

Accenture Song

Accenture

life trends

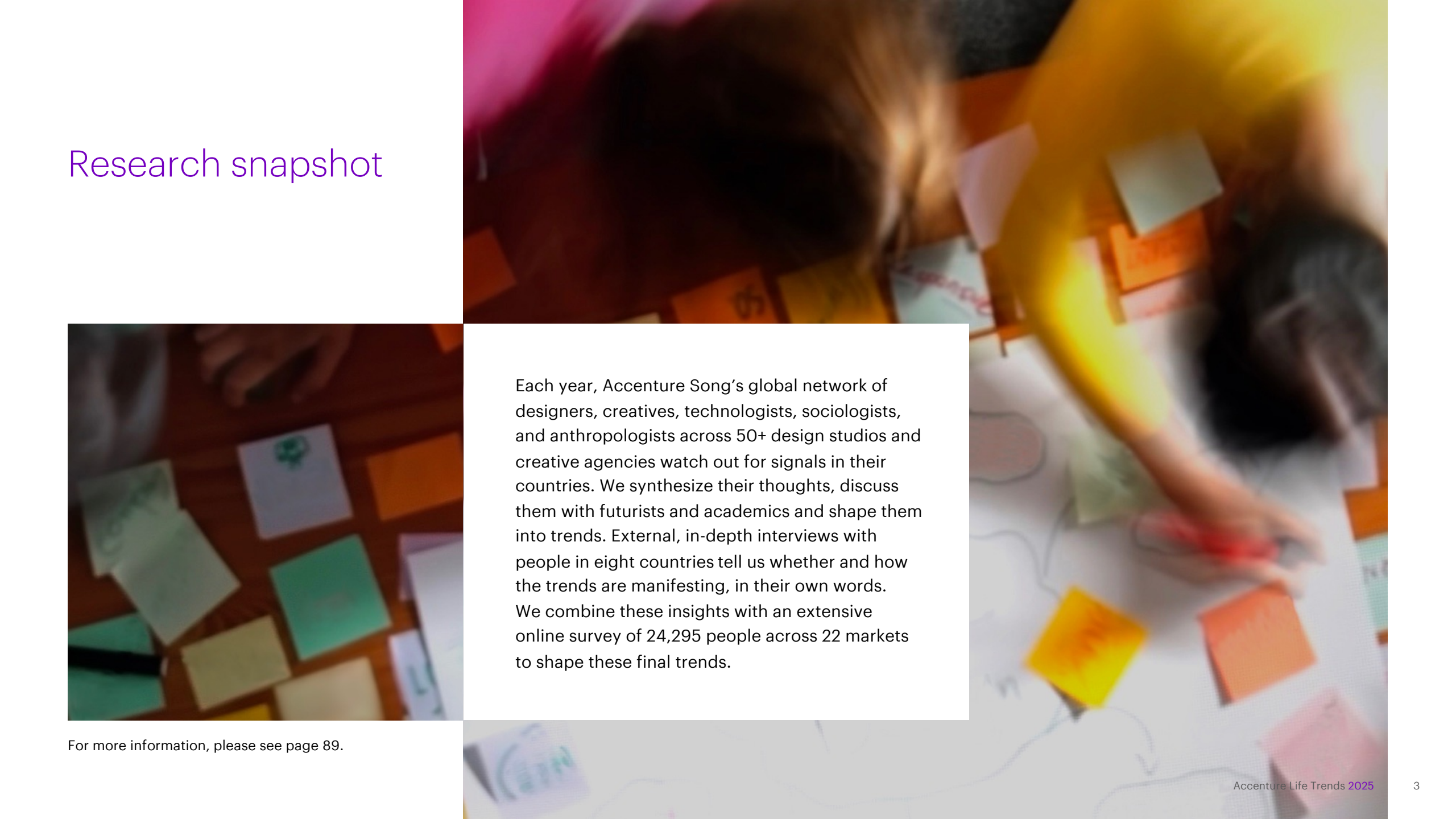
2025

About this report

We create these trends every year as a window into the interplay between people and their behaviors and attitudes to the world around them—be it business, technology or other societal shifts.

It's now commonly accepted that customer obsession is the best growth strategy. Superb customer experiences are expected. It takes meticulous orchestration to play a meaningful and relevant role in your customers' lives. However, people are messy. They're emotional and they're changing faster than you can change your business, so keeping pace is a constant challenge. These trends examine these shifts and seek to help businesses define how to catalyze growth by staying relevant to customers—which is Accenture Song's mission.

Research snapshot



Each year, Accenture Song's global network of designers, creatives, technologists, sociologists, and anthropologists across 50+ design studios and creative agencies watch out for signals in their countries. We synthesize their thoughts, discuss them with futurists and academics and shape them into trends. External, in-depth interviews with people in eight countries tell us whether and how the trends are manifesting, in their own words. We combine these insights with an extensive online survey of 24,295 people across 22 markets to shape these final trends.

For more information, please see page 89.

Executive summary

As disruptive breakthroughs dramatically evolve people's digital experiences, they naturally react and adjust their relationship with technology to ensure it still serves them. Right now, trust online is in the spotlight and people are increasingly scrutinizing what they see and what they believe, which is affecting how customers behave towards the businesses trying to reach them. Thematically, then, the opening trend anchors the set.

Cost of hesitations details how it's now incredibly easy to create all kinds of digital content, and a flood of scams is blurring the lines between the authentic and the deceptive. Even on once-trustworthy platforms, it's harder for people to tell what's real, seeding hesitation into their digital interactions.

Within this context, **The parent trap** investigates how people are evaluating their options for helping the next generation shape a safe, healthy relationship with digital technology as it evolves.

Impatience economy observes that consumers are going their own way, finding quick solutions via relatable online content to satisfy their growing impatience to achieve life goals.

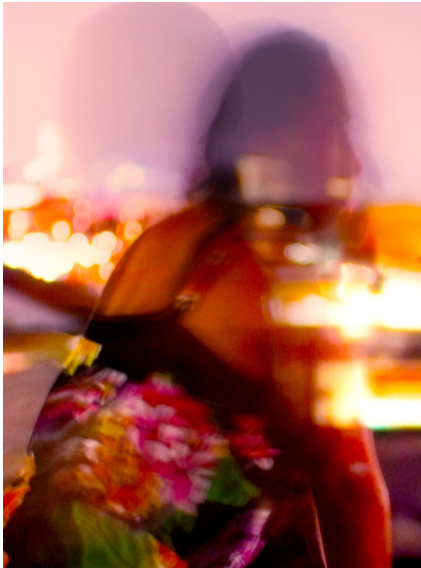
Foundational to a thriving workplace, **The dignity of work** is being challenged and resulting in rising tensions as business, technological and human trends collide. As new technologies arrive in the workplace, will people hesitate—or trust and embrace them?

Perhaps a response to a digital experience that is breeding hesitation, people are seeking simplicity and deeper connections, which we see as a movement towards **Social rewilding**. They want to engage with the world in meaningful ways, finding textural experiences that connect them with their environment and each other.

Don't hesitate. Read on.

Contents

Trend 1



Cost of
hesitations

6-22

Trend 2



The parent
trap

23-37

Trend 3



Impatience
economy

38-53

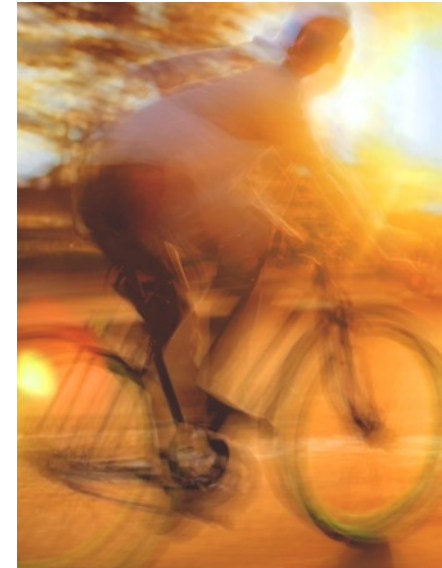
Trend 4



The dignity
of work

54-69

Trend 5



Social
rewilding

70-84



Trend 1:

cost of hesitations

The innate trustworthiness of digital technology is under threat, and its additive value for people's daily lives has become diluted by authenticity and trust issues. It's now incredibly easy to create all kinds of digital content, so a flood of scams is blurring the lines between what's real and what's deceptive, making it harder for people to tell them apart. This introduces hesitation into all interactions, which is disrupting people's online experiences.

Generative AI is a revelatory tool both for honest enterprises and bad actors. It's ushering in a new era of confusion and concern, challenging people's trust in digital in deeply personal ways. As people weigh up the possibility of dialing down their dependence on the internet, trust should become a top priority. While the scams may occur on channels, brands suffer from the consequences of hesitation.

What's going on

At the center of this trend is people's new hesitation reflex when doing anything online, and the resulting cost for anyone doing business there. For customers, the degradation of experience and the rising likelihood of being misled means they must constantly ask themselves, "Is this real?" in multiple contexts, and on platforms they once trusted. If people become too weary, online shopping could take a hit and brands would suffer.

Some of the signals that shape this trend aren't new, but their escalation makes their inclusion here important, especially as increasing use of artificial intelligence has the potential to ramp things up very fast.



In the past year,

52% 

of people have seen fake news or articles

38.8% 

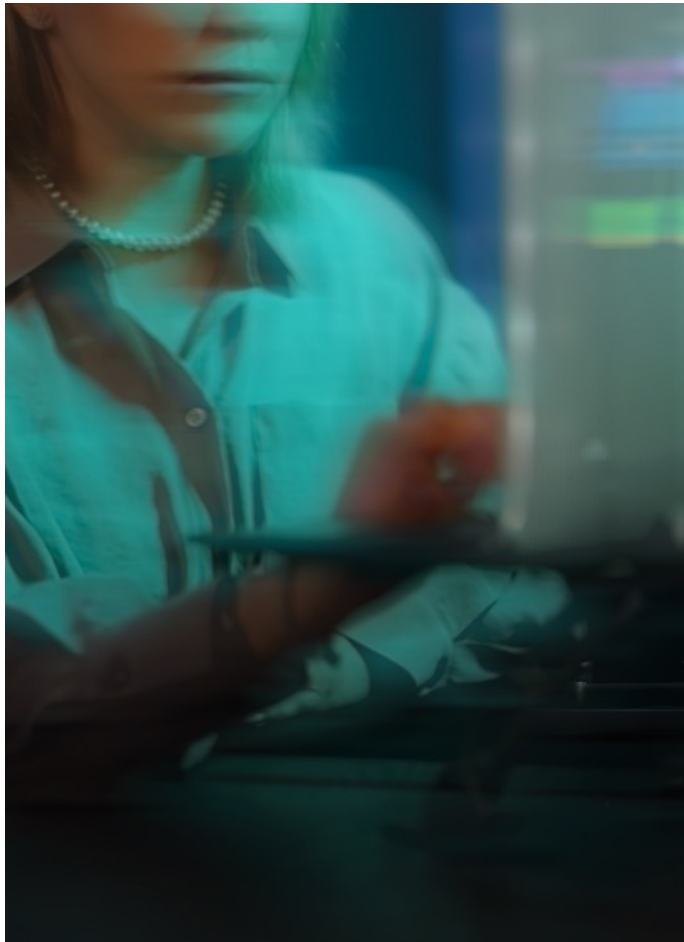
have seen fraudulent product reviews online

52% 

have experienced deep-fake attacks or scams for personal information and/or money

Accenture Life Trends survey, 2024

Suggested, recommended, sponsored, for you?



The online discovery experience has become chaotic and frustrating. The digital places that were once reliably on-point for finding products, services and information have become less effective. There are three main factors causing this degradation. First, the search experience has become cluttered with suggested posts and related queries when people just want the results they've asked for. Second, people increasingly can't trust that what they find is real, (more on that in a moment). Third, the apparent commercialization of every point in the online experience—driven by the need for a sustainable business model—means that almost half of people (48%) feel like shopping is being pushed on them whenever they go online.¹

In a world where technological progress seems so highly prized, these things should be getting better, not worse.

Search engine algorithms spawned an SEO industry that has subtly but indisputably changed the web by shaping word choices, page layouts and site maps to maximize visibility. Experts know how to make sure their content rises above genuine results that would be more helpful or relevant—and this tactic can now be supercharged by generative AI that can create against the algorithm's guidelines.²

Consequently, search results are clogged up by low-quality content, seemingly unrelated suggested posts and product recommendation lists motivated by affiliate marketing kickbacks, pushing genuinely relevant results down the page. Fundamentally, search engines now often respond to a user's request for help by creating more work—and let's not forget that their original purpose was to make navigating the internet easier.

This degradation is pushing people to create new routes to discovery. Many have lost patience with search engines and are going direct to a trusted source or retailer instead. Others are turning to places like Reddit and similar platforms, where short-form content focused on shopping recommendations has become popular.^{3,4}

Wait, is this real?

The acceleration of generative AI content into all places where people have traditionally discovered, socialized and shopped online is causing trust issues and fueling hesitation. Our Accenture Life Trends survey indicates 62% of respondents say trust is an important factor to them when choosing to engage with a brand, (up from 56% last year).⁵ If people are going to be able to distinguish between legitimate and false content, the brands and creators sharing it might consider ways to signal authenticity to rebuild trust.

“Personally, I find fake pictures or videos on the internet very unacceptable. Even though the internet is a virtual environment, virtual does not mean fake.”

YK Zhang, 33, China

Is this information real?

Even content created with harmless intent is affecting people’s ability to trust what they read online. Our survey found that 48.6% of people often or always question the authenticity of the news.⁶ It’s becoming harder to distinguish fact from fiction—to identify what has been written by a person with relevant credentials and what has been generated by a well-trained machine. Organizations producing content for digital channels are excited about the advancing abilities of technology for helping them create more of it at speed. But the critical question many are failing to ask is: Do people want it?

Further, generative AI models sometimes surface incorrect or misleading results known as hallucinations, because the models believe their own assertions. Causes include inadequate or biased training data, or incorrect assumptions made by the model. What should be the next generation of customer engagement tools are sometimes making unhelpful suggestions like putting glue on pizza.^{7, 8} Of course, this example

is easy to dismiss as absurd, but others are harder to accurately assess.

Is this product real?

Generative AI is vulnerable to exploitation for the purpose of misleading people, which is increasingly muddying the discovery experience. Computer-generated images often misrepresent the quality of a product and/or the detail of its features, sparking social media trends showing, “What I ordered vs what I got.”⁹

Is this brand real?

In advertising, bad actors are staging fake podcast endorsements or using deep-fake videos of celebrities including Viola Davis to promote dubious brands.^{10, 11} One consumer commented on X, “I keep getting [social media] ads for clothes that I would absolutely buy and then I google [sic] the company and they have no online presence beside a website. [...] no way to tell if it’s a legitimate company or an AI scam tailored to my exact taste in T-shirts.”¹²


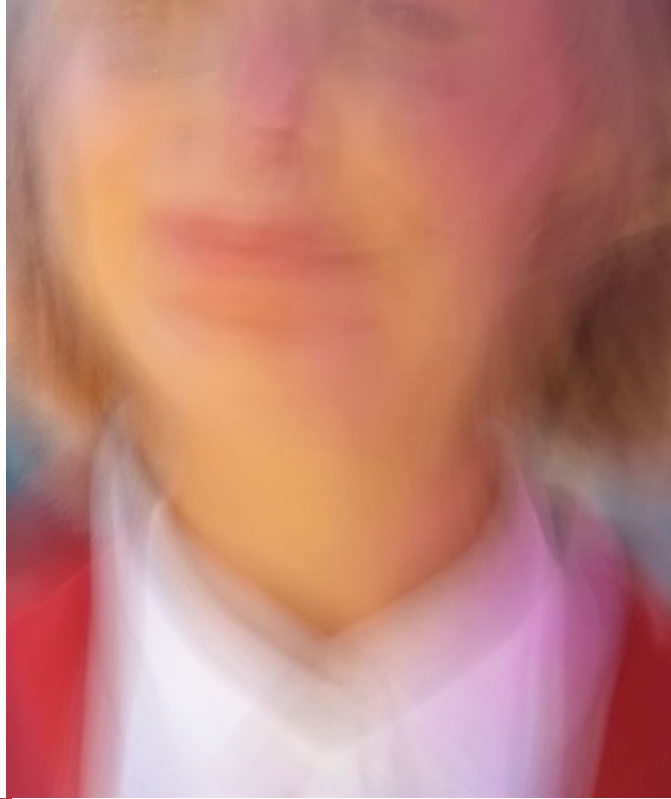
Is this website real?

People are also being stung by visiting sites that bear all the hallmarks of the result they want to see, when they are just fronts for something else. For example, customers trying to reduce their carbon footprint by buying local are increasingly receiving their order from the other side of the planet, shrouded in plastic packaging. Worse, some pay and share their personal details and receive nothing.¹³ When the deception becomes clear, people are left feeling naïve, victimized and angry.

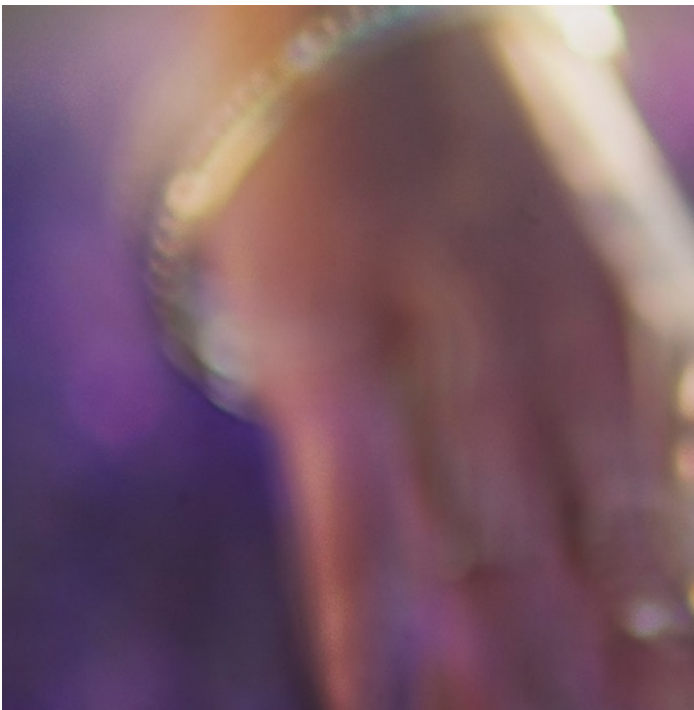
Worse still, a tactic called “malvertising” uses online advertising as a route to attack people’s computers, but it doesn’t even require direct action from the user. Simply visiting a website hosting malvertising is enough to cause problems.¹⁴

Is this review real?

Once a helpful shortcut to verifying credibility and quality, online reviews have also lost their dependability, with fake reviews becoming a pervasive issue—even more so now they are quickly scalable through AI. In 2022, TripAdvisor identified 1.3 million fake reviews, and in 2021, TrustPilot removed 2.7 million.¹⁵



Our survey found that 38% of those surveyed have seen fraudulent product reviews online in the past year, and 52.8% often or always question the authenticity of product reviews when they see them.¹⁶



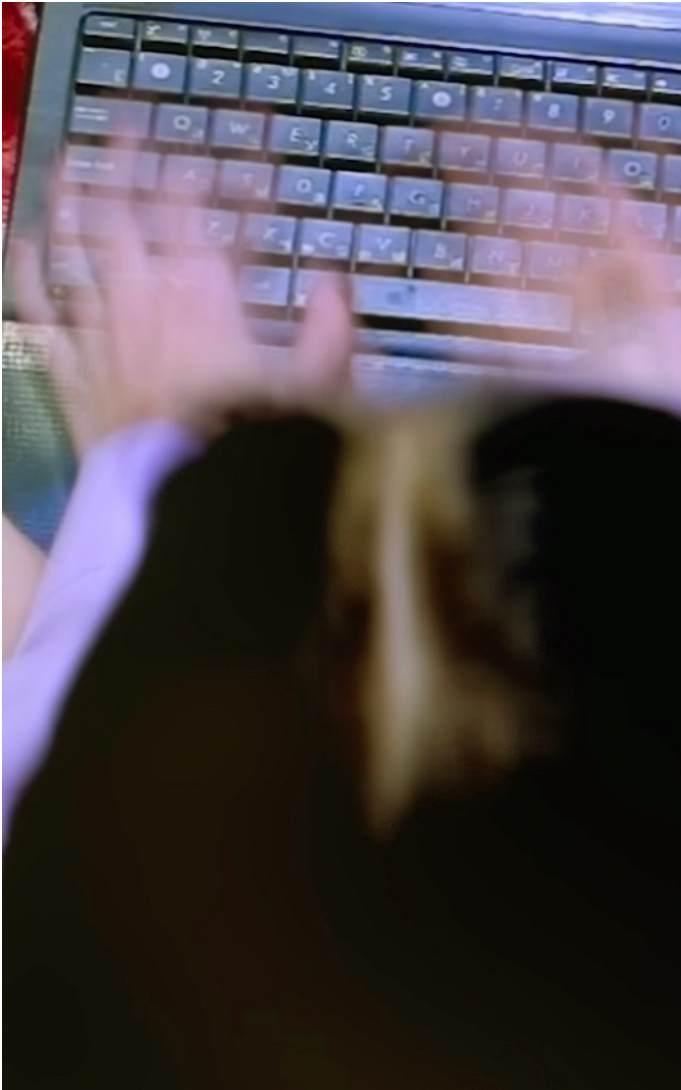
Is this picture real?

A Getty Images report revealed that people feel less favorably about brands that use AI-generated visuals.¹⁷ The survey of over 7,500 people from 25 countries found that 90% of consumers want to know if an image is AI-generated, and 87% value image authenticity. Crucially, 76% say they find it increasingly difficult to tell the difference between real and AI-generated images, fueling skepticism.

Language is evolving to lend expression to the uncomfortable feeling of spotting generative AI content that feels inhuman. “Slop” is the new “spam”—a broad term that has gained traction to describe shoddy or unwanted AI-generated content in art, books, social media and search results.¹⁸

The issue of trust throughout the online experience is multi-faceted and stems from a spectrum of motivations from well-intended and genuine to malicious and harmful.

Hyper-personalized harm



Fraudulent behavior and scams online aren't new but put them together with generative AI, and people whose aim is to commit crimes online now have a tool that makes it much easier. Releasing generative AI so that anyone can use it has created numerous unintended consequences, some of which are as serious as it gets—and it's happening before people feel the promised value of the technology.

The most tangible consequence is fraud perpetuated when people are tricked into sharing payment information in exchange for a non-existent product or service. Less easily quantifiable is the psychological impact of new, non-financial types of fraud that are destroying people's trust in the online experience and making hesitation a reflex. Our survey has found that in the past year, 32.6% of respondents have experienced deep-fake attacks or scams designed to steal their personal information and/or money.¹⁹

In June 2024, Google DeepMind published research into tactics being exploited by bad actors to misuse generative AI's capabilities.^{20, 21} Among those tactics affecting people directly are impersonation, altering people's appearance to change the story told by a photograph, and creating non-consensual intimate imagery, using

a person's likeness. They're also falsifying documents, using people's IP without permission and imitating or reproducing original work, brands or styles with the intention of presenting it as real. Listed out like this, it becomes abundantly clear that along with the good generative AI can do, it can also do significant damage in the wrong hands.

Deep-fake scams are proliferating worldwide, leading organizations to consider them a bigger threat than identity theft.²² In these scams, callers use deep-fake audio to mimic the voice of a loved one in a dire situation and request financial help. The Asia-Pacific region saw a 1530% rise in deep-fake cases from 2022 to 2023—the second largest rise in the world, behind North America.²³

Further, celebrities and citizens alike are increasingly discovering their images and voices are being used without their consent for nefarious purposes, risking harm to their mental well-being and their reputation. According to Britt Paris at Rutgers School of Communication and Information, with deep-fake technology, "anybody can just put a face into this app and get an image of somebody... completely without clothes."²⁴ Shockingly, this is happening both to adult and child victims.

For years, organizations have been asking people to prove who they are. Now, brands are on the hook to do the same.



In the absence of adequate action from those responsible for moderating this technology, people are increasingly skeptical of what they see online, leading to a risk that they hesitate to sign up, opt in or buy now. Search, social, commerce and consumption channels must tread carefully. Trust is easier broken than built, and the early signs are that consumers may already be seeking alternatives. Brands will need to be ready.

Is people's well-being simply considered the cost of progress? Digital interactions are now riddled with pitfalls and confusion, and inaction implies that the impact on people's lives doesn't matter. Brands' best route to enabling people to engage online without hesitation is to focus on reassurance and trust to serve their needs—not at the expense of strategic targets, but in addition to them. People need clear reasons to trust and engage with a brand online.



What's next

For a long time, the sheer convenience of the internet outweighed people's need for trust, but that equation is beginning to shift. Our survey found that 59.9% of people are questioning the authenticity of online content more than before.²⁵

If this trend continues, unchecked by legal or systematic intervention, people will likely start to abandon any platforms and brands they can't trust. Whether they reduce, change or stop certain behaviors entirely will be down to the individual, but it will affect discovery, sharing, shopping and socializing.

The most important move now is for every brand, platform, business and government to prioritize trust in channels and digital experiences. Leaders' goal should be to make it easy for people to trust in their brand, such that engaging with it is a hesitation-free choice.

Decontaminating the ecosystem

Design and marketing now face a huge challenge: How do they maintain a strong digital relationship with customers when the channels they use are becoming contaminated by slop? Communicating authenticity will mean revisiting or even redesigning channel strategies from scratch.

Brands must be honest about whether their channels have been polluted and whether customers have fallen out of love with, avoid or distrust them. This presents an opportunity for a more direct relationship with customers as they seek alternatives. Those that invest in becoming the trusted brand within a category could become its default choice.

We expect to see platforms investing in technologies to mitigate scams and harm, and to fumigate the slop that is destroying the customer experience. This move might be motivated by stronger policy enforcement and investment in trust and safety functions—which has recently fallen victim to efficiency drives within big tech.²⁶ It will be challenging for platforms due to the ease and low cost of AI-generated content, but prioritizing quality over quantity is necessary to maintain the internet as a valuable and authentic resource for everyone. Balancing profitability with authenticity is difficult but crucial.

“In the end, the customer is going to find out whether the product is real or fake. And if it’s fake, then you’ve lost the customer forever. The whole point of business is to build that trust with their consumers.”

Azure'de, 38, US





The search for authenticity




When platforms fall short, brands in some industries may need to prioritize consumer safety to help people avoid falling victim to scams and abuse, and to help minimize the consequences if it happens. People need protection and systems to help them right wrongs, restore dignity and repair damage. One route to enhancing trust is to create digital signifiers of authenticity. For example, it's possible to use two-way QR codes and blockchain technologies to prove the authenticity of products, to create transparency of the product's journey.


We may also see the introduction of symbols of trust, stamped onto content to indicate that it has not been created or manipulated using AI. Industries might organize new associations (or use existing ones) to manage and uphold trust standards. Technology itself may also help, with AI programmed to calculate probable reliability and an option to appeal against mistaken ratings.

For organizations dabbling with AI-generated content, it will be critical to monitor how that content is received by customers. The prevailing assumption is that people will adapt to altered images of people, objects and landscapes, but we see evidence indicating the opposite.²⁷ There are emerging risks to brand trust and perception based on the use of AI content, which must be carefully managed.

People feel it matters significantly if AI-generated images are shared by:

51% 
their healthcare provider

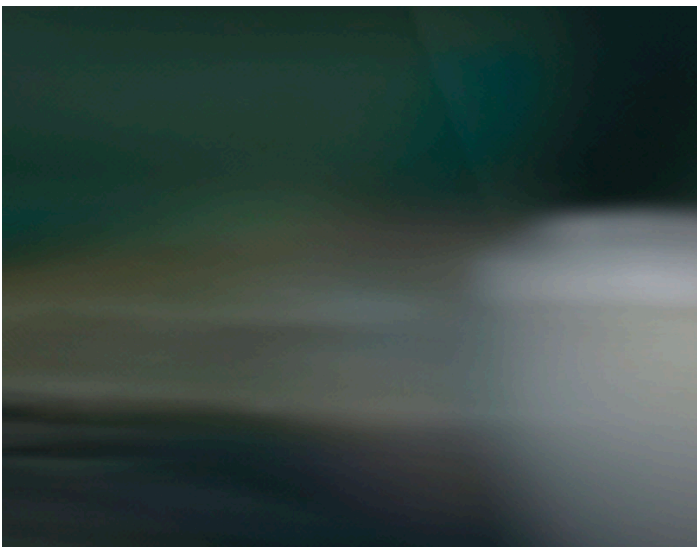
50% 
their regular bank

44% 
their favorite technology brand

Accenture Life Trends survey, 2024

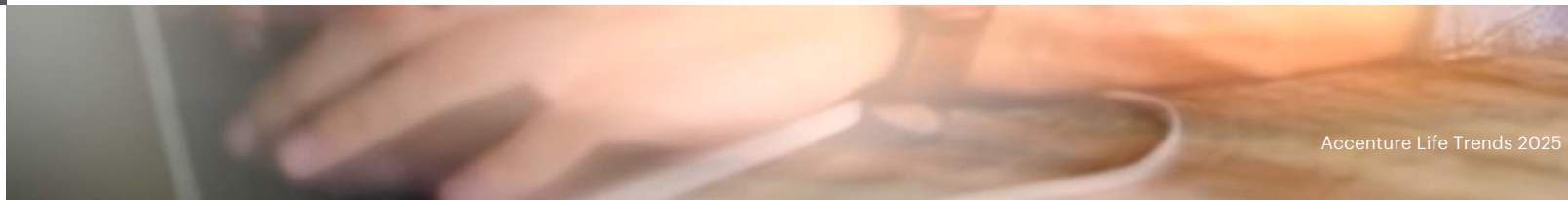
“What makes the most sense to me when interacting with a brand on the internet is the question of the trust I have in that brand.”

Daniel, 31, Brazil



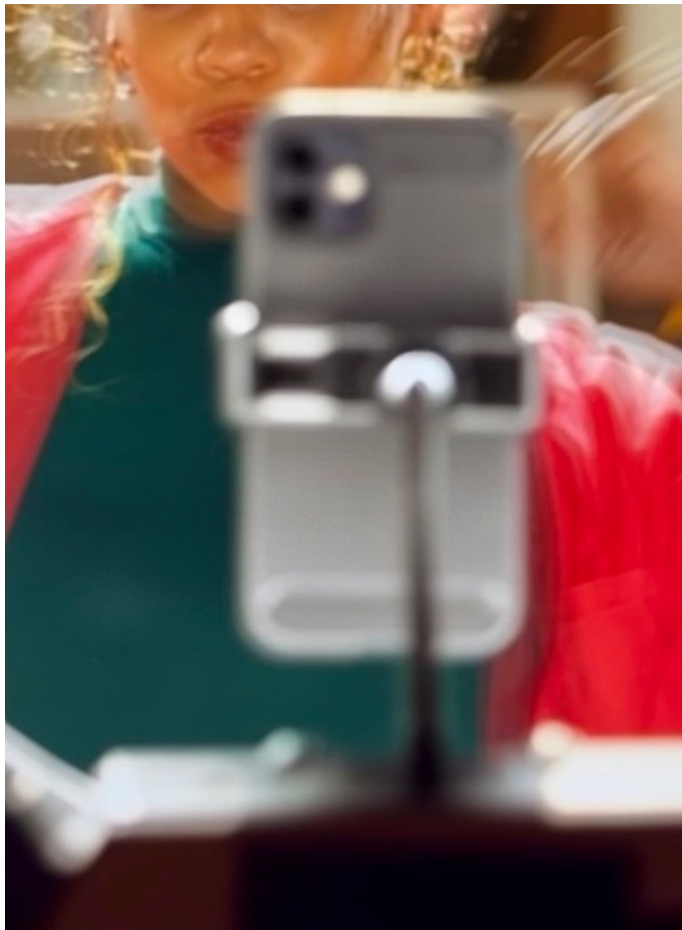
These organizations should also align with their brand purpose when considering the use of generative AI. For instance, it's long been known that imagery has a powerful effect on the way people feel about themselves. Fashion and beauty brands may want to carefully consider the use generative AI imagery and how it will perpetuate unrealistic beauty standards.

Whether formalized or unwritten, we expect to see new rules of engagement around when it's acceptable to use AI. People are likely to be annoyed by AI-generated content, images or videos that mislead in relation to travel, emotionally manipulative subjects, for illustrating or embellishing real stories, and for physical products where the design has an emotional component.





Responsibly seeking consent



When it comes to training AI models using people's content, platforms will need to be explicit about their intent—and doing this via terms and conditions will not be enough. People must be afforded a fair opportunity to evaluate whether to allow the use of their personal data.

Creators, artists, media and individual people are already grappling with issues like consent, copyright and privacy. We expect to see legislation, regulation and protection increasing rapidly and unevenly in relation to AI use cases. At the time of writing, over 400 pieces of AI-related legislation exist—most notably the COPIED act, which seeks to grant consent and transparency.²⁸

Creators rely on platforms to distribute and monetize their content, but generative AI disrupts this process by summarizing that content, using it to train data and reducing visitor numbers. Their relationship is thereby undermined, as their work is exploited without proper compensation and their livelihood is impacted. Public opinion on slop is already being swayed by creatives with large audiences who feel AI threatens their work or their livelihood.²⁹

Software solutions are already emerging. The Cara app was created to give artists who oppose unethical AI a safe space to share images and network with peers.³⁰ Developed by the University of Chicago, Glaze adds a so-called “cloak” to an image to thwart scraping attempts, and Nightshade distorts the image for the generative AI scraper.³¹ Kudurru puts control in artists' hands by enabling them to block the scraping IP address and/or to return an image of their own choosing.³²

Brands would be well advised to take a careful look at their communication channels and drive trust in and through them. This presents an opportunity for a more direct relationship with customers as they seek alternatives. Those that invest in becoming the trusted brand within a category could become its new, hesitation-free choice.

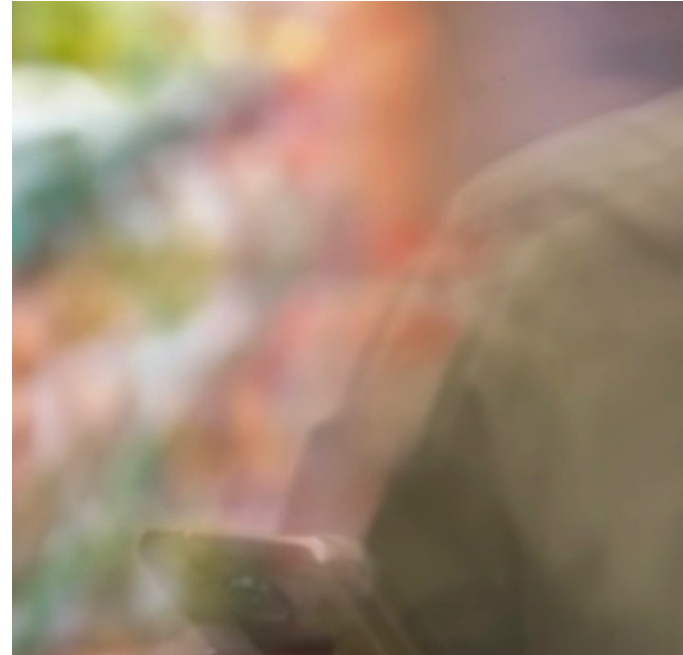
The onus is now on brands to make sure that their online activity builds trust rather than adding to hesitation.

“Authentic” was Merriam-Webster’s word of the year in 2023.³³ With the rise of artificial intelligence and its impact on deep-fake videos, actors’ contracts, academic honesty and a vast number of other topics, the line between real and fake has become blurred. Authenticity and its growing importance to internet users is more than just something brands should aspire to be. It’s something they must actively do as part of every interaction with their customers.

Being authentic and trustworthy is a win-win, because when customers can trust an organization, they will engage with it—without hesitation.

Why this matters now

In a matter of months, what people thought they knew and trusted about how they consumed information, socialized and shopped online changed. Generative AI's ability to facilitate hyper-personalized harm and harassment, deep-fakes and scams has quickly become a serious issue. Every day, people are experiencing a pause—questioning the authenticity of the information they're reading, the products they're seeing, the websites they visit, and the calls, texts and emails they're receiving.



From sophisticated scams to engagement-farming slop, online content and experiences are becoming less trustworthy for consumers. If brands, organizations and platforms fail to prioritize authenticity and earn trust, people will stop engaging.

We recommend

Platforms should evolve and invest to modernize their content moderation value chains to address the known exponential influx of content that is harmful and deceitful. This is already being worked on at a rapid pace, and that will continue.

Brands need to establish and communicate clear methods for customers to verify their authenticity. Reassure customers by creating beacons of trust in communications, commerce and baked into the product. This is a marketing, digital and security collaboration to ensure channels are trusted and customers are retained. Explore when and how to use AI-generated content, with moral and responsible AI front of mind.³⁴

Customers will need and demand support as more and more people fall victim to these sophisticated scams. Organizations will look at this in terms of costs, but they should think creatively about ways they can help their customers. Understand where customers need additional support in discovery, and provide trusted solutions, advice and communications to allay the concerns that make them hesitate.

If the volume of deep-fake scams continues, insurance companies may want think through new types of products, similar to the identity theft products launched years ago. A new insurance product against deep-fake scams and abuse could offer coverage for financial losses, legal fees and emotional distress, and could provide comprehensive protection and support for victims of digital fraud and harassment.

Governments may need to ramp up consumer protections and new compliance measures placed on organizations. These new consumer protections may require organizations to safeguard against scams, deep-fake harassment and abuse, ensuring product safety and transparency.

Trend 2:

the parent trap



Most parents' instinct is to protect their children—to keep them healthy and safe from harm. They perceive their job includes raising children to be well-adjusted adults and perhaps passing on important cultural values. One of today's biggest parental challenges is how to help the next generation shape a safe, healthy relationship with digital technology.

Growing up today looks very different from parents' own experiences. Unfettered access to the internet and social media is causing harm, influencing extreme behaviors and forcing young people to live with unintended consequences. We're seeing an acceleration of top-down policies from governments and bottom-up action from parents and schools to establish guardrails and protect children. This will undoubtedly have major repercussions for organizations—and soon.

What's going on

Finding the balance between letting children learn by experience and safeguarding them against harm has always been an underlying challenge for parents. In some situations, potential threats are obvious from a distance, giving parents time to intervene. But unlike physical hazards, many dangers of smartphones and social media for young people approach undetected, until the consequences become clear.



There are strong ties between this and other trends in this 2025 set: adults are coming to terms with the less favorable ways that digital technology has affected their lives, and they're seeking both a cure for themselves and prevention for their children.

It's important to stress that smartphones and social media aren't all bad—there are demonstrable benefits for all users, including young people. Smartphones offer obvious convenience, a ubiquitous companion to education and the safety of location tracking, while social media offers a window into a diverse world that people simply wouldn't have seen 50 years ago. This breeds empathy, curiosity and connectedness in the next generation.

For young people who don't feel they fit in with their peers, social media is a place to explore and find a precious sense of belonging—especially for those from the LGBTIQ+ communities.³⁵ It's also a remarkable mouthpiece for parenting experts, enabling them to offer clarity and education on child development that helps today's parents. It's also a place for camaraderie—a daily reminder that others are very much in the same boat.

However, evidence of the negative impact of social media and smartphones is piling up, and while governments are pushing for protective measures, many parents and schools don't feel the results are coming fast enough, so they're mobilizing. And in the absence of granular controls, their approach is more extensive.

Social psychologist Jonathan Haidt's best-selling 2024 book, *The Anxious Generation*, has whipped up a visceral sense of urgency around young people's well-being. In it, he shares statistics that show significant rises in teen depression, mental illness among college students, anxiety among 18- to 25-year-olds and hospital admissions for self-harm and suicide among younger adolescents.³⁶

These concerns have surged since 2010–2012, which coincides with mass smartphone adoption, a sudden engagement spike on social media and business models that have increased screen time.

Haidt's book is behaving as a catalyst. While these links between technology and mental health outcomes have been suggested for a while, they're now backed up by data and presented in a way that makes the harm feel more tangible and understandable.

56.5% of those aged 18-24 are more than twice as likely as those over 55 (23.3%) to agree that social media significantly impacts how they think about their own identity.³⁷



Vulnerabilities



Parents are justifiably concerned about mental and emotional harm from online bullying (from both friends and strangers), abuse, unrealistic beauty standards and age-inappropriate content that once seen, cannot be unseen.

“When there are screens, there’s no communication.”

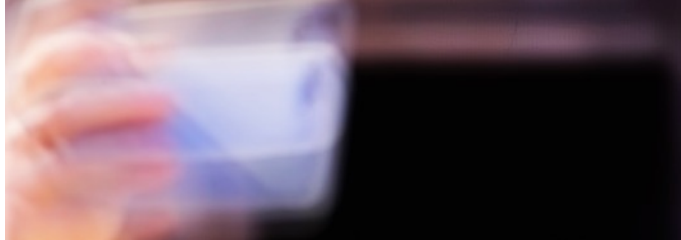
Marie, 44, France

Broadly speaking, impacts have manifested differently for girls and for boys.³⁸ For instance, a survey for the Children’s Commissioner for England found that over half (51%) of 16- to 21-year-old girls had been sent or shown explicit content involving someone they know, compared to a third (33%) of boys.³⁹

A troubling new trend is also taking hold in high schools around the world, where girls are being cyberbullied with deep-fake nudes and pornography featuring their own image without their consent. Boys at one high school in New Jersey reportedly targeted more than 30 girls in this way before being discovered.⁴⁰ This behavior is making young victims feel shamed, silenced and frightened for their safety, and has tipped bullying into sexual abuse.

Meanwhile, teenage boys are targeted by “sextortion” scammers on social media, driving some to take their own lives. In the United States, the FBI reported that over 12,600 victims—primarily young boys—were coerced into sharing explicit images and then extorted for money under the threat that those pictures would be released to their friends.⁴¹

On social media, unrealistic standards of beauty driven by filters, cosmetic enhancements and deep-fakes are, increasing symptoms of anxiety and depression in young women. This has reached new levels with the introduction of a Miss AI Beauty Pageant. As a representative from the Chilean Network for Women stated, “It is incalculable how harmful the creation of “model women” by machines can be. If beauty pageants with real women were already creating impossible expectations for us, where do invented women leave us?”⁴²



Extreme behaviors and beliefs



Parents are also concerned about the influences their children are exposed to online. Those who are persuaded into extreme beliefs or behaviors can be coerced into problematic or dangerous actions that could harm themselves or others.

Social media can be a confusing place, serving a constant flow of content to people who aren't always asking for it. Adults can find it overwhelming, and those with young, developing brains even more so. In a whirlwind of confusion, decisive voices provide something to hold on to. Unfortunately, some of the loudest voices promote toxic traits for shock purposes, which, once entertained, are perpetuated by algorithms.⁴³

For instance, misogyny isn't new, but social media is changing it. According to research by University College, London and the University of Kent, after only five days using a popular social media platform, there was a fourfold increase in misogynistic content being served as suggested content. The algorithm delivered extreme videos, often focused on anger and blame directed at women."⁴⁴ Research shows that Gen Z boys and young men are more likely than Baby Boomers to believe that feminism has done more harm than good.⁴⁵

"I think children spending a lot of time on digital screens is a bad thing. It makes them more isolated from the outside world. They become a bit detached from reality."

Peter, 49, United Kingdom

There has also been a notable increase in avoidance of in-person interaction. In Japan, a form of extreme social withdrawal called Hikikomori has been a focus since the late-1990s, just as access to the internet became widespread and adolescent boys started retreating into solitude.^{46, 47}

Unintended consequences

Another angle sees teenaged boys buffeted by anti-male messages implying that they are accountable for society's problems, with articles from respected sources pushing this narrative. Economist Richard Reeves observes that this toxicity is prompting extreme reactions in some boys, as they perceive a false dilemma that forces them to choose between masculinity and equality.⁴⁸ Parents are watching the effects take hold, as their children's self-worth plummets.

A BBC Radio documentary, "About the boys," featured young boys discussing their exposure to online pornography, their struggles at school and their thoughts on becoming men. The piece revealed vulnerabilities, conflicts and the silencing impact of being told at such a young age that men are evil.⁴⁹

While twenty years ago, there was little to separate younger men's and women's political views, evidence suggests they're polarizing in many parts of the world, as noted both by the New York Times and the Economist.^{50, 51} "What is striking... is that a gulf in political opinions has opened up, as younger women are becoming sharply more liberal while their male peers are not." This could be explained by the fact that they often occupy different digital spaces, where they are exposed to starkly contrasting narratives.

In Belgium, Flemish nationalist party, Vlaams Belang, is easily garnering support from young men, but evoking aversion among young women.⁵² In a recent international study, young men were more likely than young women to agree with statements like, "men should put career first, whereas women should put family first" and "when the economy is bad, female employees should be fired first."⁵³

Connected to these divisive narratives are symptoms like notably lower educational achievement in boys versus girls, which is not something to be ignored. In his book, Haidt states that 59% of US bachelor's degrees were awarded to young women in 2019, plus boys were less likely to be able to read and less likely to graduate from high school.

Across the board, social media is changing the way people exist in the world. Author of the newsletter "How to feel alive," Catherine Price reflected: "Has hours upon hours of exposure to social media algorithms led people to perform their lives instead of live them?"⁵⁴

Parents' demand for change

At the center of this trend is a generation of parents trapped between the imperative to protect their children from harmful parts of the internet, while cutting them off completely would remove opportunities and the ability to fully live in today's society. According to YouGov, 64.7% globally think parents should limit the time their child(ren) spend(s) on social media.⁵⁵

As Peggy Noonan wrote for the Wall Street Journal, "The truth becomes a cliché before it becomes actionable. Then a person of high respect, a good-faith scholar who respects data, say, comes forward with evidence proving what everyone knows, and it is galvanizing. [...] Jonathan Haidt's book has broken through and is clearing the way for parents' groups to move forward on an established idea."⁵⁶

Technology firms show a lack of empathy for parents' predicament. Flippantly suggesting that parents simply take smartphones away is unhelpful at best and insulting at worst. These devices and platforms were knowingly designed to exploit people's innate need for social validation, and their creators' attempts are widely perceived not to do enough to help mitigate the consequences for young people's health and well-being. Although, in September 2024 as a response to feedback from parents, a global social media platform implemented teen-focused accounts with more controls and restrictions around the content young people can see, who can contact them and limits the amount of time spent on the app.

"At the end of the day, it's the responsibility of the parents. We are the first line of defense. So, it would be nice if companies and governments would do something."

Azure'de, 38, US

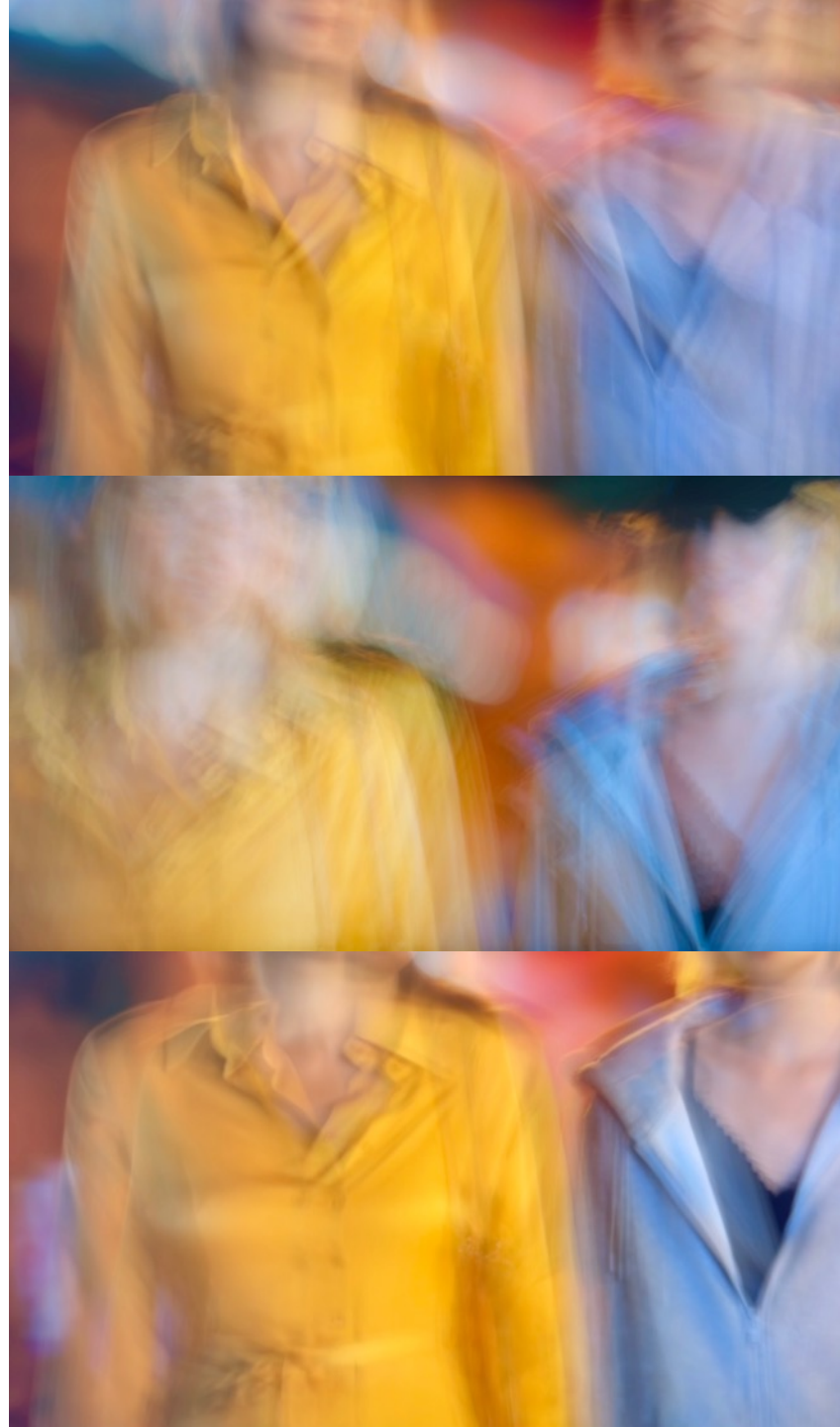
Parents aren't accepting this anymore. They're organizing from the bottom up, while governments attempt to legislate from the top down. This matters for brands because public debate around what it means to grow from child to adult in a digitally dependent world is already bubbling and could soon erupt.

Some people may not engage at all, but many will be watching how companies portray culture, and how they target children and young people. Navigating this sensitively is essential for maintaining trust and relevance in the market. Nobody cares about something until they suddenly do—because it affects them. Marketeers and employers need to be the first to care.

What's next

Parents want their children to be happy and healthy. While debate continues around the extent to which smartphones and social media have caused health impacts in young people, conflicting media narratives and technology companies behaving defensively only add noise. Parents are seeing the impact with their own eyes—they're feeling the urgency and all they want is solutions.

As the United States Surgeon General, Vivek Murthy, commented when recommending health warning labels for social media, "One of the most important lessons I learned in medical school was that in an emergency, you don't have the luxury to wait for perfect information. You assess the available facts, you use your best judgment, and you act quickly."



"The mental health crisis among young people is an emergency—and social media has emerged as an important contributor."⁵⁷

Vivek Murthy,
United States Surgeon General


Sentiment will continue to spread

Scott Galloway, NYU media professor and influential media and technology podcaster, takes a broader view of young people's plight: "A decent proxy for the success of a society is how it treats children. Not how individuals parent, but the success of the structures, incentives, and leadership charged with preventing a tragedy of the commons."⁵⁸ Parents around the world are rallying for change, and the movement is gaining traction.

In the UK, St Albans is set to become the first city to be smartphone-free for all children under 14, and a number of London schools are seeking to follow suit.^{59, 60} In February 2024, the French government passed a law to protect children on the internet, specifically on social networks.⁶¹ China has been ahead of this trend, having imposed limits on children's exposure to short videos and online games back in 2021, which was a move welcomed by most parents.⁶²

In the US, the Kids Online Safety Act (KOSA) passed, mandating that online platforms adopt a duty of care for minors by mitigating risks such as online bullying, sexual exploitation, drug promotion and eating disorders. Platforms must default to the highest privacy settings for minors, and parental controls are mandated to oversee privacy settings, limit purchases and manage time spent online.⁶³

Not all parents agree. The National Parents Union in the US states that children should have phone access during their free time.⁶⁴



"I get really nervous with them being on social media, but realize, the more that I try to limit it the less they're going to have skills and know how to cope with it."

Charlotte, 40, US





Difficult conversations at home will continue



Parent-teenager relationships have probably always been peppered with heated discussions as they struggle to balance what the child wants with what the parent believes is appropriate. The push and pull is emotional and challenging for both sides, and, whenever an agreement is made, it often doesn't last long as a new temptation always pops up to upset the equilibrium.

By design, smartphones contain all the good and bad of the internet in a single device that goes everywhere with its user. Parents cannot possibly monitor everything their children do or see on their devices, and for every existing safeguarding mechanism, there appears to be a workaround that children find long before their parents.

Modern parenting often points to modeling desired behavior—whether it's manners, creating a balanced diet, developing eco-conscious habits or use of digital devices. But parents' lives are bundled into their own devices, making it almost impossible to model healthy behaviors. Even those who have stepped away from social media may have their finances, groceries, school apps, news sources, music, utilities and personal and professional communications wrapped up in their phones.

Unbundling may be coming



Bundling every possible facility into a single device was a revolutionary move that gave people access to everything, everywhere, all the time. For adults, the convenience is valuable, but this is neither required nor desirable for children. Most parents want their children to be locatable, contactable and sociable, and able to pay for things while they develop their independence.

Unbundling everything else will be a challenge, because of the dominance of smartphones in the market and their integration into all parts of people's lives. But the customer need for a dramatic rebalancing is very much there. It will be a challenging road and will likely feature a lot of failures that could limit attempts to fringe areas, but there's no doubt the appetite for options is there.

Brand strategies need a radical rethink



Parents and children are huge demographics, so this trend is crucial for numerous organizations. We could be witnessing the start of a significant shift in dynamics. Marketing channels that have been reliable for over a decade could become significantly less effective, and people could start living more—and expecting brands to engage with them—in the real world. (More on this in our fifth trend, **Social rewilding**.)

We believe it's reasonable to expect a societal shift toward banning smartphones for the under-14s (possibly the under-16s) on a local and maybe even global scale. Any business that targets children and teens will feel the impact, including social media, technology platforms, technology hardware, telcos, banks, fast-moving consumer goods (especially food and drink), hospitality and media.

Brands need to be ready for a world in which the next generation has been well shielded from smart devices and social media. They should develop engaging, offline experiences and products that encourage creativity, humanity and real-world social interaction. We could see a wholesale rethink of how and where to market to anyone under 16, which would decimate some services and create opportunities for others.

There will be new opportunities to shape technology services that treat young people's developing brains with empathy and scientific awareness. Semi-dumb phones and telco plans for young people are likely under development as we write. The Yondr pouch has launched to limit the use of phones without removing them completely.⁶⁵ Alternative connected devices like watches will probably have a role, and AI may be deployed to moderate access to content.

It remains to be seen how dramatic the change will be. Even without outright bans, we expect to see a greater commitment to digital literacy and critical thinking, endorsed by governments and implemented by schools. But there will be a generation of young people who will strongly resist this change and seek workarounds. We expect the tension to continue for a long while yet.

Why this matters now

We believe this trend could unbalance the whole ecosystem of technology, marketing and entertainment—plus products and services targeted at younger demographics. At the least, if some, or even most, younger customers have reduced access to digital technology and social media, it will affect how brands become visible to them.



What parents and their children want could diverge further, making the use of technology a much greater, daily point of tension than it has been to date. Brands may face significant gaps in their ability to engage children and teenagers.



We recommend

If reaching younger people matters to a brand, it will be crucial to workshop a less digital/social media-dependent strategy.

Alternatives include putting retail (and retail media) in the mix, going old school with on-the-ground promotion in shopping malls, a greater weighting towards events on television and streaming services, and sponsorship.

If limits on child- or teen-focused apps and devices are imposed, it will be necessary to redesign or create services that don't depend on smartphones. Alternatively, experiences can bypass controversial content domains or be ring-fenced in more content-limited interfaces. Unbundling the smartphone creates opportunity.

Organizations should ensure they stay on top of what is culturally relevant. Social media continues to be the forge and main distribution channel for ideas, language shifts and fashion. Likely this won't change for those over 16, but movements that originate or are perpetuated in non-digital ways may become more important.

It's important to think through an organization's permission space. Will using social media advertising/commerce to engage with young people be acceptable for the company, or will it come under attack from concerned parties? And of course, if the brand serves as any kind of gateway to harmful content, whether generally or specifically to either boys or girls, it must be dealt with—immediately and robustly.

If parents' gatekeeping role for children and young people expands, brands should consider how to create parent-friendly propositions that help build an affinity with wary parents and create relevance for their children.



Trend 3:

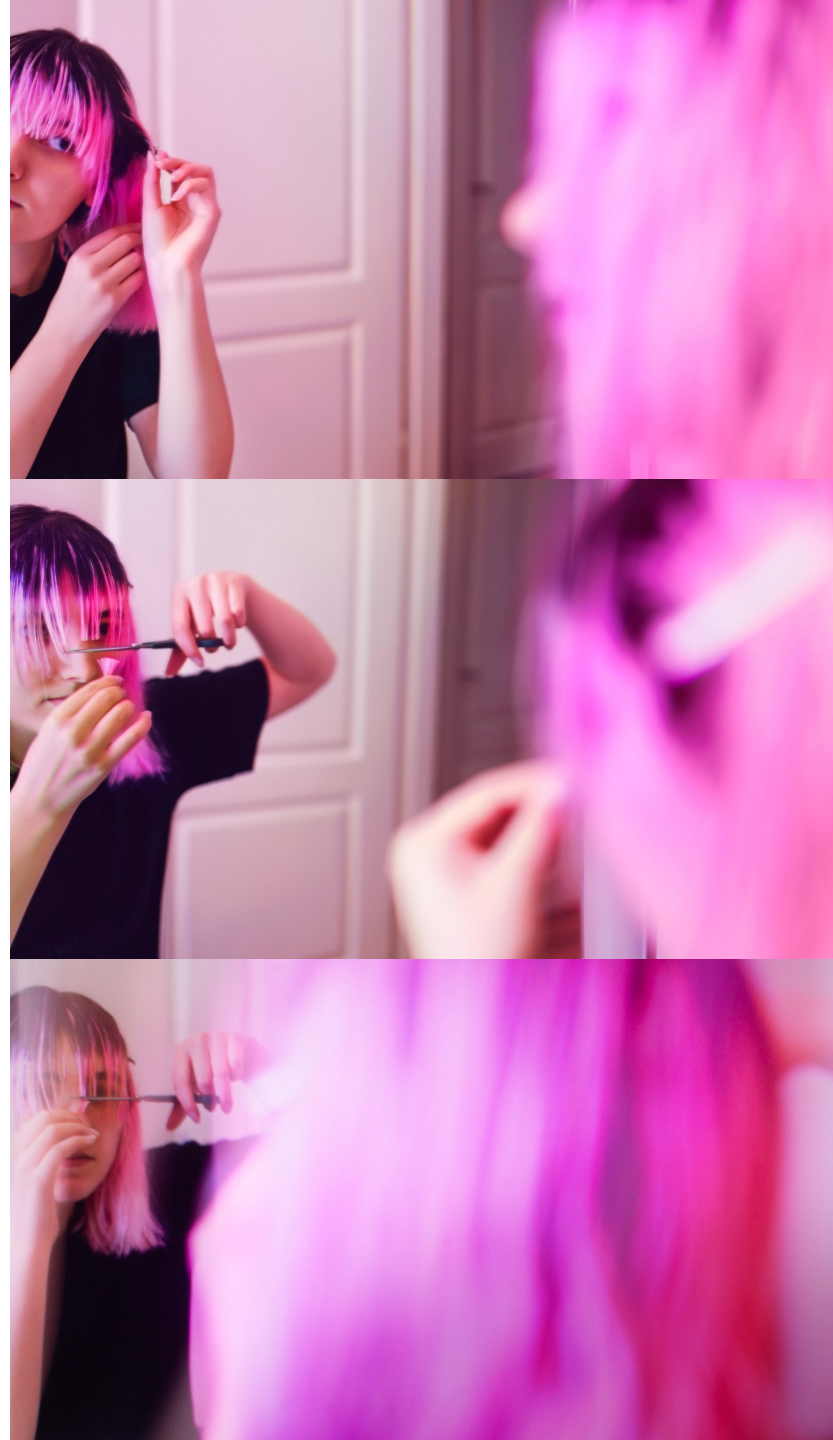
impatience economy

Many cultures around the world share a core belief in the idea that people can shape their desired future through education, hard work and determination. However, right now, the reality of a set of circumstances we laid out in last year's **Decade of deconstruction** trend is biting.⁶⁶ But an innate determination is evident in people's behaviors as they seek the shortest paths to their goals.

People are going their own way, weighing up the risks and rewards and betting on themselves bolstered by information and experience from the crowd online. At the heart of this trend is the fact that people are finding quick solutions via relatable content online to satisfy their growing impatience to achieve their life goals. When companies don't meet people's needs, they look to the crowd for education, so brands will need to plug those gaps to keep their customers.

What's going on

Two interconnected catalysts are driving people toward taking initiatives to speed up their pursuit of their life goals. First, technology has made it easier to find new routes to pursue a goal. Second, people seeking advice on navigating life's complexities are finding it in social channels, often delivered by someone to whom they relate. Bolstered by the knowledge of the digital crowd, they find the confidence to create a new path instead of following traditional ones.



55% ⚡

of people prefer quick solutions over traditional methods and many are willing to explore riskier routes to achieve their health and financial goals

Accenture Life Trends survey, 2024

It's unsurprising that the immediacy of modern life is fostering impatience—and new behaviors to match. According to our survey, 55% of people prefer quick solutions over traditional methods and many are willing to explore riskier routes to achieve their health and financial goals (68% in physical health; 67% mental health; 67% financial goals).⁶⁷

Interestingly, one word in Hindi, Urdu and Punjabi sums up this sentiment: jugaad. It doesn't directly translate to English, but it articulates the idea of improvising or creating a new solution to get a quick result when you lack the time, skills or opportunity to do it the established way.⁶⁸

Where classic approaches like hard work and education aren't cutting it, people are thinking laterally and using opportunities presented by social media and other digital platforms. Two-thirds of our survey respondents (63.2%) said they get inspiration from social media on how to do things smarter—for those aged 18–34, it's closer to three-quarters (74.1%).⁶⁹

The power of the crowd is almost like a riptide. Someone finds a new solution to a problem, tests it, and if they find success, they share it and take others along with them on a new route to a desired result.

Brands need to work out whether their value proposition is part of that tide, or whether it's sweeping around them as people crowd-source their routes to health, wealth and happiness—fundamental to survival, security and well-being.



"I look for shortcuts in every area that I can. Anything that I can do to speed my life, help make things go faster, better, more accurate."

Stan, 46, US

Proactive health and well-being

Proactive health-related behaviors stem from people's desire to live as long and strong a life as possible, and they're finding new ways to understand themselves both physically and mentally. This can prevent or resolve issues, but risks include unnecessary anxiety or incorrect treatment. Self-diagnosis is on the rise, driven in some cases by the cost of seeking medical advice and in others, by long delays in investigations. In the United Kingdom, the waitlist to see an autism specialist has increased fivefold since 2019, as found by the Nuffield Trust.⁷⁰

People also seek help from social media, which is faster than waiting for an appointment, and houses volumes of advice from people experiencing similar symptoms. Recognizing one's own experience in social content can feel validating and give people a sense of belonging. However, it can also lead to self-treatment, which, without proper supervision, can make problems worse.⁷¹

Further, medical professionals sharing generalized explanations can easily be misunderstood in situations where case-by-case detail matters.

For fitness advice, middle-aged men are tapping into approachable content found online. While some—dubbed “Huberman husbands”—are finding value in neuroscientist Andrew Huberman's layperson-friendly descriptions of well-being issues, the “quantified self” movement sees others employing the latest technologies for monitoring and optimizing their fitness.^{72, 73}

For enhancing performance, the media has reported that professional women in the US are increasingly exploring an as yet unsubstantiated health hack.⁷⁴ They're microdosing with psilocybin—more commonly known as “magic mushrooms”—to help them focus and manage their busy lives.

There are risks associated with many of these approaches. With personal trainers, gym memberships and alternative health consultants out of budget for many people, the “cheats” and “hacks” they try can turn out to be too good to be true. If the promise is too tempting to resist, some don't stop to check the credibility of their source, leading to disappointment.

“This economy is rough so if I have a mild symptom of something that I want to understand, obviously the internet is my friend. And obviously there's [social media] doctors that give you certain advice.”

Mel, 40, South Africa

Financial alternatives

People's security is deeply tied up in their access to the money needed to fund the essentials of life. Easy access to technology is empowering a new, never-ending financial hustle, breeding more options to earn, spend and invest than ever before.

More than half of Gen Z and Millennial Americans have a side hustle, earning an average of \$1,253 per month in extra income. When asked what inspired their side hustle, 40% cited inflation and 38% said it was the economic fallout from the pandemic.⁷⁵ Our survey found that in the past 12 months, 28.1% of people had started a side hustle to boost their income.⁷⁶

For many, seeking additional income has been necessary just to stay in the black, but recently, more highly paid professionals are taking on second jobs, too. Some want financial freedom, others consider their main job's salary trajectory too slow, and in some cases, it's down to uncertainty in the availability of future jobs. People seeking financial security through side hustles rather than relying on a single employer are predominantly Gen Z and Millennials. Social media is awash with people sharing their own tips on making it work. Even news sites are offering this kind of content.⁷⁷



"I use social media for things like upskilling around things like financial independence, which I'm quite into and also financial advice."

Amrita, 34, UK



On social media and other platforms, people are discovering peer-to-peer financial education through billions of videos under hashtags like #passiveincome and #financialfreedom.⁷⁸ Subreddits, podcasts and local forums share similar advice, and the fact that young people make up much of the audience for these forums has an impact on the financial world. In Indonesia, for instance, 57% of individual stock market investors in August 2023 were Gen Z.⁷⁹ The key here is the ease of availability and the style of delivery.

People relate to others who can make financial advice understandable and relatable to their own context—far more than they can to dry, factual resources on a bank's website.

Enabled by market deregulation and driven in part by the allure of easy money, digital gambling appears to be on the rise, offering another potential shortcut to wealth—albeit a risky, volatile one. Young men, in particular, have flocked to online betting, with more than 30% of 18- to 34-year-olds across the US now having online sportsbook accounts.⁸⁰ Our survey found that in the past 12 months, 16.2% of people gambled online, betting more than a day's pay each time.⁸¹

Then there's the classic: gold. Perhaps seeking the reassurance of owning something that historically has maintained its value, people often buy gold in times of economic turmoil.⁸² In South Korea, small bars of gold can be bought from vending machines in convenience stores.⁸³ US retail giant, Costco, has been selling gold bars since October 2023 to the tune of approximately \$100–200 million each month. While it may not be making much profit, it's driving increased footfall and leading to a boost in sales.⁸⁴

The desire for money and the promises of what it can do for people's lives are deeply motivating. The crowd is sharing advice on ways to find more financial security in some aspects, and financial exploration in others. It's clear that economic uncertainty is prompting diverse strategies for financial security. Before social media, advice of this type was typically accessible only to the wealthy. This shift highlights that people are more aware of the lack of relatable financial advice and accessible channels.



Affordable joy



Once the bills are paid, people derive joy from the extras in life, whether that means aspirational fashion items, memorable experiences or escapism entertainment. Faced with economic pressures, many are seeing their “fun money” depleting, and some are turning to questionable or even illegal ways to find joy.

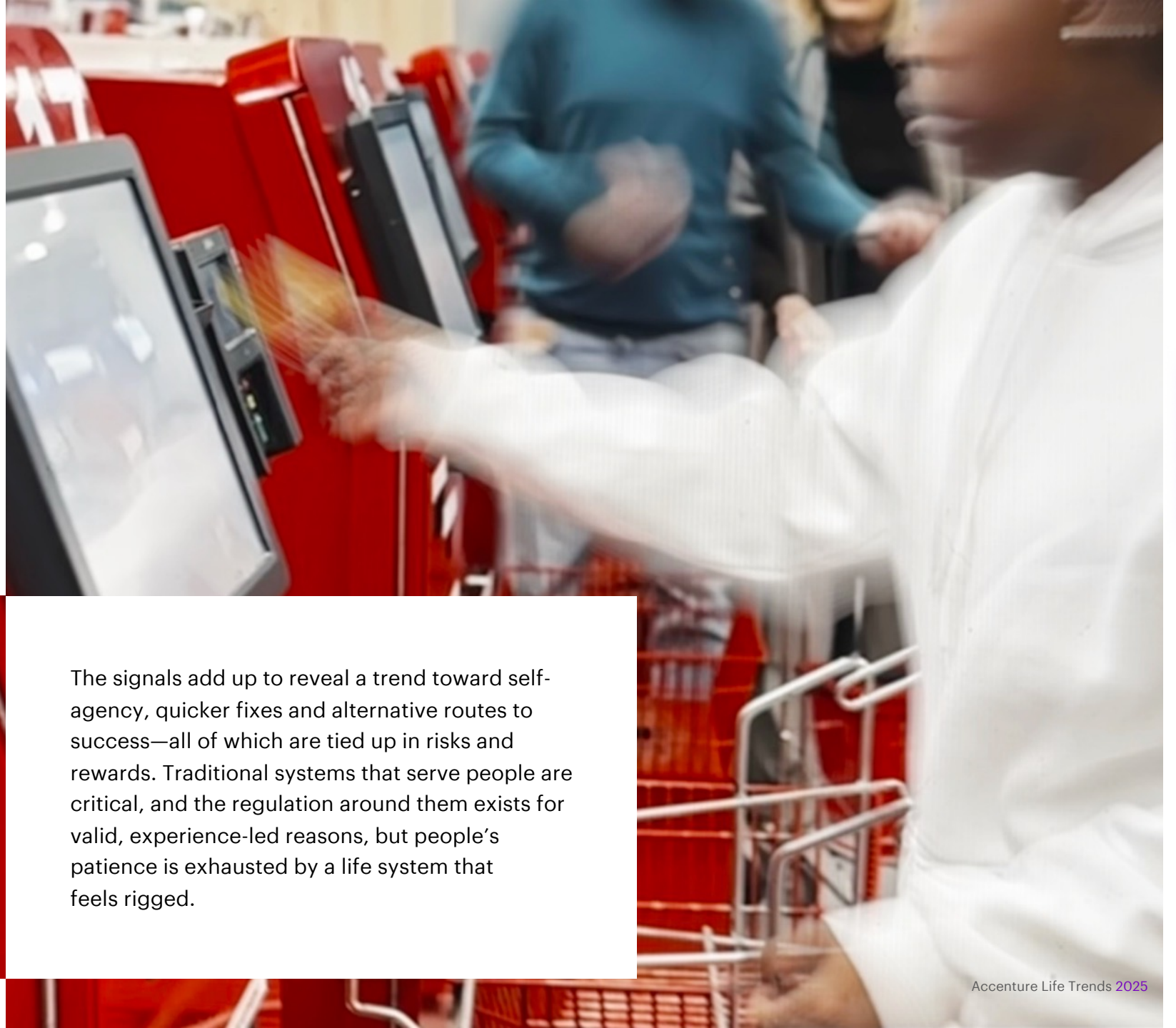
For instance, a trend dubbed “pirate and chill” is surging, costing the US economy billions.⁸⁵ People are streaming content they haven’t paid for, and/or accessing streaming services that aren’t officially available in their country. According to Forbes Advisor 2024, illegal streaming is surging around the world, and 46% of people with VPN access use it for streaming services.⁸⁶ A VPN has the added benefit of reducing the cost of accessing the service, and in many cases, the illicit services are almost as easy to use as the paid-for ones. In 2024, around 20 million viewers illegally streamed a key boxing match between Tyson Fury and Oleksandr Ysuk, costing pay-per-view broadcasters an estimated GBP95 million in profits.⁸⁷

In fashion and beauty, counterfeits and dupes have become popular among Gen Z and Millennials, enabling them to enjoy the style without the price tag. The shift here is that while wearing a fake luxury watch or branded clothing was once something to hide and pass off as real, wearing a dupe is now accepted as a smart way to embrace a style affordably.⁸⁸ With rising demand comes accelerating production, and the cycle drives itself—with some help from social media. Certain online retailers have become known for their habit of copying items on the luxury market. The difference is that now, they’re also targeting the work of independent designers, to poorer quality standards, which is seriously impacting small businesses’ profits.⁸⁹

People are taking control of their own destiny—and companies should stay acutely aware of their motivations and methods.

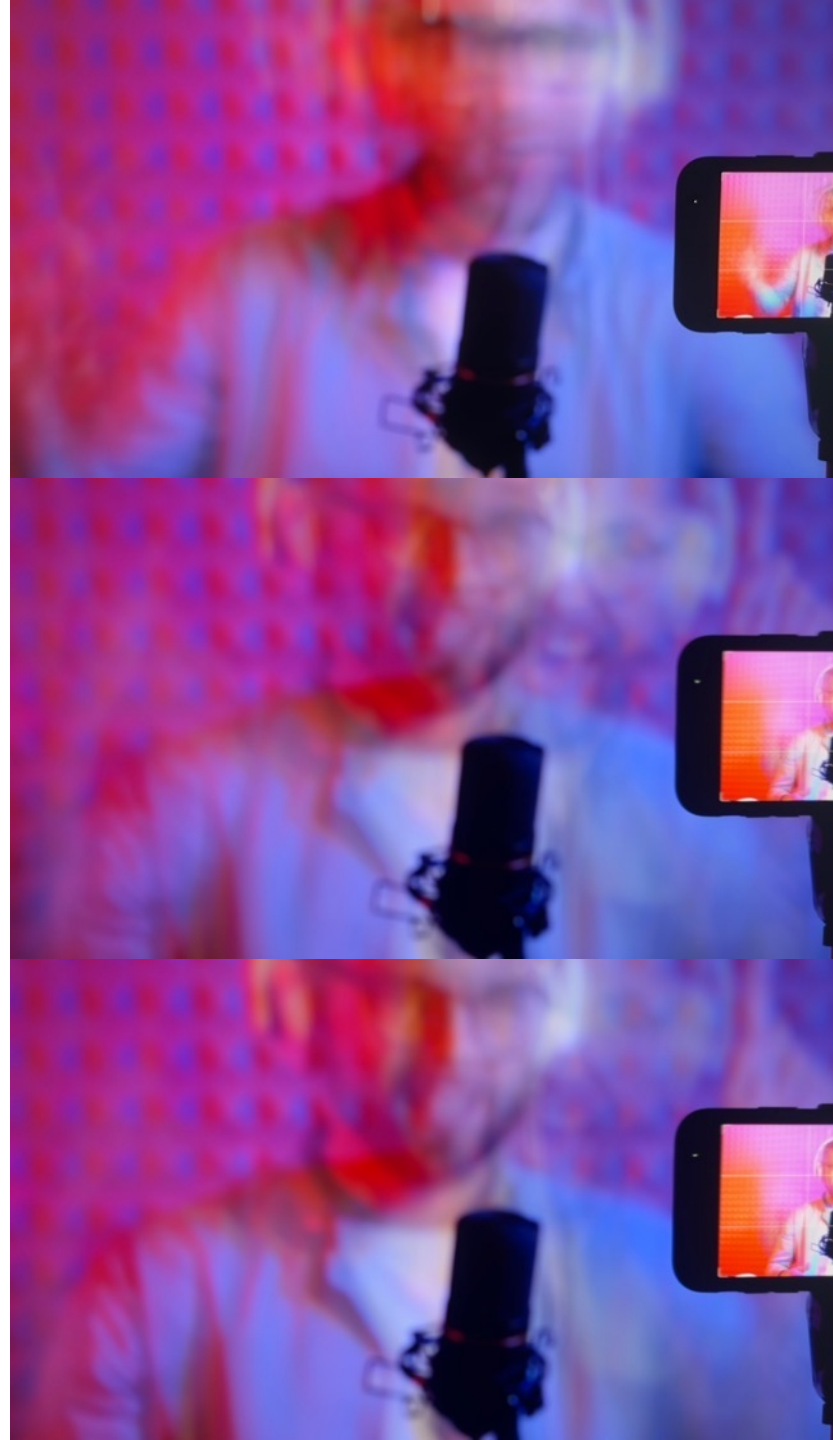



The signals add up to reveal a trend toward self-agency, quicker fixes and alternative routes to success—all of which are tied up in risks and rewards. Traditional systems that serve people are critical, and the regulation around them exists for valid, experience-led reasons, but people's patience is exhausted by a life system that feels rigged.



What's next

At the center of this trend is the fact that people are being more impatient, proactive and assertive in how they navigate life. Their new approaches to pursuing health, wealth and happiness are challenging the status quo for businesses. The role of influencers started with product recommendations and has moved on to helping people solve their life problems and offering them alternatives. For the past twenty years, tech startups have spotted gaps in the market and filled them, but now it's the power of the crowd.



68.2% 
of people would engage more with a brand that educates them through blogs and videos⁹⁰

Accenture Life Trends survey, 2024

Connection, built through content

As social media continues to offer a way to share and discover helpful information, we expect to see people continuing to help each other navigate roadblocks and improve their lives. Brands should take note of this behavior, though, as it reveals significant gaps in the service and information they offer.

Avoiding major disruption will require a rethink of customer engagement strategy, and a drive to remove obstacles to direct connection. Content and connection are not the same thing.

Influencers' content is popular because it's relatable. They share lived experiences in which people recognize their own circumstances, making it feel like they're singing the same song and their recommendations must be worth consideration. A small number of brands are already leaning into

this trend. For instance, Ally Bank and Credit Karma are partnering with Fintok influencer Michela Allocca, who shares personal finance video content with her 800,000 followers.⁹¹

We expect to see an increasing tide of people looking to each other for awareness of options that will get them to their goals faster. This is becoming a more powerful space than those where most companies currently choose to engage.

Trusted institutions have the right message but not the right medium. Social platforms have the right medium but not always the right messages. There is an opportunity here to serve an unmet need by delivering trusted information via the right channel, with a relatable, person-to-person quality.

The power of the crowd is uncovering needs that aren't being met by organizations—whether that means brands, service providers or government agencies.



Personal touches

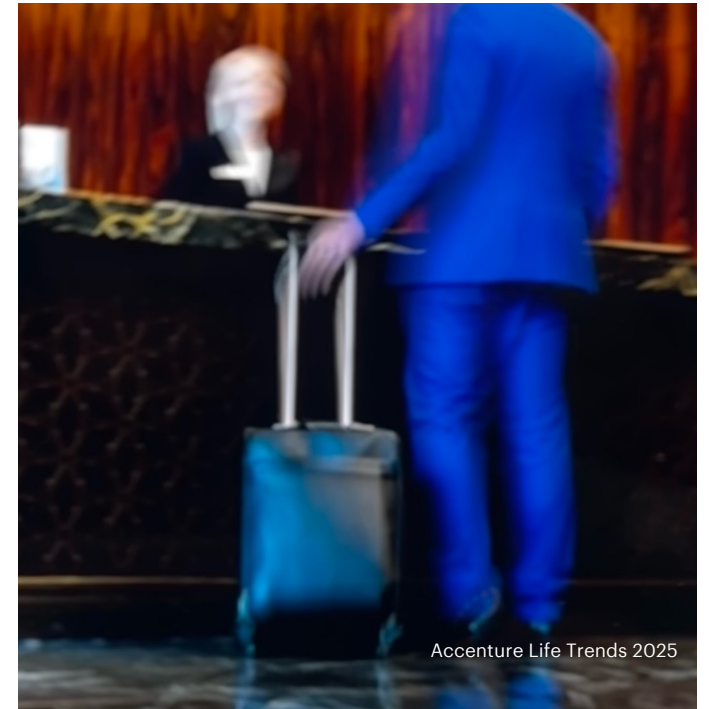
Companies should appreciate that person-to-person engagement creates intimacy, which is infinitely more relatable and captivating than anything found on a branded website. This affinity is set to disrupt and displace branded content that fails to connect on a personal level.


While writing this trend, we started referring to some of these new solutions as “smartcuts,” as they often involve making quick, intuitive, savvy choices to achieve a goal. Brands can satisfy this instinct by offering simple, convenient solutions alongside more thoughtful options for those who want to be more considered. They will, however, need to respect the balance articulated by Christine Kieffer at the Financial Industry Regulatory Authority: “Social media is public, but finances are private.”⁹²

Organizations need to understand how and where to use technology when helping people to achieve their goals. The evidence above points to people wanting peer-to-peer or at least person-to-person contact. Technology can be used to empower or facilitate engagement, but machines used in place of people will likely have a detrimental effect on trust. Companies that have been viewing direct customer relationships as a cost—and treating them as such—will need to take a hard look at whether this strategy will soon diminish growth and profits in this new context.

“I value brands that not only provide tools for immediate use but also invest in innovation and customer feedback to improve their offerings over time.”


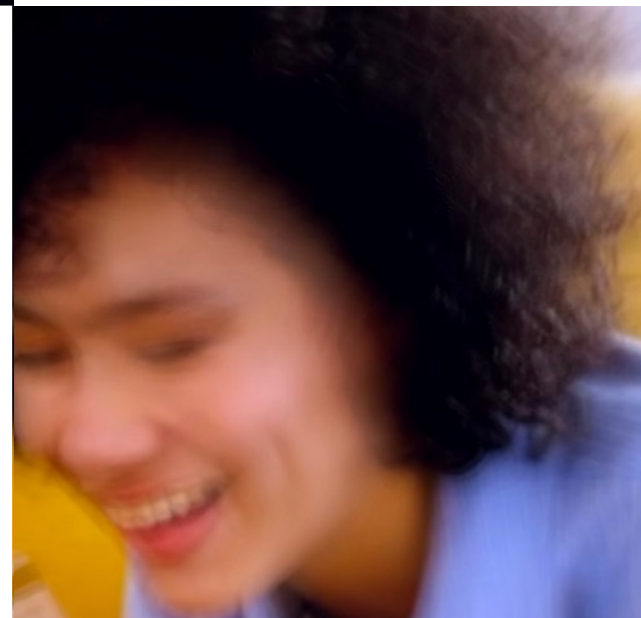
Thato, 30, South Africa





“Anything that a brand can do for me that’s making my life easier or that is saving me time is something that I think is important to spend money on, and that is in the short term now, but then also in the long term.”


Amrita, 34, UK





Companies can’t leave critical financial advice languishing on FAQ pages. They need to create a connection that is compelling enough to be widely shared for its ability to get to the core of people’s lived experience. Self-service interactions over the past few years have fallen victim to efficiencies, compromising quality and personalization. What hope does this advice have when the alternative is highly entertaining content that may inspire customers to go a different way?


Areas of life where people want long-term support:

61.1% 
Financial investment

59.9% 
Physical health

58.9% 
Mental health

57.2% 
Insurance

56.6% 
Education and skill development

Accenture Life Trends survey, 2024



Motivations behind the actions



In each industry, businesses will need to evaluate the motivations behind the new solutions people have found. In some cases, it could be down to customers' impatience, in which case companies will need to manage their expectations and make the experience simple and accessible through every touchpoint. Other times, it will be a symptom of a gap or disruption in the business model. In these situations, a quick and coherent fix will be essential to minimizing the impact.

As people continue finding and exploiting quicker and/or easier solutions, businesses will likely need to rethink their relationships with customers both in real life and online. Their determination to succeed remains strong, but their methods have evolved and will continue to do so. Brands should deeply understand what they're trying to achieve, instead of focusing just on selling to them.

Companies that offer solutions that satisfy people's need for immediacy and relatability will be rewarded for providing meaningful support as people navigate life.

Why this matters now

We believe that the personal recommendations people are absorbing from social media—those that feel more authentic, more relatable, and more actionable—are influencing decision-making in people's lives more than ever. They are becoming hyper-aware of information and actions to be more proactive in their finances, their health, and the value for their hard-earned money. Becoming the brand they want means minimizing the mundane (interactions that get in the way) and maximizing the humane (experiences that are relatable).



These so-called “life hacks” are being consumed widely and it's impacting industries where the customer's goals are deprioritized. When customers go looking for a shortcut, find a way for your brand to be the answer to their question.

We recommend

Brands should check the experience delivery.

This means looking for aspects of the experience that could be minimized—in other words, automated or seamlessly handled through invisible interfaces. Enhancing experiences with a human touch will likely set brands apart. The aim should be to deliver a fluid experience in which the offering is deeply tailored to each person, making it more relevant and engaging.

It will be important to reinvent the organization with customer-centricity at the heart. It involves identifying channels and influential voices through which the brand can help people pursue their goals when they're disengaged from institutions. For things that matter, they want advice and help from real people, so companies should expand their use of channels that feel more immediate and use voices to whom customers can relate.

The crowd's power to navigate alternatives shows that there are unmet needs. If a business only thinks in terms of products instead of customers, it's missing a valuable opportunity. Data will enable organizations to anticipate needs and proactively provide useful, relevant experiences.

People are more impatient than ever and seizing opportunities to drive their lives in their desired direction. This motivates proactivity, which is disruptive for the services and goals that require patience, including healthcare and finance. Companies should seek opportunities to position products and services in other contexts and ecosystems, broadening propositions through partnerships that develop the brand's role in people's lives.

Customer service needs fresh focus. People simply aren't getting what they want from brands/businesses, presenting an opportunity to differentiate. Customer service is about learning from the customer and applying the findings to new products services and solutions. If that loop is broken, products and the ability to innovate also suffer.



Trend 4:

the dignity of work

The dignity of work is a critical pillar of a healthy workplace, but it's increasingly being shaken by business pressures, technological advances and evolving human dynamics. In this challenging setup, the importance and value of people's contribution is at risk of being taken for granted, but the way leaders treat people will be the difference between employees embracing or hesitating over shifts caused by technologies like generative AI.

If employees aren't motivated—with agency—how can they be expected to deliver first-rate products, services and experiences to customers?

What's going on

The evidence in this trend shows that work is feeling increasingly transactional and draining for leaders and employees alike, and in many places, the once-lively workplace has become compromised. A successful value exchange between employer and employee depends on the energy each expends for the benefit of the other. The willingness or ability to invest in this exchange has weakened—and the impact has recently become apparent in the day-to-day working environment.

60% 

of large employers are using tools to track their staff's activity, despite autonomy being proven to boost job satisfaction, motivation and creativity^{93, 94}

Few would deny that the pandemic sucked energy out of working culture and, like it or not, it's still important to include here around five years since it began. According to Gartner research, the number of large employers using tools to track their staff's activity, which kicked off as a response to the pandemic's need for remote work, doubled to 60% between early 2020 and 2022, despite Forbes finding that autonomy is proven to boost job satisfaction, motivation and creativity.^{93, 94}

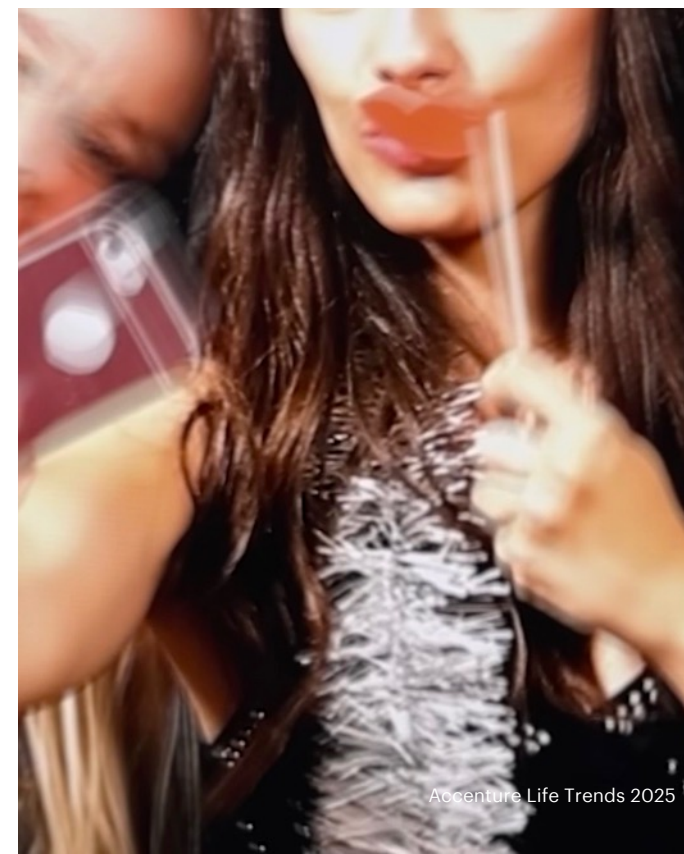
Even as things settled, the adjustments that had been forced remained in place—including the costs that had been cut for survival and never got picked up again as economies started recovering. Reluctant compromise on where work happens still haunts the workplace, the cuts driven by economic efficiencies have kept coming and the mood feels subdued.

This assertion is supported by data. Forrester research indicated that between 2022 and 2023, global employee engagement fell from 41% to 37%, and culture energy from 63% to 59%. They predict further declines in 2024, with engagement at 34% and culture energy at 55%, due to return-to-office mandates and compensation disputes.⁹⁵

Leaders have had to rapidly adapt their priorities, reshape their teams and drive outcomes while the world lurches from one crisis to the next. The result is an unsettled workplace that has been dominated by external forces, with the unintended consequence of pushing people's needs aside and diminishing their energy at work.



It's a small but significant signal that 53% of employees chose not to attend an end-of-year party in 2023.⁹⁶



Employee emotional distancing

An emotional distancing between workers and work is becoming clear. Evolving attitudes to work have employees demanding more flexibility, better balance and higher salaries. According to our survey, people prize work/life balance most highly (52%), with salary (48.4%) and job security (39.1%) following close behind.⁹⁷ Work/life balance is being elevated above all other factors (albeit by small margins), which feels significant as it potentially indicates that the promise of money could hold less power in motivating people to work harder.

Our analysis of YouGov global profiles data found that over the past two years, people have increasingly valued their free time.⁹⁸ Having realized the benefits of flexibility, many are reluctant to make the concessions that were previously accepted as a standard part of working life, affecting office culture, productivity and performance. But with only 29% of employees

trusting that their company's leaders have their best interests at heart, it's not difficult to rationalize their unwillingness to make sacrifices.

The Accenture Future of Work study found that only 29% of employees trust their company's leaders to have their best interests at heart.⁹⁹

Further, a study from Credit Karma notes that 42% of Gen Z and Millennials describe the feeling of "money dysmorphia" as the feeling of being "insecure about their financial standing, no matter the reality of their situation." As a result, some are "acting their wage"—a trend describing how, in the wake of layoffs or hiring freezes, employees are increasingly reluctant to take on additional roles beyond their designated scope.¹⁰⁰

This is exacerbated by career influencers and regular users on social media introducing some helpful and some unrealistic expectations for younger workers. Experts say early-career employees often look to peers on social media for advice, valuing relatable mentors over those with more experience or formal ties. This can be healthy, fostering genuine connections and helping people learn how to conduct tough conversations at work, but it could also lead to a dependence on less experienced voices or a decline into antagonistic relationships with employers.¹⁰¹

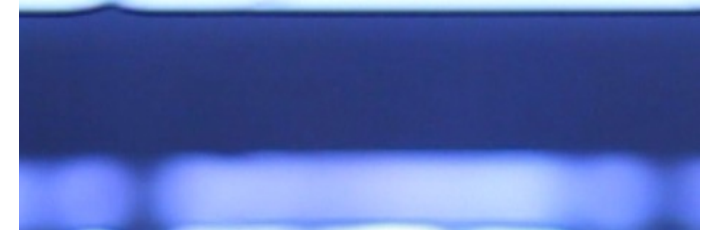
Perceived organizational dehumanization

A growing genre of academic research, “organizational dehumanization” articulates the phenomenon that employees increasingly feel they’re treated like tools, machines or resources rather than people.¹⁰² (Even the word “resource” feels inherently inhuman.)

According to Gartner, 82% of employees say it’s important for their organization to see them as a person rather than just a “human resource,” but only 45% believe their organization does view them as such.¹⁰³ This is wrapped up in the basic courtesies of human interaction, like respect and dignity. But drives for efficiency have evolved such that people feel they’re valued more by the metrics that quantify their output than their experience, skills or personal contribution to culture. This is making employees feel like cogs in a machine—functional and easily replaceable—which is demotivating and ultimately hurts both employee and employer.

Employees are also having their energy depleted by “technostress,” which has crept in over the past several years. Technostress is defined as the pressure experienced through engaging with information systems.¹⁰⁴ In many cases, well-intended IT initiatives to improve efficiency place additional burden on employees to learn new systems and regularly set aside time to input the necessary information. And often, legacy systems aren’t retired, meaning the technology load just keeps growing.

Companies striving for growth in a difficult economic landscape often place their hopes in reorganizations, aiming to restructure various functions and streamline operations. In some cases, these moves become sources of stress, and directly correlate with burnout and compromised work-life balance.¹⁰⁵ While often necessary, cost-cutting can seriously impact energy and morale in the workplace. Four years into this period of constant reorganization and cost-cutting, employees have grown weary of standing on unstable ground, which affects how they feel at work and shouldn’t be ignored.



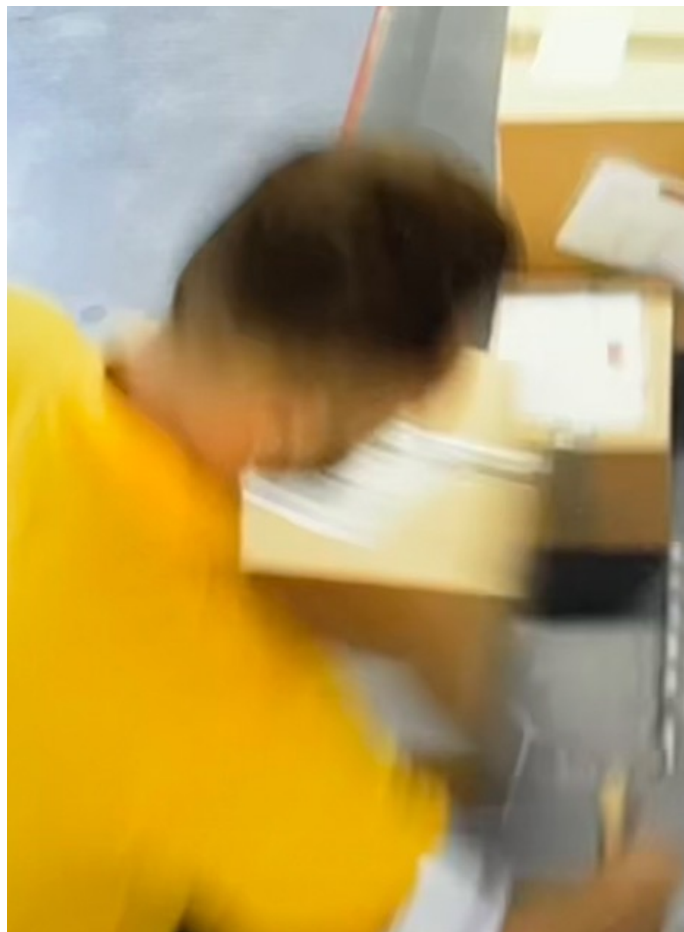
“I’d say the boss’s attitude toward employees has changed too; it’s no longer about employee well-being, but more about performance, money. I don’t get the recognition I used to.”

Marie, 44, France





The employee experience recession



The value exchange is at the heart of the “EX recession”—a phrase coined by Forrester that has picked up steam. The result is a collection of worrying tensions that are depleting energy within the workplace. Without intervention, we could see a breakdown of the employer/employee value exchange such that people continue to mute themselves in the workplace.

The activities that have long been known to bring energy to an organization have been gradually deprioritized over recent years. In companies around the world, investment has dropped for initiatives that mattered to organizations—such as diversity, equality and inclusion (DEI) and Sustainability.¹⁰⁶ Forrester predicts that organizational DEI investments will fall from 33% in 2022 to 20% in 2024.¹⁰⁷

Cutbacks to employee welfare schemes, financial incentives and training make people feel like their leaders aren’t willing to invest in their development anymore. In the United Kingdom, companies have reduced investment in training by 28% since 2005 despite 75% of employees referencing improved training and development as key to boosting their engagement at work.^{108, 109}

“Improving productivity” is the message most frequently heard (49.5%) by employees from their employers—more often than any messages about improving customer value or workforce development.

Accenture Life Trends survey, 2024

Like consumers, employees were primed on more than a decade of talk about the employee experience. Many have come to expect more than a transactional relationship with their employer. The deeper context here is an ongoing re-evaluation of the value, benefits, and social function of work. This re-evaluation has multiple fronts, but they all push towards growing feeling that human agency and dignity needs to be reasserted in the face of a challenged work culture.

What's next

The demands made and endurance required of leaders—including CEOs, management and team leads—need a new mindset and a special kind of energy. Leaders have to lead for the world as it exists today, navigating complex challenges like cost pressures, dwindling team morale and the relentless need for organizational growth in a volatile environment.

It's by no means a given that energy will be restored in the workplace, and the value exchange will find balance again. We believe that leaders who see the value of effecting positive change and creating the conditions that naturally raise enthusiasm in their teams will emerge as winners. Those who ignore what's happening will increasingly notice a lack of dignity at work, resulting in poor culture, work and motivation—and worse outcomes for customers and business growth.



Centered on
person-to-person
connection,
humanized leadership
is key to restoring
energy.


The chain of humanization

How can leaders steer their teams when so much is beyond their control? It starts by fostering cohesion and a sense of purpose among leaders. Companies must recharge leaders so that they, in turn, can recharge those that they lead. When leaders are united and driven by a clear mission, they can inspire and support their people through instability, creating a resilient and motivated workforce ready to tackle any challenge.

Centered on person-to-person connection, humanized leadership is key to restoring energy. By focusing on empathy and interaction, leaders can build trust and engagement—which is something digital productivity technologies can't replicate. This approach revitalizes teams, making them stronger and more driven. When tough decisions must be made, explaining the reasons clearly and with empathy around the impact on people will define morale going forward.

Employees should be walking ambassadors for an organization, inspired to do their best work for their employer, clients and customers, but if they feel unappreciated and short-changed, why would they bother? People need to know that their achievements for the business are noticed and appreciated. Even when budgets do not stretch to financial reward, a sincere show of gratitude costs nothing and means a great deal, but the importance of such gestures is being forgotten. Thriving work environments have leaders and team members who voice their appreciation, and good employers will ensure they know this is happening.

Support (or lack of it) directly correlates with well-being, including job satisfaction, emotional exhaustion and stress-related health issues.¹¹⁰ Bringing energy back into the workplace means actively making people feel supported by the organization—and this should become a metric for every level of leadership. Surface-level efforts will be recognized as such, and may be perceived as “well-being washing,” which would backfire.¹¹¹



“I want it to be fundamentally enjoyable and to be honest, I do not really have any connection with my employer.”

Shogo, K., 25, Japan





Use AI, but value humanity



Accenture research found that 75% of organizations don't yet have comprehensive strategies to ensure positive employee experiences and outcomes with generative AI.¹¹² As leaders start thinking about this, keeping employees front of mind becomes critical to beginning the change journey.

Leaders should be mindful not to treat people the same as they treat the tools within the organization—especially when generative AI begins to mature. If organizations fall into the trap of personifying AI agents, it could lead to a backlash and make people feel like their bosses see them and the bots as equals.¹¹³ Success will require top-down action to enable the growth of a culture that works comfortably alongside AI from the bottom up.

It's important to make conscious effort to treat people with dignity and recognize their value as experienced, skilled workers. Using generative AI tools as part of managerial work needs to be approached with care. Dignity and respect for individuals' contributions must be kept in mind, even when generative AI tools are used for written performance feedback or reviewing work.

People invest their time, effort and energy into their work so assessing their performance must make them feel valued and that what they do matters.

The tech sphere is awash with numerous opinions and predictions about generative AI's potential impact on the workplace, running the gamut from underwhelming to transformative. At the transformative end of the scale are voices including Zoom CEO Eric Yuan, who speculates that people will have digital twins to attend meetings and make decisions on their behalf.¹¹⁴ It could be that autonomous AI agents will increasingly automate tasks, which has potential to reduce jobs and to pivot people's contribution from doing the work to managing the work.

Conversely, investors are reportedly getting nervous about whether they will ever see satisfactory returns.¹¹⁵ How do people find their rightful place in this ambiguous, ever-changing AI picture?

At this point, employees listening to a swirl of conflicting information are left feeling uncertain about their near future. However significant AI's role turns out to be, if it becomes common in the workplace, employers will need to keep a close watch on the dehumanization impact on the people expected to take instruction from or collaborate with machines. And until AI is trustworthy enough to make critical choices (if it ever is), humans must maintain accountability.

Leaders and employees are all reading the same headlines, but those in control take them differently from those who must roll with any changes, and we see little evidence of employers seeking to allay employee's concerns. A recent study found just 17% of employees' companies had clear AI policies, half encouraging and half prohibiting AI use.¹¹⁶ Employees are left feeling that this potentially radical reinvention of the workplace is happening to them and not with them. This is a dignity issue. Accenture found that 60% of employees are concerned about generative AI increasing their stress and burnout, but only 37% of leaders see this as a problem.¹¹⁷

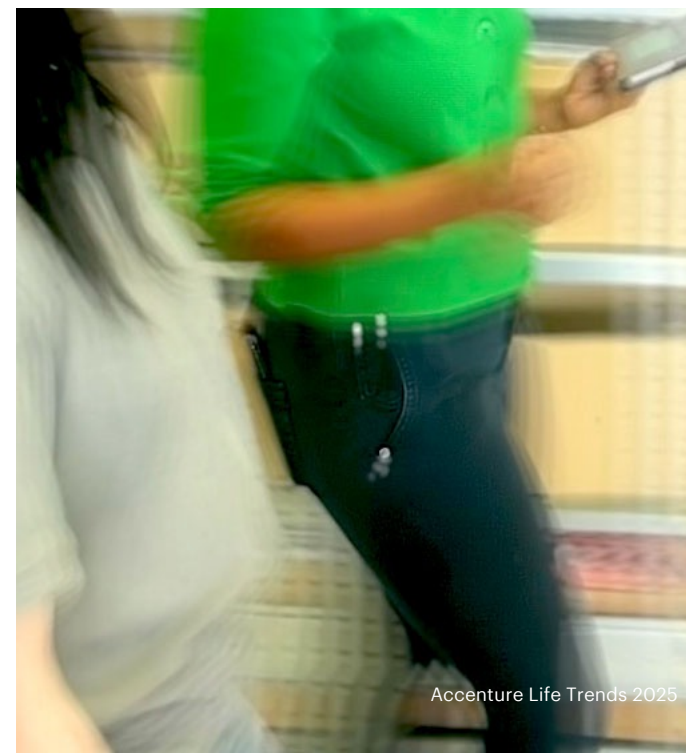
The Economist articulates an excellent point: "The thing for managers to remember is that machines can make employees feel differently about their work. So, it matters whether new technologies are introduced in collaboration with employees or imposed from above, and whether they enhance or sap their sense of competence. Bosses who ignore these issues are missing something meaningful."¹¹⁸



60% 

of employees are concerned about generative AI increasing their stress and burnout

Accenture Life Trends survey, 2024



The productivity x efficiency equation

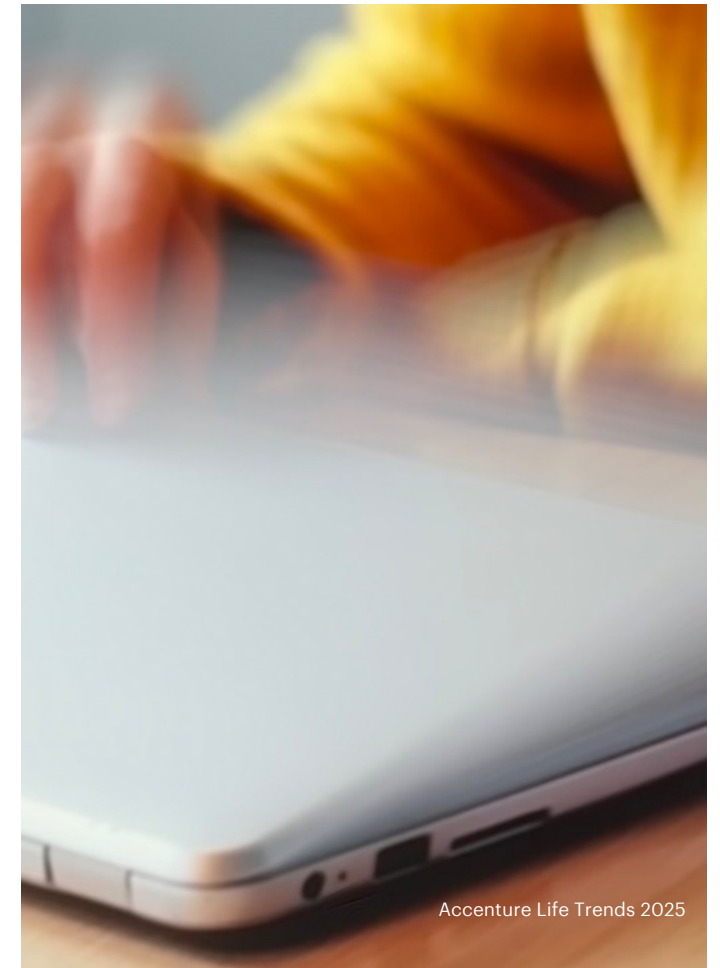
The ways in which leaders assess this technology should be transparent and grounded in the reality of how work is done within the organization. We expect that as it plays out, AI will affect some tasks more than others and will eventually eliminate or at least slim down some tasks—but not necessarily entire jobs. Leaders need to understand that jobs and tasks are different things, and clearly communicate this with employees. Employees, for the most part, care about the quality of what they produce—which is why they sometimes find it hard to reconcile generative AI's promises versus what they see it deliver.

Today, workers are already using AI in their jobs where they find it valuable to them. Our survey found that three out of four people find generative AI tools helpful at work, saying that they make work more efficient (43.6%) and improve the quality of work (38.4%), while some are concerned that they limit creativity (13.9%), make work more transactional (15.5%) and create anxiety about job security (11%).¹¹⁹

In some cases, purchasing a tool and forcing employees to integrate it into their daily processes may create more work, not less—particularly for high-impact work. And a word of warning: in this situation, employees may find workarounds that haven't been approved for corporate use.

A workplace enhanced by generative AI is likely to see an exponential increase in output, due to its capacity to produce more work at speed. History suggests that higher output often leads to a growth in capacity, which then creates new roles. Beware, though, that the risk of faster output is unreasonable expectation of time needed to do intellectually rigorous or creative work, which could compromise quality. Time to think is part of the process and is one of the most motivating and fulfilling elements of any role.

Purchasing a tool and forcing employees to integrate it into their daily processes may create more work, not less.



“By using generative AI and becoming more efficient, I am concerned about using it as people at work comment how quick I am. As a result, it’s actually increased the work I have to do.”

Shogo, K., 25, Japan



We expect to see existing roles evolving, though leaders will need to be cautious about how far roles evolve from what the employees want to do. If people in creative roles pivot to critical thinking and analysis to manage generative AI output, they could switch from executor to supervisor, creator to curator, or doer to manager. Many would be unhappy with this outcome, as the skills and talents they’ve spent their careers honing would be wasted.

How it’s implemented will matter the most. Jobs are not just tasks that can be isolated but rather, a complex relationship between tasks and what happens in between. As celebrated jazz trumpeter, Miles Davis put it: “It’s not the notes you play, it’s the notes you don’t play.”

Employee experience drives customer experience

Organizations should be looking to make better use of people's creative skills, as we expect to see them becoming an even stronger differentiator against competitors who lean too heavily on machine-generated output. Those that use generative AI as an enabler of human creativity and ingenuity are likely to find most success. For example, marketers are increasingly using high-quality, AI-generated synthetic data to save on costs, but it's widely recognized that this data should be paired with the insights of human strategists and creatives.¹²⁰

It's critical to keep front of mind the fact that investing time and effort into a fulfilled, valued workforce will enable companies to shape a differentiated, appealing customer experience (CX)—ultimately leading to business growth.¹²¹ Last year, we called out the decline of CX and perceived service levels in the trend, **Where is the love?** Could it be that a workforce without energy is a key driver? We believe it is, and that the reverse holds true—providing the key to growth and renewal.

Humanized leadership is critical to restoring energy in the workplace and emboldening people to do their best work both for their own sense of worth and for the good of the company. Without attention on—and investment in—energizing the workforce, the returns for cost-cutting measures will steeply decline.

Treating people like people and not as tools means understanding the superpower strengths that only they can contribute to a thriving workplace. When implementing AI, leaders need to be aware that alongside the lure of a rapid boost to productivity and profit, the technology also has potential to affect the value exchange with employees.

A wildlife-related quote from Alexander Den Heijer feels relevant here, too: “When a flower doesn't bloom, you fix the environment in which it grows, not the flower.”¹²² When employees work in an environment where they feel valued and understood, they feel relevant and energized, and then they create experiences that make customers feel the same. This is the key to organizational success.

Why this matters now

People want to feel like their contribution to work matters. Work is a way to realize one's potential and labor movements throughout history have been in pursuit of dignity.

Today's leaders need to adapt to today's context, including leading teams across all metrics the organization is demanding of them, while cutting costs. Critically, they should balance this with employees' engagement and well-being. These factors directly impact the company's performance, reputation and ability to attract and retain talent—ultimately influencing long-term success and profitability.



Rapid advances in AI and automation are reshaping workforce dynamics across all industries and we believe this takes a new leadership mindset.



We recommend

The workforce needs to be re-energized—starting with leaders. Facilitate authentic human connections—whether face-to-face or remotely—to revitalize teams, foster trust and boost engagement. The anemic feeling from year-over-year cost cuts in the things that energize people will need to be watched carefully.

People need to be treated like people and machines like machines—and AI shouldn't be personified. There is no dignity in a manager/employee relationship if one of them is not a person. Personifying AI undervalues human contributions and leads to unrealistic expectations.

Leaders should design fulfilling work structured with dignity and respect to retain the best talent. Treating people with respect and making it clear that their contribution is important to the team's goals are crucial to their engagement with the company and the work. Recognizing the difference they make will build pride and purpose.

Employees should have their voices heard and respected when it comes to AI adoption. People know how to do their jobs and have begun to use the technology where it best fits. Organizations might not capture value from this because in a lot of cases, the tasks weren't measured for value to begin with. At the time of writing, generative AI use cases are still emerging, but leaders should think about whether people will want to be held accountable for work that is produced by generative AI but that is their responsibility.

Change management is a constant requirement. Leadership involves creating the right conditions for strategic changes to be made. It's about determining what tomorrow should look like and working towards that as a shared goal. Leading change means consistently demonstrating and reinforcing the mindsets and behaviors that will create a desired future, including understanding how colleagues perceive and engage with their work and each other.¹²³

A person is riding a bicycle, silhouetted against a bright, hazy sunset. The sky is filled with warm, golden light and soft clouds. The person is wearing a light-colored shirt and dark pants. The bicycle is in motion, with the wheels blurred. The overall mood is peaceful and nostalgic.

Trend 5:

social

rewilding

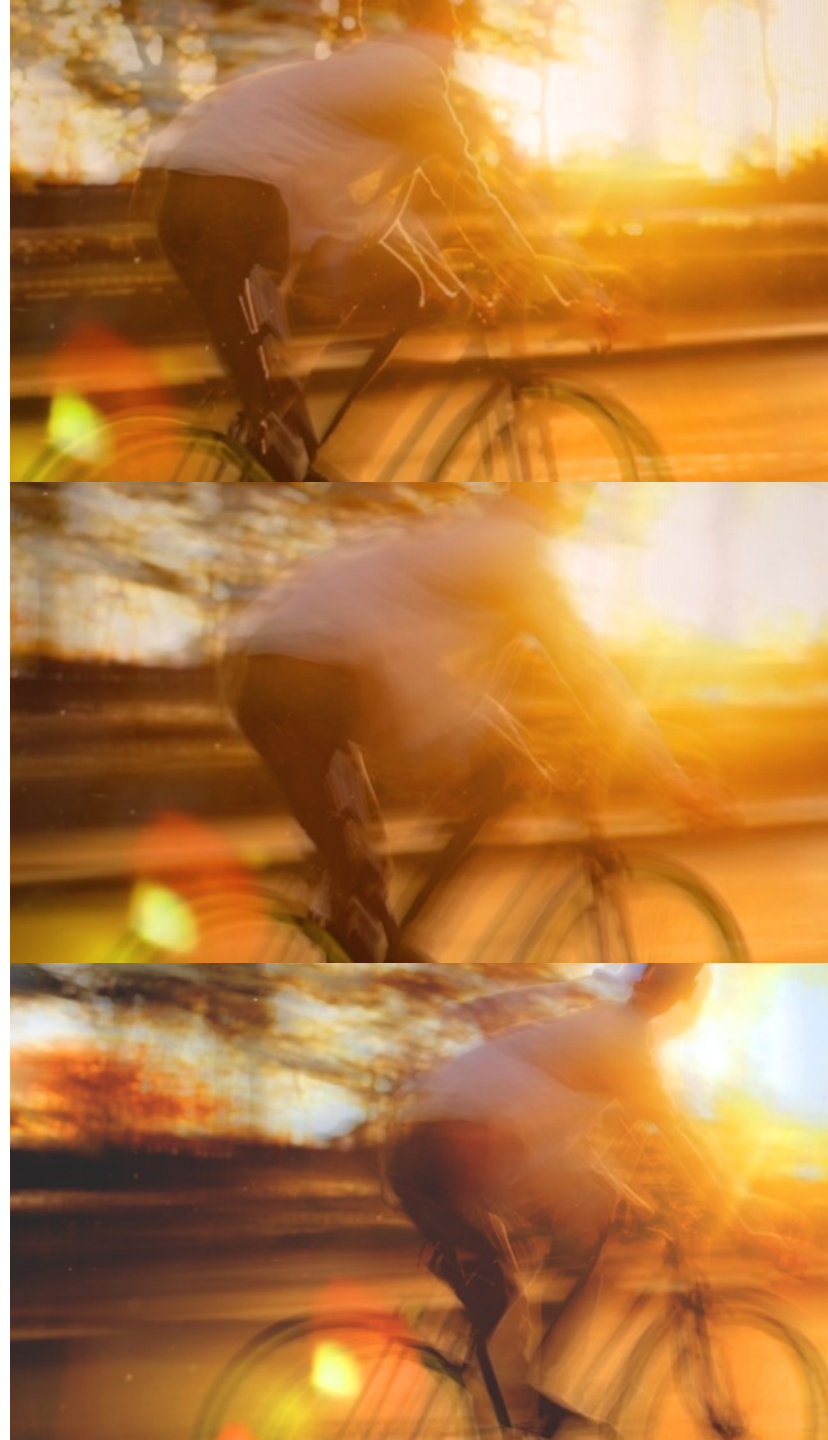
People are seeking depth, authenticity and sensory richness in their experiences. They want to engage with the world in meaningful ways, finding textural experiences that connect them with their environment and each other. This is social rewilding—a quest to reconnect socially in the real world, often but not always around nature, and to balance technology’s role in the moments that bring people joy and well-being.

When shaping Accenture Life Trends each year, profoundly local signals often spotlight fringe activities. This year, social rewilding signals from around the world combined to reveal a much bigger movement. Globally, people are increasingly embracing experiences that reconnect them with nature, enable them to create using their hands and foster genuine connections to their surroundings and other people. This offers opportunities for change in the role organizations play in their lives.

What's going on

We're seeing signals of social rewilding, revealing a growing appreciation for the physical world and human connection—often both at once. Inspired by a similar concept around regenerating the natural world, social rewilding offers hope by restoring people's natural rhythms and reestablishing connections to life, including the great outdoors, healthy routines and reviving lost hobbies and habits.¹²⁴

The past couple of decades have acted like an experiment to see how much human connection can be achieved in the digital world. Digital interactions make a lot of sense for busy modern life, delivering ease and convenience, so this is not a rejection of digital but a search for texture. There's a notable shift in people being more intentional with their use of digital, rebalancing its use to amplify the joys of real-world experiences. They're allocating digital a supportive role rather than continuing to allow it to pull them away from experiences through which they connect with people, places and culture.



“Living in the present and focusing on what’s in front of me is the most real and reliable for me. Online, I might just have a moment of happiness from reading a novel or watching a funny video but it’s fleeting.”

XJ, Li., 27, China



Pre-digital nostalgia



Nostalgia is part of this story. While people have always shared an affinity for simpler times, digitally native generations are seeking textures from the past that hold valuable novelty for them. For them, the pre-digital era reveals artifacts of textured experiences, which they are culturally retrofitting into their modern existence. For instance, Gen Z and Gen Alpha are looking back to the 1990s—before they were born—and perceiving an existence unencumbered by 24/7 connectivity.

One YouTube video entitled “Class of ‘98 Last Day at Solon High School – Part 1” has been watched over a million times and has garnered comments that celebrate the pre-digital richness of the event.¹²⁵ One user wrote, “Simpler times... everyone looked to be ‘living in the moment.’ A photograph was to be cherished. Friendship was not a mere Add Friend button.

Everyone looked ‘alive’.” Another commented, “There’s so much more social confidence here. I think social media has made everyone care way too much about what others think. This is how we were meant to interact with one another.”

“Definitely, for me, the most important remains in the real world, because the virtual world is good, but in the end, it is something that we appreciate less.”

Emine, 33, France

Meanwhile, a niche group of under-30s is finding the joy of driving modern classic cars from the ‘80s and ‘90s. Scott Linford, one of those enthusiasts from the United Kingdom, remarked, “I paid £1,500 for it in 2020, it’s worth at least £2,000 now—but the pleasure it gives is priceless. Modern cars are bland. The Minx makes me feel connected to the road, it’s fun to drive, does 30-35mpg, costs £100 to insure and easily keeps up with modern traffic.”¹²⁶

People are finding a purity of joy in making memories through experiences that are tactile and finite—enjoying it while it lasts and then moving on. This is illustrated by a rise in demand for so-called “simple technology,” which includes devices designed to perform limited functions and to perform them well.^{127, 128} In some cases, the experience surrounding simple technology is as valuable as the use of it. For example, vinyl records are not just appealing for the music they host but also for the ritual of going to a record store (which are flourishing all over the world), spending time flipping through covers, absorbing the artwork, maybe talking to fellow enthusiasts, then buying a tangible product to treasure, collect or pass on to loved ones.¹²⁹

Disposable cameras are enjoying a resurgence, too. Again, it’s not just the device, but also the experience—the physical memento of a moment that can be printed, kept, thumbed through and displayed. People are also seeking out dumbphones that offer necessary avenues of communication without the temptation of other apps.^{130, 131, 132} The ad campaign for the Light Phone III explains all the things the device cannot do as its major selling point, to “give you the space you need to take your passions seriously.”¹³³

Touch is an important factor in social rewilding—along with sound, smell and taste—as sensory enrichment is something people have lacked for a while. For instance, some shoppers are adjusting the balance of their online/high street habits and reviving the ritual of visiting a store to enjoy the atmosphere, engage with people and physically examine, smell and touch products before deciding what to buy.¹³⁴

Top physical activities people say they’ve done more of over the past 12 months:

48% 

Spending time outdoor/in nature

47% 

Hanging out with friends in real life

46.9% 

Shopping in physical grocery stores

36% 

Shopping in other retail stores (non-grocery)

30.1% 

Reading physical books or magazines

Accenture Life Trends survey, 2024

Real-world relationships with the self and others

People are searching for and appreciating deeper emotional connections with others in the real world. Those looking for love are starting to step back from dating apps and find ways to meet people in more traditional—arguably poetic—ways. A study by Axios and Generation Lab found that 79% of Gen Z are choosing in-person interactions over dating apps, with one interviewee saying, “I don’t want a pen pal.”¹³⁵

Among survey respondents who are dating in real life, 62.1% say they’re doing so more over the past 12 months, having switched from online equivalents.¹³⁶ This turning of the tide is already showing up in culture, with the Hollywood Reporter identifying a trend where new romantic comedies offer “a return to an imagined time... where authenticity and spontaneity reign in real-life interactions.”¹³⁷

“A moment of sharing, a moment of laughter, a moment of relaxation. [...] We laughed, we ate, we danced. We shared a lot of things. We talked and it’s moments like that that are becoming rarer and rarer, but they make us happy and give us joy.”

Marie, 44, France

Elsewhere, while some still appreciate the convenience of online fitness classes, others are fueling a boom in running clubs, which offer an opportunity to make friends while taking care of their health.¹³⁸ In the UK, doctors are increasingly prescribing social interaction as part of a treatment plan for those suffering long-term conditions, complex social needs, low-level mental health challenges or isolation.^{139, 140}

For self-care, the great outdoors is getting more attention as people rediscover the value of spending time in nature for improving mental well-being, creativity, physical health and longevity.^{141, 142} Some take things further, and get a great deal of personal enrichment out of growing and nurturing new life. As Dana G Smith wrote for the New York Times, “gardening is a workout, meditation and opportunity to socialize with my neighbors all rolled into one.”¹⁴³

There’s also been a worldwide surge of interest in hand-crafting activities like pottery.¹⁴⁴ For hobbies like this, it’s not possible to divide attention between a lump of clay and a screen, so people enjoy a luxurious opportunity to focus just on one thing for a while.

Grounded in culture and place



All textures of life are linked together with people, place and culture—a broad topic and one where more fascinating signals are arising. Emotional connections to place are profoundly important—it's what grounds memories and provides anchors that bring stability as people move through life. In places like Poland, Mexico, Costa Rica and China, local culture and national pride are heavily shaping domestic renaissances in fashion and travel. These elements emerge as ways for people to understand themselves, with “Where do I come from?” helping to determine “Where am I going?”

Ask anyone under 30 in urban China about the coolest activity after the Covid emergency and they'll likely reply, “city walks.” Reminiscent of French *flânerie*, this trend involves leisurely exploring urban areas. Once a niche activity during lockdowns, city walks quickly became mainstream when China lifted its COVID-19 lockdown in early 2023. Social media platform, Xiaohongshu, ranked city walks fifth in its Top 10 Lifestyle Trends for 2022 and at the time of writing, they're featured in over 2.15 million user-generated posts and 440 million views on that platform alone.¹⁴⁵

In the design industry, creatives are increasingly experimenting with maximalism through graphic styles enriched with texture and hand-crafted elements that are unmistakably human—perhaps seeking a way to stand out among AI-generated

images.¹⁴⁶ Flamboyant styles are on the rise in many parts of life, including interior design and experiential design, where luxury train travel offers nostalgic, maximalist escape.^{147, 148}

We're also seeing a reversal of a phenomenon called “brand-blanding,” where numerous well-known companies appeared caught up in a “gradual but inexorable march into the land of sans serifs.”¹⁴⁹ For example, in recent years, some brands have resurrected older logos with intricate design details and serif fonts that point toward their heritage, particularly in the fashion industry.

Social rewilding is a substantial and positive movement. It's happening right now and touching numerous parts of life.

As people, we expect most readers will recognize themselves in this trend and perhaps experience a sense of relief or space when contemplating the options for a simpler, real-world life.

In the 1990s, pioneering digital agency Razorfish used to say, “Everything that can be digital, will be.” Now, people are questioning whether it should be. Some brands that have so far been digital-first would naturally be more powerfully experienced in the real world. Brands should consider: is the sweet spot really digital-first, or is it anchored in the physical world?

What's next

We're on the cusp of a cultural movement that sees people rebalancing their relationship with the physical world. Social rewilding is prompted by the fatigue of a digital-first lifestyle and characterized as an intentional shift toward a more balanced and simplified existence. In our survey, 41.9% of respondents said their most enjoyable experience in the previous week was a physical one, while only 15.3% said it was digital. In fact, 37.9% increasingly appreciate the "joy of missing out" on technology—or JOMO.¹⁵⁰



41.9% 

of respondents said their most enjoyable experience in the previous week was a physical one

Accenture Life Trends survey, 2024

Our survey reveals momentum in people taking control of their technology habits. We learned that 59.9% of people are questioning the authenticity of online content more than before, as indicated in our first trend, **Cost of hesitations**. Of that 59.9%, three quarters (76.9%) indicate they're more intentional about their use of social media instead of doomscrolling, more than half (51.8%) are spending time with friends in person, and almost half (42.4%) are shopping in physical retail more than they did a year before. We see this social rewilding trend as a reaction to a drop in quality of content and experience.¹⁵¹

It's challenging to recognize movements as they emerge and it's even harder when the symptoms aren't easily captured by data, as is the case here, but the signals are growing in reach and number. Brands will need to assess how customers want to engage with them now, and carefully consider the real-world textures in their offerings. We expect to see companies in the startup space leading the charge toward an unbundling of complexity and a focus on simplicity and texture. This shift focuses on depth of feeling over compressed experiences.

Top categories in which people want face-to-face interactions:

60.8% 

Healthcare, wellness and mental health services

56.4% 

Grocery retailers

48.1% 

Fitness centers, diet and nutrition experts

41.7% 

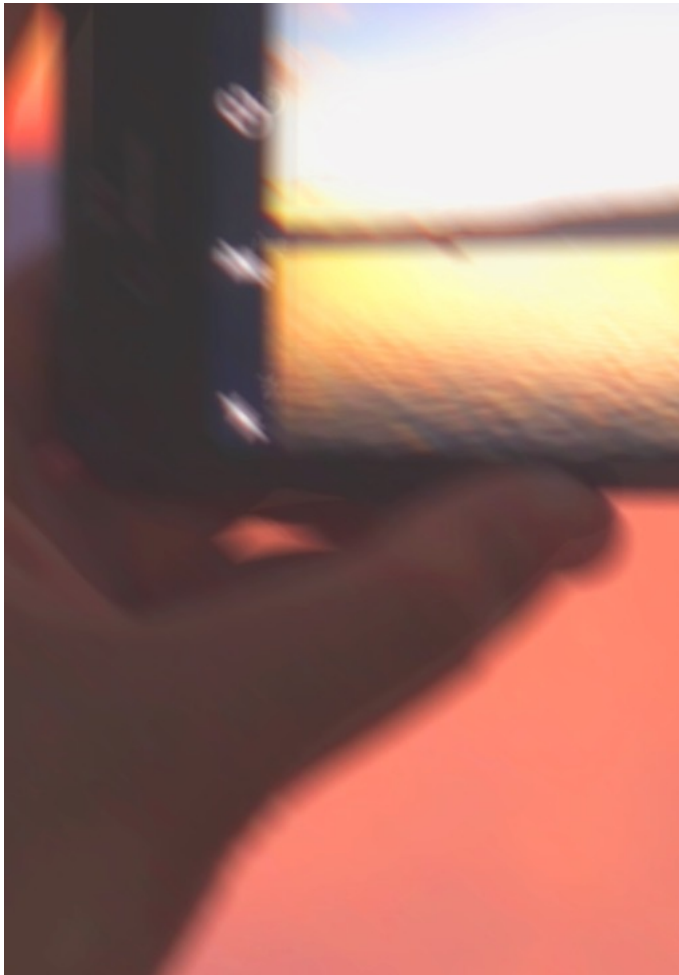
Other retailers

Accenture Life Trends survey, 2024



Accenture Life Trends 2025

Balancing digital with physical



This is less about choosing between physical and digital, and more about finding the right balance of both. Customer service, for example, is crying out for change. Companies in many industries have invested heavily in technology that enables them to deliver solutions without needing to speak to customers. Bank branches have been closed, and chatbots have been deployed to reduce voice calls. Some companies bury contact numbers on their websites, and when people manage to call, they're often greeted by automated messages inviting them to resolve their issues online. Customers should feel they're seen more as an investment for growth rather than a cost to serve.

These companies should apply the same rebalancing approach to customer service as people are applying to life. In our survey, 65.3% of people say they are intentional about their use of social media.¹⁵² Companies will need to scrutinize which parts of the business are best delivered via digital channels, and which would be enriched by a more sensory, textural treatment or human-to-human connection.


Brands should be mindful of their dependence on digital to drive real-world interactions. We expect to see more people reducing their time on social channels, which would dent brands' engagement figures. E-commerce isn't going away, but brands will need to find other places where they can get people's attention without overstepping their new boundaries.

Connecting to something real

People will appreciate and tell their friends about companies that reach beyond the transactional and deliver something personal. For example, barbecue company, Big Green Egg encourages people to “disconnect to reconnect with friends, your family, and neighbors.” The company avoids distribution through large retailers or direct-to-consumer, focusing instead on local distributors who can build lasting personal, local relationships with customers.¹⁵³

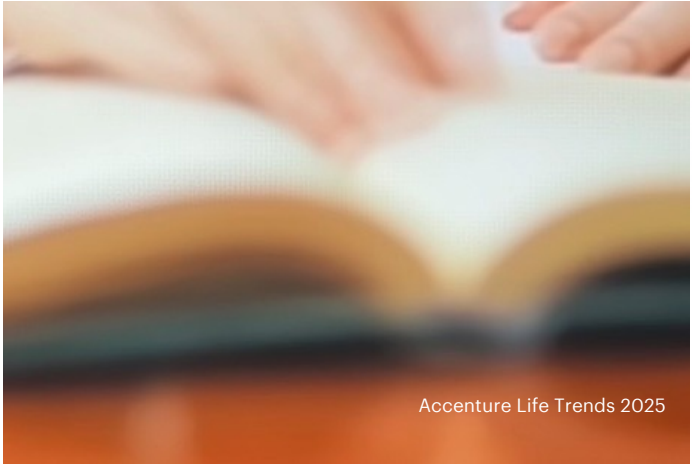
It may be a solid strategy to look to very different industries for inspiration. In the creative sphere, digital is returning to its role as a complement to the experience rather than a replacement for it. Artists are now dominating both the streaming market and the vinyl market, so this is not just a grassroots movement of enthusiasts—it’s also a lucrative strategy for the wider music industry. In 2024, Taylor Swift’s music accounted for 7% of vinyl sales in the US in 2023.¹⁵⁴

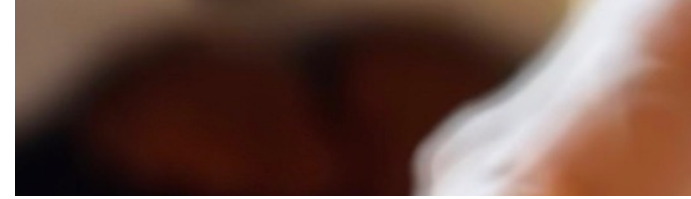
Brands should be asking themselves how they can deliver joy offline as part of their brand promise. They will need to define what “the good life” looks like for their customers and work out whether they have permission to find a place in it.



“In the past year, I have participated more in physical, face-to-face activities such as reading books, attending live performances, exercising and taking walks. I think brands can interact with me more by organizing more offline events such as activity days, consultation days or exhibition days.”

M. Xie, 44, China





Using texture to drive loyalty



The bonds of loyalty are strengthened through real-world textural experiences, offering a depth and authenticity that digital interactions often lack. While digital tools provide powerful means to measure, reward and visualize engagement, they cannot fully replicate the emotional richness of textural experiences. Textural experiences offer a layer of emotional depth beyond what is visually immediate. This means exploring sound and audio, real-life experiences, scent and ways to inspire emotional responses.

The Paris Olympics in 2024 provided a powerful reminder of what draws people into an experience. What made it memorable viewing were the displays of real emotion—more than the statistics around the records the athletes broke or the performance statistics they recorded. Notably, music was a much greater part of the Olympic experience than ever before, adding further texture and broadening engagement.

Sport is a fantastic source of inspiration for textural experience. It's deeply event-based, limited to a defined period, which is a compelling part of texture. On a related point, brands that have most impact at sporting events are those that add something relevant, fun and additive without getting in the way of fans' enjoyment of the event.

Physical experiences create lasting memories and a sense of presence that deepens trust and loyalty, and this presents an opportunity to engage.

People like having a reason to do something, and brands can benefit by embracing that need. For example, sportswear and other health-related brands are jumping at the chance to sponsor running clubs, where members can sample their products and participate in events.¹⁵⁵

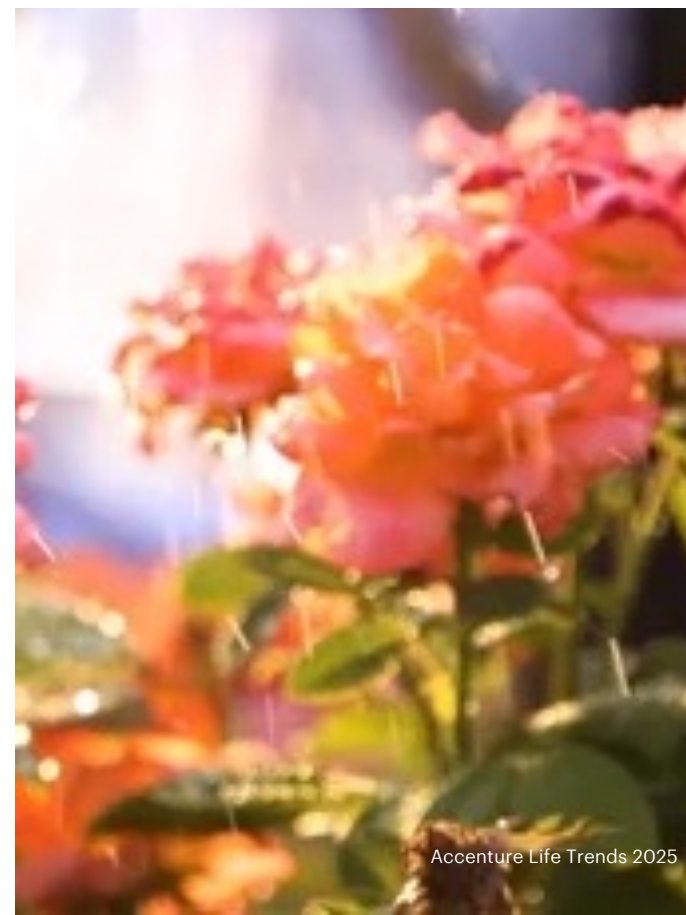
It has long been known that spending on long-term brand building is important for sustained growth, as quantified in Binet and Field's seminal book, *The Long and the Short of it: Balancing Short and Long-Term Marketing Strategies*.¹⁵⁶ They recommend allocating 60% of marketing budgets to long-term brand building, which grows equity through emotional engagement, and 40% to short-term tactics, which drive immediate sales. One well-known apparel brand has seen a significant decline in customer engagement in recent years, and there is speculation that this is at least in part down to performative marketing.

Initiatives that offer people real-life experiences that feel authentic to the brand will do well. The brand will then find a natural place in a newly

balanced lifestyle where digital reclaims its crown as a phenomenally practical resource, and the real world regains a dominant role in people's lived experience. Brands should balance the share of budget spent on digital, which delivers a shallow experience, with the share spent on providing tangible touchpoints that carry with them depth and sensory engagement.

Balance is the theme that trickles through all Life Trends this year. People are rebalancing the role of technology in their lives as facilitator rather than lead actor. They're assessing their own digital habits, helping the next generation to learn from their experiences and redirecting their attention toward more enriching activities.

People are stopping to smell the proverbial roses—and even grow them, too.



Why this matters now

People are seeking out enriching experiences in the physical world, creating opportunities for brands to create more vibrant, textural experiences that connect with customers' lives offline. We don't expect people to abandon digital technology, but we do believe more people will seek to adjust the balance, scaling their use of screens back in favor of real-world experiences.



This movement is happening now, and we expect to see it grow both in scope and popularity, so brands that get on board with it now will likely set themselves apart.

We recommend

Brands should seek out non-digital ways to authentically connect with customers in the moments when they're looking for textural, face-to-face experiences. This could be a key differentiator at a time when many brands have shifted the focus to digital. It may mean bringing additional joy to moments of fun, or being there physically when customers need a helping hand.

Organizations need to understand what people value in simpler technology. As people reach for simpler technologies in the moments that matter to them, the mindset they're in when they do so is important, as is the possible effect on their expectations of a brand. The aesthetics that simple tech advocates have adopted (including film grain and digital noise) are key as they signal a brand's relevance and understanding of the emotional desire to disconnect.

There's an opportunity to go local—without the clichés. Brands can build affinity by sensitively connecting with local cultures—without stooping to stereotypes—and highlighting the texture and nuance of specific cities and regions in events, content, advertising and experiences.

It's time to go green. Certain brands may benefit from embracing the nature-led aesthetic that is becoming increasingly important to people, and/or exploring events or even business models centered on people's desire to get outdoors.

About Accenture Song

It's all about touchpoints—where relevance and emotion happen.

Each one of these touchpoints must be a harmonious blend of strategy, creativity, design, technology and intelligence to create customer value that drives enterprise value. If any of these elements fall short, the touchpoint becomes less effective—and the opportunity to build a relationship is compromised. Relevance is thoughtfully written in at the granular level and manifests in the numerous touchpoints where brand and customer come together.

Accenture Song orchestrates a diversity of talents, skills and experience to drive relevance, by harmonizing every touchpoint across the customer experience. Because relevance is not an accident—it is built. Hence Accenture Life Trends, which aim to help organizations deeply understand the context of what is happening when people and brands interact.

The breadth of skills and the depth of experience at Accenture Song enables us to ensure our clients remain powerfully relevant in their customers' lives, turning every touchpoint into a connection, and building every connection into a lasting relationship.

The value created at each stage of the customer journey has its own unique hallmarks. In some cases, there's overlap, but each cluster of touchpoints has a specialty.

Marketing: Where awareness is generated

Sharing the right message with the right customer at the right time. Creativity and strategy lead the charge, developing compelling messages and targeted campaigns powered by technology and intelligence. This optimizes reach and engagement, turning awareness into action and driving enterprise growth.

Design and Digital Products: Where the customer engages

Empowering customers to achieve their goals effortlessly. Thoughtful design centered on people's needs ensures that each touchpoint is smooth and engaging, driving customer satisfaction, increased adoption and loyalty, ultimately generating significant enterprise value through improved efficiency and sustained customer relationships.

Commerce: Where purchase happens

Using technology to power smooth transactions, while strategic planning ensures the shopping experience aligns with customers' needs and design makes purchasing effortless. This harmony drives higher conversion rates, customer satisfaction and repeat business, ultimately increasing revenue and long-term value by optimizing each critical touchpoint.

Service: Where issues are handled

Meeting customer needs efficiently at every touchpoint. Strategy ensures that support is aligned with customer expectations, while technology enables quick, efficient responses. An integrated approach with a constant data, feedback and improvement loop resolves issues effectively and enhances customer satisfaction and loyalty.

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Nick Law is Accenture Song's Creative Chairperson and lead of our Creative Strategic Priority. He is one of the world's most innovative and versatile creative leaders, who believes all technology needs creativity to make it human, and all creativity needs technology to make it real. He has twice been named in the Creativity 50, a list of the world's most influential creative people.



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Among other client facing roles, Katie is the global thought leadership lead for Accenture Song, focused on how future technologies are changing the future of interactions, human behavior, and marketing. With over 17 years of strategy experience, Katie serves as a futurist and the lead content writer for the annual Accenture Song Life Trends report.



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Alexandre leads R&D for Accenture Song and incubates new areas such as Generative AI with a 3–5-year horizon at the intersection of human, business and technology trends. Alexandre also leads the Accenture Song Innovation Center in Sophia Antipolis, a unique ideation space dedicated to the future of customer experience. With a background in Computer Science and Physics Research, and 20+ years of international R&D experience, Alexandre is a prolific inventor with a passion for AI, Marketing and UX.

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Research methodology

Crowdsourcing

Each year, we ask Accenture Song’s global network of designers, creatives, technologists, sociologists, and anthropologists to watch out for potentially influential signals and trends impacting their communities and countries. We run trends workshops throughout March in 50 studios around the world, then teams pitch their top ideas to the editorial team in March-April. We also interviewed thought leaders, futurists and academics to uncover any additional signals on the horizon. In addition to this, we analyzed YouGov’s Global Profiles database to identify the biggest changes in consumer behaviors and attitudes across 48 markets.

Experience Innovation Radar

We worked with Accenture Song R&D in Sophia Antipolis, France, to broaden our perspective of emerging signals using the Experience Innovation Radar, a proprietary high-frequency signal research process focused on the intersection of human, technology and business trends.

Validating our trends

We validated our trends externally in two steps. First, we video-interviewed 57 people in 8 countries to understand how the trends are manifesting in their own words. Secondly, in partnership with our colleagues at Fiftyfive5, we ran an online survey across 22 markets with 24,295 respondents in July 2024 to validate the magnitude of the trends. Once the trends were refined, we put them to the test with Accenture’s own experts. Throughout the process, we have worked closely with our colleagues in Accenture’s Tech Vision team to build on each other’s findings and perspectives.

Throughout this report, all statistics are taken from our Accenture Life Trends survey unless otherwise stated. Quotes may have been lightly edited for clarity.

Survey sample size by country

Country	Sample size
Australia	1018
Brazil	1018
Canada	1010
China	2023
Colombia	1016
Egypt	1023
France	1024
Germany	1014
India	1009
Indonesia	1005
Italy	1009
Japan	1026
Malaysia	1003
Mexico	1017
Philippines	1001
Singapore	1007
South Africa	1002
Spain	1019
United Arab Emirates	1008
United Kingdom	1000
USA	2016
Vietnam	1027

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Cost of hesitations

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The parent trap

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