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2024
Trends *with* Benefits

EXPANDED WITH EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVES

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A business guide to understanding and embracing the year's emergent sociocultural shifts.

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OPENING
Thoughts

The turning of a page, the changing of seasons, coming of age, graduation—our culture is permeated with rituals and myths of resurrection, resolutions and recommitments that allow us to imagine, to believe in a preferable way forward. We create these points, at which we give ourselves permission to have hope, to face our transgressions even to forgive the sins of our past, to reframe our setbacks and imagine a comeback. And so it is that we stand on the threshold of 2021 with cautious optimism.

For many, 2020 was, in a word—unimaginable. After all, who could have predicted the confluence of crises that left the world in suspension? No one saw this coming. Unless, perhaps you follow climate science, because there were clues. Or maybe you lived in an underserved zip code, grew up faced with systemic racism, because then you also could see this coming. Perhaps, you're of the leaning that followed President Trump's Twitter account or maybe you read any number of alt-right posts on Parler or Facebook—because then the signs were very clear.

One lesson we must learn from 2020 is that monitoring a breadth of cultural signals is more imperative than ever. Not just those that are congruent with our view of the world, but as my colleague Valerie Jacobs will unpack in her explanation of the Multiverse—those that are outside or even counter to the alternative reality that we have built from our feeds, preferences and profiles. In the words of Canadian philosopher and student of culture, Marshall McLuhan, "Indeed, it is only too typical that the 'content' of any medium blinds us to the character of the medium." We must be rigorous in our efforts to understand our biases. Modern-day viability requires an exercise of openness and a higher caliber of empathy. Without which our blind spots to a diversity of culture ultimately leave us vulnerable. In the words of J. Irwin Miller, former CEO of Cummins Engines, "In the search for character and commitment, we must rid ourselves of our inherited even cherished biases and prejudices. Character, ability, and intelligence are not concentrated in one sex over the other, nor in persons with certain accents or in certain races or in persons holding degrees from some universities over others. When we indulge ourselves in such irrational prejudices we damage ourselves most of all, and ultimately assure ourselves of failure in competition with those more open and less biased."

Monitoring a breadth of cultural signals is more imperative than ever. [And] not just those that are congruent with our view of the world.

At LPK, we believe our foresight practice is about preparedness—not prediction. We believe in building proficiency in the ability to articulate the animating drivers of future shifts—rather than conjecture. As a tenant of our practice, we promote the notion of "embracing discontinuity." The practice of embracing discontinuity is aimed at exercising our abilities to imagine future states that aren't slight derivations on what we are experiencing today—to jog us from our comfort zones in order to accept a broader world view.

Changing world views are a modern reality that businesses must ultimately embrace in order to prepare for the shifts of tomorrow. For businesses to successfully navigate the chaos of today's cultural landscape, organizations must adopt an anticipatory mindset—a pervasive cultural familiarity that we call "*Future Fluency*." This mindset empowers organizations to act with a sense of wisdom relative to what's ahead, accelerating innovation, transforming businesses and reshaping categories. Not only does preparedness arm an organization with anticipation, it informs decision-making. It poises organizations with ability to maneuver on a volatile landscape and execute strategies across multiple possible scenarios.

In this report, my colleagues and I would like to examine the shifts big and small that are shaping our changing values, attitudes and beliefs. We approach our work with an effort to revisit our memories of the experience of 2020 before they fade and bleed together so that we may all learn crucial lessons from them this time that empower us to forge the irons of the past into a more promising future.

Bryan Goodpaster
*Senior Creative Director,
Trends & Foresight*

THE RISE OF THE *Multi-* VERSE

Valerie Jacobs
Chief Growth Officer
& Futurist

I've always been a fan of science fiction for a number of reasons. Not the least of which is that the creators are so visionary. Freely thinking far into the future and open to myriad possibilities. Asking and answering so many "what if" questions and deeply considering the implications of past and present dynamics. The movies and books that titillated my imagination are too numerous to mention, but it seems that many sci-fi writers not only dreamt up possible futures but seemed to predict, if not mold our current realities. (See cyber-prophet Neal Stephenson's **_Snow Crash_**, 1992, or *The Diamond Age*, 1995, which many early technologists and digital entrepreneurs cite as their inspiration.) Also, there's the science part of sci-fi. Underpinning the best of the genre are ideas of complexity theory, quantum physics, artificial intelligence, and the list goes on. Seeing these ideas as the enablement of immersive worlds, compelling narratives and often come to life through the magic movies and television was exciting. Specifically, I loved the idea of alternate realities: The Multiverse.

There is no longer even a baseline for consensual truth.

Honestly, I love the Multiverse both as a thought experiment that can drive plot and character, and create new visions of the world, but also, I believe it is a very real possibility. That said, I always thought about alternate realities as necessarily existing in different dimensions—meaning parallel universes, a copy/paste, if you will that over time, could diverge and evolve, split into more parallel universes and so on. But now, the biggest trend I believe impacting our present day existence (and creating the trajectory of our world) is that the multiple realities now exist in a single dimension: *our* reality, which continues to splinter into factions that believe a different set of "facts."

How did we get here? There's not enough room to give this a proper academic and fully contextual explanation, but from a trends standpoint, we started discussing this about 10 years ago, when author and thought leader Eli Pariser coined the term "filter bubble" to describe the phenomenon of being in an informational echo chamber caused by algorithms that only feed you reinforcing information. In 2011, Pariser published a book by the same name: _The Filter Bubble: How the New Personalized Web is Changing What We Read and How We Think._ At the time, I think most of my colleagues were concerned about this more on a personal level, or saw it as impacting individuals and their agency—a sense of an "other" narrowing our perspectives without our permission and in the name of customization and great experiences. We discussed how to "pop" the bubble so we were well informed and able to braille the culture without the shaping of "recommended" content (said more directly, bias from search engine results).

Fast forward to 2016, with the US election results and the question of political interference by Cambridge Analytica, our conversations were re-energized. We considered how a number of tech giants were using our data to shape opinion, spread misinformation and more broadly impact society and culture.

Our reality... continues to splinter into factions that believe a different set of "facts."

In 2019, **we** articulated this as a trend called **Algorithm Warfare**, where we both described the state of affairs and the desire from consumers to push back against the gentle predictive nudges. The sense was that as a society we needed to have heightened awareness of the filter bubble effect and actively fight against it. That at the individual level, our creativity and discovery were being blunted by algorithms on all of our platforms, from Facebook to Netflix, from Google to Instagram, et al. Our point was that we needed to buffer ourselves from such influence and that big tech really had nothing to gain by changing their game.

In late 2019, we began discussing an upcoming book by Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power.* The book, a 4-inch tome, delves further into the implications of corporations gathering our data, surveilling our every move and shifting the paradigm from humans as consumers to humans as the product.

2020 saw these ideas begin to mainstream with the Netflix documentaries *The Social Dilemma* and *The Great Hack* **(2019)** and *The New York Times* **podcast** *Rabbit Hole*. These all aimed to pull back the curtain to reveal the unintended consequences of, and detrimental impact of, biased algorithms, digital echo chambers, and laying bare the truth behind the motivations of big tech. Seemingly born from altruism (connection, free flow of information, sharing) many of the engineers, executives and technologists reveal in their own words their fears about the world they've helped to create. Said more accurately: the worlds they helped to create. It now appears that there are indeed multiple universes of shared realities. A true Multiverse, but instead of them being in discreet dimensions, they co-exist in one. Wherein swaths of our society operate with different sets of facts. There is no longer even a baseline for consensual truth. Only in late 2020 did Facebook finally remove misinformation

supporting Holocaust deniers. It is unclear if this is implicit acknowledgement of their role in allowing (if not profiting from) the spread of misinformation. *Rabbit Hole*, the NYT podcast, literally takes one down the rabbit hole as it investigates and documents one man's "radicalization" by YouTube.

All of this is deeply disturbing to me both personally and professionally. The implications for trend forecasting and consumer understanding are serious and significant: these filter bubbles have created numerous realities and, as professionals, we now have to understand not only those with differing beliefs (which has always been part of our jobs), but differing *realities.* Finding unifying messages will become increasingly difficult. Resonating with "shared values" could be precarious. Perhaps there will never again be opportunity for true "mass marketing." Or maybe everything will need to become necessarily bland to avoid seeming alignment with dubious or dangerous ideas.

This has also been referred to as a Crisis of Truth or a "post-truth" society. Many find themselves with the feeling of collective gaslighting, at worst questioning their own sanity. While this trend has been building for over a decade, how exactly to articulate it fully and understand its implications fully remains to be seen. Perhaps these different realities existed all along, but we relegated them to "subculture," essentially deeming them fringe and small. But 2020 ripped the lid off of that idea in many ways, alerting us to culture that is not at all fringe or small. And further there were systemic forces creating coexisting "multiverses," even before technology polarized the privileged. The result is that now more than ever we have a personal duty to root it out of our lives as human beings and to acknowledge it as we go about our professional work. We must set aside our distaste for those whose realities don't match our own, accept and process the shame and guilt for our ignorance and complicity, and seek to use our power to understand, have compassion and to unify.

> *Perhaps these different realities existed all along, but we relegated them to "subculture."*

The Multiverse:
EUROPE LOOKS *Inward* & SEES A RISE IN CLOSED COMMUNITIES

Sofia Mutinelli
*Senior Strategist,
LPK Europe*

> *The rise of the Multiverse is not exclusive to the United States, nor does it only involve matters of the political realm. In Europe, the movement is pushing people toward hyper-localism and more insular, closed communities—both physical and virtual.*

Positively, people are getting closer to one another, be it physically or emotionally. The "localization" of everything is encouraging Europeans to find deeper delight in the domestic and nearby. But in tandem, this localism is acting as an echo-chamber for like-minded individuals, resulting in the creation of barriers beyond just geographical. The rise of digital connections and virtual communities, especially with the pandemic, has given us even more power to arbitrarily choose who to surround ourselves with. Most likely, those who share our values and are closer to us, in space and belief. Social media is having an important role in enabling closer, more targeted and exclusive connections—sometimes for good, but often to damaging effect.

For example, Clubhouse, the new, members-only social network, increased from 3,500 in December 2020 to _over 600,000 members_ around the world by February 2021. The benefits that come from more intimate and interests-oriented connections are not to be discarded, but this closed-door environment is also creating a tendency to over-protect and over-trust our own virtually built circles—another version of creating our own truths, even though we believe they are virtuous.

Alarmingly, digital private communication channels are fueling misinformation and self-reinforcing beliefs. For example, Black Twitter, which mainly focuses on issues of interest for the Black community, recently saw the fueling of Covid vaccine misinformation. The prevalence and believability of this misinformation was such that it reinforced beliefs grounded in historical distrust, fueling a potentially dangerous negative consensus amongst this community. Ultimately, the impact created a lack of willingness to get the vaccine, with _Twitter taking action to strike misinformation_ in early spring 2021.

We've observed a similar effect on WhatsApp, where family and friends' groups keep people close and connected, offering aid and real-time support. But there is the "double-edged sword effect" when these communities become a breeding ground for misinformation. Again, topically, Covid vaccine misinformation has surged, making it increasingly difficult for actual science and accurate public health messages to reach people's feeds and steer decision-making.

The fact is: groups of this kind could exist without outsiders being aware of them—but the hope is that the very cause of the problem could also be the solution. Indeed, online platforms can offer an incredible way to foster positive, all-inclusive communities and inform for the better.

In this context, brands have an opportunity to leverage the community outreach they have built over time; to broadcast trusted information, either as actual advisers, or as a platform for reliable experts. One example: in the height of the pandemic, clothing retailer **H&M opened its social media channels**, including Twitter, to organizations like the Red Cross and the UN Development Programme, helping them post key health messages on Covid-19 to reach communities across the globe.

This kind of holistic collaboration between government, society and brand could be the new trifecta for reform and progress. From transparent cooperation and simplification of messages to partnerships with NGOs and relatable experts, brands possess the power to bridge the divides and foster new kinds of communities.

In the face of increasingly inward populations, it's crucial to continue promoting openness and interconnectivity. We run the risk of creating communities *within* communities, where rumors and myths of all breeds arise, accessibility becomes invite-only and views that go viral—for varied reasons—become harder to veer around. Now, more than ever, preserving communities in their positive essence becomes a moral imperative for all of us—brands and businesses included.

Brands possess the power to bridge the divides and foster new kinds of communities.

> **"I kind of made up my mind that I wouldn't waste time in front of the TV, sitting on the couch, not making any use of the time."**
>
> *Bryan M | Lockdown Doesn't Have to Be a Waste of Time*

> **"Gaining a sense of mastery over something does have the ability to restore a sense of control, and that's important right now."**
>
> *Vaile W | Lockdown Doesn't Have to Be a Waste of Time*

Paradox of PURPOSE

Ashley Edwards

> **"How do you let your imagination run wild while you're just trying to survive?"**
>
> *Manoush Zomorodi | Author of "Bored and Brilliant"*

Struggling to maintain a sense of normalcy during the pandemic, we navigate the tension between intention and comfort, action and inertia as equal and opposite acts of self-preservation. Whether focusing on gardening, projects or self-improvement, or leaning into rest and indulgence, we seek to regain the sense of balance and rhythm of our pre-COVID lives.

> **"You're supposed to be inventing something or coming up with the next big business idea or doing something great that's going to be worthy of time spent at home. I'm trying to be more OK with just being."**
>
> *Maggie S | Stop Trying to Be Productive*

> **"I've been doing Zoom yoga with friends several times a week. I'm trying to really prioritize habits like these to protect my mental health."**
>
> *Lauren S | Taking Online Classes to Become a Better Person*

> **"I rebelled against my own productivity...I stopped setting alarms in the morning. I removed the pressure to exercise, so I stopped. I fell out of love with cooking and in love with takeaways."**
>
> *Jessie M | How to Find Motivation*

> **"After years of not playing, I dusted off my flute and have been practicing for 20 to 30 minutes daily. It was quite shocking to me how far my flute-playing skills had fallen. Yet, I felt a flood of great memories. It's brightened my outlook."**
>
> *Stacey W | Using Creativity to Beat the Pandemic Blues*

> **"Get yourself some Indian food and drink a bottle of wine with your spouse. We're going through a lot and we all just need to take it easy."**
>
> *Chris B | Stop Trying to Be Productive*

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CASUALWEAR

For casualwear brand Entireworld, the pandemic has brought tremendous growth—up 662% from last year—as many look to sweatpants as their new life uniform.

LINEN

Linen-centric brand Linenshed offers bedding, curtains, table linens and clothing that embraces the casual, lived-in look of linen.

W.F.H.

Part of the new normal of work-from-home life is learning fun and sometimes-surprising facts about coworkers. Interiors, disobedient children and pets, piles of laundry, creative projects and quirky collections help to humanize our colleagues, banish stereotypes and surely make work a bit more entertaining.

SOCIAL CASUALIZATION

Ashley Edwards

With fashion and retail already facing a reckoning, the pandemic acted as an accelerant for a forced reinvention—leaving behind the exhausting cycles of excessive consumption and performative lifestyles. Now, we embrace realness, comfort and naturalness, creating a new outlook that suits our largely work-from-home, stay-at-home lives.

BEAUTY

The days of precisely timed root touchups and "full-beat" beauty are numbered. While getting-ready rituals remain important, experts in the beauty category say that a shift is coming from cosmetics to skincare as more people forego their old routines and search for at-home friendly alternatives. Beauty brands are adjusting their products and communication in preparation for a post-Covid world where more natural looks will become the new standard.

FASHION

With many consumers no longer feeling it necessary to "dress up," fashion retailers have taken a major hit. This change is indicative of an increasing move toward the end of fashion as we know it—less dressing for success, more simple comfort.

BRAND SHIFTS

Household names like J. Crew and Gap have shuttered stores and laid off employees in the wake of fashion's shifts, but have caught on to the casual wear trend.

TRAN-SCENDENT NATURE

Bryan Goodpaster
Senior Creative Director,
Trends & Foresight

Amidst 2020's (and early 2021's) cultural "burn-out," consumers are seeking reprieve from their ever-rising stress, turning to the restorative powers of the great outdoors. Harkening for Thoreau-style "simple living," we romanticize our relationship with the soothing sanctuary that is nature.

Some shifts can be identified as perennial—and in many ways cyclical or expected. One example that perennially reappears is the tendency for each generation to reject or rebel against the values of its parent generation, while idealizing those of the grandparents' generation. Another such trend example is for cultures to migrate toward urban centers at a time of great optimism, economic growth or scientific advancement. The counter to this trend is also recurring: in times of extreme uncertainty, economic downturn or chaos, we tend to harken for the countryside, for meditation and the healing powers of nature. We tap into our inherent ability to "go it alone," unencumbered by the trappings of the civilized world.

In 2020, our cortisol levels climbed as we faced precariousness from every angle: public health, social inequity, political divides and a climate in crisis. We sought respite, be it in the form of *psilocybin* or an afternoon hike. As we began life in lockdown, uncertainty was stoked by the very institutions we rely on for consistency. Isolated, we yearned for meaning and connection to something greater than politics, punditry—even religion. As this shook our sense of stability, our response was very expected, very human. We harkened for the healing forces of nature—for wide open spaces, elemental earth and a mythic, if not transcendental, connection to something bigger than ourselves. Perhaps in the past, longing for the transcendental arrived as part of one's journey toward higher-order pursuits, but 2020 created a situation where our desire for transcendence was driven by the need for escape. This human need for nature manifested in diverse and uneven ways for the US population, largely drawn along racial and socioeconomic lines.

As the US faced food shortage fears, victory gardens reappeared on a scale similar to that of post-World War II. In March, Pennsylvania-based Burpee Seed Company sold more seeds than in its entire 144-year history. By September, home canning jars were in short supply. As we coped with life in suspension, global automotive sales plummeted while the sale of bicycles rose 75% in April, *doubling the April record for the first time.* In general, sales related to anything outdoors-oriented saw a boom. People turned to public parks like never before to cope with the crisis when the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommended visiting public parks, particularly those "parks close to your home" as a means to protect yourself and others from COVID-19.

120 minutes
AMOUNT OF OUTDOOR TIME REQUIRED PER WEEK TO *REALIZE HEALTH AND WELLNESS BENEFITS*
NATURE.COM

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251%

INCREASED YEAR OVER YEAR, *US SALES OF KAYAKS*. *NPD GROUP*

Yet, this put our public parks in an odd bind. This fall, Yellowstone National Park realized its busiest September on record with over 800,000 visits—a 20% increase over the prior year. As many National Parks closed early in the pandemic, traffic to many local and state parks surged. Online searches for local trails and state parks climbed to unprecedented levels according to *Google Trends* data. And we don't see interest falling in concert with falling temperatures. According to NPD data, sales of "backcountry-related" sporting equipment such as Nordic equipment and snowshoes saw a *75% year over year increase August-October.*

And while consumers waited in line to get into specialty retailers to get their hands on a pair of $200 hikers, the reality is that for millions of Americans this style of respite is both financially and even physically out of reach. The Trust for Public Land, a nonprofit working to protect public parks and outdoor spaces, estimates that roughly 100 million Americans do not live within a 10-minute walk of a public park. According to TPL's database, a little over half or roughly 55% of Americans have convenient access to a local park. Further, research using CDC data by the Brookings Institution found that *"regions with lower park access tend to have higher poverty rates."* In an article in The Washington Post, TPL's innovation and strategy director Linda Hwang pointed out that "On average, parks that serve a majority of people of color are half as big and serve nearly five times as many people per acre when compared to parks that serve a majority white population." And so, in this time of crisis, we unveil another failing in our public infrastructure. At a time when the role of these green spaces is seemingly more crucial than ever before, access to this very fundamental public amenity is more apparently uneven.

69%

GLOBAL INCREASE IN REQUESTS FOR *CYCLING DIRECTIONS ON GOOGLE MAPS* FEB-JULY *GOOGLE*

800,000

RECORD VISITS TO YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK *IN SEPTEMBER 2020* NPS.GOV

We should... design spaces and communities with equitable access to natural environments that facilitate physical and mental health.

In April, Gehl, a Copenhagen-based design and planning firm that reimagined Times Square in New York City for pedestrians and bicyclists, surveyed 2,000 respondents to understand the importance of public parks during the pandemic. Not surprisingly over 65% of those surveyed experienced greater appreciation for access to recreation and public space during the pandemic— with over two-thirds of respondents using public space daily. Of those, 81% of respondents said they were using public space for exercise and 72% said they were using it for relaxation—something essential to physical and mental health.

As we recognize the universal connection between physical and mental health and our relationship to the outside world, we should ask ourselves what we have learned about public parks and green space during this pandemic. We should reassess our opportunity to design spaces and communities with equitable access to natural environments that facilitate physical and mental health. And make even lofty ideas, such as "transcendence," available to all who desire respite and inner peace.

Transcendent Nature:
EUROPE'S CITYSCAPES SHIFT FROM GRITTY URBAN TO GREEN & *Interconnected*

Sofia Mutinelli
Senior Strategist,
LPK Europe

Long before the pandemic hit in spring of 2020, people in Europe were experiencing the organic momentum of a changing relationship to nature and outdoor mobility—a shift that has been dramatically accelerated by Covid-19. From Paris to Parma, London to Lyon, the need to connect to the outside world is translating to tangible urban planning initiatives: from city centers reimagined as lush green spaces to kilometers and kilometers of newly paved biking paths. The trend isn't just about businesses and municipalities becoming greener, but these entities taking an active role in how citizens experience green—prompting a noted surge in new modes of micro-mobility.

For instance, instead of high-risk taxi rides, more and more Europeans have resorted to modes like walking or biking for quick trips to handle daily necessities. In Milan alone, use of a shared electric scooter program increased by 400% in 2020, spurring the transformation of 35 kilometers of streets into pedestrian-only paths. Paris has long been thought of as an evolving "mobility experimentation lab," as described by its mid-19th-century designer, George-Eugène Haussmann. In 2021, Paris is accelerating this experimentation, rolling out programs that achieve a new goal to be *ville du quart d'heure*, or "the 15-minute city." The vision is a "city of proximities," easily navigated in quicker, greener ways that promote convenience and long-term sustainability.

Says Carine Rolland, the program's commissioner: "Proximity means that we will, through our social links, rediscover our way of living in cities. We want open spaces, but ones for doing nothing in particular, where people can meet each other or encounters can happen as much as possible. We live better when we live together, and this will rework our social fabric."

Solo bike rides, hikes and afternoons in the park are as much a spiritual experience in 2021, breaking physical and emotional barriers in cities that have experienced especially long and arduous periods of lockdown.

Although globally relevant, European cities represent an epicenter for innovation and experimentation that deepens our connection and interdependence with nature. For example, seven European cities are taking part in a new project called *"City Loops,"* funded by the EU Horizon 2020. Focused on sustainable city planning, the initiative is incentivizing larger renovation *initiatives that include the construction of "circular streets"*—ones comprised of pedestrian-only pathways, more green spaces and public seating, like benches, made entirely of recycled materials sourced locally.

Such newly reinforced local rhythms are starting to have ripple effects on the way we shop and how retail experiences are responding. For instance, partnerships with neighborhood stores and supermarkets to enable hyperlocal delivery are flourishing. London-based *Weezy, the "15-minute supermarket,"* reflects an emerging retail format rooted in proximity and micro-mobility. By simply downloading an app, you can find a local store to pick and pack groceries—from fresh fruit and vegetables to local meat and dairy—and get it delivered in minutes.

From their size and geographical distribution to their walkable spaces and strong local identities, Europe's cities now represent the cradle of a lifestyle movement—a shift from concrete urban to interconnected and ultra-green, which will continue to transform communities worldwide.

400%
INCREASED IN USE OF A
SHARED MOBILITY PROGRAM
IN MILIAN IN 2020

35 kilometers
AMOUNT OF *NEW PEDESTRIAN PATHWAYS* TO BE PAVED IN MILAN

How might your brand adapt to serve a more disparate, nomadic population, where communities are smaller, increasingly intimate, and less accessible?

How might changes in "centers of gravity" across the country shift political, financial, and cultural movements?

THE GREAT MIGRATION

Elyse Dierking
Strategy Director, Trends

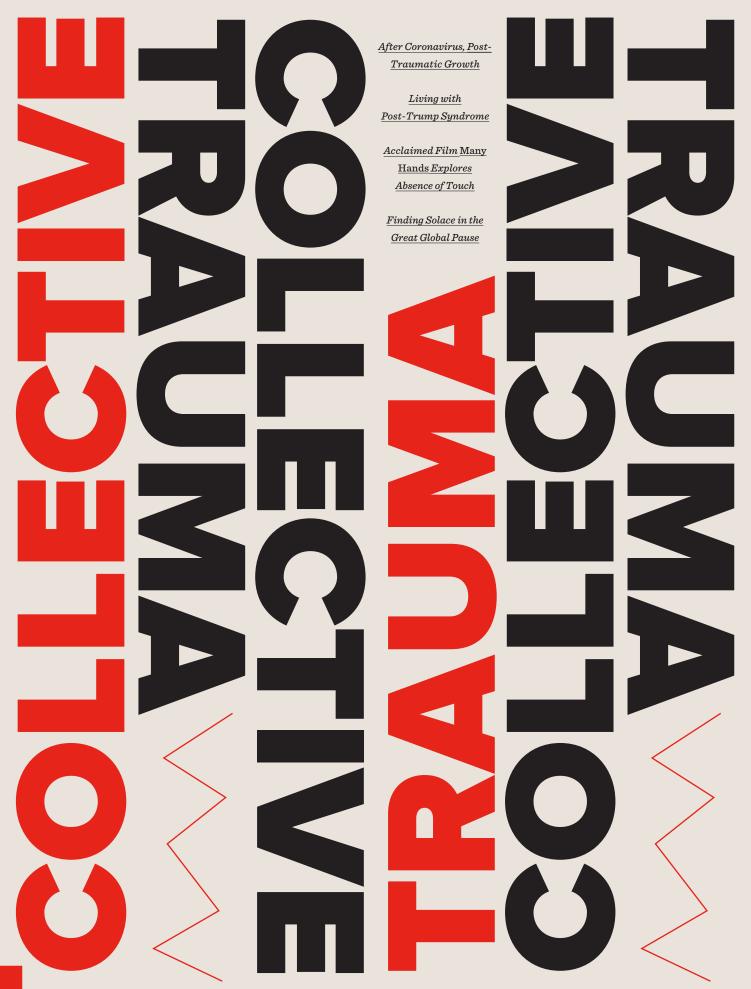**How might connection and relationships change or suffer as populations spread out?**

Though movement from the coasts to the interior of the country was already in place, the pandemic—together with increasing rates of climate-related disaster—has created a country on the move. This migration is beginning to dissolve the notion of the "coastal elite." Now, we seek to live lives filled with more freedom, flexibility, and space, slowly bringing the best parts of city life with us as more economic and cultural hotspots are inevitably established across the country.

How might suburbs revitalize as cities—expensive, close-quartered—fight against new concerns?

COLLECTIVE TRAUMA
COLLECTIVE
TRAUMA
TRAUMA
COLLECTIVE
COLLECTIVE
TRAUMA

breathe.

In the midst of a pandemic, recession, and mounting mental health crisis amplified by both, Americans are experiencing a collective moment of stress like never before. However, while this mass-trauma—spanning all socio-economic classes, regions, and backgrounds at once—is affecting an entire population, across the board the most marginalized are disproportionately in danger both in immediate and long-term effects. In a world where self-care is the most needed and least accessible resource, how will your brand survive?

Elyse Dierking
Strategy Director, Trends

NEW GREEN EXTREMES

Anna Pompilio
Senior Strategist, Trends

Sustainability is a word we hear a lot. Fuse it with other equally ambiguous phrases like *green, ethical, responsible,* and *eco-friendly,* and it's easy to create an indeterminate-yet-lofty term with no clear action items or expectations. When it comes to sustainability, the path to success is as undefined as the term itself.

Over the last five years, our trends practice has helped countless brands focus on sustainability—both in theory and practice—to define their points of view, but today, it's about movement toward *action*: clear tactics, metrics and goals. And while 2020 brought chaos, confusion, and a haze of anxiety that has yet to clear, it did offer us clarity on one thing: sustainability isn't as elusive as we thought. And it's an imperative to businesses moving into 2021. In fact, many practitioners, myself included, would no longer identify sustainability as a trend, but a global movement, picking up momentum in recent years and reaching far beyond cyclical, expected trends shifts.

Previously, the environmental impact of our actions seemed vague and far away—a problem for future generations to deal with. But over the last year, the

unseen came into full view: we were confronted with our collective impact as human beings on this planet. In 2020 we witnessed wildfires rage around the globe, a record number of hurricanes, extreme temperatures and flooding. These patterns required many to abandon their homes and relocate. On the other hand, we also saw the impact of our "lockdown": satellite photos that showed lower air pollution levels and early data shows lower carbon emissions and improved water quality in rivers and water bodies. We were reminded that we can make immediate change. In fact, we must.

The pandemic changed how hundreds of thousands of organizations were run, from businesses to schools. Many learned to work effectively without the destructive practices that take a toll on the environment. Virtual calls replaced meetings and travel. Businesses looked for closer-to-home supply chains. "Work from home" created less need to heat and cool big buildings. Even fast fashion took a hit as shopping was deprioritized for more pressing essential needs. The industry quickly deflated and, in the process revealed just how wasteful its six-seasons-a-year schedules were. Ultimately, businesses were forced to

adapt abruptly, and in doing so, saw that they can action on sustainable initiatives more quickly than ever thought possible.

It's not enough for corporations to maintain a sustainable status quo. Consumers seem to believe that big businesses shoulder the majority of responsibility when it comes to negative environmental impact. This has emboldened everyday citizens to demand accountability from corporate leaders. And now, people are asking for *more*: more transparent supply chains that provide clarity around products from factory to home. Less microplastics in the clothes we wear and the air we breathe. More care when considering the way our products are packaged and shipped to our door. The way we view our consumption and impact on this world—big or small—may never be the same. And that's the best possible outcome. We go into 2021 with our eyes open, no longer blind to our impact. Sustainability may have felt too arbitrary and existential to tackle in the past, but now, it's clear to consumers and corporations alike that immediate change is feasible—and that real, tangible results are possible.

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PERFORMATIVE MORALITY

Anna Pompilio
Senior Strategist, Trends

In 2021, brands will be taken to task on their social, economic and political *alignments.*

A continuation of the virtue signaling seen in the last several years relative to values like sustainability, the pandemic and social justice movements of 2020 have given rise to more of the same. Now mask shaming, protesting, yard signs and book clubs are the new status symbols—the subtle signals of intellect and "wokeness." In the year ahead, people will call companies to account, examining if their efforts to promote justice, equity, diversity and inclusion have indeed been genuine, or yet another performance.
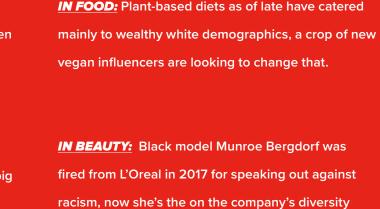
IN CULTURE: "Woke" was originally defined as awareness of societal barriers and inequalities between groups. Now, the word has lost some of its intended purpose... and value.

IN AMERICA: America is experiencing a "moral convulsion." Heightened levels of distrust span from big corporations to our own neighbors, and it's affecting our future.

IN FASHION: Fashion is seen as one of the worst offenders when it comes to environmental and social impact—consumers are taking notice and changing the way they shop.

IN FOOD: Plant-based diets as of late have catered mainly to wealthy white demographics, a crop of new vegan influencers are looking to change that.

IN BEAUTY: Black model Munroe Bergdorf was fired from L'Oreal in 2017 for speaking out against racism, now she's the on the company's diversity and inclusion board.

ONLINE: "Wokefishing" is the latest concern in online dating. Users have started lying about their political beliefs to lure partners.

FLEX YOUR *Future* FLUENCY

▼ As we often say, trends are trends are trends… until you do something with them. By immersing yourself in these forces of change and focusing on preparedness over prediction, you can translate 2021's emergent trends into effective, future-forward business strategies. Developing this anticipation muscle is key to becoming **_Future Fluent:_** a personal and professional ability to foresee potential outcomes, then act wisely.

So, what next? We asked our Trends & Foresight experts for guidance on how to act upon the big shifts taking place.

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF

In a world of multiple, continuously splintering realities, how do you position your brand to resonate—without further contributing to divisiveness? In the Multiverse, how might your target audience definition and messaging strategy change?
Valerie Jacobs

How can brands play a role in the continuously evolving urban structure? What is their opportunity and responsibility to facilitate a lifestyle movement, beyond the pandemic?
Sofia Mutinelli

In the landscape of fake news and incessantly fueled rumors, what can brands do to encourage open conversations, fight misinformation and preserve a general sense of belonging? How can they connect with the communities they serve at a deeper level?
Sofia Mutinelli

How might you leverage the insights in Paradox of Purpose to position empathy-first offerings that feel permissive to both ends of the "COVID-coping" spectrum?
Ashley Edwards

How might your brand re-think its consumer target(s) in light of this new social casualization? Post-pandemic, will he or she continue a more casual self-presentation as a more authentic form of self-expression?
Ashley Edwards

If green space is the new spa or self-care respite, how might health and wellness brands reorient themselves to facilitate brand experiences in the great outdoors?
Bryan Goodpaster

How does your brand account for the shifting landscape with a more diverse range of economic, cultural and emotional needs?
Elyse Dierking

In what authentic ways can your brand provide a moment of solace for consumers—a respite in the sea of consumption messaging?
Elyse Dierking

Should things "renormalize," how might we prepare for lasting consumer behavior changes when it comes to sustainability and environmental impact?
Anna Pompilio

How might your business begin to discern "visual activism" from action-based, measurable change?
Anna Pompilio

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MEET THE EXPERTS

Valerie Jacobs

Chief Growth Officer & Futurist,
LPK North America
valerie.jacobs@lpk.com

Bryan Goodpaster

Senior Creative Director,
LPK North America
bryan.goodpaster@lpk.com

Ashley Edwards

Elyse Dierking

Strategy Director,
LPK North America
elyse.dierking@lpk.com

Anna Pompilio

Senior Strategist,
LPK North America
anna.pompilio@lpk.com

Sofia Mutinelli

Senior Strategist,
LPK Europe
sofia.mutinelli@lpk.com

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