



TREND REPORT | 2026



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THINK BLINK at sld.com



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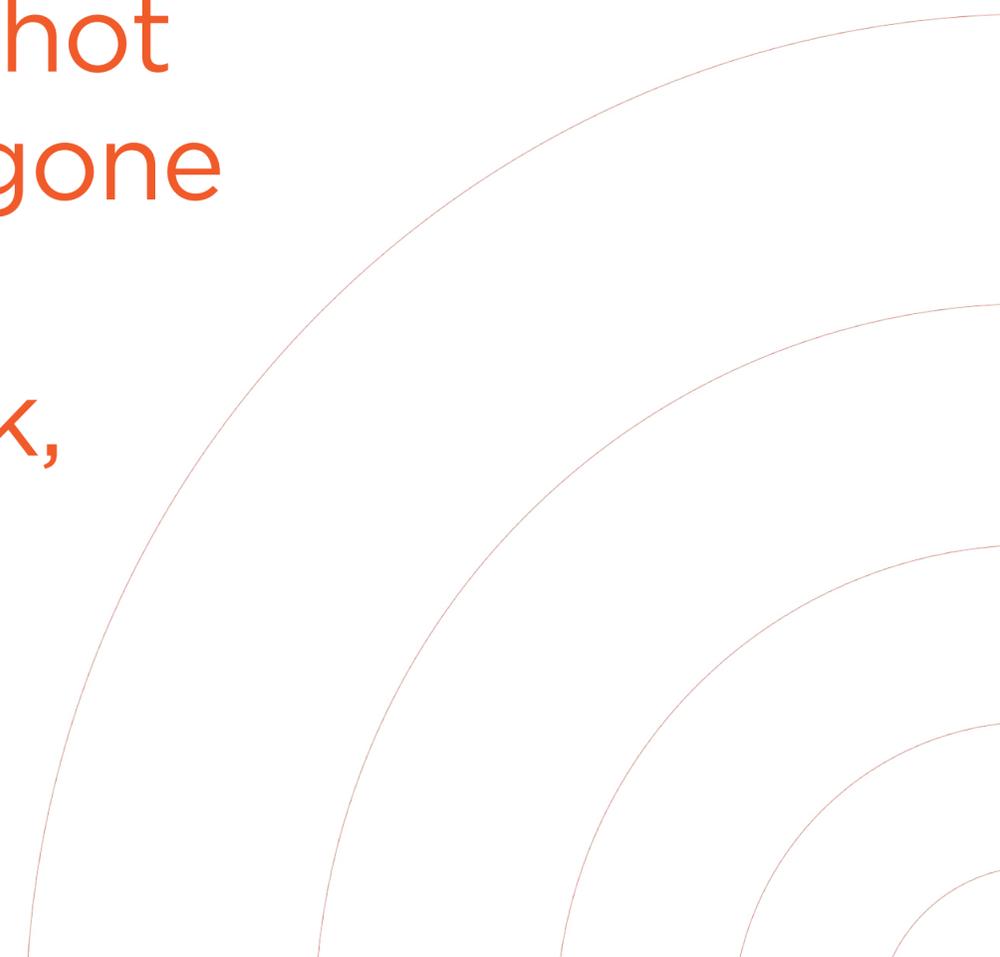
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Trends are driven by underlying forces that are shaping our world, impacting us at work, at home, shaping our future. Our trend reports don't focus on one-off hot topics that will be here today, gone tomorrow, but on the forces of change that drive how we think, feel and behave.



TREND 1



Nationalism in a Global Community

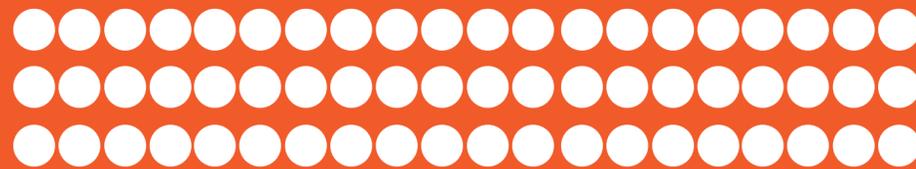
Economic downturns are commonly used to fuel nationalist sentiment. As people seek security in uncertain times, “others” are an easy scapegoat. But in an interconnected world, protectionist policies can create as many problems as they solve.

Far right political parties made big gains in **8** EU countries this year.



Source: Factually

60+ countries targeted by Trump tariffs in 2025.



Source: Al Jazeera

Australia cut immigration ceilings **50%**
Canada cut 24% with more cuts coming.

Source: Government of Canada, VisaVerge

Nationalism

MADE HERE MOVEMENT

Description

The “Made Here Movement” reflects consumers’ growing preference to support locally made products.

Context

Supply chain disruptions and nationalist policies are accelerating re-shoring efforts. Consumers in Canada, United States, and other markets are rewarding “Made Here” labeling as a response to economic uncertainty and cultural pride.

Implications for Brands

- Domestic manufacturing and local sourcing in product design and packaging have become powerful trust signals for consumers.
- Many brands should rethink supply chains and partnerships to support local manufacturing.
- Use brand storytelling to emphasize national impact and community support as core values.





Navigating “Made Here” Claims



Patriotic Purchasing



The Benefits of Local Sourcing

DESIRE FOR DOMESTIC TRAVEL & TOURISM

Description

Micro-travel is on the rise, with consumers increasingly choosing to take short, 1-2 hour trips rather than long-haul vacations. These quick, accessible experiences connect them with local culture and history.

Context

Rising geopolitical tensions, tighter budgets, and busier work schedules have encouraged consumers to prioritize domestic trips. In response, governments and tourism boards are promoting heritage sites and regional experiences to boost local spending.

Implications for Brands

- Brands offering domestic travel services or products tied to heritage tourism can differentiate themselves through storytelling and curated local experiences.
- Highlight pop-ups and other branded experiences that engage local environments and people.
- Brands can strengthen relevance by using region-specific visuals and language that reflect local identity and pride.





What is Micro-Travelling?



Local-based Marketing Strategies



The Growing Popularity of Weekend “Workcations”

EVOLVING BORDERS, EVOLVING BUSINESS

Description

With Canada and United States (among others) reducing immigration levels to ease pressure on housing and public services, global debates over borders, labor, and cultural identity arise.

Context

Evolving border policies and slower immigration are reshaping workforce availability, intensifying competition for talent in sectors already stretched thin. This environment is influencing how brands structure teams, manage recruitment, and communicate their values in a climate where representation and inclusion are under closer scrutiny.

Implications for Brands

- Supply chains and labor shortages in key industries push brands to innovate with automation and new hiring models.
- Brands can highlight diverse offerings as immigration continues to drive growth.
- Cultural sensitivity: marketing campaigns must balance national pride with inclusivity, ensuring immigrant communities feel represented and valued.
- As scrutiny around immigrant labor intensifies, brands must adopt practices that prevent exploitation. Being proactive in safeguarding workers strengthens both reputation and employee trust.





The Future of Talent Acquisition



Protecting Migrant Workers



How to Practice Inclusive Marketing

DATA SOVEREIGNTY

Description

Governments are increasingly asserting control over digital infrastructure and data, a trend known as technology and data sovereignty. Consumers and regulators are scrutinizing how data is stored, processed, and shared across borders.

Context

Countries are enforcing stricter rules on data localization, cloud storage, and cross-border transfers to protect national interests and citizen privacy. Geopolitical tensions, cybersecurity concerns, and increased digital surveillance at borders are seemingly shaping these policies.

Implications for Brands

- Consumers are becoming more selective, favoring brands that demonstrate compliance, transparency, and secure data handling.
- Brands must ensure data storage and processing comply with local regulations to avoid fines and harm to reputation.
- Transparent data policies and communication enhance consumer trust.





Key Principles of Modern Data Privacy



Updated Data Compliance Marketers Should Know



How to Communicate and Build Trust with Consumers

TREND 2



Disrupting The Status Quo

The combined impact of the rising cost of living, ubiquity of tech and access to information, globalization, shifting relationships to religion and climate change is disrupting many established social norms. Young people are opting out of the status quo, sometimes by choice and sometimes by circumstance, creating foundational disruptions to the existing social contract.

Gen Z is opting out of the following social norms:

- Getting a driver's licence (only 25% of 16 year olds have their license)
- Living on their own (about half of North American Gen Z live with their parents)
- Getting married (more than half of Gen Z spend zero dollars on dating each month)
- Having kids (1 in 3 don't want kids)
- Consuming alcohol (10% less than other generations)
- Having sex (30% decline in teen sex in the US since 1991)

Source: US Federal Highway Administration, Time, Macleans, Forbes, Newsweek, CDC, Time

Opting Out

SHIFTING PATHS TO FULFILLMENT

Description

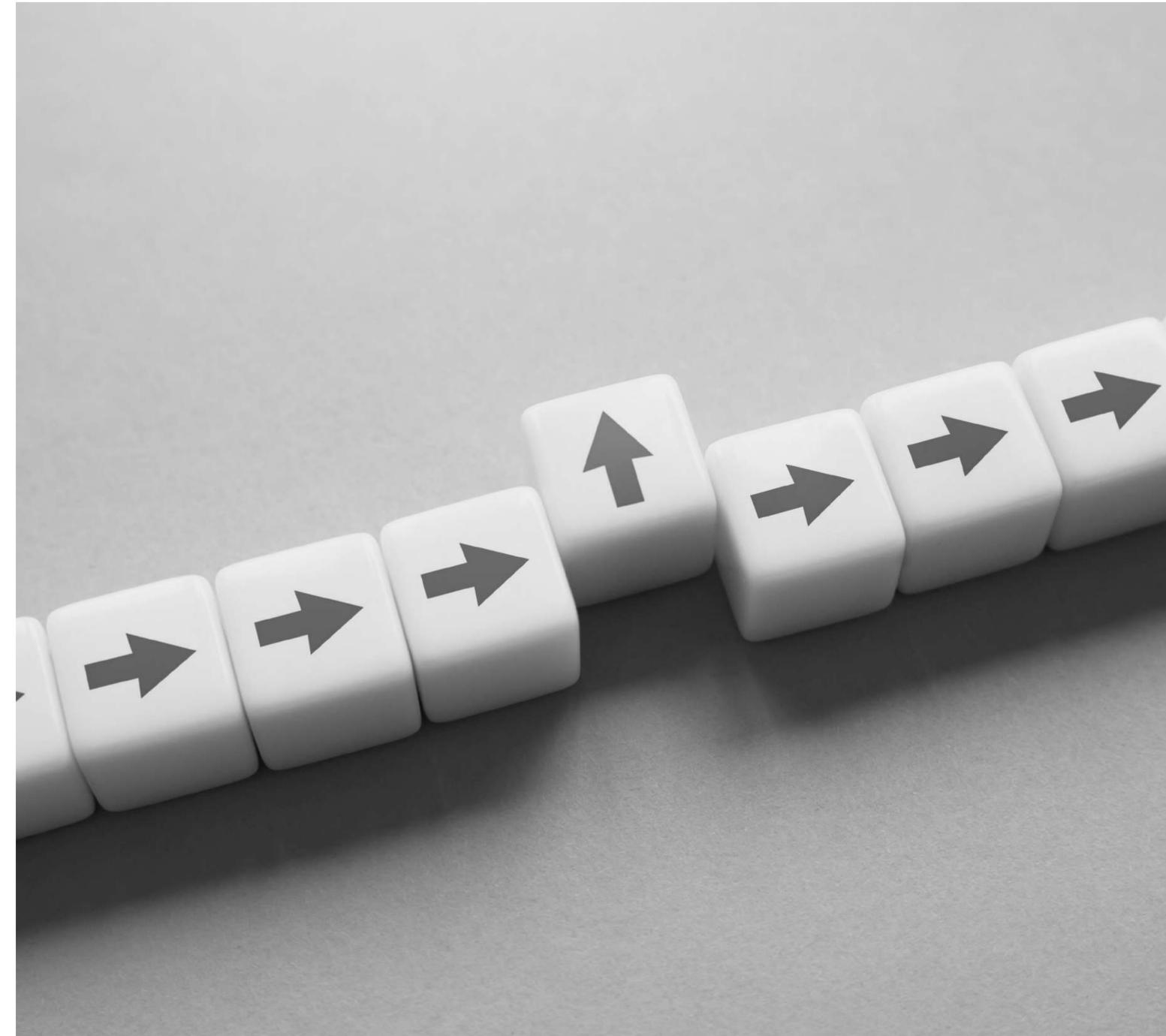
Individuals are increasingly making conscious decisions to step away from societal pressures and default milestones.

Context

Traditional goals such as marriage, starting a family, and even getting a driver's licence are increasingly delayed or declined. Younger generations are redefining fulfilment around personal growth, financial stability, and lifestyle choice, rather than adhering to conventional timelines and expectations.

Implications for Brands

- Growing demand for single-person or smaller family household products, such as smaller appliances, personalized subscription services and portioned packaging.
- Banks and insurers are pressured to develop products that address non-traditional family structures from single-income retirement planning to inclusive coverage models.
- With fewer family-related expenses, many consumers have greater discretionary income to spend on dining out, pet care, and hobbies.





Single-Serving Packaging for Emerging Lifestyles



Why Young People Are Declining Traditional Life Paths



Marketing to the New Independents

DIGITAL DETOX

Description

Consumers are deliberately stepping back from constant connectivity, social media, and digital distraction through digital detoxes.

Context

Rising awareness of the mental health impact of excessive screen time, coupled with skepticism toward algorithms, drive this behavior. A growing number of people are starting to minimize screen time by adopting practices such as “phone free mornings”, disabling non-essential notifications, rediscovering analog hobbies, and reconnecting with nature and the real world.

Implications for Brands

- Brands can benefit from highlighting experiences that provide meaningful breaks from technology, including retreats, workshops, and curated in-person events.
- Emphasize quality content in marketing strategy as a shift from mindless consumption to quality-over-quantity is emerging, with a focus on engaging with digital content that enriches or educates.
- Step back from automation and invest in training your staff to build genuine, real-world connections with consumers.





The Increase in Popularity of Digital Detox Apps



Demand for Tech-free Spaces and Why it Matters



The Importance of Human Connection in Business

REVERSE INFLUENCER TRUST

Description

Traditional influencer marketing is losing impact as audiences question authenticity and paid endorsements.

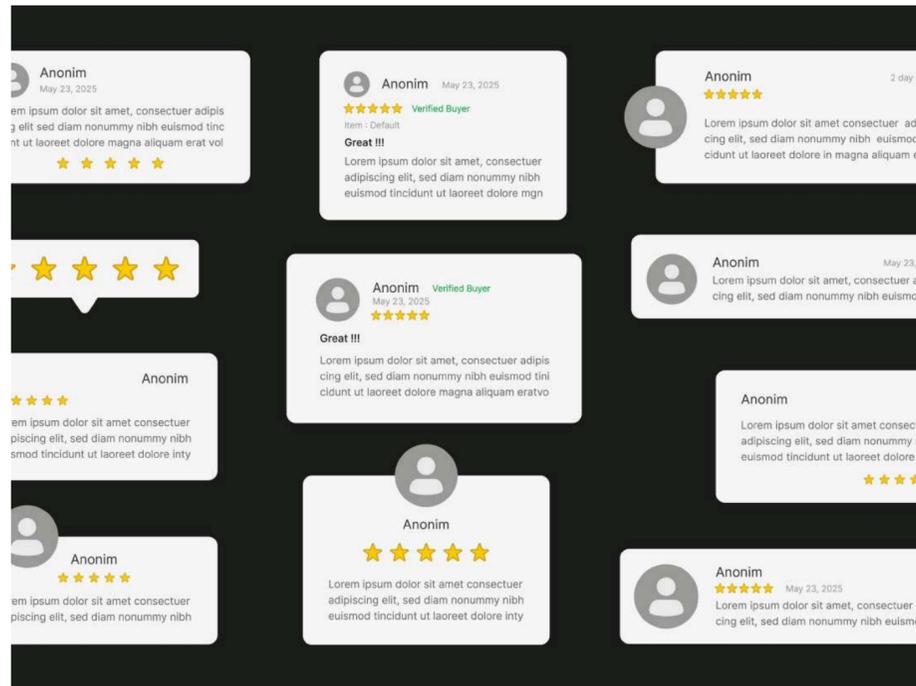
Context

High-profile cases of influencer scandals, AI-generated content, and an over-saturation of branded partnerships have eroded confidence in the influencer market. Younger generations in particular, prefer recommendations from niche or micro influencers/creators, everyday consumers, or community forums where relatability and transparency outweigh follower count.

Implications for Brands

- Go beyond one-off posts, and instead build long-term partnerships with influencers by inviting them into the product development process, even co-creating collections.
- Verified review features, peer-to-peer recommendations, and community testimonials are increasingly critical to building trust.
- Transparent disclosure of partnerships and an emphasis on authenticity are now baseline expectations.





The Power of Verified Reviews



Influencer Trust Index



Strategies for Upscaling Micro-Influencers

CELEBRATING MINORSTONES

Description

More people are embracing “minorstones,” the celebration of small, everyday wins instead of waiting for major life events. Posting about finishing a tough week, adopting a pet, or trying something new has become just as meaningful as traditional milestones.

Context

Driven by a counter-reaction to social media’s focus on major achievement, businesses are embracing this by creating campaigns and products that cater to smaller, more personal celebrations.

Financial institutions, like **SoFi**, have held “debt graduation” ceremonies for customers who have paid off loans. Clothing brands like **Madewell** are offering discounts for events like half birthdays.

Implications for Brands

- Opportunity for brands to develop products, packaging design, or loyalty rewards tied to “small wins” moments like surviving a tough week or paying off a bill.
- Shift tone from aspirational to affirmative, use language that validates consumers’ lived realities instead of idealized versions.





Small Wins Make Big Impact in The Workplace



The Science Behind Why Celebrating Small Wins Matter



How Celebrating With Consumers Can Boost Engagement

TREND 3



AI Disruption

This year it was challenging to keep up with the news about AI. The technology promises to be disruptive, but as with any new technology there will be glitches along the way. And the intended uses may not be the ones that are ultimately adopted. The signs of disruption are showing as consumers become comfortable with AI – but companies are still struggling to make the promised gains in efficiencies.

78% of companies are using AI.

However, 95% of AI pilots are failing. Those who seek efficiencies see less success than companies who use it for innovation and growth.

Source: [Fortune](#)

\$391M is the global AI industry value.

It is expected to grow to **\$3.49 TRILLION** by 2033.

Source: [Zigron](#)

51% of email-marketers believe AI-supported email marketing is more effective.

AI in marketing is expected to grow at a CAGR of 26.7% between now and 2034

Source: [CharimaDigital](#)

AI Disruption

SEARCH ENGINES LOSE TO AI

Description

The increased use of AI has shifted the way people search for information, creating a whole new market for Generative Engine Optimization (GEO).

Context

With traffic from ChatGPT search projected to overtake traffic from organic search by **2028**, the way the world looks for information is rapidly changing. AI companies are starting to experiment with their own search engines powered by their models, like **ChatGPT Atlas** or **Perplexity Comet**. This is fundamentally changing the way brands optimize themselves for the web and will have a direct impact on content and format as they fight for relevancy in AI platforms.

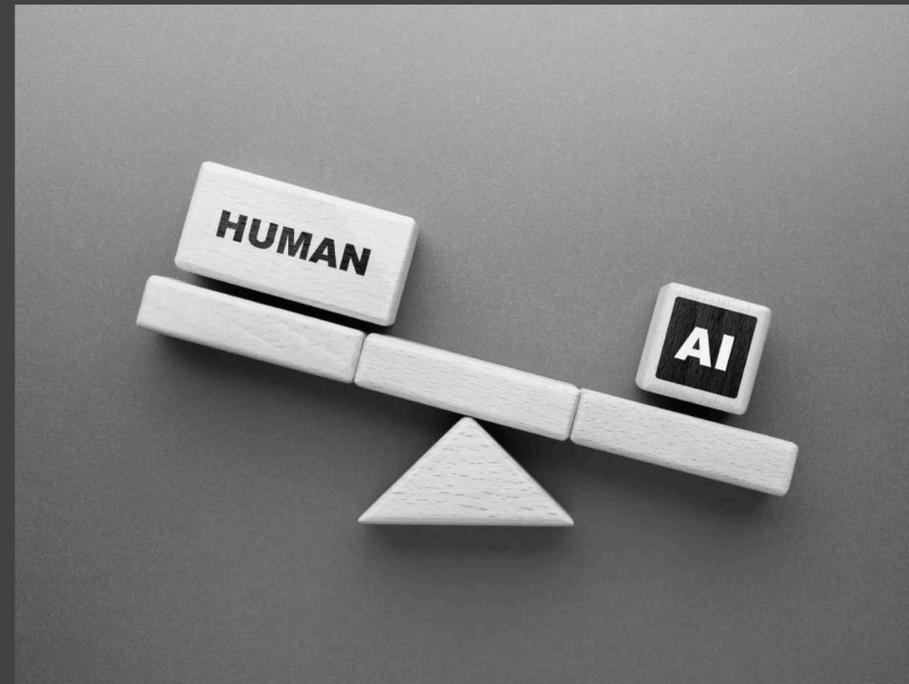
Implications for Brands

- Brands will have to tweak or overhaul their content, social media, and marketing strategies in order to compete with GEO.
- With more people using AI answers to search queries, company websites will be less visible in organic searches.
- Budgets for non-digital advertising services may need to increase depending on how GEO impacts search-ability.





Using AI for Deals



AI as a Decision Maker



AI for Clothing Fit

ANTI-AI SENTIMENT IS GROWING

Description

While AI is largely hailed as at the next big technological advancement, there is growing resentment towards the tech from the working class. But it's not only those who fear replacement: even within the tech sector there are many voices suggesting we're not ready for what AI could bring.

Context

As AI continues to advance, many consumers are starting to fight back against the technology. There has been increased hostility, from the **vandalization of self driving vehicles** to boycotting creative work that has used AI. Concerns range from potential loss of jobs to more existential worries about how it may impact the future of humanity.

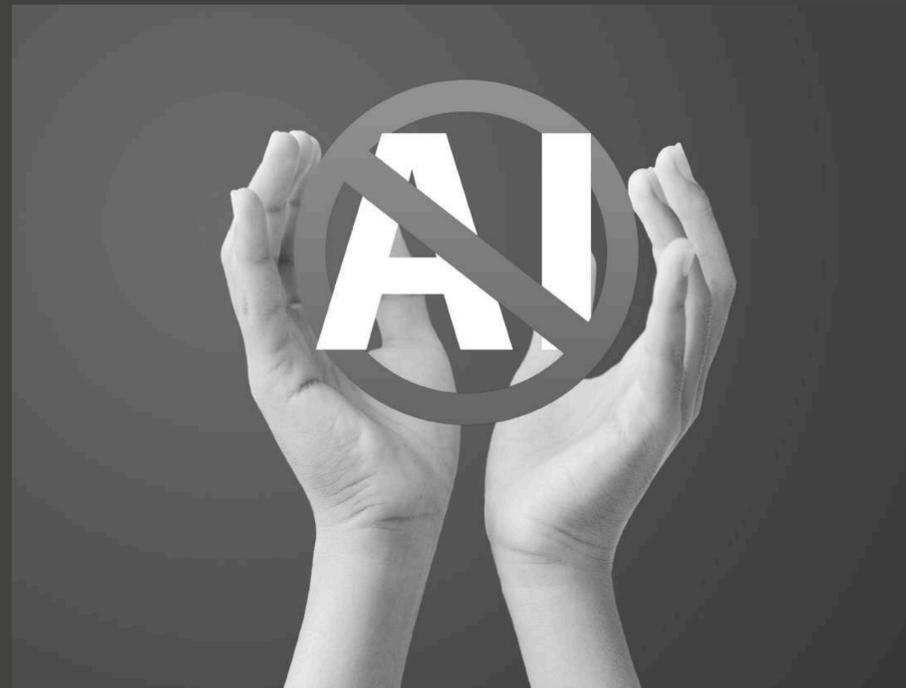
Implications for Brands

- Brands need to understand their consumers' point of view when it comes to AI, for example in what context is an AI chatbot welcome and in what context does it create concerns?
- Creative generated by AI is often afflicted by the Uncanny Valley effect, or the feeling that something is "off" or "creepy" that people get when watching AI generated video.

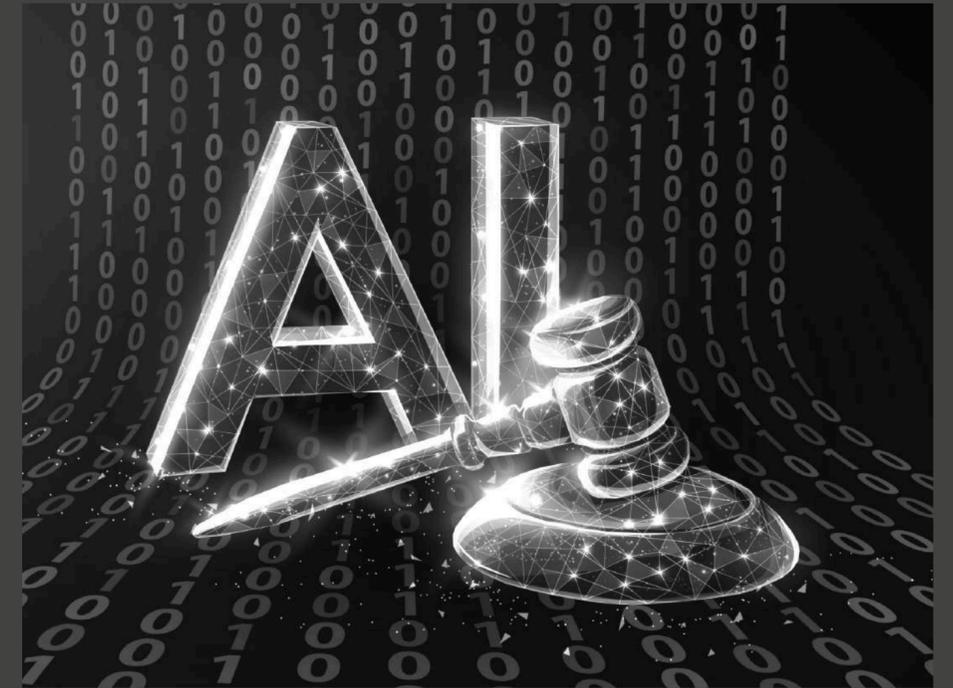




Data Poisoning



Anti-AI Communities



Anti-AI Legal Challenges

UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES OF AI

Description

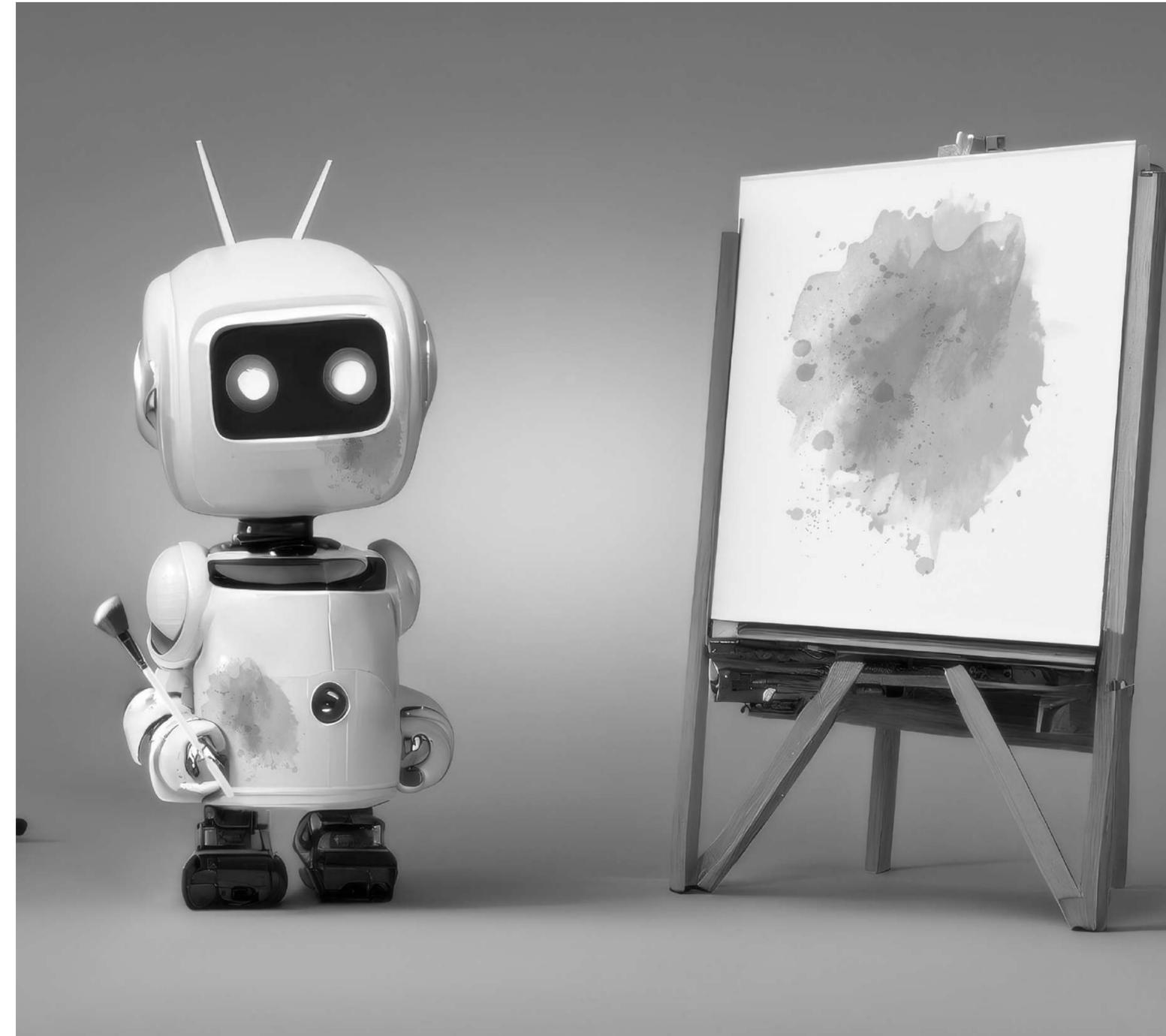
The rapid adoption of AI across the world has made some lives easier, but also comes with unintended consequences.

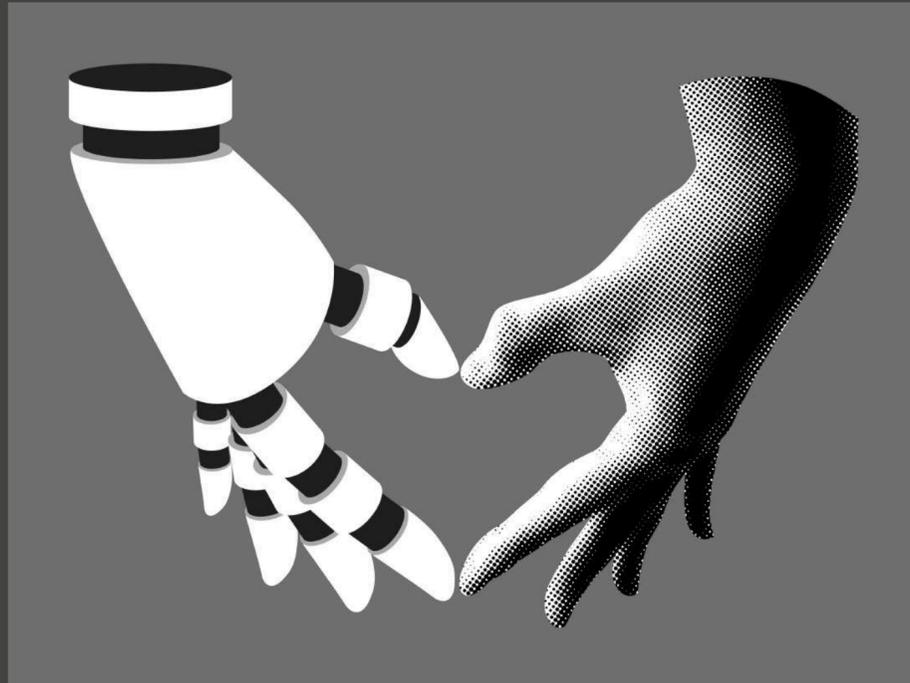
Context

Almost **20%** of American adults are interacting with AI daily. Its rapid expansion has created a \$12 billion dollar market in just three short years, and along with its rise come unintended consequences. From **Hollywood AI actors** to **social media AI spam** to **AI art taking over**, AI is impacting many sectors. In the same way that social media sparked unintended behaviors, not all of them positive, AI usage is triggering unexpected and potentially harmful outcomes.

Implications for Brands

- AI has made it harder for people to distinguish real material from AI generated content, reducing trust.
- AI bots can circumvent tools typically used to weed out non-human engagement in online surveys, making research more difficult and expensive.
- “AI work-slop” refers to low quality AI-generated work that bogs teams down rather than reaching the promises of acceleration and efficiency.





Finding Love With AI



Rapid Job Loss



Electrical Grid Failures

TREND 4



Hacking Health

Now that modern medicine can extend our lives by decades, people are seeking to improve the quality of those extra years. Health and wellness has exploded, bringing with it a stream of misinformation that's become highly politicized.

Measles cases
in North America increased by
20%
from
2022 to 2023

with **2025** being a record year for cases

Source: WHO

18%

of consumers trust health
influencers more than
healthcare professionals

68% of health influencers have
a financial interest in the products
and treatments they promote.

Source: Sortlist

GLP-1 drug claims rose
52%
from
2023 to 2025

In the US, it is anticipated that the
demand for these drugs will increase
insurance premiums by as much as 14%.

Source: Exploding Topics, <https://explodingtopics.com/blog/trending-topics>

Health Hacks

THE RISE OF BIOHACKING

Description

Consumers who are short on time and motivated by health are turning to 'biohacking' for DIY, "data-driven" tweaks that promise faster, measurable improvements to wellness.

Context

Biohacking has moved from niche forums to the mainstream thanks to a culture of longevity and the next wave of **personalized healthcare**, a market estimated to be worth over a trillion dollars by 2033. The barrier to entry has been lowered by creators like **Bryan Johnson** and **Andrew Huberman**, encouraging people to take on small, daily steps such as delaying their caffeine intake, cold plunges, or using certain supplements. But for all the promise of being data-driven, many of these "hacks" are lighter on the science than consumers are led to believe.

Implications for Brands

- Brands will need to build trust through transparent claims, third-party validation where possible, and data/privacy controls.
- Create micro upgrades to products and services that enhance health through trending wellness hacks.
- Concerns regarding trust, safety and privacy persist. Consumers will seek out brands that are evidence-based.





Wearable Tracking Tech



DNA Based Products



**Health & Wellness
Integration**

INFLUENCING WITH MISINFORMATION

Description

The health advice we receive is increasingly being shaped by content creators, amplifying access at the cost of accelerating medical misinformation. Regulating health information is increasingly difficult, especially when policymakers are running against the evidence.

Context

Platforms are in flux. YouTube maintains a policy on medical misinformation but has **recently relaxed** some moderation in the name of 'public interest', creating uncertainty about enforcement. Governments are stepping in: the U.S. Surgeon General has called for social media to be subject to **cigarette-style warning labels** and the EU is enforcing the **Digital Services Act** against TikTok and Meta to ensure greater transparency and address the risk of harmful content.

Implications for Brands

- When communicating health-related information or partnering with wellness influencers, brands need to ensure legal teams review carefully.
- Ensure your brand develops a crisis communication plan in place to help resolve misinformation around your brand.





Misinformation Influencers



Ingredient Claims



Vaccine Fears

THE OZEMPIC CRAZE

Description

Weight loss has become as easy as an occasional injection thanks to GLP-1 drugs. The popularity of these medications is creating a butterfly effect for a variety of industries, along with some social concerns.

Context

With **1 in 8 adult** Americans having tried a GLP-1 type drug, brands in fashion and food are reporting huge shifts in their categories. Lower appetites have a considerable impact on how **people eat**, with users preferring **smaller, nutrient dense foods with clean ingredients**. Fashion brands are also reporting sales' boosts as consumers come in for smaller sizes. At the same time, some fear a return to extreme thinness as the ideal body for women, erasing years of body positivity.

Implications for Brands

- Brands in food and beverages will have to reconfigure product portfolios to meet the needs of GLP-1 users.
- Be alert for the impact of hyper-thin models or influencers, as this is sparking backlash and controversy with consumers.

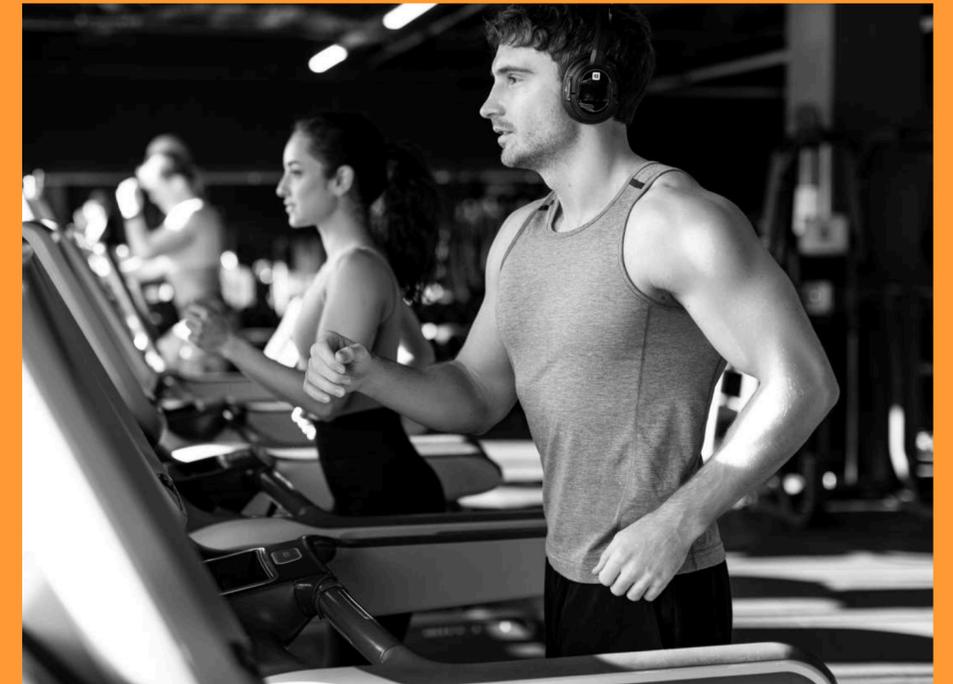




Ozempic Sized Meals



Industries in Trouble



Fitness Industry Evolution

UNHEALTHY POLITICS

Description

Anti-science rhetoric is making its way from the fringe to the mainstream as consumers struggle to get the care they need from traditional healthcare systems.

Context

Expertise is being framed as a bad thing by populist politicians, including in medicine. The potential harm to public health is significant. For example, political figures suggesting Tylenol is linked to autism or recommending unproven treatments for COVID normalize anti-science conspiracy theories. Mistrust in healthcare is not without just cause: the opioid crisis was caused by greed in the pharmaceutical industry. Unfortunately, the solutions being offered aren't poised to solve the real issues and may cause real harm.

Implications for Brands

- Brands will have to adapt to the new consumer who is trying to navigate these contradictions.
- Some health-focused brands may find their values in direct opposition to new regulations, potentially creating opportunities or crises.





MAHA Movement



Abandoning Vaccines



Red vs. Blue State

TREND 5



Tech Companies Run The World

Digital technology has been rising in influence since the internet became available to the public in the late 1990s. Today, it is the dominating force impacting social issues, the global economy, politics and consumerism.



8 of the **10** richest people in the world are tech billionaires

Over 400 of the world's 3000+ billionaires are from the tech sector, second only to finance.

Source: [Forbes](#)

\$394 M of visible donations were contributed by tech leaders in the 2024 presidential election.

\$273.2 went to Trump, with most of that sum coming from Elon Musk.

Source: [The Guardian](#)

\$38B in government money has been awarded to Musk's empire.

The Pentagon is awarding top AI companies huge contracts valued at up to \$200M per company.

Source: [Gartner](#)

Tech Power

BIG TECH RULES THE WORLD

Description

Tech billionaires are side-stepping taxes while shaping the world to their liking. Some tech companies now have as much wealth as a small nation and are using it along with their technology to influence social and political outcomes.

Context

Governments are struggling to regulate big tech - and some leaders prefer to use tech to sway public opinion, even if it runs counter to democracy. Fraud, misinformation, and bot-driven viral moments (like the Cracker Barrel outrage) are all rising as tech companies show little interest in what is best for human beings, and governments show little ability to reign them in.

Implications for Brands

- Fraud on social media, including fake brand websites and accounts, and bot-driven behavior, will continue and get worse.
- Big tech will use surveillance-like activity to collect and sell consumer data, raising ethical concerns.
- Online data collection will become less valuable as the rise of bots skews results.





DOGE Cuts Red Tape for Elon



Bot Farms Dominate Social Media



Leading Our Future Super Pac (OpenAI)

TECH BILLIONAIRES IN SPACE

Description

Over the past decade, the billionaires of the world have been vying to break through the final frontier of space travel.

Context

Elon Musk famously hopes he will die on Mars, while Jeff Bezos' wife and Oprah's best friend were part of a billionaire-adjacent team of women who accompanied several real astronauts in a near-orbit rocket trip. Human beings have always yearned to know more, and space is the ultimate unknown. Commercial space travel may still be years away, but it's no longer unimaginable. While billionaires may see space as a conquest, the rest of us may find it spurs our creativity here on earth.

Implications for Brands

- Space hotels are under construction. Brands should start asking what commercial food and beverages look like in space? What will the influence be on fashion here on earth as well as in the cosmos?
- Brands that start R&D now will be at the forefront of a new era that will bring unprecedented opportunity.
- Science fiction is no longer a niche. Even bizarre conceptual stories are becoming mainstream, giving brands a view into the willingness of consumers to be imaginative and out-of-the-box.





Voyager Station



Blue Origin Vs SpaceX



NASA & Commercial Partnerships

AI BUBBLE FEARS

Description

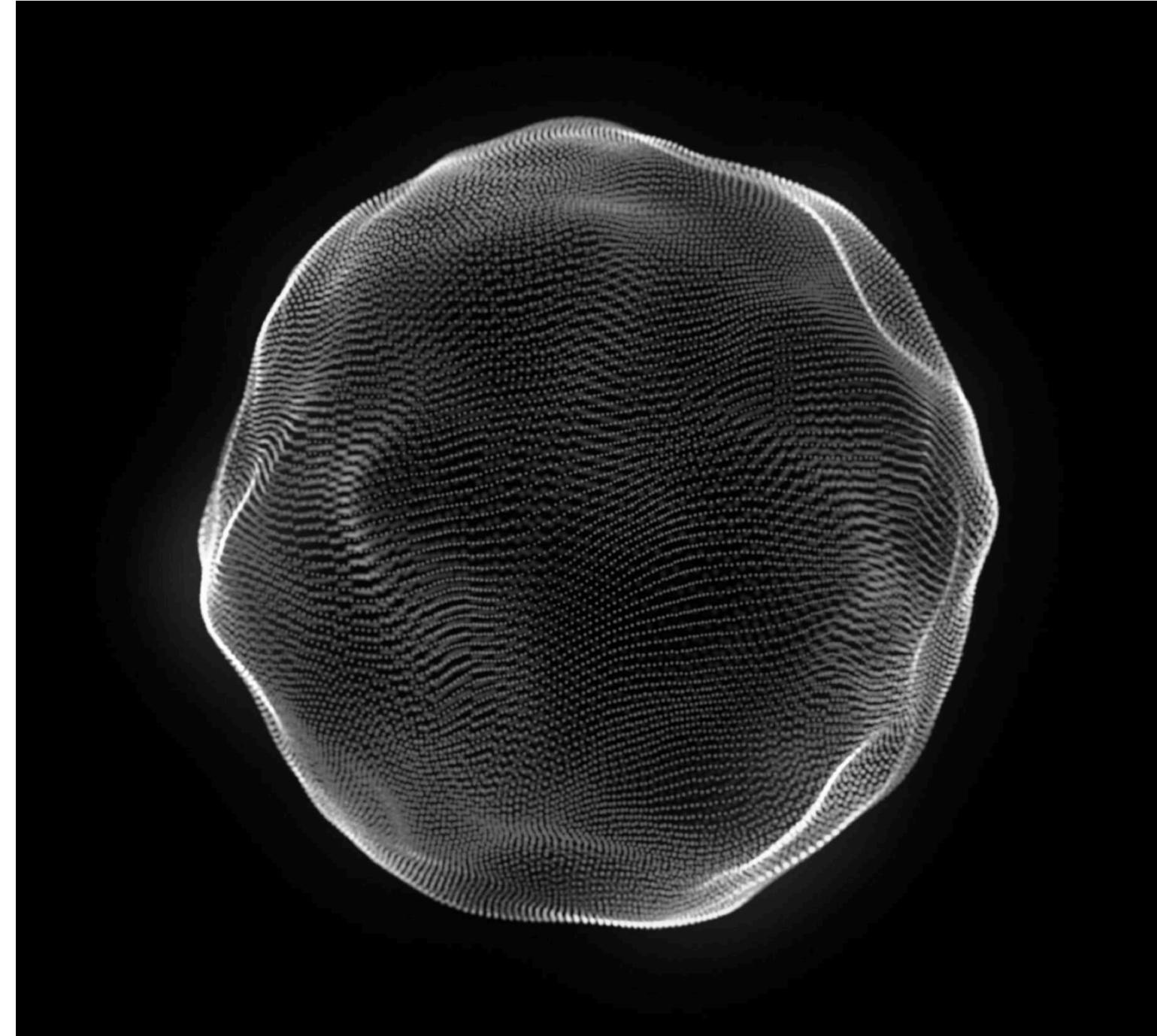
Many economists fear a repeat of the 2008 tech bubble as the valuation of AI companies soars... and how they'll turn a profit is still unclear.

Context

Although many experts agree AI's potential is extraordinary, its future is a big unknown. And some doubt AI will ever reach the potential being touted by its creators. Companies are madly testing AI, but research shows they're not really finding the promised efficiencies because of gaps in quality. The energy required to fuel AI adds to the cost equation.

Implications for Brands

- Brands investing in AI tools should be aware that the cost will rise, perhaps dramatically.
- Advertising within AI platforms is becoming a new channel for marketing and even sales.





DeepSeek Stirs the AI Pot



Peter Theil Dumps Nvidia Stock



MIT Report on The GenAI Divide

TREND 6



Black & White, Left & Right

Nothing gets our attention like extreme content. Political divides are being exacerbated by social media algorithms that favor sensationalist content over nuance. Far right political groups have seized on these tools to drive their agenda, pushing their opponents further left. But just how extreme is the average consumer? Extreme views are rising, but most people are still somewhat closer to the middle.

53% of Gen Z women

say they are feminists. Only 32% of men say the same.

In the US, young women are leaning left while young men are leaning right.

Source: Kings College London

10% of users create

97% of political content

Source: Pew Research Center

1% of the top US earners make

20% of the total national income.

Source: World Inequality Database

Black & White

GENDER DIVIDE BECOMES A CHASM

Description

After what seemed like decades of progress, the gap between men and women is growing again.

Context

Women are overall out-performing men in terms of education, life expectancy, and even happiness. However, the backlash against female empowerment is rising. Reproductive rights are being rolled back, “trad-wife” influencers are selling submission, and the “male loneliness crisis” points the finger at women. A rising swell of misogyny is most visible online, where teenage boys are targeted with anti-women messaging within 30 minutes of being online. In response, many young women are “de-centering men” and focusing on career and female friendship.

Implications for Brands

- Conduct consumer research regularly to understand how this is impacting your brand.
- Keep in mind that women make more financial decisions for households than men.
- Be prepared to defend female-focused brands, including staff, from misogynist attacks.





Netflix Series Adolescence



**The Gap & Katseye vs.
American Eagle & Sydney
Sweeney**



Political Division in Dating

INCOME INEQUALITY GETS EXTREME

Description

Today, consumer debt is the highest it's ever been and wages for the average worker have stagnated. At the same time, the world's wealthiest people have more money than ever before in history.

Context

The split between the high-end luxury customer and the average consumer has become a chasm. Even middle-class consumers are struggling to afford basics such as healthy food and transportation. The affordability crisis will ultimately impact brands across every category.

Implications for Brand

- Pandering to a value-focused consumer without a real value-focused offering will result in backlash.
- There is a rising "eat the rich" populist movement. Brands need to be careful about aligning themselves with the billionaire class.
- Shrinkflation and other strategies used by brands to increase revenue are increasingly under scrutiny and may even face legislation.





NYC Elects A Democratic Socialist Mayor



Maxwell Apartment



The Deceptive Downsizing Prohibition Act

REBRANDING DEI

Description

Far right attacks on DEI initiatives have reverberated throughout the business world, as new policies leave companies who want to continue their efforts unsure of how to proceed.

Context

Although some businesses are aligned with the “anti-woke” worldview, most organizations that have DEI initiatives view them as positive. A more diverse team is more innovative, and DEI initiatives are attractive to top talent. Some companies have publicly doubled down while others have rebranded their initiatives to avoid scrutiny.

Implications for Brand

- Future-focused brands will continue supporting diverse consumer needs, which requires a diverse workforce.
- Those who align with anti-DEI sentiment may find their talent pool less attractive.
- Standing by decisions that may come under fire as being “woke” is a better strategy than waffling back and forth.





Brands Take A Stand



NFL Doubles Down on Bad Bunny



Reimagining DEI

RAGING MODERATES

Description

Political moderates are starting to break through the story of extreme division. However, they face opposition from both sides as rhetoric continues to be extreme.

Context

Extreme political views don't reflect the values of the majority: most Americans, for example, have moderate views. But extreme stories tend to perform better on social media platforms and search engines, making it harder for those voices to be heard. As the public tires of the hard-right/hard-left divide, moderates are starting to break through in their attempt to build bridges.

Implications for Brand

- Most customers are exhausted by the fighting. Brands can win by playing a role in bridge-building, by messages of unity and connection.
- In our own research, consumers are aligned with the importance of offering an inclusive environment.
- Retail and other public spaces should continue to focus on making everyone feel welcome.





Pete Buttigieg on FOX News



Raging Moderates Podcast



Centrist Democrats Flipping Seats

THANK YOU



Check out our website:
sld.com

Find us on LinkedIn:
[shikatani-lacroix-design](https://www.linkedin.com/company/shikatani-lacroix-design)