREE BARCELONA

Barcelona, one of Europe's most visited cities, is planning to ban all short-term rentals by 2029. The licenses for the 10,101 apartments currently approved as vacation rentals on platforms such as Airbnb and Homeaway will not be renewed when they expire in November 2028. This means that from 2029 on, "tourist flats as we conceive of them today will disappear from the city of Barcelona," mayor Jaume Collboni announced. The new measure aims to ease the city's ongoing housing shortage. Collboni said the boom in short-term rentals in Barcelona had helped push up rents by 68% in the city, and the cost of buying a house by 38%, calling it the city's biggest problem.



Some 67% of travelers globally say they want to visit less crowded destinations on their next trip.

Booking.com's 2025 Travel Predictions

WHAT'S NEXT

POINT TO THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED:

Companies can encourage travel to lesser-known destinations by reframing the unexpected itinerary as the most aspirational.

SHOW THE WHOLE PICTURE:

Beyond just stating the amount of CO2-e kg emitted, brands can get creative in how they communicate the holistic social, cultural, and environmental impact of a particular trip.

QUALITY OVER QUANTITY:

What if businesses rewarded travelers who book fewer, longer trips and give back to the communities they visit?

NEXT TECHNOLOGIES:

Extended Reality
Generative AI
Third Place Gaming
Lo-Fi Design

WORK-LIFE BOUNDARIES

38

A burnt-out workforce is putting life first. As employees reassess their relationship with work, rising demand for clear boundaries and better protections will spur a modern-day labor movement. Work-to-live is the new mentality, and flexibility is the expectation.

edges



BURNOUT COACHES

First came life coaches and career coaches, now come the burnout coaches. These coaches help people manage chronic workplace stress by identifying practical solutions, which might include practicing essentialism, prioritizing sleep health, or simply adding a line to your email signature saying you won't reply to messages sent after 6 p.m. Some employers offer sessions with a burnout coach as part of their mental health benefits, but the majority of clients pay out of pocket (around \$250 an hour) for one-on-one meetings. Despite the field's lack of credentialing and oversight, demand is rising rapidly as exhausted workers look for new ways to cope.

WELLNESS-ORIENTED COWORKING

Recognizing the rising demand for co-working spaces as well as a growing cultural obsession with wellness, fitness entrepreneur Tony de Leede has launched a new concept called Wello Works. Located in Sydney, the venue offers both Wello Coworking, which includes private offices and spaces for team collaboration, as well as the Wello Collective, a wellness-focused area with amenities like HydroMassage, LED Light Therapy, and infrared saunas. The idea is that workers can go to one place to get their work done while also fitting in doses of movement, mindfulness and self-care throughout the day. By putting work and wellness under one roof, Wello Works is aiming to make healthy balance the most convenient choice.



REMOTE WORK WARS

The remote work wars are intensifying as companies push for in-office returns at all costs. Major employers like Amazon and Asda maintain that showing up in person is essential for collaboration and productivity, yet the majority of workers are still fighting to preserve the flexibility they gained during the pandemic. In the UK, nearly half of recent graduates say they wouldn't consider a job without hybrid options, and over 50% view remote flexibility as valuable as a competitive salary. Employers who aren't willing to budge on the office mandates should be prepared to offer flexibility in other forms, whether that be unlimited vacation, choose-your-own perks, or fluid scheduling.

UNHAPPY LEAVE

"If you're not happy, do not come to work." That's a message directly from Yu Donglai, founder and chairman of Chinese retail chain Pang Dong Lai, to his employees. During the 2024 China Supermarket Week, Donglai announced that employees would be eligible to request 10 days of additional "unhappy leave" whenever they're feeling down in the dumps or simply need a rest day. The leave cannot be denied by management. This move is very on-brand for Yu Donglai, who has publicly condemned Chinese overwork culture in the past. His policies reflect this, too, stipulating that employees work a maximum of seven hours a day, have weekends off, are paid well above the national average, and get 30 to 40 days of annual leave in addition to five days off for Lunar New Year. Though still considered progressive, especially in China, Yu's policy is indicative of a much larger push to decenter work from our lives.

FLEX FUTURES

As of December 2024, Singapore requires all employers to establish a formal process whereby employees can request flexible work arrangements. Employers must respond to the request within two months, and can deny requests only if supported by valid business reasons, such as productivity concerns. The policy is designed to accommodate an aging workforce and offer better support for caregivers, making flexible arrangements like telecommuting and adjusted work hours far more common. Similar measures are already in place in the U.K. and Ireland, with other countries expected to follow suit.



Randstad's annual survey found that work-life balance is the top motivator for employees around the world, ranking above pay for the first time since the study began 22 years ago.

 Randstad Workmonitor 2025

REST REMINDERS

Zoom doesn't want to be blamed for your burnout. The company has [filed a patent application](#) for a new feature that uses machine learning to understand your schedule and determine when you need to take a break from your computer. Users can select certain actions they want to be reminded of at specific times, whether that be going for a walk after two or more hours of straight meetings, journaling in the morning, or taking a mid-afternoon snack break. With most workplace tech designed to optimize productivity at all costs, Zoom's patent reflects a small but positive step in a more human direction.



WORKWEEK DIVIDE

Shifting labor dynamics are creating very different workweeks across the globe. In many cases, the push for a four-day workweek is still going strong. [Iceland](#) has become a global leader in this movement, following a series of successful trials which demonstrated that reducing the workweek to four days without a pay cut boosted productivity and significantly improved employee well-being. Countries like Spain, New Zealand, and [Japan](#) have since launched similar trials inspired by Iceland's success. On the opposite end of the spectrum, however, some countries are enforcing longer workweeks out of economic necessity. Most recently, [Greece](#) introduced a law allowing for a six-day workweek in certain industries, primarily those operating 24/7 services and some manufacturing sectors, where employers can require employees to work an additional day with a 40% pay increase for the extra hours. Extended workweeks also remain common in countries like South Korea and India, though there is increasing advocacy for reforms that address burnout. The results of these efforts will be monitored closely by both governments and employers alike, meaning the traditional five-day workweek may eventually no longer be considered standard.

WHAT'S NEXT

○ PRACTICE WHAT YOU PREACH:

Policies and benefits only go so far. If the company culture doesn't foster clear work-life boundaries, employees will feel the pressure.

○ 360° FLEXIBILITY:

Flexibility is no longer just about when and where you work. It also extends to pay packages, benefits, and team structures.

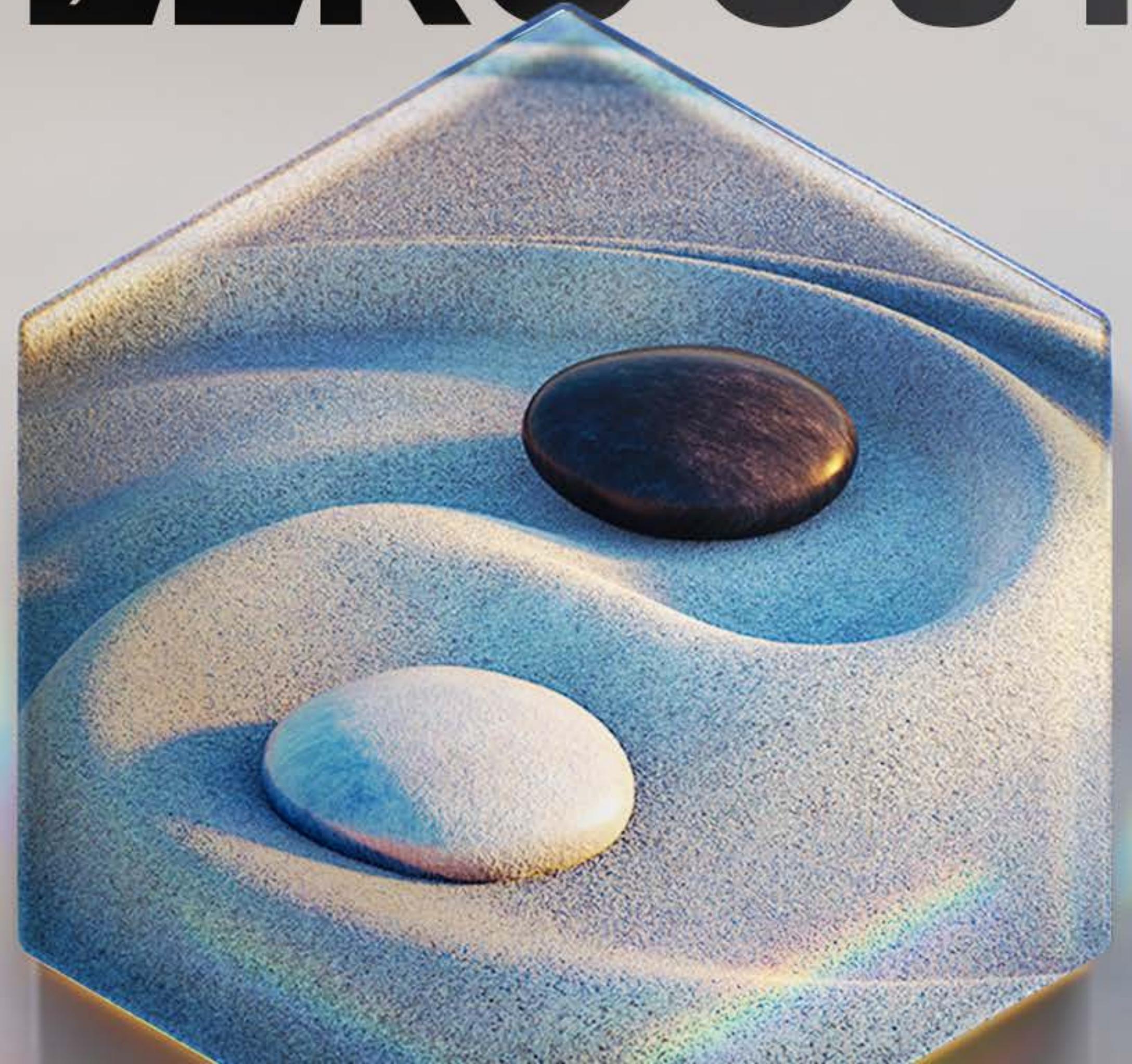
○ REINFORCE BOUNDARIES THROUGH COMPANY TECH:

Instead of tracking when employees are offline, what if systems alerted managers when their team members were working too much overtime? Or, for non-office workers, what if scheduling software allowed employees to set their own break times?

⟨ NEXT TECHNOLOGIES: ⟩

AI Agents
Spatial Computing

ZERO OUT



39

The always-on is getting some much-needed time off. We've overstimulated and overstuffed our lives, and now we're collectively hitting the pause button to reconnect with ourselves. Nothingness is our new ideology, and it's reshaping our values, our systems, and our consumption.

edges

JUNIOR NURSING HOMES

Nursing homes are the [hot new hangout spot](#) for young Chinese. Across China, hostels, coffee shops, and rural resorts are rebranding themselves as “junior nursing homes” (青年养老院, qīngnián yáglǎoyuàn) reserved exclusively for Gen Zs and millennials. Young people can stop by to exercise, meditate, garden, play mahjong, fish in the river, or just relax. Owners of these junior nursing homes say they mostly attract white-collar corporate workers looking for a temporary escape from the hustle. It’s the latest sign that young Chinese professionals are burnt out, as made clear by similar lifestyle philosophies like “lying flat,” or doing the bare minimum to get by. As young people chase a more relaxed lifestyle, a market full of slower hobbies and low-pressure escapes will take shape.

UNDERCONSUMPTION CORE

From [#underconsumptioncore](#) to [de-influencing](#), TikTok users are on a mission to counteract the constant barrage of ads and influencer hauls. These trends promote buying less and reclaiming a simpler life, hyping up anti-consumption as a way to minimize waste while saving money. “It’s kind of bragging that you’re not influenced,” says beauty journalist Laura Capon. For brands, this movement presents an opportunity to pivot away from relentless product promotion and acknowledge the impact of thoughtless consumption. Instead of pushing people to “add to cart,” consider helping them make the most of things they already own—whether by creating repair guides, highlighting timeless styles over wasteful trends, or sharing clever uses for products that often end up in the trash.

BILLBOARD BAN

Vernier, a suburb of Geneva, has become Switzerland’s first town to [ban commercial advertising](#) from its streets. The move reflects a growing pushback against the commercialization of public space, where every available inch has been monetized to vie for attention. By eliminating outdoor ads, Vernier is shifting the focus from consumerism to community, inviting residents to experience a cityscape that prioritizes creativity, mindfulness, and civic pride. This quiet revolution challenges the global advertising machine, proving that less noise can lead to more meaningful connections in the public sphere.

OFFLINE CLUB

When you attend an event run by the Netherlands’ [Offline Club](#), the first thing you do is turn in your phone. The burgeoning club is aiming to liberate people from their devices with a series of “digital detox hangouts” and tech-free getaways. At these hangouts, which usually take place in cozy cafes, guests spend a few hours switching between socializing and quietly reading or journaling on their own. Offline Club hangouts have been selling out early in cities across the Netherlands, and the founders are already fielding requests from people looking to set up similar communities around the globe. “The world is screaming for less screen time and more connection,” says one of the club’s founders, Ilya Kneppelhout. In a time of burnout culture, learning to switch off is a new form of liberation.



BOOZE-FREE LIVING

Young people are rewriting the social script, and alcohol is no longer the star of the show. Concerns about mental and physical health are a big factor. Almost [two-thirds](#) of consumers aged 18-24 say that they worry about the emotional impact of alcohol, and [45%](#) of Americans now consider drinking in moderation as damaging to health—roughly twice the share who did in the mid-2000s. This cultural shift opens the door for businesses to innovate around a new era of socializing. From alcohol-free bars and sophisticated mocktails to wellness-focused social spaces, the opportunity to redefine nightlife and hospitality is immense. Just look to how major brands like Diageo, Moët Hennessy, and Pernod Ricard are investing heavily in zero-proof options. Or, check out the growing number of [sober bars](#) offering late-night fun sans hangover. For forward-thinking businesses, the decline in traditional drinking is less of a problem and more of a blank canvas, inviting creativity to meet the needs of a generation redefining celebration, connection, and indulgence.

BACK-TO-BASICS TECH

In a world addicted to constant notifications and endless scrolling, the humble dumbphone is making a surprising comeback. Companies like Punkt and Light Phone are continuing to see a surge in sales driven by millennials and Gen Zers—inspiring competition from even bigger names. In 2024, Heineken launched an internet-free "Boring Phone" that leaves people no choice but to live in the moment, while Nokia relaunched its iconic 3210 model with updated features like 4G and a color screen. This demand for simple, nostalgic tech speaks to a growing desire to reclaim our attention from tech giants and practice more intentional living.

QUIET ZONES

Belgian rail company NMBS is heading calls for peaceful, distraction-free travel by expanding quiet zones across its Intercity services. These designated areas—which will be available to 65% of passengers by summer 2025—offer passengers an escape from loud conversations, phone calls, and music at no extra cost. The reaction from passengers has been overwhelmingly positive. More than half that took part in a NMBS survey say that they take the train more often since the quiet zones were introduced. With peace and quiet in high demand, you can imagine similar zones popping up in public parks, cafes, and more.



"These days, a year of nothing sounds dreamy, even inspirational. There has been, as they say, a vibe shift."

— Holly Williams, BBC

WHAT'S NEXT

① TONE IT DOWN:

What is the "Zero Out" version of your product or experience? Think quieter, simpler, sober, or totally unplugged.

② PERMISSION TO DO LESS:

Encourage people to say goodbye to abundance in every area of their life—whether by living with less or dialing back their commitments.

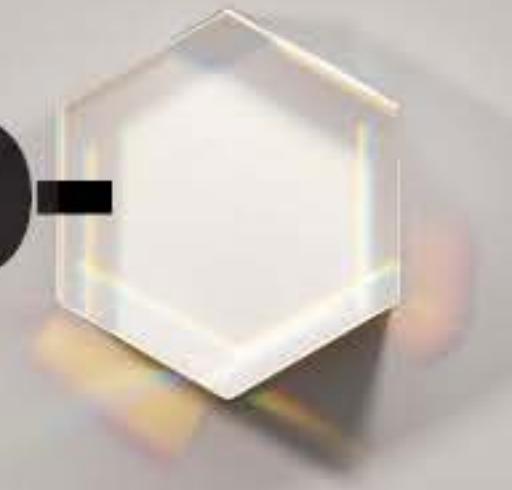
③ MAKE IT HUMAN:

As AI is integrated into everything and anything, experiences that feel innately human will offer a refreshing reprieve.

⟨ NEXT TECHNOLOGIES: ⟩

Ambient Interfaces
Lo-Fi Design
Untethered Audio
Tactile Haptics

NEXT TECHNO- LOGIES



NEXT is TBWA's global innovation practice designed to lead brands into new spaces.

To learn more about how NEXT turns intel into action, visit tbwa.com/next.

AI

Generative AI

Generative AI explores how new tools have expanded our creativity capabilities. Beyond task-oriented and productivity tools, the expansion of AI into creative spaces has shown capabilities and endless possibilities of human imagination.

AI Agents

AI Agents can autonomously execute much more complex tasks by leveraging vast data sets to deliver utility at an unprecedented level. This brings the ability to create custom applications adapted to specific personal use cases with endless possibilities.

Assistive Robotics

Robotics and task-oriented assistants are becoming more accessible and adaptive. We're seeing robotics appear for all aspects of life, here to assist humans with everyday tasks while opening up new forms of inclusive and sustainable solutions.

Connected Objects

As connected objects become more popular and the Internet of Things (IoT) becomes more of a reality, it's time to prepare for mass adoption. Connected digital and physical objects are opening up new methods of interactivity—we can now create connected products, packaging, clothing or even an ecosystem of products—expanding the possibilities for deeper interaction.

LIQUID REALITY

Third Place Gaming

Gaming has become a "third place" where we spend our time socializing, shopping, learning and escaping. Beyond entertainment, it's become a place of communal connection and active discovery. Gaming Worlds allow us to live alternative lives and experience new things beyond what's possible in reality.

Extended Reality

Bringing the virtual and real-world together through extended, immersive experiences. Extended Reality allows brands to create integrated environments for playful, educational or social experiences.

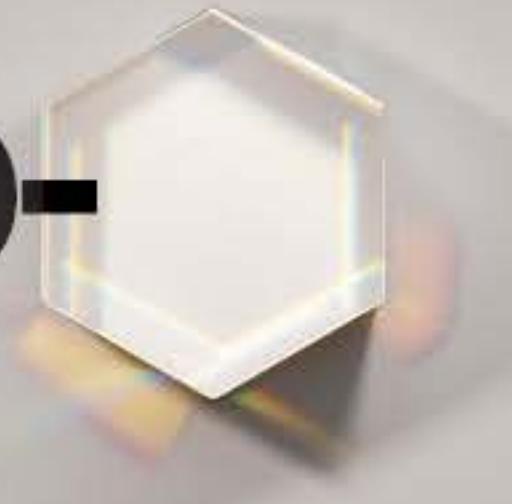
Avatar Identities

The more time we spend in virtual environments, the greater the need to express our individuality. Avatars and digital doubles are allowing us to present ourselves in a more fluid way, embracing the many aspects of our identity both anonymously and pseudonymously.

Non-Fungible Everything (NFTs)

NFTs have evolved from static digital-art collectibles to rewarding community environments—unlocking access to exclusive groups and experiences that are built on trust and transparency via the blockchain.

NEXT TECHNO-LOGIES



INTERFACES

Untethered Audio

Audio-first experiences are on the rise as people seek a reprieve from screen time. Brands have the opportunity to own a unique voice and create deeper engagement through sound.

Ambient Interfaces

A new breed of ambient, always-on technologies are eliminating the need for swiping, scrolling, or physical touch. These screen-free interfaces will make tech more omnipresent but less invasive, adding some refreshing variety to our daily tech diet.

Spatial Computing

The future of experience is spatial with new hardware and technology allowing us to extend our surroundings and senses. Through experiences that seamlessly blend with physical environments, spatial computing will allow us to interact with immersive content like it's part of the real world.

Neural Control

The brain can now interact with technology, opening up new possibilities for how we experience existing environments while allowing people with mobility limitations to carry out essential tasks. We're closer to experiencing the true power of mind control—for fun as well as for good.

Tactile Haptics

Haptic technology is bringing a sense of touch to virtual experiences—further breaking down the barriers of immersion and realism and raising the bar for sensory experiences.

INCLUSIVITY

Community Commerce

A resurgence of community-focused commerce is offering an alternative to the mass, undifferentiated world of e-commerce we currently know. These niche, peer-to-peer marketplaces offer consumers more engaging experiences that closely tie to their individuality and passions.

Worldbuilding

As the brand ecosystem grows and canvases expand, we can now build entire universes that deepen connection to ideas, characters, or intricate narratives. Worldbuilding gives us new ways to engage with audiences and go beyond what ordinary storytelling is capable of.

Decentralized Social

Online communities are shifting to decentralized social spaces, token-gated communities and blockchain technology. This creates new forms of social structure built from co-creation and co-ownership.

SUSTAINABILITY

Modular Design

Modularity is marking the end of one-size-fits-all design. Whether to reduce environmental impact or help people express their individuality, these modular products and services will allow brands to serve a wider range of needs.

Lo-Fi Design

Lo-Fi design is opening the door to new creative avenues. Brands can tap into this frugal, no-frills approach by encouraging users to hack and remix existing products, playing with intentional imperfections, or embracing low-tech innovation.

Bio-Materials

Alternative eco-materials are challenging our reliance on disposability. As we transition away from plastic, bio-matter like seaweed, mushrooms, and algae will bring us back to nature.

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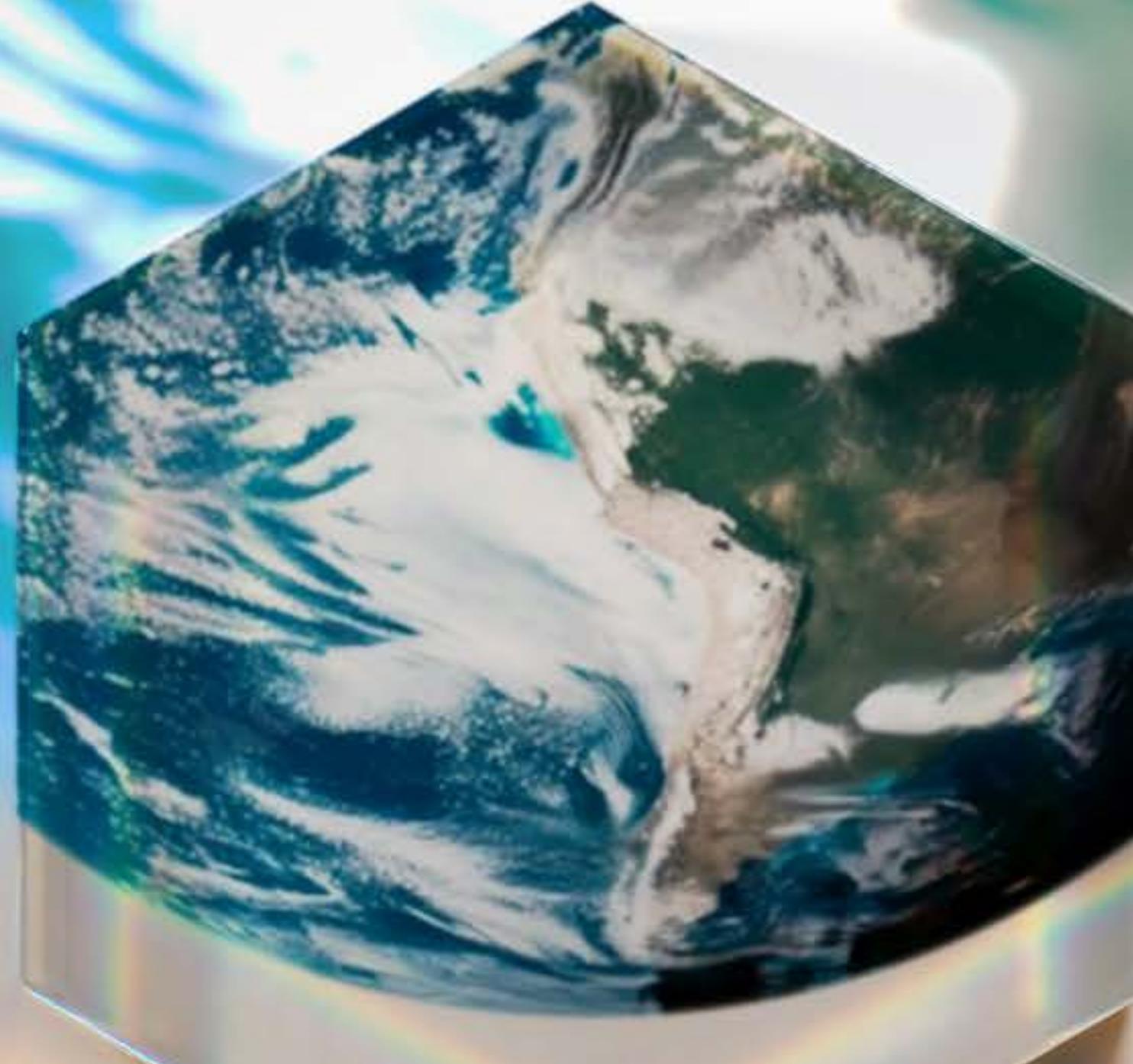
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To our dedicated Spotters network, our engine of global insight—thank you for looking to the future with us.

ABOUT US



Backslash is the cultural intelligence unit serving the agencies of Omnicom Advertising Group (OAG).

Fueled by insights from our global collective, we closely track worldwide developments so that our clients can not only anticipate cultural change, but lead it.

Through a dynamic hybrid of strategy, first and third party data, and journalism, Backslash turns cultural blur into business opportunity.

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