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I'm feeling 2022

“If you don’t know
where you are,
a map won’t help.”

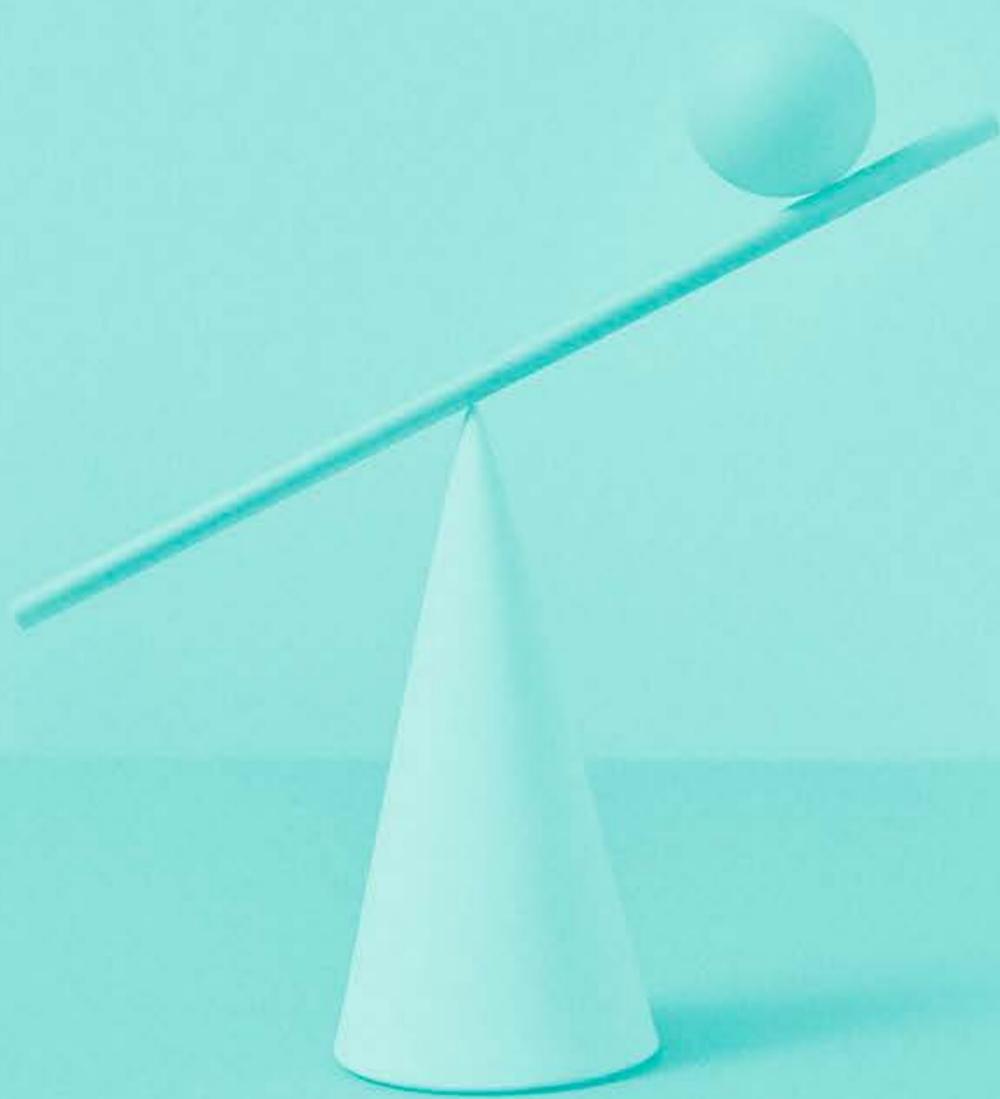
— Watts Humphrey, software engineering icon

We are not soothsayers, magicians, or fortune-tellers. But at Curiosity, we keep ourselves and our work informed by cultural change so we can uncover and share the direction your consumers are heading. And what they’ll be expecting.

As creative problem-solvers, we know that understanding audiences is a must. But audiences change over time. And they changed a lot in the last two years. Consumers took things into their own hands in a whole new way. They are more aware, more communicative and more ready for whatever challenges life throws their way. Whether it’s environmental angst, mental health issues, or dating frustration, today’s consumers are empowered to find what they want and say what they feel to meet their needs. These are the pandemic-sparked patterns and behaviors that are here to stay.

Top 7 **shifts** we are prioritizing for 2022

- 01 ————— 360 Wellness
- 02 ————— Emerging Communities
- 03 ————— Gen Alpha
- 04 ————— Retail Futures
- 05 ————— Planet Love
- 06 ————— Identity Flux
- 07 ————— Era of Resignation

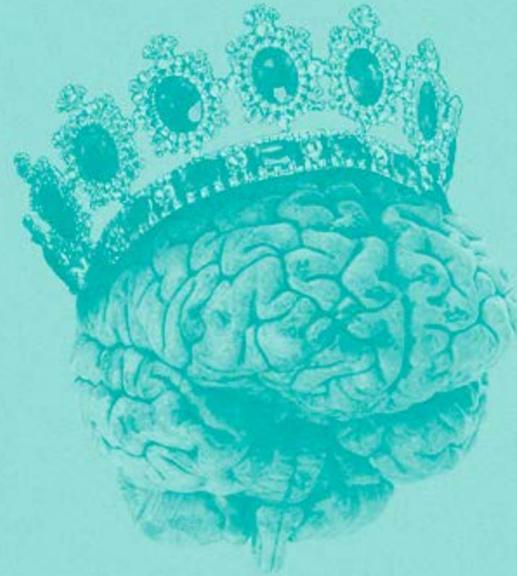


01*

360 Wellness

physical health

mental wellbeing



360 Wellness

Shift 01: from physical health to mental wellbeing

Increased economic pressures, career responsibilities, and time-constrained lifestyles have broadened the focus and definition of health. Life adjustments made during the pandemic accelerated these stressors. Health is now recognized and prioritized as our greatest wealth. If we do not have a healthy body and mind, everything else falls by the wayside. Holistic health is also happiness. It is not a singular term. But it is on our terms. We seek to take greater control of our health destiny and look for reliable sources, new methodologies, and more complete solutions.

New Benefit Spaces

Across categories, benefit spaces built to take care of all facets of health are growing. In food and beverage, low-sugar, plant-based, gut-health, and diverse diets are shown to increase mental clarity and mood.

COVID-19 amplified the idea of immunity as a key benefit to a well-built diet. Many brands have made this a key innovation space in 2021.

Nootropics and adaptogens have been growing for many years as more people look to enhance mental performance and focus. Although they are mostly found as supplements, both are part of the increasingly popular functional food and beverage group.

Designing for Mental Health

The spaces we inhabit are proven to affect our mental health. And designers have always been in the background creating things to evoke an emotional response. With a newfound emphasis on our emotional and mental well-being, designers are expected to have an increased role in shaping the future of our built environment around our mental health.

Sensory Interior Design in Dallas uses light, acoustics, color psychology, and natural elements to create healthy spaces where the mind, body, and soul can recalibrate.

Sense of smell plays a critical role in mood, stress, and working capacity. Brands like the Nueco have introduced products that link positive scents to the most important areas of the brain, directly associated with our emotions and mood.

Backed by Science

Consumers today have more access to information and the ability to research and fact-check. Meaning they can see through marketing BS immediately. Credentialing and transparency are essential to cultivate and hold onto consumer trust.

According to Pew Research, most (89%) Americans trust medical scientists. And 88% report a great deal of confidence in medical scientists — an increase of 35% based on pre-COVID numbers.

Beauty brands are busy connecting their names to biomedical discovery and scientists to build trust in innovations. Likewise, food and beverage companies are looking to governmental accreditation to support new health and wellness claims.



Implications

As health and wellness become central in all categories, brands can find new ways to win over their consumers:

- * Focus on benefit spaces that address the mental state and connect it to the physical state.
- * Design for moods – reach into your brand’s core archetype to inspire your look, tone, and feel.
- * Look to credited scientists and influencers for support of your product claims. Give access to consumers to all levels of research behind your brand’s offerings.

*02 Emerging Communities

traditional relationships

nuanced community



Emerging Communities

Shift 02: from traditional relationships to nuanced community

Those we've trusted as close confidants and support systems have been reframed over the past couple of years. Besties, family, and neighbors became possible points of conflict or illness during the pandemic. These points of contention moved us to find new groups of people to fulfill basic human needs of community. More and more people are craving experiences in smaller, niche communities and subcultures. Digital connection, paired with locality-based interests, has made it possible to create communities based on shared interests, beliefs, values, and culture.

Interest-Based

Exhausted by the barrage of digital content, audiences are only willing to make time for things that interest them. Social media users now number nearly 4 billion (Fast Company), but many brands haven't figured out a way to make their voices heard in a meaningful way — resulting in a mess of white noise to consumers.

Younger audiences are leaving many public-facing social platforms and flocking to smaller, more intimate online destinations — otherwise referred to as “digital campfires.” Platforms like Fortnite, Roblox, Twitch, and TikTok are organized by common niche interests and allow members to private message one another, to connect to a micro-community, and to participate in a shared experience (Harvard Business Review).

Belief & Value-Based

We are all a little religious. Every person worships at the altar of something. We want to peek behind the supernatural curtain to feel assured everything does indeed happen for a reason. And we want to commune with people who share our same values and ethical frameworks.

In the past, this led people to formalized religion. Lately, it's led people to astrology, digital detox retreats, the slow movement, therapists' offices, or the Brené Browns and Glennon Doyle's of the world — effectively the spiritual mediators of our time.

In our polarized age, communities are increasingly based on shared ethical frameworks and religious alternatives instead of family, duty, or power.

Cultural-Based

As America becomes more culturally diverse, Asian-American, Latin-American, and Black America are embracing recognition for their beautiful differences.

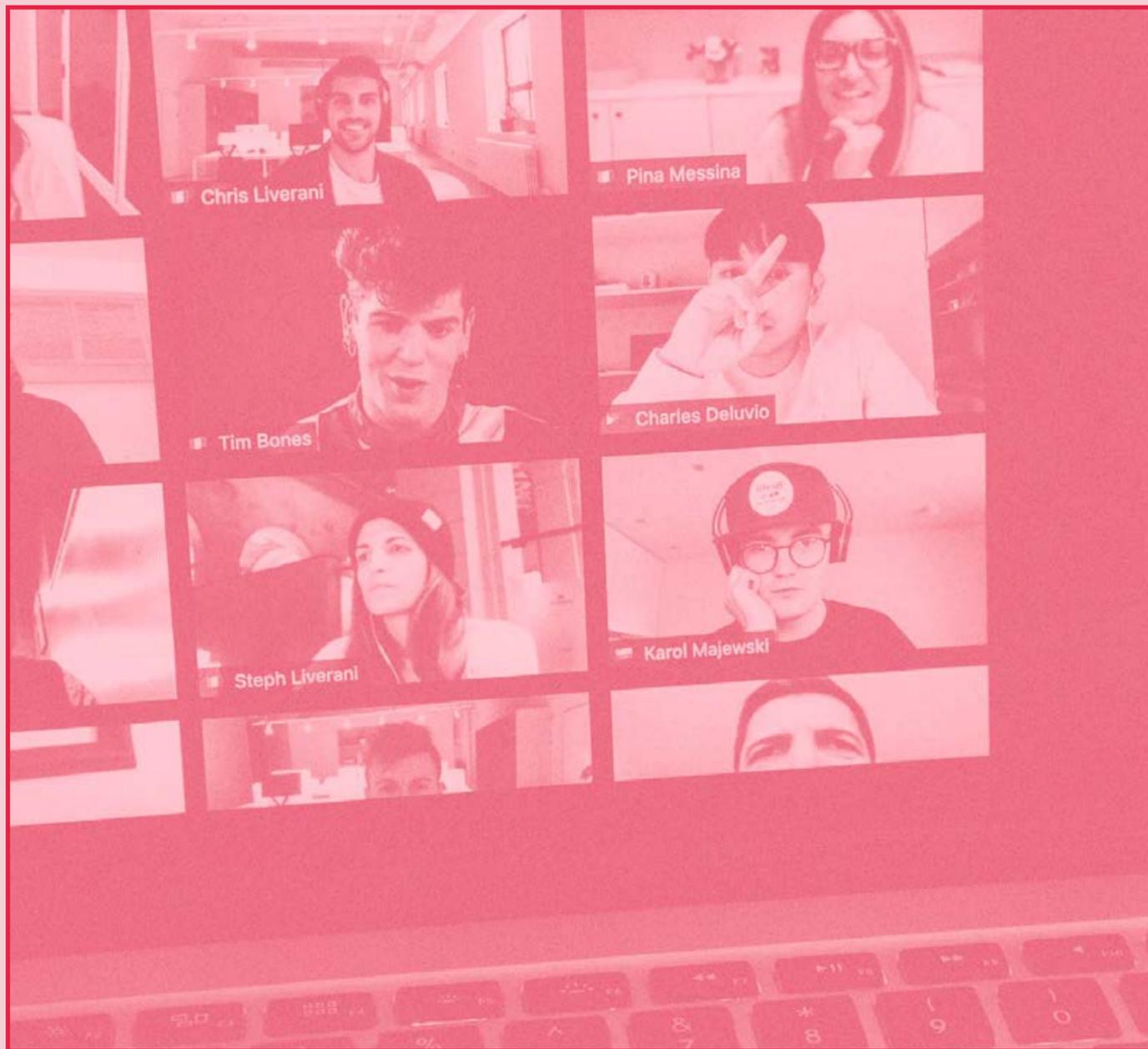
Asian Americans are America's fastest-growing racial or ethnic group (82% population growth between 2000 and 2019, according to the US Census), representing a buying power more significant than the economies of all but 13 world nations (Selig Center, 2021).

America's Latinx community is now 62 million strong, and the younger population in particular seeks brands that reflect their identity.

Authentic Dating

During the pandemic, we learned the importance of meaningful connections and making mindful choices for ourselves. This habit transfers to the dating world, with online app users becoming more intentional in relationships made on dating apps. They take the time to be honest with partners, focusing less on physical attraction, and looking outside their “type.”

About 45% of Hinge users said the pandemic spurred healthier dating habits such as no longer ghosting, a practice in which users simply stop responding, or “disappear,” without explanation; the practice is down 27% on the app. They're playing fewer games (like ghosting) because we're prioritizing our own time to make genuine connections. For many in the dating arena, quarantine reminded us that we only have so much time to be ourselves — so why not spend it being our true selves?



Implications

As new communities of consumers bond and form over shared values, speaking their language, and living their values become key to success.

- * Rethink your communication strategy to include fewer big social media platforms and more gaming, chat, and niche platforms.
- * Re-examine your brand's true values and take a stance on issues that your brand and company are living.
- * Connect with a variety of cultures in an authentic way. Take time to learn about the growing demographics in your markets and learn more about their deeply ingrained values.



03* Gen Alpha

childhood innocence

empowered decision-makers



Gen Alpha

Shift 03: from childhood innocence to empowered decision-makers

Well-informed, environmentally concerned, creative, and constantly connected — the kids born post-2010 are poised to be a part of the largest generation yet and already have significant spending power. Generation Alpha is the largest demographic to have grown up in homes without both biological parents. And they're the largest demographic of foreign-born children in the U.S. Currently, they are being coined “mini Millennials,” but are finding newer ways to make their mark. Digital from birth, Gen Alpha are the young decision-makers of the family. Their parents include them from the beginning stages of the shopping journey, ranging from snack choices to vacation ideas.

Empowered Consumers

Parents involve their kids in shopping decisions more than ever. Digital since birth, this generation can do the research, connect with peers, and make informed decisions on what they want.

72% of parents say they involve their children in the beginning stage of the purchase journey, allowing them to research products in-store (69%), online (67%), and by watching commercials (60%). Some even go so far as to encourage their children to add items to a wish list or shopping cart (56%), according to the National Retail Federation.

Banks and financial institutions like Chase Bank and Greenlight are already molding Gen Alpha's spending patterns by offering debit cards and financial education.

Owning Their Creativity and Individualism

Empowered influencers, Gen Alpha magnifies their innate kid creativity online — and they make a lot of cash doing it. “Kidfluencers” are taking over the internet, and kids prefer to watch their peers do activities online (vs. TV or movies).

The No. 1 profession kids want to be when they grow up is a YouTuber. A survey of 1,000 children by the travel company First Choice shows that “75% of children ages 6 to 17 want to become YouTubers,” followed by a blogger or vlogger.

Healthy Habits

72% of parents have witnessed a decline in their child's emotional well-being (Ipsos). Parents and kids are opening their minds to new ways to take care of both their minds and bodies through plant-based, hydrating, gut-healthy, and low-sugar offerings.

Dietary alignment and experience are shifting how this group feeds their energy with less traditional mealtimes but more desire for functionality.

US baby food brands Fresh Bellies, Lil'gourmets, and Tiny Organics are all sponsors of the Shaping Early Palates project to help diversify and promote healthier long-term eating for toddlers.



Implications

As the newest generation of consumers become empowered to make their mark, talk to them first but keep their Millennial parents in mind.

- * Remember that each age group desires to emulate the one above them. For kids 0-4, the parents are making decisions, but after that, kids are deciding based on the behaviors of the age group above them.
- * Connect with kids over their shifting values while making your benefit offerings tempting to parents.
- * Enable kids to be a part of your brand/product process and give them credit for it.
- * Consider what your brand can do for the mental health crisis happening with this generation and new benefits that they are craving.

*04 Retail Futures

retailer-dictated

informed consumerism



Retail Futures

Shift 04: from retailer-dictated to informed consumerism

With the desire to shop safely during the pandemic, new behaviors were formed and are here to stay. Consumers are less trusting — of companies, of governments, of institutions — than ever before. And they're less likely to take brands on their word when they say they're doing the right thing. DTC brands and small to medium brands have won the hearts and minds of consumers based on niche, custom offerings paired with convenience. A new culture has formed around consumers' expectations of the desire for the same treatment and transparency on every platform.

New Models of Consumption

Shopping is now an always-on experience. Product purchases take place via multiple channels. 73% of consumers use a mix of physical stores, e-commerce, digital apps, social commerce, and marketplace platforms to buy products (Deloitte).

DTC and “Instagram brands” have learned to target at the right time and place. As a result, many grew over 300% in 2020.

Big brands are taking note — either adapting their communication strategies or acquiring smaller brands without association. L’Oreal is acquiring brands like DECIEM (The Ordinary, etc.), which sell “unbranded” simple, pure ingredients that are highly effective and invite consumers to educate themselves on ingredients and purposes.

Convenience Culture

Attention spans are getting shorter in 2022. If you want to win, think quick and custom. Shopping is less about buying products online or in stores and more about how shopping fits into consumers’ schedules. Consumers will continue to demand frictionless experiences.

McDonald’s has announced that it is doubling down on the three D’s: delivery, digital, and drive-thru — a strategy to win in fast food. Micro-fulfillment in stores will continue to be necessary, especially as product shortages hit harder. Walmart is adding small fulfillment centers beside some of its stores that use automated bots to retrieve goods for online orders. Additionally, Walmart now has fully driverless trucks that transport online grocery orders from a dark store to a nearby consumer-facing store for pickup.

Informed Consumers

Years of unforecastable chaos paired with economic uncertainty have left people seeking control through knowledge. Consumers need clarity and transparency from brands as well as flexibility and options to make decisions that suit their individual changing needs and circumstances.

Just when we thought QR codes were irrelevant, they have found their time to shine. Consumers are using them on the shelf to find the information they desire quickly.

Overly explained ingredients can result in confusion. Consumers want to know what it does — they want the science-based facts behind their nutrition, beauty, and overall wellness.

Thriftiness as a Badge of Honor

Saving money while having a sense of purpose has become an intentional way of shopping in 2021.

Digital thrift stores have become side hustles and a way to build sustainability into shopping. Further, shoppers are searching for deals in grocery stores on food close to the expiration date to save cash and help eliminate food waste.

The Reddit Frugal Living community saw a 200% increase in views in the second week of August 2020. Its 1.3 million members focus on sharing creative ways to waste less and gain more while envisioning a better future by discussing topics such as four-day work weeks and universal basic income.



Implications

As consumer behaviors continually adapt to pandemic conditions, consumers are more empowered and informed than ever. Nothing is going backward from this point. Retail and sales must adapt.

- * Take cues from DTC and Instagram brands in connecting to niche audiences via communication and tone of voice.
- * Consider what other brands or influencers would make sense to associate your brand or collaborate with to increase your audience.
- * Reconsider how your packaging is communicating on shelf by being more explicit about your benefits and adding credentials. Consider QR codes to provide additional information to customers who want deeper research.



05* Planet Love

our caregiver

our responsibility



Planet Love

Shift 05: from seeing Mother Earth as our caregiver to our responsibility

Changing climate, transparent science-based facts, and fair labor laws paired with the basic human need to connect with nature have created a refreshed relationship with our ultimate caregiver, Mother Earth. As we look forward and grapple with environmental angst, we know our future relies on reciprocity in caring for her (the earth). Consumers are taking control and using their dollars as their voice for what they want — a healthier environment to be healthier humans.

Morality of Environmentalism

While many brands have made their voices heard on controversial topics, consumers want to see measurable progress against their goals.

Hero companies like Patagonia are open and honest about their shortcomings, emphasizing that they are not perfect, but working hard to improve their impact on people and the planet. Their 2020 report gives statistics about how they actually measure up to their goals: “87% of our line is Fair Trade certified sewn because we recognize that apparel workers are among the lowest-paid people in the world.”

Consumers expect transparent communication around processes, sources, and brand values from companies that desire a relationship with purpose-driven consumers.

Consumers Take Control Over Climate Crisis

We witnessed extreme weather-related events across the world throughout the last two years, stoking fears about the highly adverse consequences of climate change. According to a recent Deloitte survey, climate change was the number one concern for Gen Z, followed closely by unemployment and health care. As a result, people are looking for concrete actions from businesses to address environmental issues.

While sustainable and environmentally healthy products cost more, consumers see that they can make simple changes for the future by using their dollars. Younger generations also want to work at environmentally conscious companies and prefer a company that aligns with their values.

Circularity

On average, companies generate 7.81 metric tons of waste for every million dollars in revenue. Our planet has reached a tipping point. As consumers increasingly embrace circular consumption patterns, they seek products and brands that align with their environmental values.

Many new fiber sources will continue to be discovered and created at reasonable prices for use in fashion and packaging in general, including recycled plastics, pulps, and natural extracts from the manufacturing process.

Beauty brands like Emma Lewisham, Phlur, Caudalie, and vitamin brands like Care/of have not only become circular and carbon-positive but have shared their process, encouraging others to follow suit.



Implications

As we gain knowledge and cross new challenges with something entirely out of our control, we look to the earth as we shape our future.

- * Report transparent facts vs. faking perfection when it comes to your company's environmental and sustainability efforts. Update consumers on how you are taking steps to move toward your goals.
- * Create internal goals and communicate them outwardly. Use independent regulators to verify your brand's carbon footprint, sustainability, fair trade practices, etc. Consumers will expect to see this verification as part of product labeling.
- * Examine your internal manufacturing processes and consider partnering with other companies that can reuse your waste materials.

* 06 **Identity
Flux**

gender specific

fluidity



Identity Flux

Shift 06: from gender-specific to gender-fluid

As the pandemic unfolded, we had time to pause — allowing us to examine ourselves and what we truly value. With that came new outward expressions of our identities, broken stereotypes, and the rethinking of how we view masculinity and femininity. Consumers are expecting brands to embrace this fluidity and meet all facets of identity and heritage.

Expressions of Identity

The LGBTQIA+ community’s fight for rights, fair treatment, and authentic expression of identity dates back over a century. Fortunately, these movements have been instrumental in normalizing authentic expressions of identity for Gen Z and beyond.

Fluid representations of gender are quickly becoming more common and slowly becoming accepted due to their visibility on social media platforms. What were once activities reserved for girls and women has now been widely adopted by people across the gender spectrum. This normalization can be seen in cis-male celebrities like Harry Styles and Kid Cudi who frequently sport dresses and painted nails.

Expanding Beauty

In 2020, brands began noticing increased male interest in beauty and cosmetics. With this, brands began to realize that their products were not adapting to the needs of this newer audience. And with a new audience, comes the need for new visual representation and product innovation to meet their needs. While it’s still early, beauty brands will likely need to develop new strategies to fit a wider range of consumers, making room for people across the gender spectrum.

Natural Self-Expression

After spending an entire year on virtual calls, people are emerging from their caves with a new POV on makeup. To express their individuality, consumers are now prioritizing looks that celebrate what’s on the inside. It’s a sharp move away from the highly popularized “no-makeup makeup look.” Whether it be using specific colors, types of makeup, or application, these types of expressions are positioned to pick up in popularity as offices begin to loosen their dress codes.

Authentic Aesthetics

The online version of self is something consumers have self-dictated since the onset of social media. Aesthetics of what people share have shifted from glamorous perfection to realistic imperfection. They’re starting to care less about their online image, and more about how their social media represents real life: the good, the bad, and the ugly.

For brands, candid, unposed imagery is encouraged, especially when it comes to forming a genuine perception. Well-produced images will still be around, but the raw, low-fidelity images — when posted genuinely — are likely to resonate with consumers.



Implications

As we get more in touch with who we are and what we value, we align ourselves to products that drive expression.

- * Reassess your product innovation to develop products that meet all of your audience's needs, especially those of your new or emerging audience.
- * Accurately represent your audience in all marketing materials. Low fidelity imagery is in — and, start with user-generated content (UGC).
- * Examine how your brand can exude authenticity. Determine its voice and how your brand can genuinely engage with consumers about cultural moments.

*07 Era of Resignation

hustle

— life balance



Era of Resignation

Shift 07: from hustle to life balance

As we adapted to new working conditions, we realized that achieving balance, focusing on hobbies, and even working from a travel destination is in reach. People discovered they could do bigger and better things — whether that's resigning from the workforce or pursuing their passion to make a living. Consumers are continuing to shift their values from work-life to life-work balance — realizing that life is too short to work strenuous hours and not love your job.

Slow Movement

Anti-hustle culture rallies against hyper-work culture. Post-lockdown, professionals are starting to slow down. They want to make “rise, glow, and shine” a priority over “rise, grind, and overwork.”

We are hearing the Chinese word wu-wei, which translates to non-doing, or effortless action. This is a facet of the Slow Movement, in which we’re encouraged to embrace the “flow.” The concept is all about slowing down our day-to-day activities to avoid overdoing and burnout.

Mantra of “I Quit”

With the rise in burnout and overwork, people are beginning to share their feelings beyond just their inner circle. Consumers, particularly Gen Z, are using apps like TikTok to open up about mental health struggles and build communities that discuss depression, panic attacks, and burnout.

Thanks to the power of social media, the word is getting out about how companies treat their employees. This open airing of grievances ultimately helps fuel the normalization of work/life balance.

Working for Purpose

For many, a paycheck isn’t enough. Professionals are searching for opportunities that align with their values. Whether it’s switching over to the world of nonprofit because they value giving back or taking a pause from work to take new classes around a hobby they love – this “pursuit of purpose” is a trek that consumers want employers and brands to help facilitate. For employers, this looks like support and investment in the passions of their workforce. For brands, this looks like developing products that help consumers find their purpose.



Implications

As we started logging fewer hours at work, consumers began searching for ways to escape the grind.

- * Determine how your brand offers purpose to people's lives. Establishing what your brand stands for will attract the right consumers — and the right employees.
- * Slow down with consumers. Figure out how your brand can contribute to this era of relaxation. Think mindfulness.
- * Create experiences that push consumers to pause their stressful lives and engage with your brand. Essentially, consider how your brand can contribute to the life part of work-life balance.

“The future
 is always
 beginning **now.**”

— Mark Strand, poet

This year, individuals challenged and expanded our senses of identity. And the urgency to solve problems, both societal and ecological, became even more focused.

These factors will manifest in how we connect and make purchase decisions in 2022. Meaning, consumer interaction and brand expectations will be shifting all year long.

The strategy team at Curiosity is always looking, reading, watching, and questioning so that we can stay in fresh conversation with the world we’re living in. The future is always beginning now — and staying curious is how we stay on the forefront.

Want to learn more? Contact us.



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