

The Age of re-enchantment

Emerging trends and opportunities

+ WUNDERMAN
THOMPSON

A REPORT BY WUNDERMAN THOMPSON INTELLIGENCE

Welcome to the age of re-enchantment

It's time to remake the world through the lens of re-enchantment, where the new brand metrics are jaw drops, heart swells, and goosebumps. Brands can help people transcend tough times and jolt them from long-standing malaise by celebrating the thrilling, the uplifting, the awe-inspiring, and the magical.

Whether numbed by pandemic isolation, burned out by grind culture, or shocked by the 21st-century horrors of politics, war, and climate crisis, people are feeling a sense of absence that is hard to neatly define. More than three-quarters of people now say they “just want to feel something, to feel alive” and 74% say they feel like they are waiting for something good to happen.

Uncertain times might imply a shift to a more practical attitude, but instead people are yearning for emotion-inducing experiences that deliver feelings of joy and wonder, craving the spectacular, the surreal, and the otherworldly. Even darker thrills are inspiring to some: the fear-inducing, the uncanny, the dystopian.

We saw the first shoots of this movement in this year's “Future 100”: in the appetite for adventure and thrills in Remote Dining, in the craving for amazement in Multiversal Design, and in the burgeoning joyconomy expressed in Ageless Play.

People have always enjoyed being transported, but crucially, there is now an appetite for brands to deliver this: 65% of people would like brands to wow them with spectacular advertising and marketing, and 61% want brands to help them feel intense emotions. In fact, almost twice as many people say they are likely to buy from brands that bring them a sense of joy (49%), or those that surprise and delight them (45%), than from brands that just do what they say they will (26%). Yet few brands are tapping into this desire: 70% of people say they can't remember the last time a brand did anything that excited them.

The trends that follow explore the yearning for re-enchantment. Our hypothesis maps them to three overlapping needs: first, a quest for reawakening and sense-making in a chaotic and confusing world; second, a desire to transcend the everyday and feel part of something bigger than ourselves; and finally, an optimistic impulse to actively usher in a kinder, more hopeful future. At their heart, these trends are about betterment—both personal and collective.

Via 18 original trends backed by proprietary survey data, and interviews with 20 thought leaders in the space, this report sets out a path for brands to reflect the new mindset—and re-enchant the world!

Marie Stafford

Global Director, Wunderman Thompson Intelligence

Contents

Introduction	4
By the numbers	16
Trends	25
Awakening	26
Dark comforts	28
Mortal branding	33
Full-spectrum feels	36
Generative awe	40
Absurdist retail	46
Selling serendipity	50
Transcending	54
Transcendent wellness	56
Natural upskilling	60
Intrepid dining	64
Monumental wonders	67
Multiversal luxe	72
Sensory techtopias	75
Reimagining	80
New spiritual rebels	82
Fear for good	87
Next-gen luddites	91
Design untamed	95
Radical reconnection	99
Unleashing the joyconomy	104
Brand takeaways	110
Methodology	115
Acknowledgements	116
About us	118

Introduction

Re-enchantment defined

We define re-enchantment as fulfilling a craving for feelings of wonder and awe, an appetite for joy and fun, and an openness to thrills and adventure. It also includes more than a hint of mystery and the willingness to experience a few goosebumps. We yearn to feel something, whether it's delight, awe, surprise or exhilaration.

In part, the need for re-enchantment is linked to the dull fate of becoming adults: we lose our sense of childlike wonder over time and the world becomes less magical. But it's also a much-needed counter to the times we live in. As we will outline, we live in a rational, explained world, and one in which we are harried and anxious, with little time to pause and pursue these sensations. This has been compounded by the pandemic experience: ***“the least fun years any of us will collectively experience,”*** according to psychologist Mike Rucker.

In more ways than one, something has been lost. There is an absence, a vacuum to be filled. That is why we call it re-enchantment.

As our trends will show, the emotions of re-enchantment are powerful; they can help us make sense of a complex world, they make us feel part of something meaningful that is bigger than ourselves; and they can instill optimism, opening our eyes to future possibilities.

While the trends that follow resonate widely across markets and cohorts, we dived deeper into the views of generation Z where relevant to gain some pointers on how the trends might evolve. But over the next few pages, our Drivers set out why this is happening now.

“If there were a
Spirit
of this age,
it would look a lot like fear.
For years now we’ve been
running like rabbits.”

/ **Katherine May**,
Enchantment: Reawakening Wonder
in an Exhausted Age, 2023

Drivers

The desire for experiences that can uplift, inspire, and enthrall is eternal, but it is becoming more intense in an age that is, and has been, plagued by unease. Crucially, the desire for brands to deliver more emotional intensity across touchpoints feels heightened. In our interviews with global thought leaders, we asked why the demand for re-enchantment is on the rise, which helped us to identify the following primary drivers of our trends.

Generation dread

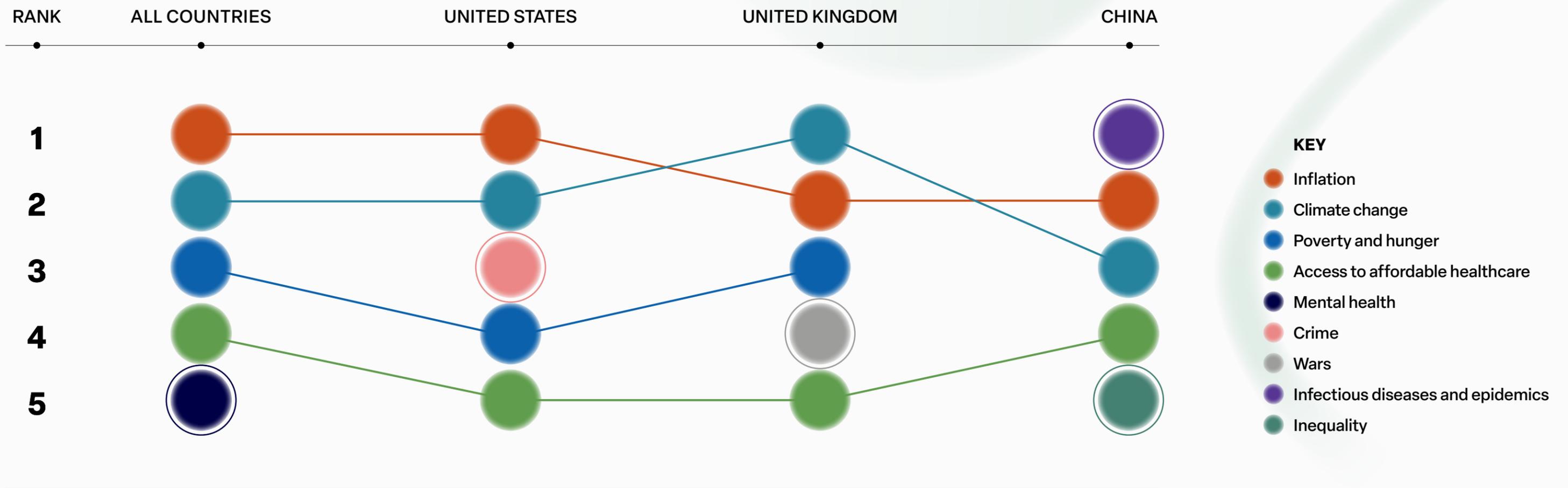
In the past few months, economic journalists have revived the term polycrisis, which describes the interplay of multiple shocks whose impact manages to exceed the sum of their parts. Collectively, we are navigating some of the toughest challenges in living memory, beset by economic turbulence, rampant inequality, conflict, and polarization, not to mention the pandemic, all set to the backing track of a mounting climate emergency. Together, these factors contribute to a pervasive sense of unease and uncertainty. Just 25% of people say they are positive about the way things are going in the world, and 71% are anxious about the state of the planet. (For the top issues facing the world by country, please see the chart on the following page.)



Generation Dread: Interconnected anxieties

Biggest problems facing the world today

(top five ranking by country)

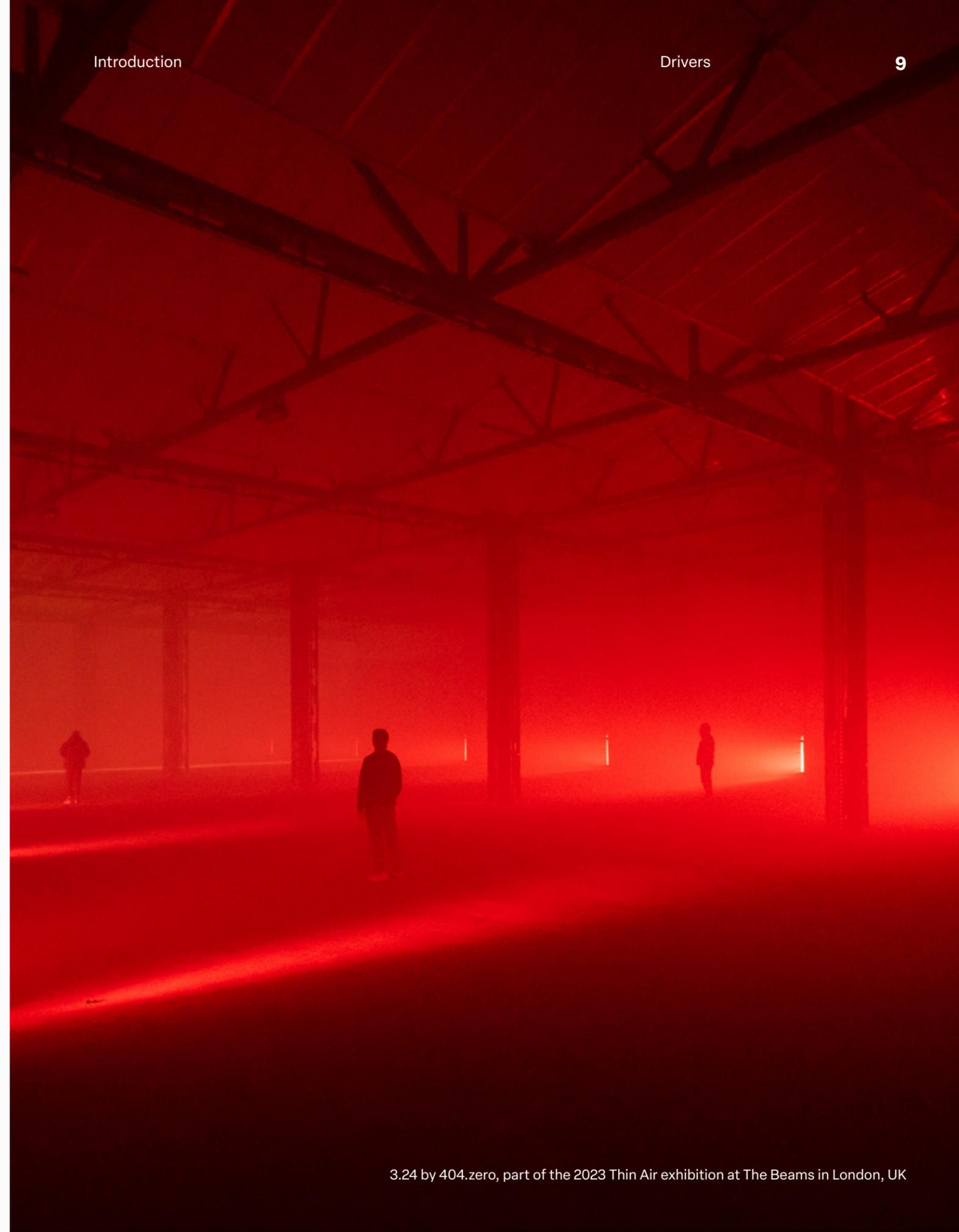


The hyperrational world

Our world is dominated by pragmatic, functional leadership, our lives are quantified in data, and our choices are marshalled by algorithms. Little mystery remains when we can summon up the answers to almost anything in seconds. Even entertainment seems formulaic, mining past successes to endlessly churn prequels, sequels, and remakes. Brands can do more to deliver inspiration: according to Wunderman Thompson's data, 61% of people say that "companies and brands aren't doing anything original these days." Hyperrationality is leaving us jaded, says psychologist Kirk Schneider, author of *Life-Enhancing Anxiety: Key to a Sane World*. He explains that the "efficiency-oriented life" is driving a "yearning for something deeper in our lives, a greater sense of purpose and meaning."

"We tend to live in the trappings
of the mundane, the
Boring,
and the ordinary."

/ **Jason Silva**, artist, filmmaker,
storyteller, TV personality, and futurist





Attention for sale

From the 24-hour news cycle to the reductive chatter of social media, from caring responsibilities to the productivity demands of grind culture, day after day, people face unprecedented clamor for their attention. Psychologist Mike Rucker, author of *The Fun Habit*, explains to Wunderman Thompson Intelligence: **“We have had to develop really advanced heuristics and algorithmic ways to get through life, because, if not, we would be crushed under the deluge of information coming to us.”** Despite this, we compound the problem ourselves because we fear boredom, says Kenneth Carter, Charles Howard Candler professor of psychology, Oxford College of Emory University. We fill our time with entertainment that turns into **“a constant drone of content.”** The upshot is that we feel depleted: almost half of people (46%) say they “feel tired and burned out all the time,” and 67% agree that technology is making us “feel more detached from the real world.”

The joy deficit

Mental health is now a global crisis and more than 1 billion people have a form of mental disorder, according to the World Health Organization. This was exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which will be remembered as a generation-defining event, exposing millions to the impacts of illness, grief, isolation, and sensory deprivation.

Dacher Keltner, psychology professor at University of California, Berkeley, and one of the world’s foremost experts in awe, believes that in many parts of the world we are suffering from awe deprivation. He tells Wunderman Thompson Intelligence that younger generations in particular **“are more stressed, anxious, and self-conscious than at any time in history.”**

Now more than half of generation Z and parents with children under 18 tell us they “are too stressed with daily life to think about seeking experiences that are all about fun.”

Many are missing out on the wellbeing benefits of emotions such as joy and awe (see Elements of Re-enchantment section for more).

Fraying social fabric

Is friendship in decline? Data from the Survey Center on American Life released in 2021 shows a sharp decline in friendships over the past three decades: 49% of Americans reported having three or fewer close friends, compared to 27% in 1990. The number who had no close friends at all quadrupled over the same period. This is a pattern that repeats in other countries. A 2023 study by Ipsos across 32 markets reported that, on average, 21% of respondents had no friend or relative on whom they could rely in time of need.

In more individualist societies, people report a loss of community spirit. In the United States and the United Kingdom, more than six out of 10 people agree that “there’s no sense of community anymore” compared with four out of 10 in China. In a sign of the times, disruptive scenes in theaters in London and New York exemplify a new era of toxic individuality in which etiquette and social niceties are thrown out the window.

This all matters because collective experiences are important sources of emotions such as joy and awe. **“The fundamental social challenge of the era is how to rebuild community that has been lost,”** says Keltner. Faced with multiple societal challenges that require collaboration on a systemic level, recognizing and nurturing our interdependence is becoming ever more crucial.

Elements of re-enchantment

Re-enchantment can take many forms and channel different emotions or sensations. Here we explore some of the key emotions brands can harness, and what they can do for us.

Awe and wonder

In his seminal book *Awe: The Transformative Power of Everyday Wonder*, psychology professor Dacher Keltner explains: *“When we experience awe, regions of the brain that are associated with the excesses of the ego, including self-criticism, anxiety, and even depression, quiet down. Awe shifts us from a competitive, dog-eat-dog mindset to perceive that we are part of networks of more interdependent, collaborating individuals.”*

Experiencing awe elevates our thinking beyond making meaning out of the everyday, and changes our perspective to a more prosocial outlook that can offer transcendence. Keltner describes the *“eight wonders of life”* that can induce awe, from witnessing moral beauty and mortality, and enjoying nature, music, and visual art to experiencing collective effervescence, spirituality, or an epiphany. It’s worth noting that the word awe derives from the same word as fear, so experiences can sometimes be negative as well as positive.

89%

say awe-inspiring
experiences make
them feel good

Joy and fun

Joy and fun may be regarded as frivolous and childish, but there is a growing consensus among scientists and psychologists that embracing joy has powerful mental health benefits. Psychologist Mike Rucker, author of *The Fun Habit*, defines joy simply as “**doing the things you like.**” He argues that living a joyful life, or “**putting the fun habit into play,**” forces us to act more mindfully and deliberately, which gives us more agency and control over our lives. This can create an upward spiral that improves our mental hygiene, as well as cultivating a more optimistic growth mindset.

83% actively seek out experiences that bring them joy and happiness

Fear, dystopia, and the uncanny

While fear may generally be considered a negative emotion, it can play a key role in creating experiences that are fun, thrilling, and even life affirming. Experiencing fear can quicken our heart and breathing rate, and cause us to sweat. It can also produce the feel-good chemical dopamine in our brains, in addition to stress-inducing cortisol. According to Coltan Scrivner, a behavioral scientist at the Recreational Fear Lab in Aarhus University in Denmark, the key when designing fear-inducing experiences is hitting the sweet spot to create something that is more fun and dopamine-inducing than scary.



Experiencing fear can also give us a sense of control and agency in a chaotic world. For example, those who experience anxiety and depression, and feel overwhelmed and helpless, can feel empowered by experiencing fear in a context that is finite and controllable.

50% are fascinated by content that explores dystopian themes or futures

Thrill and adventure

A thirst for newness and authentic experiences is driving consumers to seek out thrills and adventure. The power of thrill-seeking is driven by a perception of risk provided by an element of danger or unfamiliarity. The payoff is the uplift provided by the release of chemicals such as dopamine, adrenaline, and endorphins, and the hormone testosterone. Thrills and adventure provide a momentary feeling of elation and an intense emotional response that can shake people out of the malaise of grind culture. Jody Culham, Canada research chair in immersive neuroscience at Western University in Ontario, believes that, while thrill-seeking is traditionally linked to daredevils and adventure junkies in the physical world, it could be democratized through technology. She tells Wunderman Thompson Intelligence: *“I suspect the definition of a thrill-seeker is going to grow, if you’re in virtual reality and you know that you’re really safe.”*

59%
seek out experiences that will challenge them

Serendipity and surprise

Experiencing the unexpected and the surprising provides a profound uplift while jolting us out of the monotony of the everyday. As psychologist Mike Rucker explains in his book *The Fun Habit*, “**Our nucleus accumbens—a region in the brain associated with pleasure and reward expectation—responds most strongly to unexpected events.**” As efficiency-focused modern living can be both predictable and relentless, serendipity and surprise offer a route to anticipation and excitement for increasingly jaded consumers.

50% want to feel more surprise in their life

Magic and mystery

Magic, mystery, and the surreal have fascinated people for millennia, but in a hyperrational, increasingly automated world they provide a route to enchantment that stokes our imaginations and allows us to perceive the extraordinary. These mythical elements also connect us to the immense possibilities of existence outside of ourselves.

76% agree that when something is magical it allows them to escape from the mundane



Cigarette Tits (Idealized Smokers Chest II), 1999, by Sarah Lucas, part of the 2022 Objects of Desire: Surrealism and Design 1924—Today exhibition at The Design Museum in London, UK. Photography by Andy Stagg

By the Numbers

Original consumer data collected using SONAR™, Wunderman Thompson's research consultancy, from 3,009 adults aged 18+ in the United Kingdom, United States and China.

In a chaotic world, the **global outlook** is uncertain

Biggest problems facing the world today

Which of the following issues do you feel are most important for society to address?

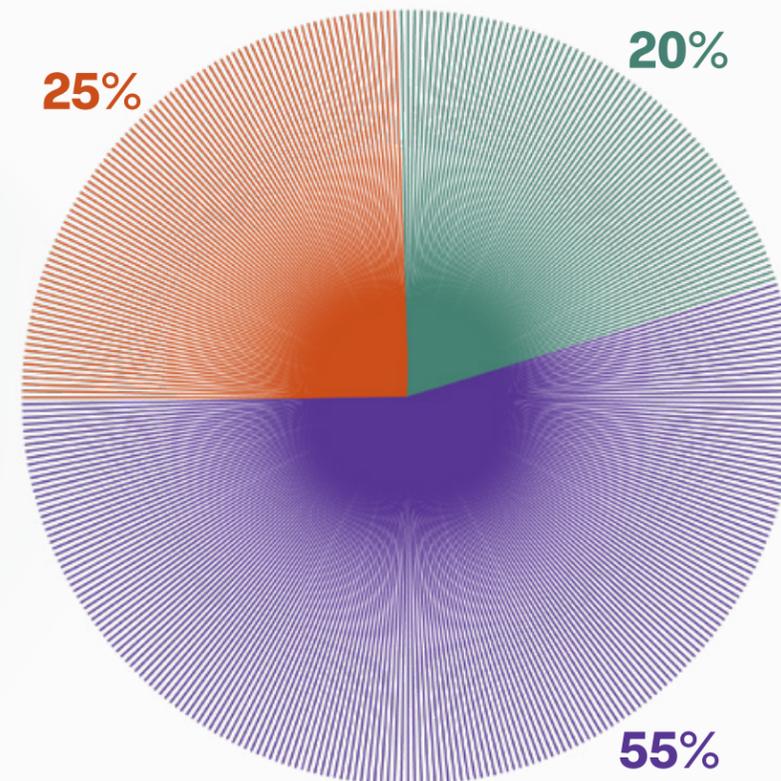
TOP 10 RANKED

1. Inflation
2. Climate change
3. Poverty and hunger
4. Access to affordable healthcare
5. Mental health
6. Wars
7. Inequality
8. Infectious diseases and epidemics
9. Crime
10. Chronic health conditions

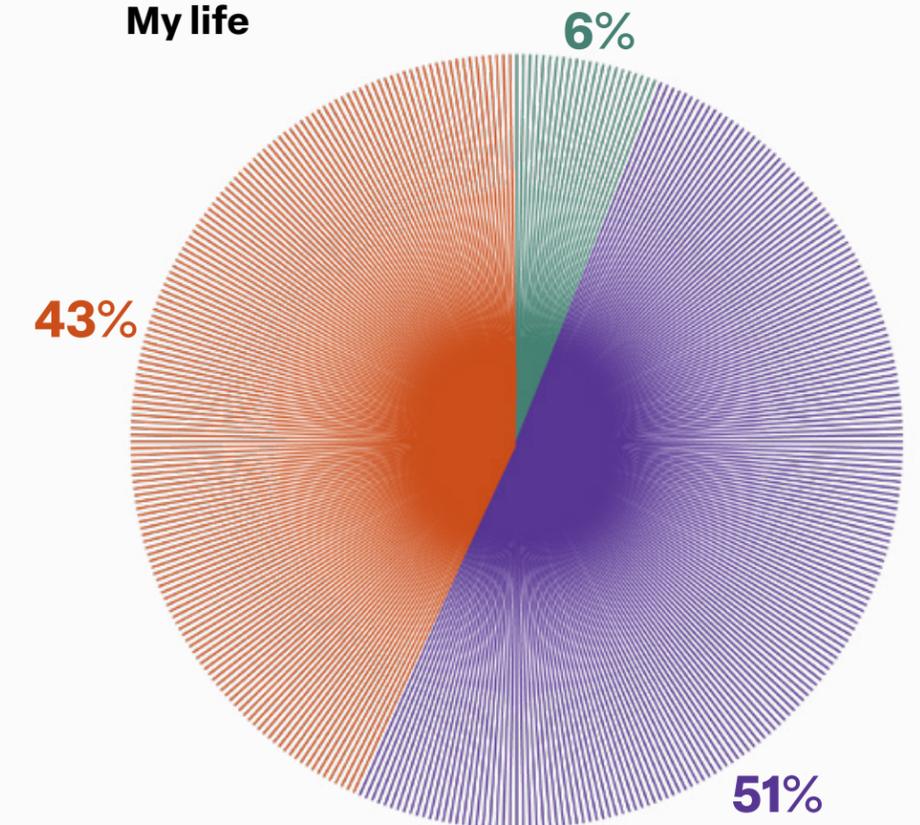
Future outlook

Will things get better, worse, or stay the same over the next 12-18 months?
(% agree)

The world

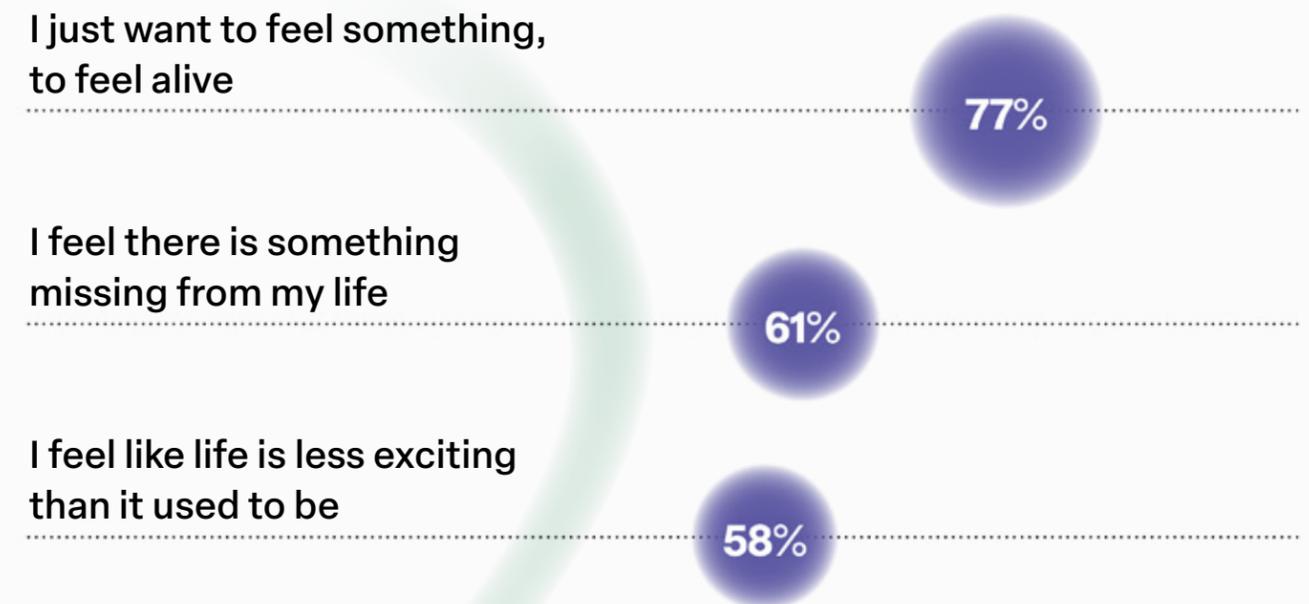
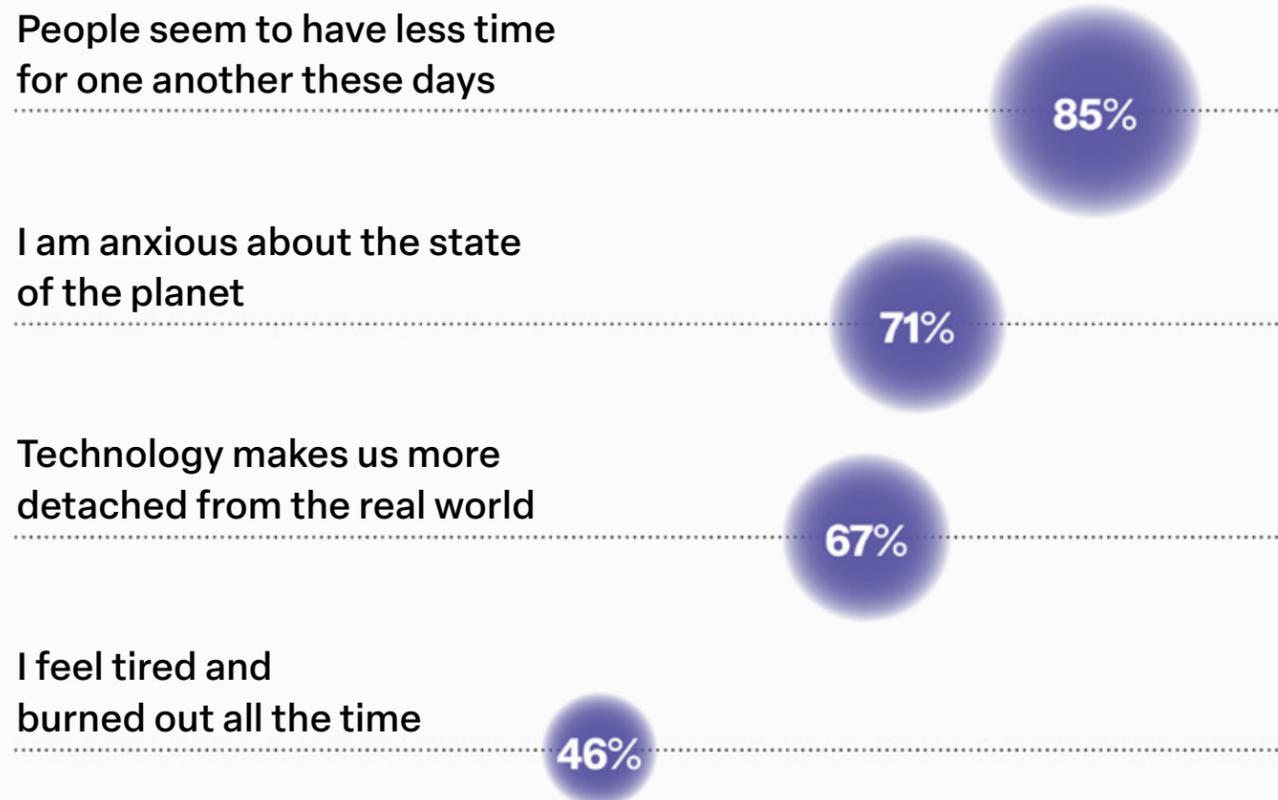


My life



■ Get worse
■ Stay the same
■ Get better

People are **feeling** depleted, detached, and uneasy



There is a widespread yearning for **re-enchantment**

I actively seek out experiences that bring me joy and happiness

83%

Awe-inspiring experiences make me feel more connected to the world

78%

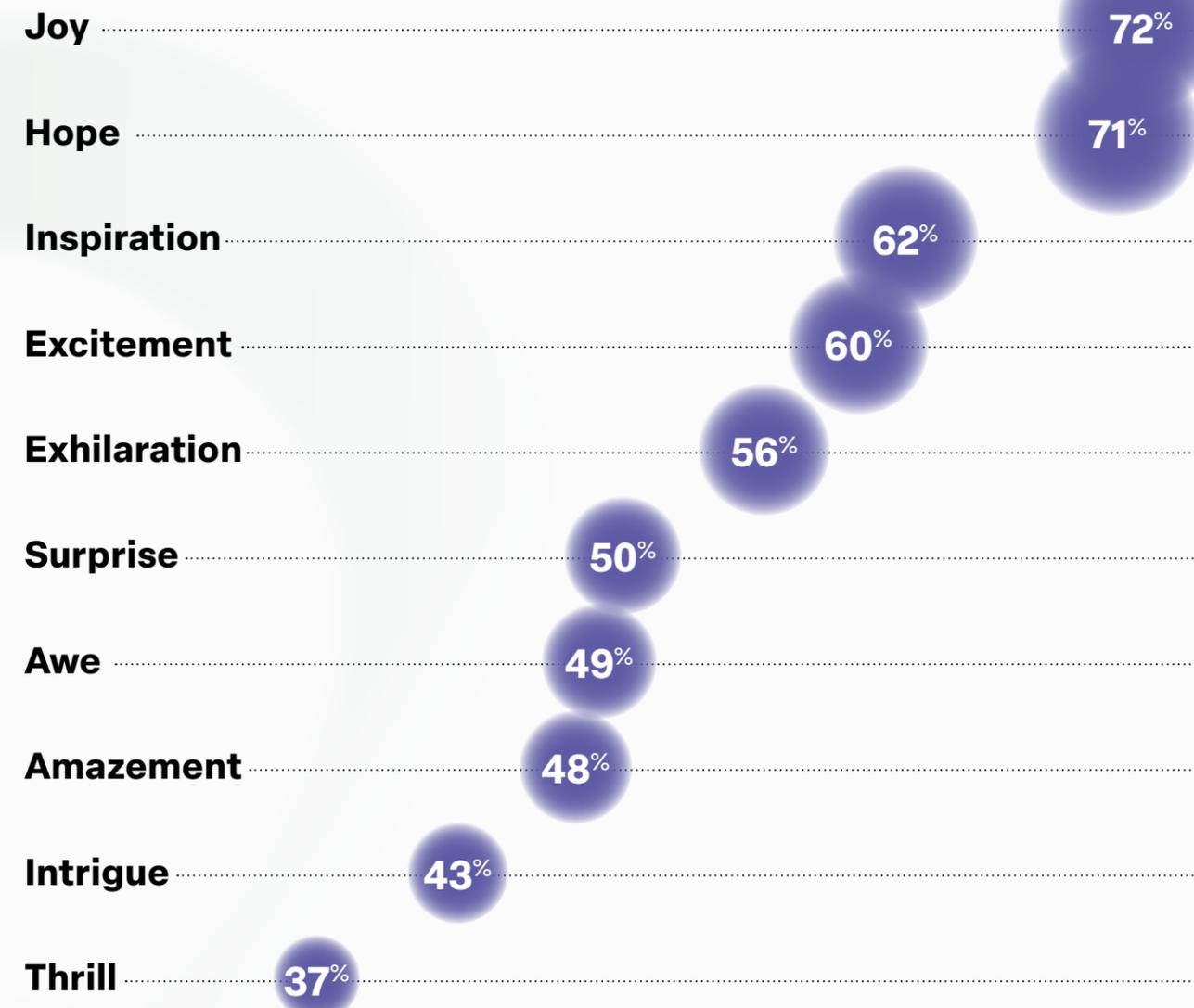
When something is magical, it allows me to escape from the mundane

76%

I prefer to spend time in places that spark my imagination

68%

People want more emotion in their lives (% agree)



People now expect brands to **re-enchant** them too

Brands should make more effort to wow me with spectacular advertising or marketing

65%

I want companies and brands to provide me with multisensory experiences

63%

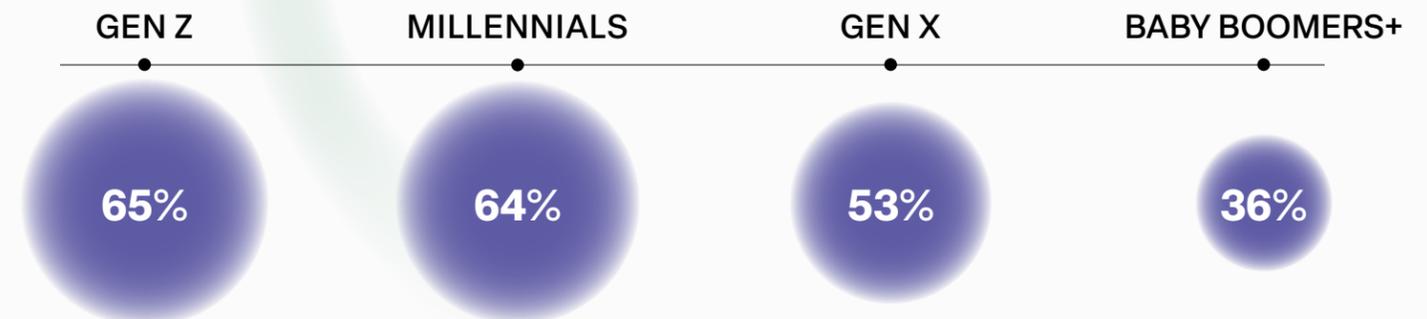
I want brands to help me to feel intense emotions

61%

70%

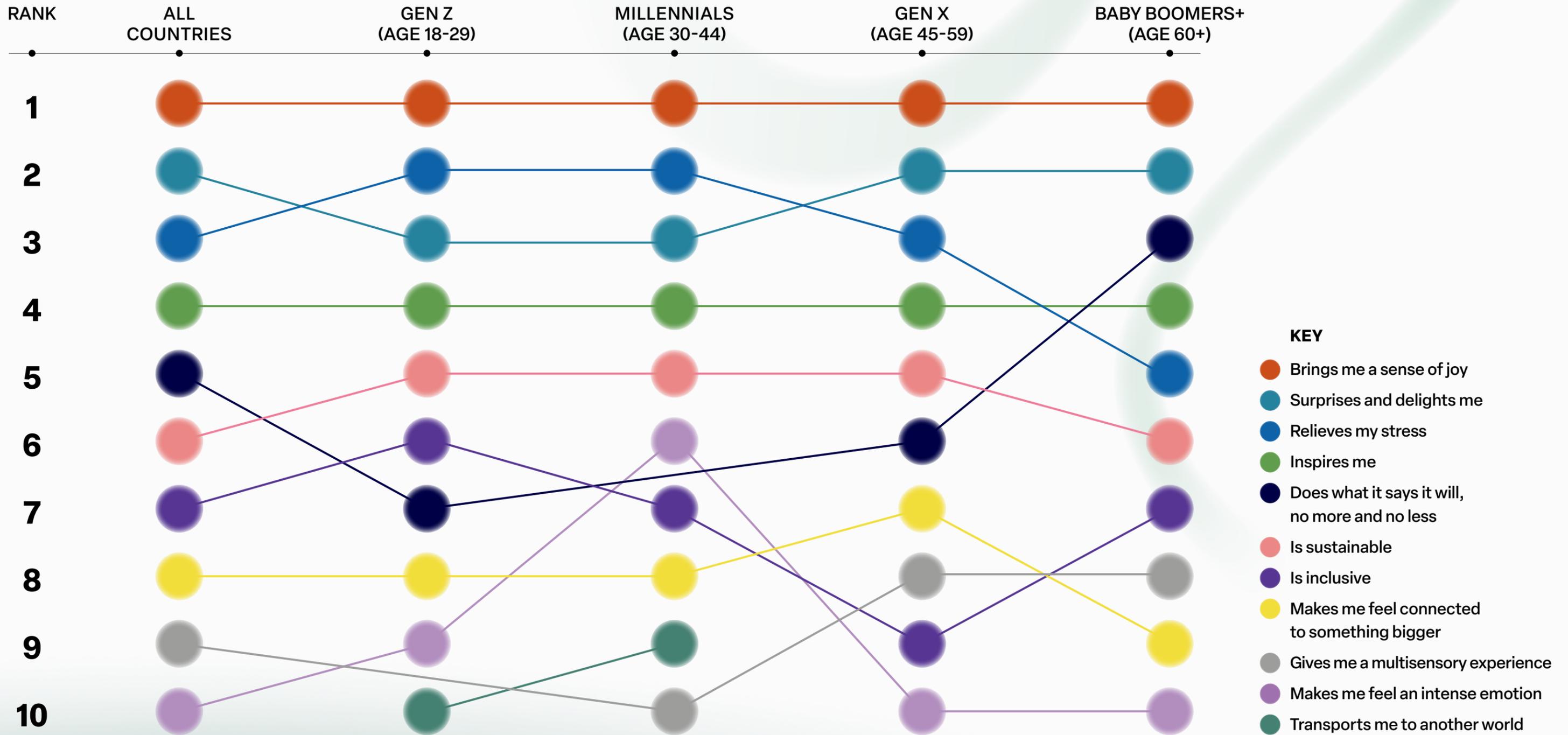
I can't remember the last time a brand did something that excited me

I want to live in a world where brands think giving customers goosebumps is important



Re-enchantment drives brand engagement

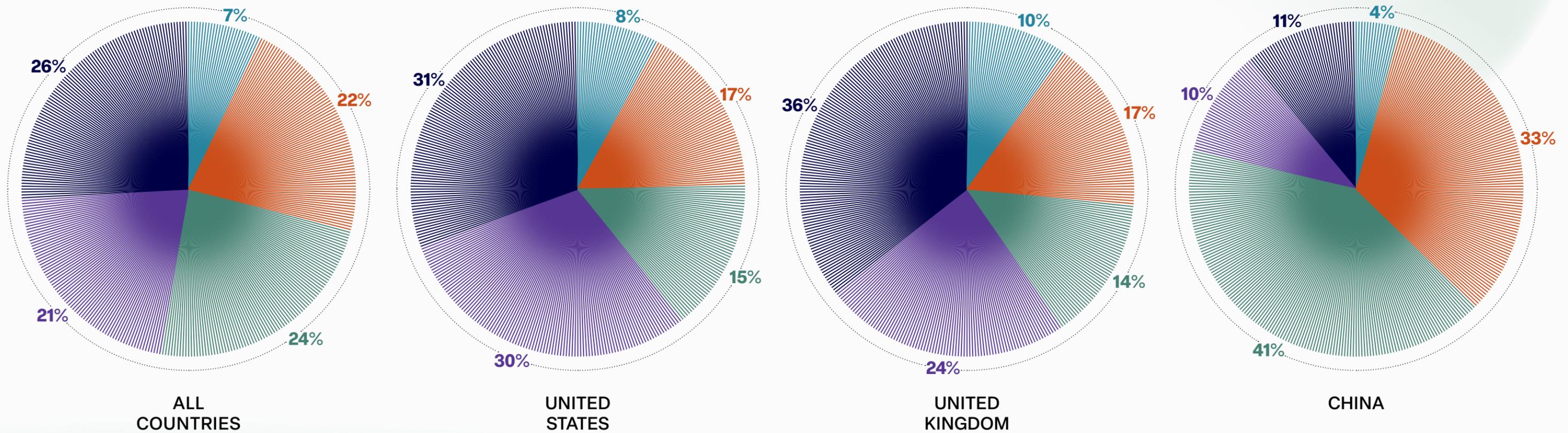
I'd be more likely to purchase a brand if it... (top 10 ranking by generation)



Re-enchantment personas

While our data shows that many people would welcome elements of re-enchantment in their lives, this can manifest in different ways. We analyzed our audience across the United States, United Kingdom, and China to identify four distinct groups with different preferences. These groups lean into dark and dystopian themes, joy and awe, thrills and novelty, and the surreal and dreamlike. Each group resonates most strongly with one aspect of re-enchantment but may also enjoy others too. To understand the unique characteristics and attitudes of each group look to the following pages and the graphic at the end of each trend. See our methodology on page 115 for full details.

- KEY**
- Dark Devotees
 - Joy Hunters
 - Optimistic Explorers
 - Digital Dreamers
 - Low-interest group



Dark Devotees (26%)

PROFILE: Single generation Z and millennial men, low to middle income

DRIVER: Fear, and dystopian content and experiences

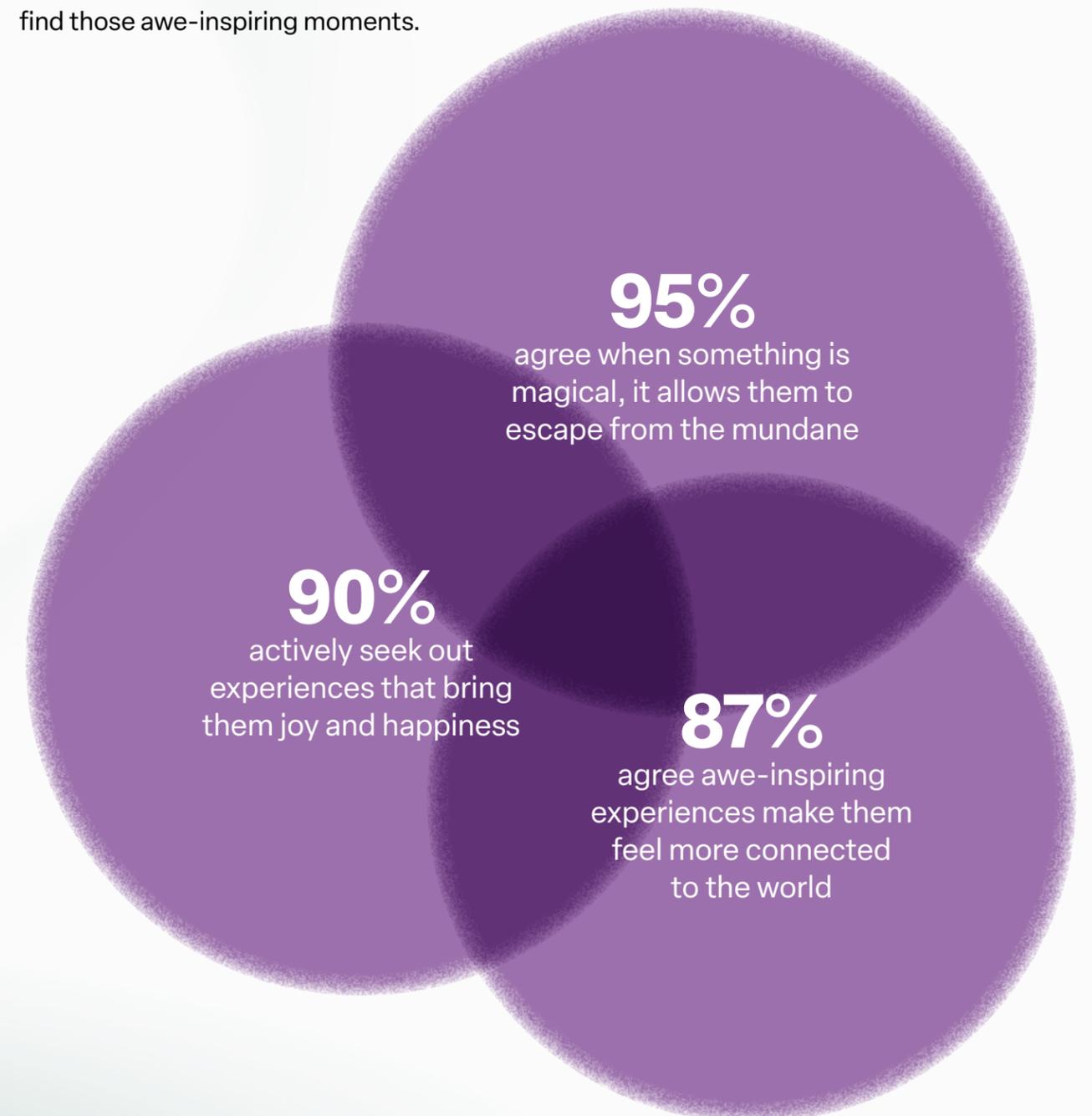
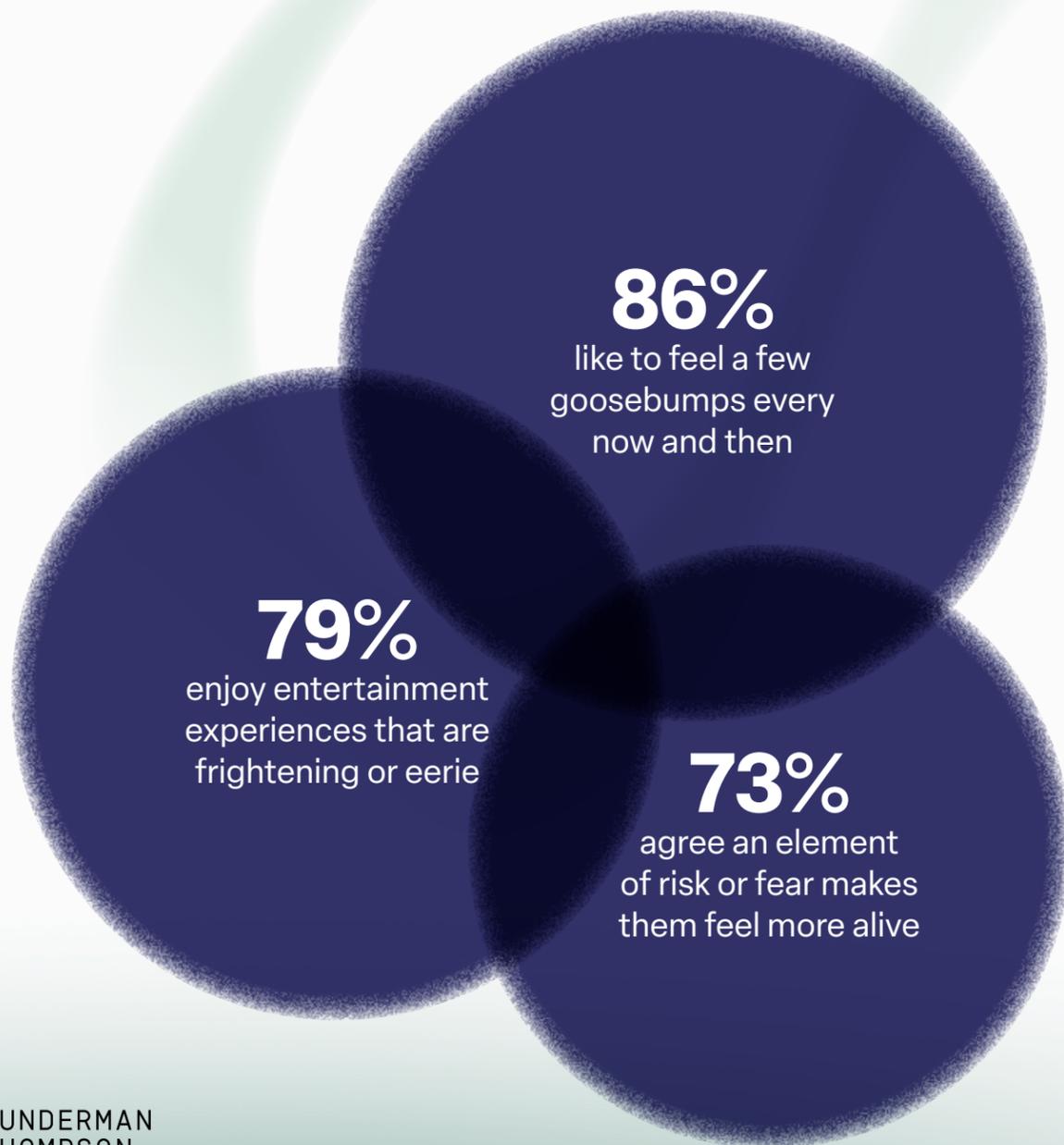
Dark Devotees are adrenaline-fueled horror enthusiasts who live for the thrill of the scare. They enjoy recreational activities like rollercoasters, off-road driving, and quad biking, and have an interest in extreme sports like skydiving. Seeking out challenge, they look to brands to excite, surprise, and wow them, and they relish a frisson of fear.

Joy Hunters (21%)

PROFILE: Married older women with children over 18, middle to high income

DRIVER: Escaping the mundane

Firm believers in the power of fun, Joy Hunters want experiences to bring them moments of joy, awe, and even a little magic. They are keen travelers, and planning is important to them—they also love seeking out the new and novel. Brands should look to fascinate or inspire them, helping them to break out of the mundane and find those awe-inspiring moments.



Optimistic Explorers (24%)

PROFILE: Older couples with children, middle to high income

DRIVER: Novelty and surprise

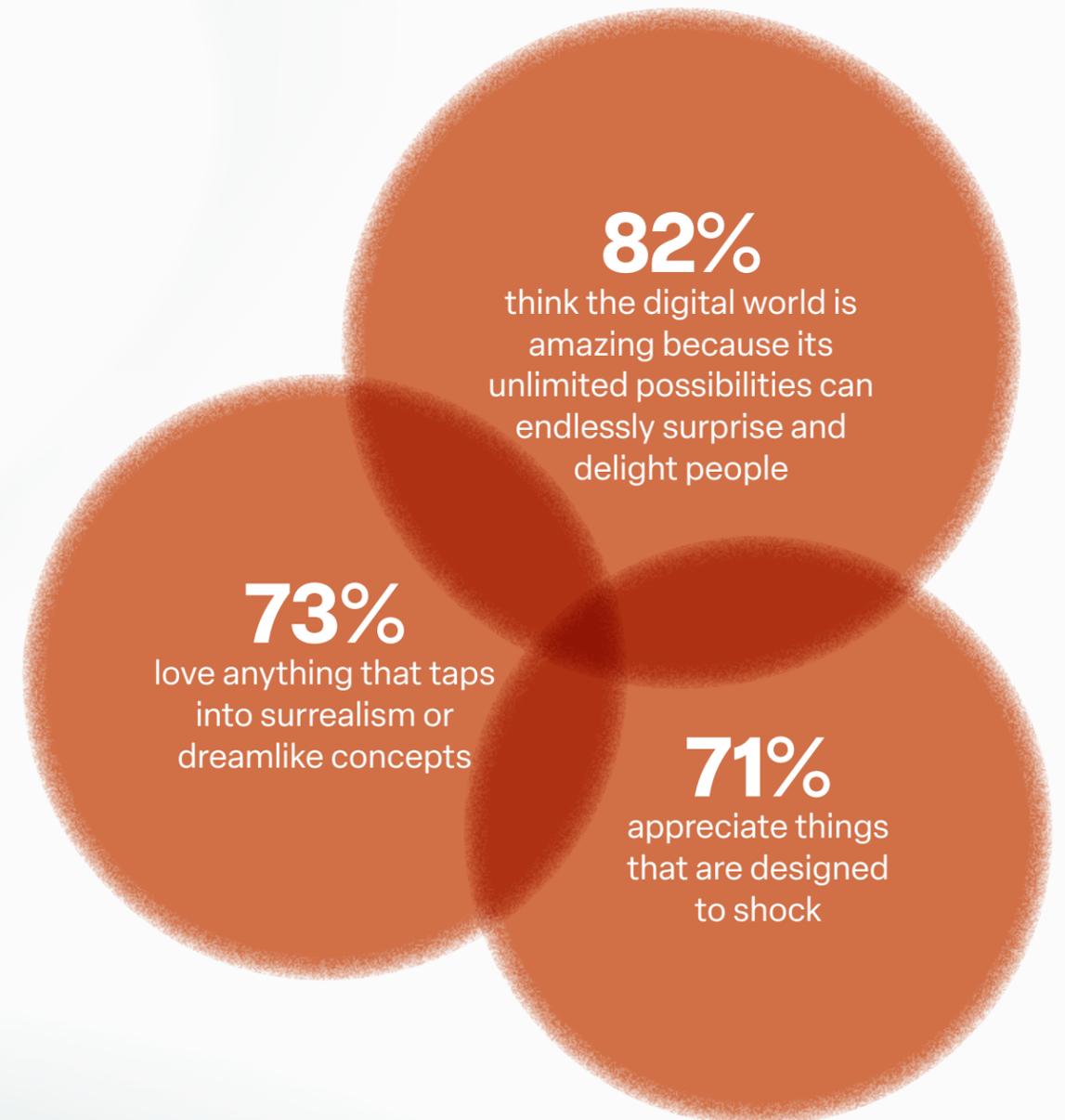
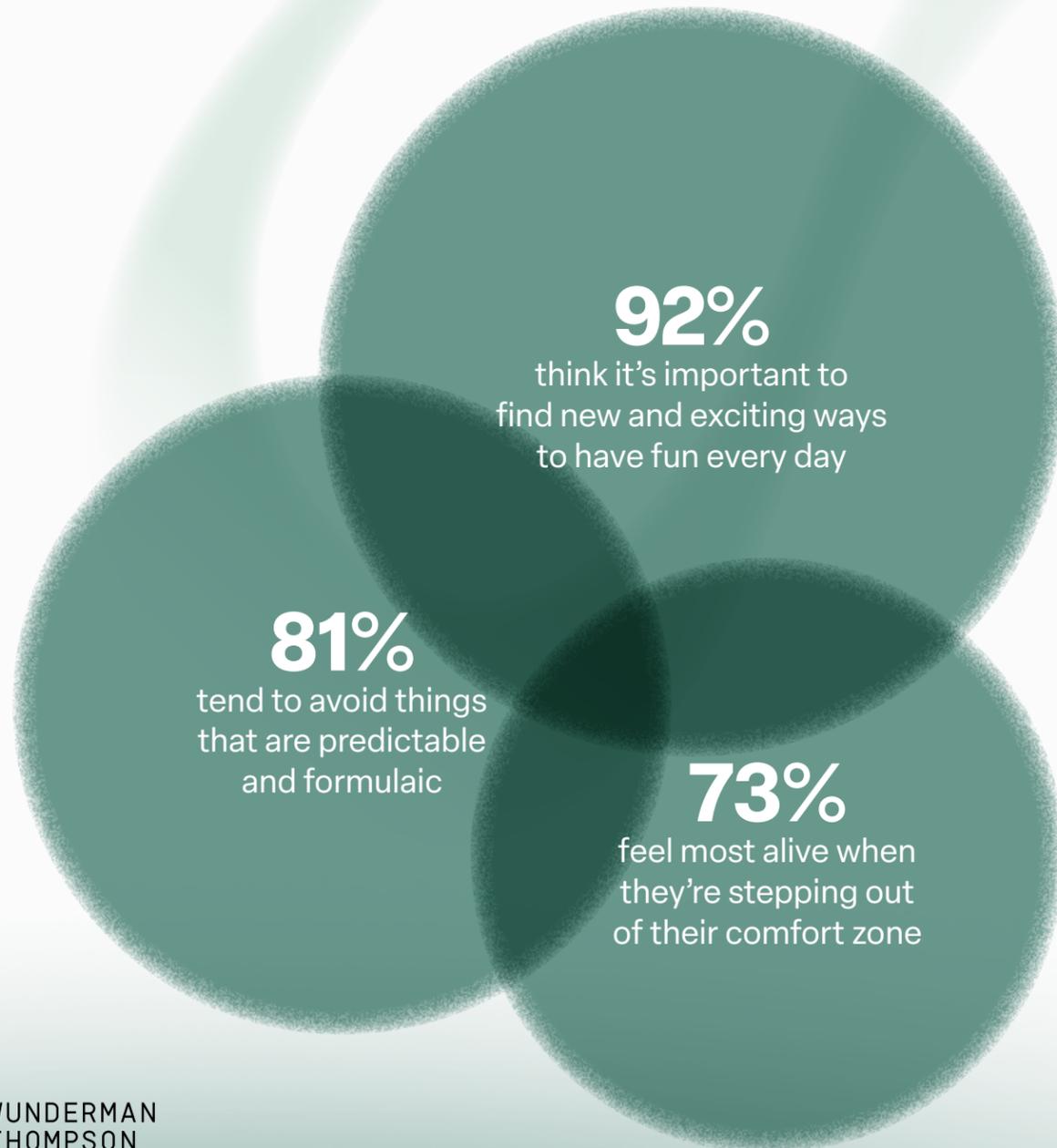
Intensity is key for Optimistic Explorers, who want to test the boundaries of their comfort zones. They thrive on the excitement of new experiences, particularly those that offer a thrill or adrenaline rush. They revel in the mystery of the unknown and show an interest in topics like the paranormal. Always seeking out fresh ways to have fun, they want brands to bring them joy, excitement, exhilaration, and even intrigue.

Digital Dreamers (22%)

PROFILE: Young gen Z and millennial couples, low income

DRIVER: Entertainment tapping into the surreal, dreams, and digital worlds

Digital Dreamers find beauty and wonder in the surreal, the fantastical, and even the shocking. They are constantly looking to be entertained, and technology makes their lives more exciting and intense. They gravitate towards digital realms, valuing the unlimited possibilities available there.



Trends

AWAKENING

Three-quarters of people say they “just want to feel something, to feel alive.” Brands can help people feel excited and inspired, shaking off malaise and emptiness with a dose of curiosity, magic, and wonder. Darker themes, and even difficult emotions, can help people make sense of real-life complexity.



Dark comforts

Content exploring dark and dystopian themes is on the rise, offering ways to process complex emotions and even prepare for future challenges.

In an uncertain world, we're seeking goosebumps. Despite, or perhaps because of, the frightening effect of the polycrisis, consumers are turning to horror and dystopian content to help them understand and cope with the horrors of the real world. Our research suggests dark content also gives people a feeling of agency during chaotic and confusing times.

Horror has never been more popular. In the United States, box office data from Nash Information Services reveals that the genre is enjoying a golden spell, having peaked at nearly 12.5% of market share in 2021, at the height of the pandemic, and tracking at close to 10% as of April 2023. Even in China, which traditionally skirts this theme, there is an emerging niche in folk-horror gaming epitomized by the popular *Paper Bride* series.

In tandem, 2023 has ushered in a deluge of dystopian entertainment exploring dark themes, from the post-apocalyptic visions of HBO's *The Last of Us* and Apple TV's *Silo* to eco-thrillers depicting nature's revenge on humanity, such as Prime TV's *The Rig*, or *The Swarm* from ZDF. More than half of our US and UK respondents, and more than a third in China, say they are fascinated by content that explores dystopian themes or futures.



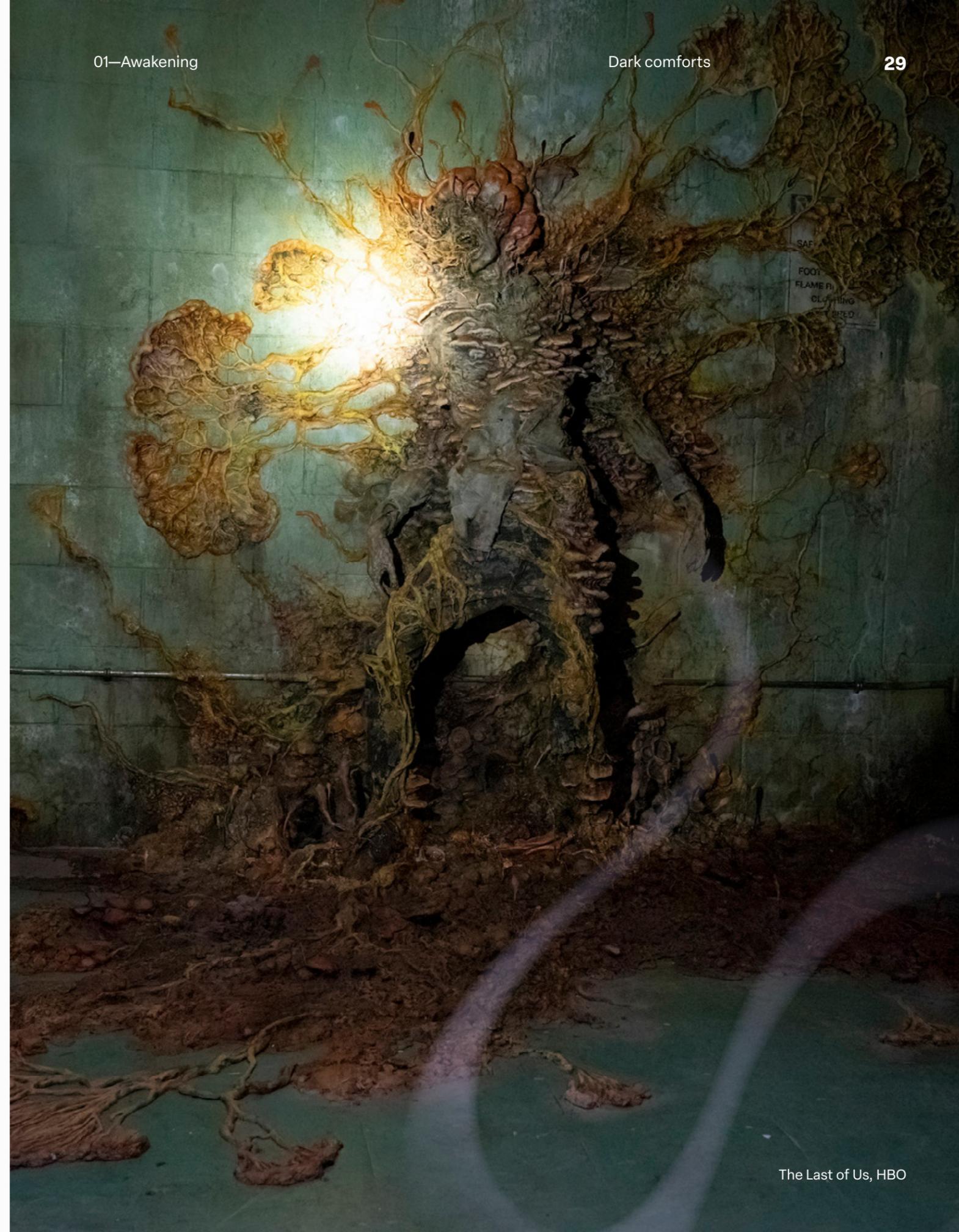
The Horror Show!, A Twisted Tale of Modern Britain at Somerset House, London 2022-2023. Harminder Judge Self Portrait (after Kali & Gene), 2009, Digital c-type print © Harminder Judge.

Content that mines supernatural themes is also on the rise. The *Uncanny* podcast, which explores tales of the paranormal, has been commissioned by the BBC as a full-fledged TV show after racking up more than 5 million listens worldwide. Danny Robins, its creator and host, explained to the *Guardian* in 2022 that when real life feels horrific, audiences **“want to feel that hit of fear.”** But why?

Horror offers a simple enjoyable adrenalin rush for some, but for others it seems to operate as a safety valve. If we inhabit a world that feels unsafe or chaotic, horror can supply a route to safely process anxiety and renew our sense of control. In our study, 55% agree that horror provides an opportunity to experience fear in a safe environment (rising to 65% of gen Z).

Coltan Scrivner, a behavioral scientist at Denmark’s Recreational Fear Lab at Aarhus University, has conducted pioneering research on horror and morbid curiosity. **“Think of recreational fear as an off ramp for anxiety,”** he suggests. **“Feeling anxious, you’re in a vicious cycle and you can’t get off. Now you open a doorway for something to feel anxious about, but it’s finite and controllable. If I get too scared, I can watch it with the lights on; I can turn the sound down; I can manipulate the source of the anxiety. It gives you a sense of control. You’re scared for 90 minutes, and then it’s over.”**

This notion of fictional horror as a salve could explain the genre’s popularity among underrepresented groups and underline rising demands for inclusion. Black horror, epitomized by Jordan Peele’s films *Get Out*, *Us*, and *Nope*, grapples with the real-life experience of racism and inequality. Likewise, for LGBTQ+ viewers, treated as “other” by heteronormative society, horror can be a means to process their experience. Even the common trope of “final girls,” who survive to the last frame of a movie to tell the tale, offers a form of cinematic female empowerment from the only genre to give women more screen time than men.





Horror and scares can also offer simulations of potential dangers, helping us to learn and prepare for the challenges ahead. This accounts for a pandemic spike in streams of the film *Contagion*, according to Scrivner. He explains that **“what people were doing is searching for this fictional example of what a pandemic looks like, at the same exact time that they were searching for real information about the pandemic.”**

Further underlining the trend, prepping, or survivalism, is on the rise worldwide, according to a CBS *60 Minutes* news story. Oprah even listed a survival prep kit among her holiday gift recommendations for 2022: the Judy Emergency Pack bundle comprises 53 pieces of equipment, including a hand-cranked radio and those all-important biohazard bags.

Our experts told us that scares can also offer a kind of transcendence, by showing us we are part of something beyond the everyday. The uncanny and the supernatural offer mystery and a sense that there might be more to life.

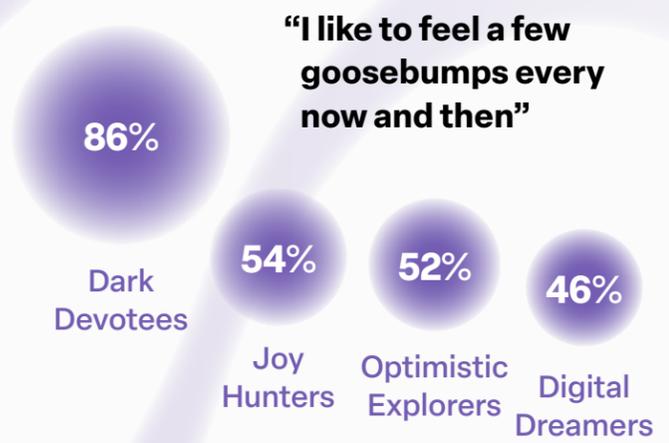
Is there a way for brands to tap into this dark fascination? Yes, say our experts, but with caveats. Scrivner suggests brands keep inclusivity in mind and position fear as a challenge that anyone can tackle, rather than something too skills oriented. A good example might be a 2022 activation from S.Ride, a Tokyo cab service, which dared passengers to ride along with Sadako, the ghost girl from *The Ring*. The “Spellbound by Sweden” campaign from Visit Sweden is a chilling audio story based on Swedish mythical creatures that is geo-restricted, designed to be enjoyed when exploring the country’s forests. Scrivner cautions that fear requires a fine balance, though: too much and the audience is terrified, too little and they are bored.

Nell Lloyd-Malcolm, CEO and founder of xydrobe, a new experiential platform for luxury commerce, tells us how the brand is using fear as an accent. **“We are working on something that I would definitely describe as scary right now, but it’s always paired with something that has a driving force behind it,”** she says. **“So we may start somewhere scary and end up somewhere inspiring.”**

For more on xydrobe, see Sensory Techtopias on page 75, and to read more about brands using fear as a communication tactic, see the Fear for Good trend on page 87.

WHY IT’S INTERESTING

People are using horror as a coping mechanism, as a way to find agency in an uncertain world, and just for fun. A frisson of fear could offer a distinct and novel route to engagement for brands: more than half of people say they enjoy feeling a few goosebumps every now and then (57%), especially millennials (67%). The key is to deliver thrills that preserve and respect audience wellbeing, explain Torquil McIntosh and Simon Mitchell, cofounders of the global design studio Sybarite: **“Exploring a darker side to curiosity can bring greater engagement, there is no question of that. However, there should be an accountability and responsibility to this.”**



The generation Z take

“Dark and grotesque themes target something that we all have inside of us that we don’t always speak about.”

Indian female, 21

“For brands that tap into feelings like horror, that gives me a bad taste in my mouth. There’s a really thin line between fearmongering and trying to be funny, or something.”

American female, 24

“Emotions like awe, horror, fear, and the grotesque can be a powerful way for brands to create an authentic, memorable, and impactful experience. By evoking strong emotions brands can deepen their connection with consumers and create a lasting impression. However, brands should also be mindful of the potential risks: it can be seen as insensitive or offensive. Be mindful of cultural sensitivities and avoid using shocking or disturbing imagery for the sake of shock value alone.”

Japanese male, 20

“Be mindful that such territories aren’t true to life and therefore brands should be careful about how far they push their audience. However, they should have fun as people often like horror, for example, for the thrill that it brings.”

Indian female, 22



The Last of Us, HBO

“Brands should
FOCUS
on using aspects like awe
and horror to reinvigorate
the numbed sensations of
the people.”

/ **Nigerian male, 21**

Mortal branding

World events have trained a lens on our own mortality, opening up cultural conversations about death.

While there is great variation in the way cultures around the world approach death, the events of the past few years have brought our relationship with it into focus. According to Wunderman Thompson data, 64% of people agree that we are more in touch with our own mortality now than before the pandemic. We are also seeing a rise in dark tourism, in which travelers seek out destinations associated with death or disaster, as explored in our Dark Zones trend in “The Future 100: 2023.”

This is giving brands, particularly those in Western countries that have typically shied away from conversations in this space, more latitude to reference them. Crucially, campaigns that illustrate or hint at our eventual demise don’t have to be morbid. They can pave the way to deeper meaning, inject *joie de vivre* and establish connection to something far greater than ourselves.

Embracing our own mortality can be life-enhancing, says psychologist Kirk Schneider. He tells Wunderman Thompson Intelligence that it’s about **“*appreciating this amazing moment that we have between two voids, one birth and one death, that we can tap into and feel a part of.*”**

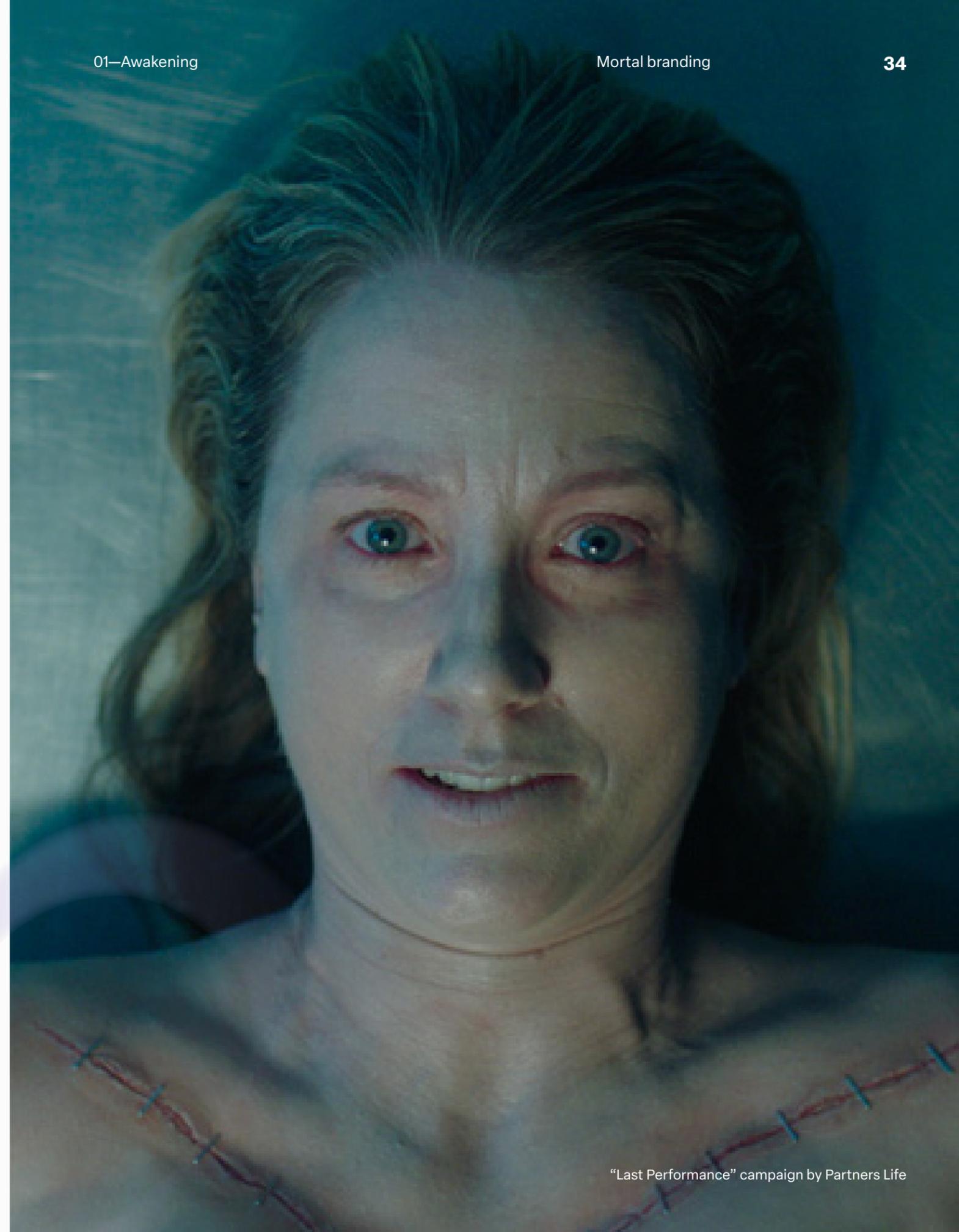
Brands are tentatively exploring opportunities to imbue storytelling with this larger-than-life meaning. Take the 2023 campaign “The Greatest Story Ever Worn: Legends Never Die” from denim apparel brand Levi’s, which dramatizes the true story of a man who so adored his 501s that he requested his loved ones all wear Levi’s jeans to his funeral.



Awareness of our own mortality can be motivating: our data finds almost universal agreement (93%) that “life is short, so we need to make the most of it.” Premium travel rentals company Plum Guide tapped into the urge to seize the day with its “No Time for Average Stays” campaign. It bluntly reminded people of how few holidays may remain in their lifetime, and even sent a troupe of people dressed as the grim reaper onto the streets of London to reinforce the message. Chief brand officer Ali Lowry told Skift, **“This notion of mortality really resonated because it’s punchy. It’s not what people might necessarily expect from a booking platform.”**

Using mortality as a shock tactic like this undoubtedly cuts through. New Zealand-based life insurance company Partners Life, for example, collaborated with the country’s leading crime drama *The Brokenwood Mysteries* to add a chilling twist to its call to action. At the end of every episode of the TV show, the murdered character was revived in the morgue to deliver their “final performance” about the value of life insurance. In South America, heart charity Fundación Cardiológica Argentina used the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 as an opportunity to raise awareness of the link between heart attacks and stress, such as that caused by watching the soccer. Its “Cancel the World Cup” campaign analyzed tweets from soccer fans and sent messages to the most stressed out and infuriated, inviting them to visit a cardiologist.

Businesses are also testing the mortality waters with innovations that stray into this territory. Amazon is developing a feature that will enable its voice assistant to simulate voices of lost loved ones; at the 2022 Re:Mars conference, Rohit Prasad, senior vice president and head scientist for Alexa, shared a demonstration depicting a deceased grandmother reading to her grandson through Alexa. Elsewhere, metaverse virtual world Somnium Space has been developing its Live Forever Mode feature, which enables users to create an AI-powered digital avatar of themselves that looks and moves like them. This, the brand claims, will live on in the digital space long after the user has died.



The notion of a brand engaging with themes as intimate as death will be anathema to some, and in certain markets taboos remain. In China, in line with cultural mores, few advertisers stray into this territory, or else take a light-hearted tone. In Baidu's 2022 short film to promote its artificial intelligence devices, an old man who has passed away honors a lifelong promise to always take his wife to the National Day celebrations by requesting a day off from heaven.

WHY IT'S INTERESTING

Cultures differ on their perspectives on death; however, the tides are gently shifting in the West. Memorable and tasteful activations that tap into a heightened awareness of our own mortality can help people connect with something greater than themselves.

"We are more in touch with our own mortality now than before the pandemic"



"The Greatest Story Ever Worn: Legends Never Die" campaign by Levi's

Full-spectrum feels

Brands are embracing the full spectrum of human emotion, acknowledging that difficult feelings are an important part of life.

Consumers are increasingly fluent in their own emotions, making use of mood-tracking devices and mood-journaling, and even buying mood-enhancing food, drinks, or perfumes. In tandem, an industry is growing up around mood optimization, largely focused on happiness.

But research increasingly shows the importance of embracing the full range of our emotions, not just the positive ones. Only by acknowledging and working with emotions like fear, anxiety, and pain, can we better understand them, gain greater control over them, and build more resilience.

In his recent book *Life-Enhancing Anxiety: Key to a Sane World*, psychologist Kirk Schneider promotes 19 steps towards cultivating awe, which include the need to **“foster an appreciation of pain as a sometime teacher.”** He tells Wunderman Thompson Intelligence: **“My experience indicates to me that one usually has to really grapple with the anxieties that come up. You have usually got to do the work to tolerate the ambiguity, the distress that can come up, which can be converted into something very powerful and meaningful, and I think much more enduring than just a quick-fix approach to awe.”**

Schneider also argues that by confronting difficult emotions we can **“avoid the much worse anxiety that has to do with the denial of facing those issues.”** Psychologist Mike Rucker adds that **“when you are emotionally flexible, then you can shorten the amount of time it takes to process trauma and you can get yourself back up.”**

Brands are now amplifying this conversation, helping to normalize negative emotions by foregrounding them in campaigns.

For its February 2023 *Beauty* issue, lifestyle media brand Highsnobiety commissioned photographer Richie Talboy to shoot “For Crying Out Loud,” a portrait series of people crying. The arresting series aimed to capture people at their most vulnerable, and at the same time normalized the idea of embracing and working with emotions that are traditionally regarded as being negative.

German fashion brand Hugo Boss’s debut NFT character collection with the Web3 company Imaginary Ones fully embraced emotional realism. Its NFTs depicted a wide range of emotions including joy, love, anger, fear and sadness and launched with the tagline: “All feelings—positive and negative—are valid, and allowing ourselves to feel them is key to our wellbeing and good mental health.”

Other brands are exploring emotions as a choice filter. Mondelēz brand Philadelphia opened a Feeladelphia pop-up restaurant where diners could order dishes based on the emotions they wanted to feel, such as allure, curiosity, and spontaneity. Lifestyle marketplace Planet Woo’s Shop by Mood feature allows shoppers to filter products via non-traditional or quirky mood states, including “trippy” and “horny.”

Available in grey, yellow, and why did I marry you?



IKEA is introducing **Couples Counsellors** to help foster better communication in relationships. Book your appointment now to find a better shopping experience.



Agreed on your child’s name but can’t agree on a coffee table?



IKEA is introducing **Couples Counsellors** to help foster better communication in relationships. Book your appointment now to find a better shopping experience.



Made it through the pandemic together but can’t make it through the storage department?



IKEA is introducing **Couples Counsellors** to help foster better communication in relationships. Book your appointment now to find a better shopping experience.



Looks great in the study, no it’s a game room, no it’s a study, no it’s a game room.



IKEA is introducing **Couples Counsellors** to help foster better communication in relationships. Book your appointment now to find a better shopping experience.



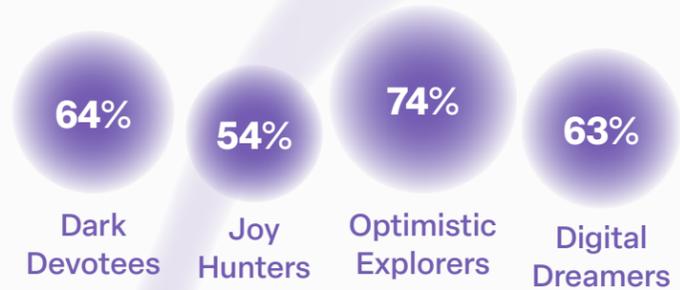
Al-Futtaim Ikea in the UAE is going a step further, holding up a mirror to relationships with its 2023 “Counselling Couch” campaign. In a nod to the strain put on couples by a trip to the furniture store, the retailer added a QR code to selected items that invited customers to book an in-store couples’ therapy session to talk it out.

Wunderman Thompson Intelligence’s survey suggests that consumers are open to the idea of brands helping them explore their emotions, with 61% saying they want brands to make them feel intense emotions. More than half (59%) say they seek experiences that mentally or physically push them out of their comfort zone, while nearly a fifth (18%) of consumers in the United States and the United Kingdom said they’d be more likely to buy from a brand that challenged them.

WHY IT’S INTERESTING

There is an opportunity for brands to take the lead on emotional literacy, empowering people to embrace the full spectrum of their feelings, and to give them encouragement and safe spaces to tackle these tricky but ultimately enriching conversations.

“I want brands to help me to feel intense emotions”



“When you are emotionally flexible, then you can shorten the amount of time it takes to process **trauma** and you can get yourself back up.”

/ **Mike Rucker**,
Psychologist and
author of *The Fun Habit*

The generation Z take

“If someone is just thinking about the positive and ignores the negative side, they don’t actually get to feel their emotions, or get to know why they’re sad. So it’s definitely good to explore negative emotions.”

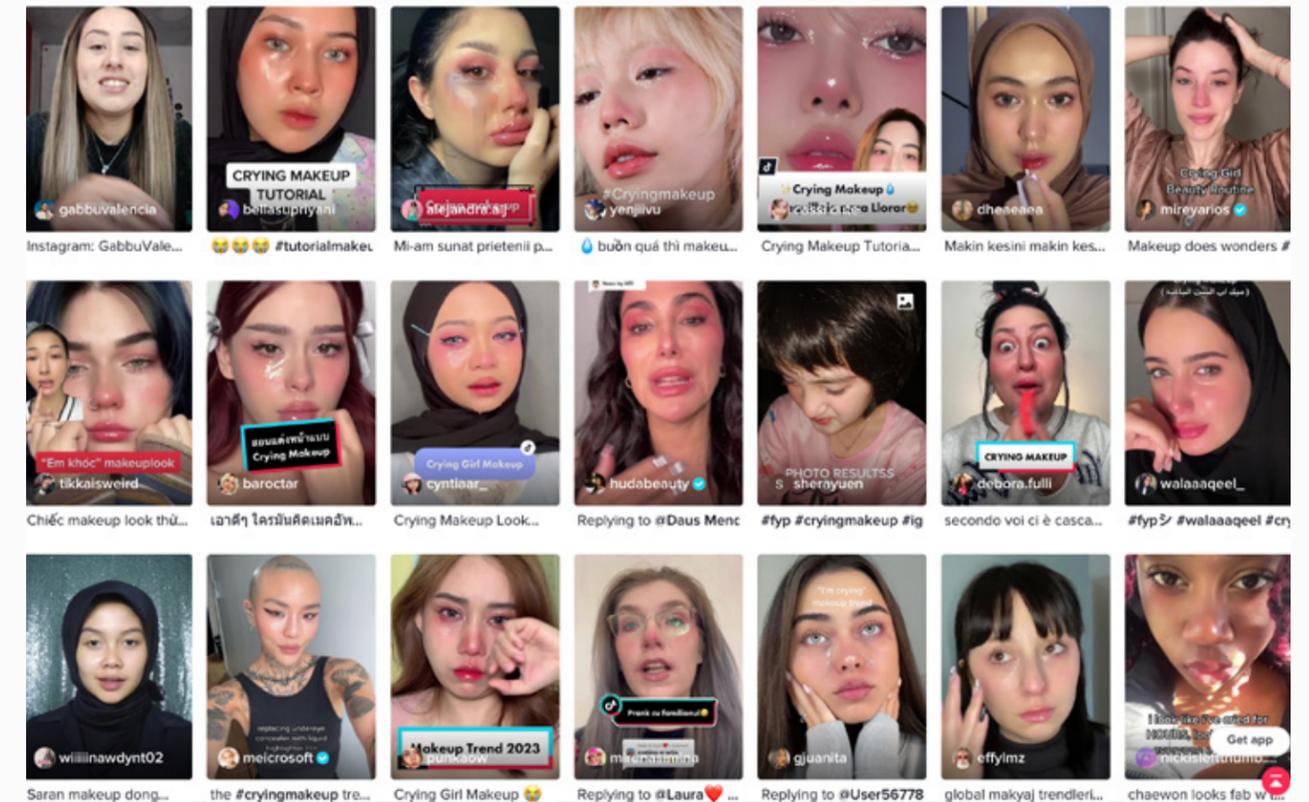
British male, 24

“I consider myself a pretty happy person—but someone who’s happy all the time, that’s not real. Real people have different emotions and it’s good to have them because, if you don’t, you’re not going to value the happiness, the good emotions.”

American female, 27

“I definitely explore the negative emotions, but in a positive way. I’m gen Z, I’m a therapy girl. You have to be able to understand why you’re sad, why you’re anxious, or why you’re upset about something so that you can get over it and be happy.”

American female, 23



#cryingmakeup trend on TikTok

“It would be a privilege to choose how I actually feel—but we can’t. I feel like every hour that goes by I probably focus on a different **emotion**, regardless of whether it’s positive or negative.”

/ British female, 19

Generative awe

Brands are racing to harness the vast and awe-inspiring potential of generative AI.

Artificial intelligence (AI) is revolutionizing our world at an exponential pace with generative AI, the buzz term on everyone's lips. This subfield of AI generates novel content such as images, music, text, and even code that is almost indistinguishable from that created by humans. Already 51% of people globally have tried or are interested in trying generative AI tools, according to Wunderman Thompson data, highlighting the blistering pace at which this technology has evolved to capture public imagination.

The state-of-the-art AI chatbot ChatGPT has garnered a wave of publicity since its launch by OpenAI in November 2022. Early adopters describe it as a productivity marvel that almost defies comprehension in its ability to handle dialogue.

But there is more to generative AI than just efficiency, and it's already infiltrating the creative world, causing brands to take notice. Image generators Midjourney and Stable Diffusion enable users to produce high-quality visuals quickly and easily using text prompts, even without prior training. So lifelike are some of the AI-generated images that people have been duped into thinking they are genuine, such as the hyper-realistic image of Pope Francis wearing a white, ankle-length puffer coat that went viral in March 2023.



For brands the race is now on to leverage the power of generative AI. In March 2023, Coca-Cola launched the Create Real Magic contest, which invited fans to use generative AI tools to create their own branded artworks. A series of videos for the Jordan Tourism Board, released in February the same year, show the country's landmarks reimagined by AI. Google now has plans to introduce technology that can generate new advertisements based on existing content within months, according to a *Financial Times* article in April. While some worry that generative AI could jeopardize human creativity, others are embracing its potential.

Benjamin Benichou, CEO and cofounder of tech company Drop, tells Wunderman Thompson Intelligence that ***“by collaborating with AI, we can reach new heights of creativity and push the boundaries of what’s possible.”*** He has caused a stir on social media with his innovative generative AI concepts, depicting everything from hypothetical brand mashups to his series of Impossible Stores, which included Nike stores on top of Mount Everest or on Mars. Benichou believes that AI’s capacity to generate truly novel ideas is what’s driving the awe.





AI-generated content allows artists to build relationships with technology. Colombian creative director Daniel Shambo says, **“Once I start with an idea, then it becomes a conversation with the artwork.”** The collaborative element is key: for him, it’s about the people using the tools. He states that **“the technology is just the thing that’s in the middle—it’s like the ball in a soccer game—but what’s important is the people around it and how they’re playing with that ball.”**

Nima Abbasi, partner at creative studio Maison Meta, believes generative AI could be a democratizing force, driving inclusion for people from diverse backgrounds. He tells Wunderman Thompson Intelligence that AI is **“flattening and broadening the playing field.”** As a founding partner of the inaugural AI Fashion Week in April 2023, Maison Meta is hoping to uncover the next big talent in fashion. The platform has attracted designers from all over the world, says Abbasi: **“For AI Fashion Week we have people from Nigeria, from Uruguay—we have people from all over the world. You just wouldn’t expect normally for those people to be participating in such a piece.”**

Generative AI is also being used to revive access to lost memories and cultures. As part of BIDA Fair—Bolivia International Digital Art, Bolivian-Australian filmmaker, technologist, and artist Violeta Ayala created AI portraits of her grandmothers that bring to life elements of Quechua culture, history, and resistance not captured in photographs.

Unsurprisingly, the conversation surrounding AI is complex. Lawmakers struggle to keep pace with its development, resulting in intellectual property and copyright issues. This makes it a challenging environment for brands to navigate. In March 2023, Italy became the first Western country to block ChatGPT, over a lack of transparency in its use of data. Some AI experts and tech leaders (including Elon Musk) are calling for a pause in AI development to allow time for safety protocols to be put in place. **“Pandora’s box has been opened and it’s just the beginning. We definitely have to put some ethics behind it, and the government has to put in place some laws to control generative AI’s outputs and results,”** Cyril Foiret, founder and creative director of Maison Meta, tells Wunderman Thompson.

WHY IT’S INTERESTING

Generative AI provokes wonder and alarm in equal measure. As the technology continues to advance at an unprecedented rate, we can expect a host of exciting applications, but some experts worry these could surpass human understanding. While brands must move with caution, those that embrace the potential of generative AI are poised to be at the forefront of awe-inducing creativity and innovation in the years to come.

“I am interested in trying generative AI tools”



MONCLER
GENIUS

The Art of Absolute Imagination
adidas Originals



Benjamin Benichou (he/him), United States

Benjamin Benichou is the CEO and cofounder of California-based tech company Drop. He uses generative AI to create hypothetical brand mashups and concept stores that defy imagination. We asked him why he's excited about generative AI and the possibilities it unleashes.

One of the most exciting aspects of generative AI is its ability to create novel ideas and combinations that we might never have thought of on our own. It exposes us to new perspectives and encourages us to break free from our usual thought patterns.

By collaborating with AI and leveraging its strengths, we can expand our creative horizons and push the boundaries of what's possible.



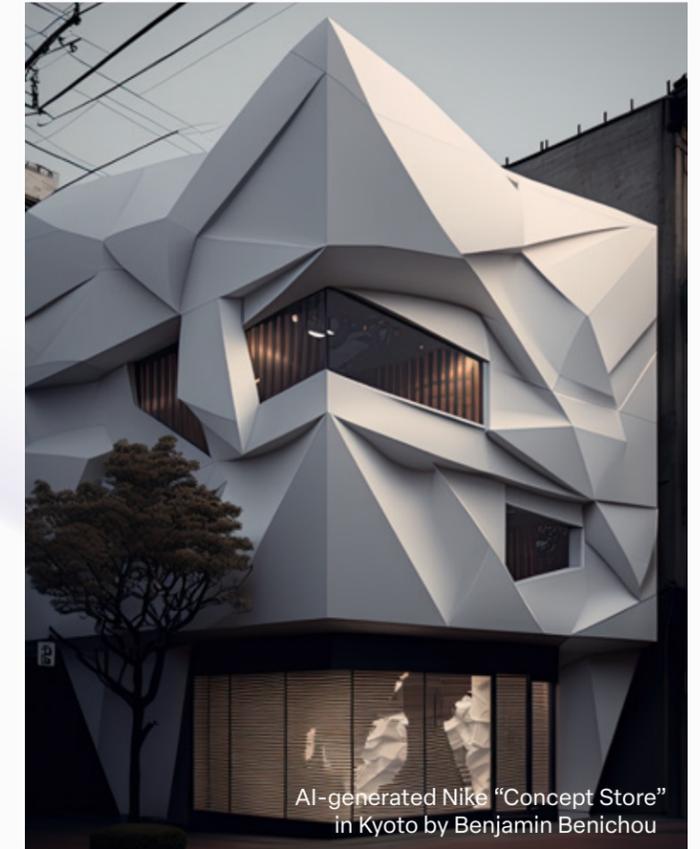
AI-generated Nike "Impossible Store" on Mars by Benjamin Benichou

My Impossible Stores series serves as a prime example of how generative AI can help unlock new levels of creativity. As someone who isn't an architect or a 3D designer, I was able to leverage AI to overcome these limitations and venture into a whole new creative realm.

While some of the concepts might seem impractical at first (or truly impossible), they serve as a starting point for further exploration and refinement. These unconventional ideas can inspire real-world retail design by pushing architects and designers to think beyond the norm.

Happy accidents happen all the time when working with generative AI, and they should be embraced.

If you have a very specific idea in mind and try to force the AI to create exactly what you're envisioning, you may end up frustrated. Instead, I use AI as a sparring partner, starting from an idea and iterating around it.



AI-generated Nike "Concept Store" in Kyoto by Benjamin Benichou

AI does have limitations, but I believe it's not the technology itself that limits our creativity, but rather how we choose to use it.

It's possible that, as AI continues to evolve, it may generate ideas that surpass our current understanding and imagination.

While it's difficult to predict the exact impact this would have on creativity, one thing is certain: the fusion of human and artificial intelligence has the potential to drive innovation and redefine the way we approach the creative process.



Absurdist retail

Brands and retailers are using the surreal, the dreamlike, and the wondrous to inspire, helping consumers find beauty in a chaotic world.

The revival of the 20th-century surrealist movement is *“an aesthetic reflection of the insanity of our reality,”* as British journalist Jess Cartner-Morley put it in a February 2023 piece for *Elle*. The parallels are being drawn not just by artists and philosophers but also by brands, which are repurposing surrealism’s ability to find beauty within the absurd and unconventional.

Two-thirds of millennials and gen Zers express a liking for anything that taps into surrealism or dreamlike concepts, and we’re now seeing the aesthetic spread, even touching mainstream brands and retailers that are using the kooky and surreal to re-enchant consumers.

One expression of this trend sees the cartoonish brought to life. Brands MSCHF and Red Wing Shoes both launched comically oversized boots in early 2023. MSCHF’s Big Red Boots, which resemble something Japanese anime character Astro Boy might wear, sold out in minutes and were omnipresent at New York Fashion Week. US-based high-quality workman’s boots manufacturer Red Wing Shoes sought to underline the quality of its craftsmanship by lovingly recreating a pair of Mario’s boots to tease the new *Super Mario Bros Movie*.

While high fashion has long been associated with outlandish concepts designed to shock and invoke awe, now appliance manufacturer KitchenAid is getting in on the action. To launch Hibiscus, its 2023 color of the year, the brand worked with designer Marta Del Rio to create a surreal fashion show at NYFW AW23 inspired by its most iconic products, the Artisan Stand Mixer and the K400 Blender. Models wore hot-fuchsia dresses featuring over-the-top, bubbly, cartoony shapes, accessorized with metal kitchenware details.

With consumer spending facing a continued squeeze, retailers are also looking to the surreal to woo consumers back into stores. In January 2023, Louis Vuitton launched its new Yayoi Kusama collection, a second collaboration with the avant-garde Japanese artist. Stores around the world were suddenly covered in her signature dots, with some including larger-than-life animatronic robots modeled after the artist. The flagship store in Paris even featured a giant sculpture of Kusama peering into the windows from the rooftop.

Elsewhere, the Grand Numéro de Chanel exhibition ran from December 2022 to January 2023 in Paris. It took visitors on a multisensory, dreamlike journey with magicians, dancers, and olfactory experiences. Featuring giant fragrance bottles and oversize chess pieces, the ethereal installation evoked Alice's journey through the looking glass.



A dress from Marta Del Rio's capsule collection for KitchenAid launching their 2023 color of the year. Photography for Paper Magazine by Tom Kerr

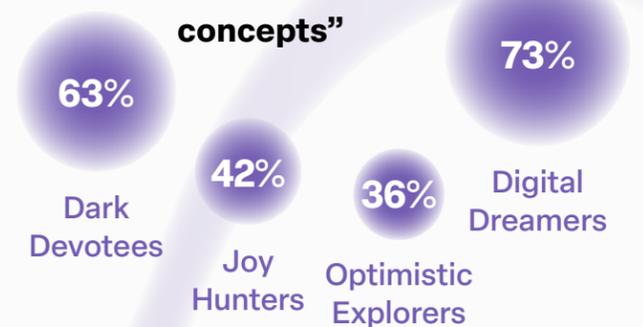


Aiming to entice the 68% of people who prefer to spend time in places that spark their imagination, not to mention the 52% of people who are willing to pay more for elevated shopping experiences, London-based global design studio Sybarite created the subterranean SKP Chengdu shopping center in China to bring people into a parallel world. The studio’s cofounders, Torquil McIntosh and Simon Mitchell, tell Wunderman Thompson Intelligence that **“the parallel world is a recurring metaphor. It suggests a universe that is similar to our own but with subtle differences that play to intrigue and wonderment—familiar yet different in unexpected ways, if you like.”**

WHY IT’S INTERESTING

According to McIntosh and Mitchell, **“customers are looking for a sense of discovery and escapism from the everyday, thus they relate to spaces that transport them away and take them on an adventure.”** In an age when fake news and global crises abound, people are using surrealism to break free from the mundane and to help them find fun and beauty in the absurd.

“I love anything that taps into surrealism or dreamlike concepts”





Selling serendipity

Jaded consumers want brands to delight them with the surprising and the unexpected.

In a world increasingly focused on speed and efficiency, consumers have an appetite for an injection of mystery, surprise, and serendipity into their lives. But our research suggests that brands are not doing enough to deliver on this. Nearly half of people surveyed (48%) say they tend to avoid things that are predictable and formulaic, yet a massive 70% say they can't remember the last time a brand did something that excited them.

In his book *The Fun Habit*, psychologist Mike Rucker explains that **“we are drawn to the unexpected elements of surprise.”** Wunderman Thompson Intelligence research confirms this appetite. Half (50%) of those surveyed say they'd like more surprise in their life, while 74% agree that they enjoy an element of mystery and surprise in the things they do. This unlocks pockets of opportunity for brands to deliver an escape from the everyday.

In summer 2022, Japanese train operator JR West launched “Dice Travel,” a serendipity-based campaign to encourage people to explore new destinations. Travelers rolled a virtual dice on the JR West app, which dictated the ticket they received to one of six corresponding locations. All round-trip tickets cost the same (¥5,000), encouraging customers to embrace the adventure of the unexpected and the unplanned.



British online travel company Journee builds on this approach, booking vacations for customers to surprise locations. Users fill in a 10-minute questionnaire to be matched with a secret destination, only finding out where they're going when they open an envelope at the airport.

Ultra-fast Swedish food delivery service Kavall is also trialing a serendipitous offering with its Kavall Unplan solution. Those feeling uninspired in the kitchen can order an Unplan delivery in 10 minutes, which brings a random meal kit box containing a surprise recipe and ingredients. A limited number of lucky people have even been given a physical Kavall Unplan button, which they simply press whenever they want a surprise meal delivered.

Unpacking the lure of the unexpected, Torquil McIntosh and Simon Mitchell, cofounders of global design studio Sybarite, tell Wunderman Thompson Intelligence that ***“creating a glimpse into the unknown and unexpected conjures up anticipation and excitement.”*** This is an apt description of Coca-Cola's limited-edition Creations range, which uses mystery and intrigue to engage consumers, rather than traditional product cues based on ingredients, provenance, and flavor. Instead, options such as Starlight, Byte, and Dreamworld deliver the taste of outer space, pixels, and dreams, creating FOMO around a product that simply must be experienced.





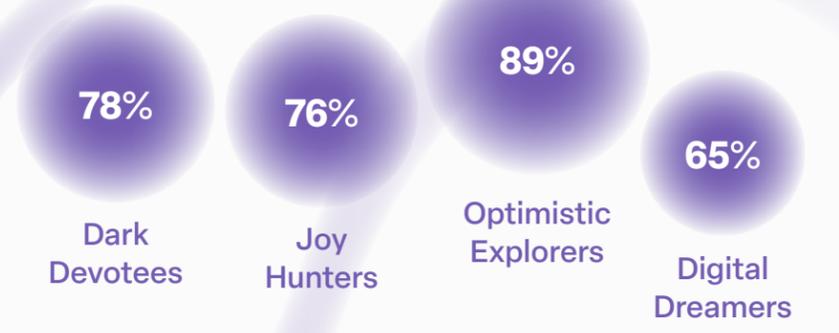


Surprise and delight can also be delivered via customer service that exceeds expectations, like the impromptu free ukulele lessons for passengers on a Southwest Airlines flight to Hawaii in 2022. It can come from unexpected rewards like Brewdog’s “Checkout Chancer” ecommerce promotion that gave one in every 25 customers the value of their order back in credit. And it can be delivered through product curation, collaborations, and launches that put newness and discovery ahead of predictability.

WHY IT’S INTERESTING

Regardless of the delivery mechanic, mystery and surprise are becoming increasingly important tools for brands looking to break through the noise and deliver meaningful experiences. Wunderman Thompson data shows that 45% of consumers would be more likely to buy from companies and brands that surprise and delight them, so money is being left on the table by brands and companies focused solely on efficiency.

“I enjoy an element of mystery and surprise in the things I do”



Transcending

02

Experts say that when we feel part of something that's bigger than ourselves, it's good for our wellbeing. We quiet the chatter in our minds and focus our attention outward instead—it's prosocial. From the wonders of nature to the dazzling power of AI, there are many ways brands can tap into the power of transcendence, delivering experiences that enthrall the senses and spark imagination.

“Maybe ‘the point’ isn’t to live
more, in the literal sense of a longer
or more productive life, but rather,

to be more
alive
in any given moment.”

/ **Jenny Odell**, *Saving Time:
Discovering a Life Beyond the Clock*, 2023

Transcendent wellness

As a growing body of research points to their wellbeing benefits, we are seeing a rise in experiences designed to simulate or provoke self-transcendence—in other words, losing ourselves and forgetting our worries.

Mental wellness is perhaps the defining issue of our time. We live in an age of hypervigilance, where we monitor threats present and future, seen and unseen. The demands of work and home are leaving many exhausted: almost half of people (46%) say they feel tired and burned out all the time. Screens commandeer and consume what's left of our attention.

“People are feeling more estranged from themselves, both internally and between each other, because of this often efficiency-oriented life we live. They’re yearning for something deeper in their lives,” concludes psychologist Kirk Schneider, speaking to Wunderman Thompson Intelligence.

Transcendence, often associated with deep meditation, spirituality, or psychedelic drugs, delivers the serene and comforting realization that you are part of a bigger whole. It can help people to leave behind the stresses of the everyday and quiet the ceaseless chatter of the “monkey brain.” Astronauts often report this sensation when observing the earth from space, in a phenomenon known as the overview effect. Now a wave of scientists and creatives are using technology to deliver a similar effect to a wider audience.

Jason Silva, a Venezuelan-American artist, filmmaker, storyteller, TV personality, and futurist, is using real-time generative artificial intelligence to create “Cyberdelics”—trippy visual narrative films that deliver a psychedelic-type experience to transport the viewer. Silva sees these *“philosophical espresso shots”* as a positive tool for mental wellness that can *“get us out of rumination so that we can finally be in the deep now. Anything that provides refuge from the over-rumination that characterizes mental distress, I think is a good intervention.”*

Virtual reality (VR) is also showing potential in this space. David Glowacki, an American artist and molecular physicist, developed a collective VR experience that delivers self-transcendence in a bid to replicate the sense of peace he felt during a near-death encounter. The therapeutic experience, dubbed Isness-D, has been shown in tests to have similar effects to a medium dose of LSD or psilocybin, according to a 2022 study published in *Nature Scientific Reports*. In the experience, participants appear as clouds of light, which seem to blur and mingle with one another, producing feelings of deep connection. The technology has already been adopted as a therapeutic tool for cancer patients and their families by the VR startup AnuMa.

Also tapping into communal experience, Dreamachine is a device that can deliver transcendental multisensory experiences that “explore the potential of the mind.” Created by Collective Act, a UK producer of large-scale commissions, in a partnership that includes the architecture collective Assemble and the composer Jon Hopkins, the experience claims to offer a way to disconnect from the everyday and reconnect to the self. Images are projected onto people’s eyelids as they relax with their eyes closed, inviting them to interpret the colors and shapes.

“Steve Jobs famously said, ‘The computer is the bicycle of the mind.’

He might as well have said, the computer is the new LSD.”

/ **Jason Silva**, filmmaker, storyteller, TV personality, and futurist



The exhibit reached more than 100,000 people in a UK tour in 2022. In an interview with the *Guardian*, Hopkins explained, **“There has been a decline in general mental health and a yearning to live differently. In my opinion, looking inside ourselves is where we find the answer.”**

WHY IT'S INTERESTING

The rise of these technologies speaks to a yearning for powerful experiences that can quiet the ego and enable a shared connection to something bigger than ourselves. Almost two-thirds of people (61%) have this sense that something is missing from their life. For brands, could there be an opportunity to facilitate therapeutic moments of connection and transcendence like this?





Natural upskilling

To support wellbeing, brands can educate people to go beyond the quick nature dips of the pandemic and build a habit for life.

“We are very awe-depleted in our culture,” psychologist Kirk Schneider explains to Wunderman Thompson Intelligence. **“There’s so much emphasis on the quick fix and instant result—the efficiency model for living—that we’ve lost touch in many ways with a more raw contact with nature and ourselves, which can be very enriching and very revitalizing.”** Nature can have a powerful impact on our physical and mental wellbeing. This is something we learned during the pandemic: 65% of global respondents now say they are seeking out more opportunities than before to immerse themselves in nature.

The so-called #sillylittlewalk (a TikTok hashtag with more than 1.5 million views as of May 2023) was all well and good for a while, but now we’re seeking a deeper engagement with nature. With a focus on educating their audiences, this offers brands a tangible opportunity to illuminate the benefits of nature-based awe for life.

Hoping to upskill UK gen Zers on the multifaceted power of nature to improve their mental and physical health, Woo is a new shopping and media wellness platform created by the British commercial broadcaster ITV. Bold psychedelic graphics and influencer content add authenticity to its message that good wellbeing is for everyone. In May 2022, it launched *Nature’s Calling*, a series outlining the benefits of the great outdoors and activities such as wild swimming. “Forget the overdone walk in the park, this show is going to give you a whole host of new outdoor ideas. After all, nature is for life, not just for lockdown,” it exhorts.

As Schneider explains, mere exposure to nature is not enough; we must learn the skill of appreciation to be open to its awe-inducing powers. In March 2023, Finland was declared the “happiest country on earth” for the sixth consecutive year in the Sustainable Development Solutions Network’s World Happiness Report. This is something that Heli Jimenez, senior director of international marketing at Business Finland, attributes to a **“close relationship with nature and our down-to-earth lifestyle: it’s not some mystical state, but a skill that can be learned and shared.”**

Hoping to pass on its knowledge, the country is hosting a free four-day workshop in June 2023 at a luxury resort in the Finnish woods for 10 lucky applicants, who will learn how to cultivate happiness through a deeper bond with nature.

In China, which has only latterly emerged from the pandemic, the ecommerce and social shopping platform Xiaohongshu (Little Red Book) is encouraging people to get outdoors and get back to nature as an antidote to widespread boredom and anxiety. As part of its Go Wild Festival (which has the slogan, “Come outside, don’t see outside”) it hosted a series of nature-based activities, from hiking to cycling to frisbee.

Nature isn’t universally accessible, so a number of urban attractions are using technology to create fantastical experiences and help educate a wider audience on the benefits of the natural world. Opened in March 2023, the BBC Earth Experience, narrated by Sir David Attenborough, offers a spectacular 360-degree immersive audiovisual journey through the natural world across all seven continents, using vast multi-angle screens and the latest in screen technology. Visitors can learn about the world’s diverse range of species and witness everything from a four-ton elephant seal fight to a forest of fireflies. From summer 2023, Toronto plays host to Arcadia Earth, an environmental storytelling platform that uses virtual reality, augmented

“A question we often get is:
‘How are you so
happy?’

We believe Finnish happiness stems from a close relationship with nature and our down-to-earth lifestyle: it’s not some mystical state, but a skill that can be learned and shared.”

/ **Heli Jimenez,**
senior director of international marketing,
Business Finland

reality, and massive screen projections to “inform, inspire, and activate” communities to positively impact the planet. The Museum of Earth, “a perception-shifting experience and collaborative gathering place,” will open in Los Angeles in 2024, offering a kinetic and tactile journey for families that unites awe-inspiring experience with positive action for the planet.

WHY IT’S INTERESTING

Harnessing nature for wellness is now an essential life skill. While people are getting reacquainted with the wonders of nature, there’s still an untapped opportunity for brands to educate people more broadly on its lifelong wellbeing benefits as well as facilitate more regular exposure. This delivers a win-win: the rewards of time in nature are well documented and it can also deepen awareness and advocacy. As the saying goes, we conserve what we love.

“I seek out more opportunities to immerse myself in nature now than pre-pandemic”



Anton Sæten (he/him), Norway

Content creator Anton Sæten shares clips on TikTok of his daredevil stunts, from aerial skiing to somersaulting into icy lakes. Having grown up with an outdoors lifestyle, he finds serenity in nature. We asked Sæten about what drives him to seek out big thrills.

Ever since I was little, I've been drawn to getting out in nature, preferably away from anywhere you can see houses or human activity. It's just a freeing feeling.

We have amazing nature in Norway. Especially on the west coast, we have a lot of rainy days and short days in the wintertime—part of the culture is getting outside as much as possible when the conditions are nice.



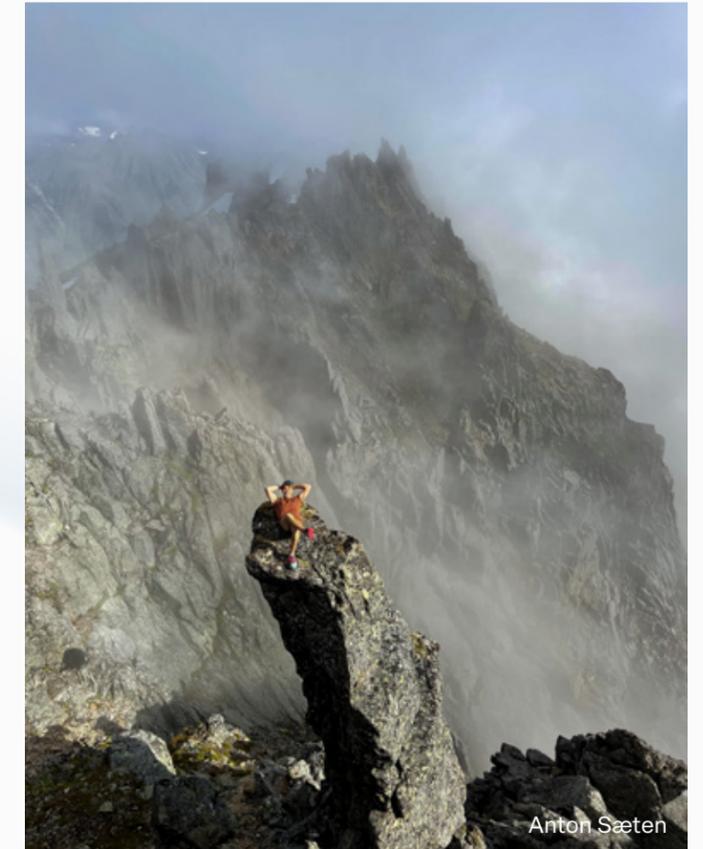
Anton Sæten

I've always liked to push the limits, but I do things at my own pace. If it's way out of my comfort zone, I'm not going to do it.

If I find myself in a dangerous situation, my brain switches and goes into survival mode instead of being scared. It's like everything else doesn't matter; it's a weird feeling. Everything just stands still and usually I do pretty good evaluations quickly to get out of situations.

One of the most fun things about trying a new trick or a new activity is that the only place you are in that exact moment is just right there. You're super-present. Every other thing in the world just doesn't matter. I think that's the feeling I hunt when I do new, bigger things: that super-present feeling.

I've only recently really tried to see how my body reacts to ice dipping. In the beginning I hated it, but that made me want to try it more. I would fill up my bathtub with snow and ice. The first day I did three minutes. After a month



Anton Sæten

I was all the way up to 22 minutes. After a while you get used to the shock.

I think people are just bombarded with stress. [It's important to] get out there and just disconnect. It doesn't have to be anything fancy—a nice trail around a lake, up on a mountain, or a bike ride—just to get your mind off things. I think that's good for your mental health now and long-term.

In terms of my social channels, I'm trying to use them to spread positivity and fun. I'm also just enjoying the process along the way.

Intrepid dining

Jaw-dropping dinner settings are satisfying diners' hungry stomachs and eager minds with outlandish, thrilling, and immersive meals and experiences.

According to a survey conducted by Wunderman Thompson Intelligence, 80% of consumers want to be wowed on trips, and 81% are interested in traveling to awe-inspiring and spectacular destinations. Consumers are thirsty for adventure and new experiences. Why not serve them up something tasty at the same time?

In June 2023, Veuve Clicquot will welcome up to 28 guests to Champagne, France, for an incredible deep-sea tasting. Inspired by an 1800s shipwreck off the Åland Islands in the Baltic Sea—where 47 bottles of Veuve Clicquot champagne were uncovered by divers after more than a century underwater and found to have remained preserved—the brand has regularly hosted tastings as part of its “Cellar in the Sea” program. Guests are invited to compare champagne aged underwater with that aged on land, in its chalk cellars in Reims. This year, however, those brave tasters who are also experienced divers will have the chance to descend into the sea themselves to witness the extraordinary treasure lurking beneath the waves: the Åland Vault that now formally houses the project’s bottles underwater.

Avid aviators may never even have to leave the skies on their next trip. In 2024, OceanSky Cruises will launch its floating five-star airship hotel. The Swedish company will welcome elite daredevils on this lighter-than-air, sustainable expedition from Longyearbyen, Svalbard, to the North Pole. Guests will board and disembark at undisclosed remote locations, and will enjoy meals prepared by an award-winning chef, spacious cabins for luxurious comfort, and panoramic windows for perpetual, unbelievable views.



Wunderman Thompson data reveals that 68% of consumers prefer to spend time in places that spark their imagination. For diners who crave awe-inspiring mystery and suspense as their main course, one of New York City's newest speakeasies is sure to thrill. The Office of Mr. Moto, which opened in January 2023, requires guests to decode a cypher in order to enjoy the restaurant's multicourse omakase. The code, if cracked, opens a Victorian-era mailbox at the front of the restaurant to allow diners entry to the intimate, part-restaurant-part-museum experience. For beverage pairings, guests have to rack their brains to solve an additional cypher.

At Eatrenalin in Rust, Germany, hungry visitors can enjoy their meals as part of "an emotional and culinary experience." Guests sit at individual "floating chairs" and tables that move and rotate around the restaurant as if part of a theme park ride. Instead of encountering roller coasters and water parks, diners are immersed in a series of multiversal settings. Alternating lighting, music, and visual experiences are paired with fine-dining cuisine to complement the emotions of the story, which follows an artificial intelligence hostess that just wants to become human.

68%
prefer to spend time
in places that spark
their imagination





*“I think we are experiencing a little bit of a surge in what people were calling **revenge travel, and revenge experiences,**”* psychology professor Kenneth Carter tells Wunderman Thompson Intelligence. *“I think that’s what we’re seeing in this **thirst for the unusual, this thirst for authentic experiences, this thirst for this newness, because we had a year or so where things didn’t feel new.**”*

WHY IT’S INTERESTING

Fine dining and fantastic views are never out of style; but these adventurers are craving more than a good meal. Intrepid diners are setting sail on excursions that evoke unforgettable awe and discovery to feed their minds and hearts, as well as filling their stomachs.

“I prefer to spend time in places that spark my imagination”





Monumental wonders

Unprecedented, vast scale can be used to design environments and customer experiences that elevate consumers' sense of wonder and wellbeing.

Seven years in the making, a new marvel of modern heavy engineering is wowing visitors in east London. The Cody Dock Rolling Bridge - designed by architect Thomas Randall-Page and Tim Lucas of engineers Price & Myers - is one of a kind: a big heavy structure that can roll.

In its resting position, it seems to be a simple, understated footbridge. But astonishingly, the 13 metric ton structure made of steel and oak is so precisely balanced that it can be rolled through 180 degrees by just one person using a hand-operated winch. A “celebratory and playful” experience that no doubt also delivers a moment of wonder.

Monumental experiences, whose vastness makes us feel small, can be good for us, helping to put life into perspective and even increase connection with society: 89% say that awe-inspiring experiences make them feel good, while 78% say the experiences make them feel more connected to the world.

Now brands are applying these same principles to retail environments and customer experiences, injecting a sense of wonder and elevating customer wellbeing.



Japanese sweets specialist Shunkado brought wonder to its new headquarters in Hamamatsu City on the south coast of Japan, which is imagined as a two-story dining table with larger-than-life chairs tucked around the outside. The arresting scene makes passers-by feel as if they've stumbled into a land of giants from a fairy tale, and the theme continues in the building's public restaurant and café, where oversized tea pots and tea cups are placed throughout.

Another "land of the giants" experience comes courtesy of French fashion label Jacquemus, which sent renders of giant handbags on wheels seemingly speeding through the streets of Paris in a recent video activation.

When creating monumental structures, sustainability must be a key consideration. London-based global design studio Sybarite delivered on this with the 190-acre landmark SKP-S Chengdu department store in China, which is based on the sustainable "sponge city" concept. The "sunken" luxury retail park is made up of five subterranean levels and the tone is set at the ground-level SKP Park, of which 75% is covered in greenery, including 33 gardens. The landscape is dominated by The Tower of Life, a series of 26- and 36-meter-high "lantern-like towering water beacon sculptures" emitting ever-changing light patterns and displays.

The monumental is also infiltrating public artworks. Danish-Icelandic artist Olafur Eliasson, in collaboration with British writer Robert Macfarlane, plays with light and reflections in their proposed reality-bending spectacle for Silecroft Beach in West Cumbria, in the United Kingdom, to accentuate the site's existing natural beauty. As part of their Your Daylight Destination installation, due for completion by 2025, a 98-foot-long metallic trough will be installed into the sand at the beach.





This will be submerged when the tide is in, and fill with water as the tide goes out, creating a vast, picturesque reflection of the clouds and sky above. Eliasson says that the project is ***“a humble reflection of what is already there—the beach, the water, the sky, the plants and animals—reframed within a space that invites self-discovery in a deep-time perspective.”***

WHY IT'S INTERESTING

By embracing the potential of scale we can create physical environments and customer experiences that make people feel as if they are part of something bigger, and something that transcends their understanding of the world.

“Awe-inspiring experiences make me feel more connected to the world”



The generation Z take

“Awe feels like a lost relic, especially in the sphere of architecture, art, prose, and design. Modern design often favors practicality and mass production over something worth looking at, which inspires us and makes us feel truly alive.”

French male, 24

“Visiting the local botanical gardens induces a sense of awe, as being in any beautiful natural location usually does. The feeling at the time is that you are very small and insignificant in the bigger picture of nature and the universe in general. However, this is not a bad thing at all, as it creates a sense of freedom that was not there before. It reinforces the idea that your actions will most likely not have an effect on the whole universe and so allows you to trust your intuition more when making decisions, rather than constantly second-guessing yourself.”

Moroccan female, 18

“When I went on holiday to a national park in Utah, America, and we did a route called The Narrows, it was actually insane. You basically hike through a mountain, go through water that comes up to your waist—and it can get higher—and it’s just so beautiful. I was in awe of how beautiful the place was. How am I here? How am I doing this? How lucky am I that I get to experience a trip like that?”

British female, 26



SKP-S Chengdu retail park in China by Sybarite. Photography by Shihao Xiao

“People are chasing an experience
that makes their

heart beat

a little faster in anticipation, something
that will be ingrained into their mind, so when
they think of that feeling of shock and awe
they are thinking of your brand.”

/ Indian male, 23

Multiversal luxe

Brands are embracing the otherworldly to enthrall luxury consumers.

As we enter what many are calling the age of the new space race, a flurry of luxury brands are turning to the allure of the otherworldly and the multiversal to capture the attention of ultra-high-net-worth consumers for whom the Earth is no longer enough.

London-based global design studio Sybarite is behind some of the most ambitious otherworldly retail designs in China. Discussing the power of otherworldly design, the studio's cofounders Torquil McIntosh and Simon Mitchell tell Wunderman Thompson Intelligence: ***“Channeling the otherworldly is about presenting a unique shopping experience that is wired with intrigue; a world that is different to our own, a vision with a different perspective. Humans, by nature, long to explore in a different dimension. Customers are drawn to the idea of being able to access a higher level of consciousness with encounters that delve into the depths of their minds and bring escapism.”***

Premium Chinese patisserie brand Holiland channels the multiversal, kitting out its Shanghai store as an intergalactic spaceship. It features a wormhole that promises access to another dimension, LED screens showing the “multiverse” world outside the store's windows, and products inspired by colorful meteors, enabling visitors to be fully immersed in the possibilities of the otherworldly.

A sense of childlike wonder at the infinite mysteries beyond Earth are also infusing creative communications. Burberry's "Night Creatures" campaign video from October 2022 depicts three protagonists as they encounter an otherworldly sci-fi creature. The latest iteration of Louis Vuitton's "Towards a Dream" campaign for 2023 is set in the breathtaking Chilean mountains, and opens with scenes of a UFO emitting otherworldly orbs of light before guiding a group of children on an unforgettable adventure.

Long a source of wonder, space is taking on renewed significance as NASA gears up for its Artemis lunar mission in 2024, and commercial space travel and asteroid mining come closer to reality. This is inspiring a new generation of interstellar aesthetics on the luxury catwalk. Gucci's Cosmogonie show in May 2022 celebrated the stars with luminescent fabrics and constellation-covered looks, while Dior collaborated with NASA for its fall 2023 menswear collection, "Guided by the Stars," featuring vivid images of remote galaxies captured by the James Webb Space Telescope. Dior Men's artistic director Kim Jones told *Women's Wear Daily*, ***"You're looking into the unknown, which is very, very beautiful. The vastness of it is the thing that I think is so enthralling, or terrifying to some people."***

Chanel also evoked the thrill of space exploration, erecting a giant popup Moon Base in Tokyo for its "Once Upon a Moon" activation in late 2022. Visitors could pose for photos in the Chanel Moon Rover before receiving a complimentary space-themed passport as a souvenir of the experience.





The multiverse is suggestive of infinite possibility, and this offers a much-needed source of optimism, according to artist Jason Silva. ***"What's happening in the world of innovation, to me, feels like the ultimate antidote to existential distress,"*** he tells Wunderman Thompson Intelligence. ***"We feel so small and meaningless, but we make space shuttles. Our tools and technologies are the means by which we transcended our limits and our existential smallness."***

WHY IT'S INTERESTING

While the otherworldly has long captivated humanity's imagination, its renewed popularity with luxury brands underlines a collective yearning for playful adventure and discovery that delves into the depths of our minds.

"I like to be transported to other worlds by stories and narratives"



Sensory techtopias

Advanced technology offers new opportunities to deeply immerse and engage people, tantalizing all of the senses.

New innovations are offering sensory ways for brands to connect with consumers and, after a couple of years of sensory deprivation due to the pandemic, demand is potent. According to Wunderman Thompson data, 63% of people want brands to provide them with multisensory experiences, and 72% expect as many of their senses as possible to be engaged when experiencing something new.

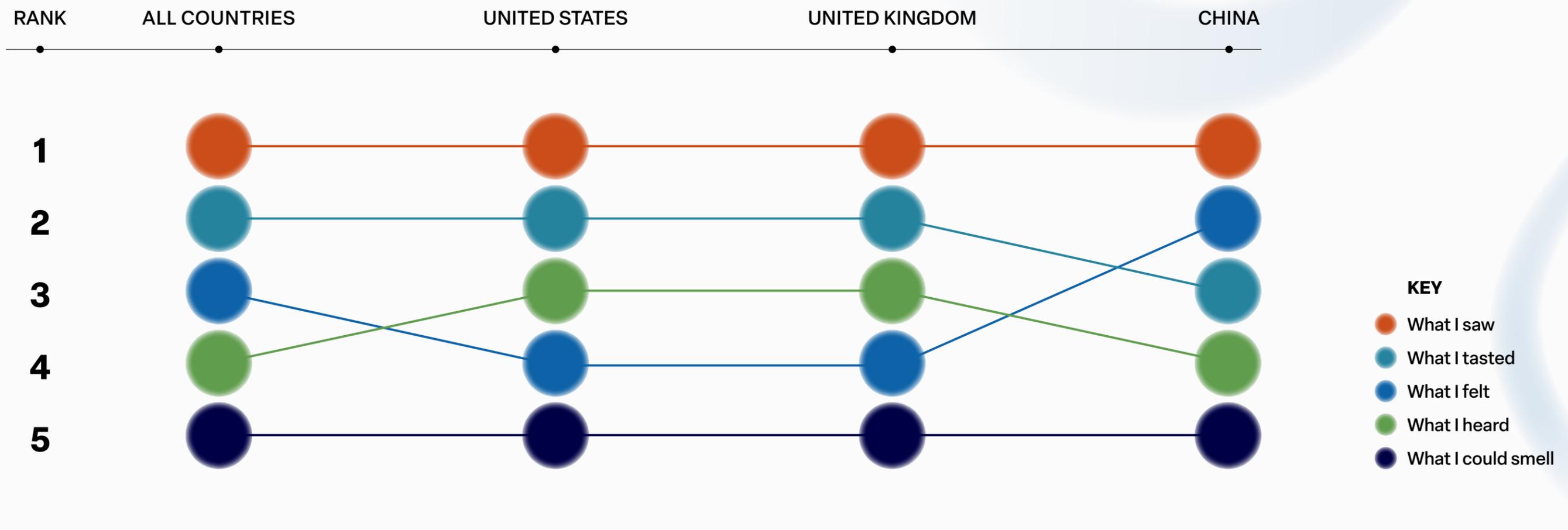
Previously, visuals have dominated experiences and, indeed, sight is the sense that people most frequently expect to be stimulated when enjoying experiences (see chart on next page). Now brands are increasingly able to tap into all the senses to truly amplify immersion.

Xydropbe, launching in 2023, is a pioneering experiential concept for luxury retail that aims to immerse people in the vision and ideology of a brand. Shoppers will step inside a mysterious black “one-person experience pod,” a physical portal to transport them to virtual realms using “stunning visuals, scent, surround sound, and temperature control.”

Sensory Techtopias: What drives sensory experience

Most important sensory element for an intense and memorable experience

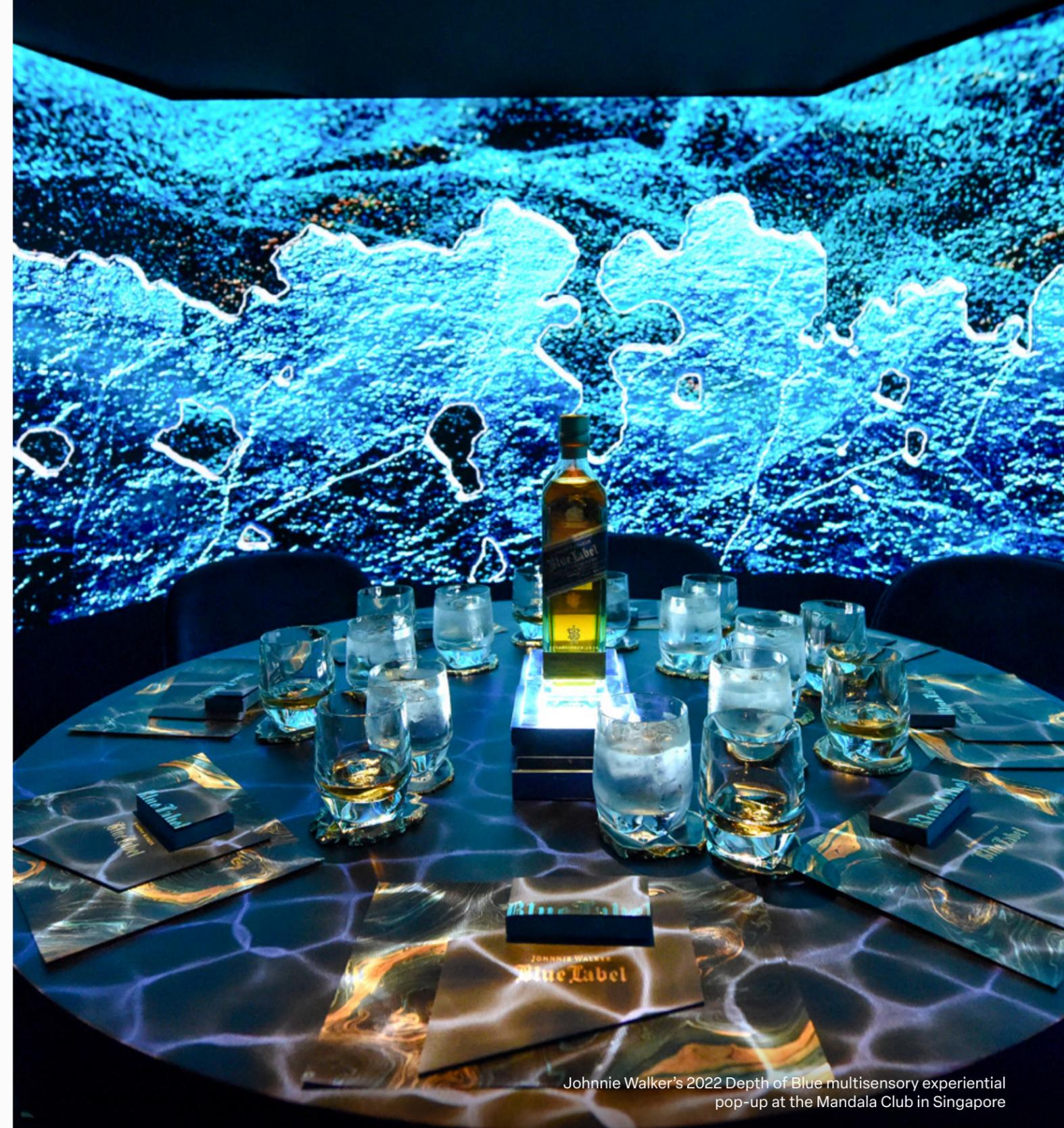
(top five ranking by country)



Explaining the thinking behind xydrobe, CEO Nell Lloyd-Malcolm tells Wunderman Thompson Intelligence: **“You get an emotional reaction out of people when you have something that’s multisensorial. It feels real, so you’re able to put people into situations that they would never be able to do otherwise. It’s being a time traveler; it’s being someone who can actually feel as though they’re experiencing extraordinary things. We can’t achieve that in traditional retail, and we definitely can’t achieve it on ecomm.”** Lloyd-Malcolm promises an experience that will **“provide an outlet for brands to start engaging with storytelling that’s on a similar level to these big blockbuster Hollywood movies.”**

Speaking of Hollywood, at CES 2023 Canon showcased its latest immersive tech innovations, in a partnership with the Universal Pictures thriller *Knock at the Cabin*, directed by M Night Shyamalan. Entering a full-size replica of the eponymous cabin, visitors were transported into the story via one of four immersive technologies, including Canon’s Kokomo virtual reality (VR) software, which enabled them to enter a photoreal environment and speak to one of four characters from the movie. Visitors wearing the Canon MReal mixed reality headset could put themselves in the characters’ shoes, barricading the doors of the cabin with virtual furniture while under attack from intruders trying to smash their way inside.

People rank touch as the third most important sense in delivering experience, but as Jody Culham, Canada research chair in immersive neuroscience at Western University in Ontario, tells Wunderman Thompson Intelligence, the lack of “feeling” in VR is a major gap right now. **“The big thing that’s lacking is a sense of touch,”** she says. **“There’s nothing commercially available that’s widespread.”** In the future it should be possible to add this layer.





In Japan, NTT Docomo and collaborating institutions are developing the world's first sensation-sharing technology, which allows users to send movements or tactile sensations digitally. Docomo already has plans to build on its Feel Tech technology, enabling the sharing of other sensations, like taste, hearing, and even emotions.

Smell is the sensation that people least expect to play a role in immersive experience, and olfaction is the least understood of our senses from a scientific point of view, yet research tells us that it is highly evocative, able to transport us instantly to another place or time by triggering memory.

Experience designers are now experimenting with scent as a narrative device to engage viewers more deeply. At the 2022 Cannes Film Festival, Indian film director A R Rahman premiered *Le Musk*, a VR cinematic experience that tells the story of an orphaned heiress on the trail of three mysterious men, each with a distinctive scent. Sensory direction was provided by London-based multisensory extended reality studio The Feelies, which created bespoke scents. Viewers watched the film from immersive VR chairs by LA-based Positron, which also incorporate motion, pitch, and haptics.

Japanese scent technology company Aromajoin is helping to bring multisensory experiences to the home with its Aroma Shooter, a digital scent device premiered at CES 2023. Designed for gaming or movies, the technology can synchronize smells to videos using "solid state" cartridges, instantly toggling between different scents.

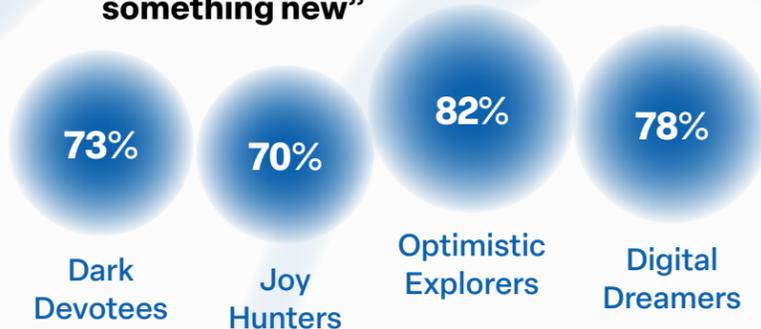
It's worth noting that there is a sweet spot for the intensity of sensory immersion. While 64% of people expect digital and virtual experiences to activate all their senses, 54% report finding multisensory experiences overwhelming. This seems like a conundrum, but researchers are already working on a solution.

Adaptive entertainment can adjust to individual preferences based on various biomarker metrics tracked using artificial intelligence (AI) and affective technologies like facial recognition. Coltan Scrivner, a behavioral scientist at the Recreational Fear Lab in Aarhus University in Denmark, shared details of ongoing work to develop **“a VR game that learns what you’re afraid of. The idea is that instead of scaring you as much as we can, we want to keep you in that sweet spot, where you’re having the most amount of fun.”** Such interactions will get ever slicker, as Ian Beacraft, CEO and chief futurist at Signal and Cipher, explained at SXSW 2023: **“It’s not just about creating with AI. It’s about relating with AI. We’re actually going to have some sort of relationship with it.”**

WHY IT’S INTERESTING

After an extended period of global sensory deprivation, we are on the brink of a new era of tech-powered sensorial enrichment, which will offer brands new and exciting opportunities to deeply engage and wow audiences.

“I expect as many of my senses as possible to be engaged when it comes to experiencing something new”



Reimagining

The final stage of re-enchantment imagines a better future, challenging the status quo and fostering optimism for what comes next. There are opportunities for brands to help reimagine our connections to each other and to nature, to build better relationships with technology, and to reassert the right to fun and joy in our lives.

ALL THE THINGS
THAT COULD
HAPPEN NEXT

New spiritual rebels

A creative rebellion, led by the feminine and the marginalized, presents a challenge to the status quo.

Popular culture is mining dark themes—encompassing witchcraft, the grotesque, and the monstrous—to challenge the status quo. Questioning traditional power, it offers alternatives: the feminine, the marginalized, the self.

In October 2022, *The Horror Show!*, an exhibition at London’s Somerset House, explored 50 years of creative rebellion via a triptych of dark themes: Monster, Ghost, and Witch. The grotesque and the monstrous stand for the rejection of conformism and an explosion of raw creativity. In the Witch theme, **“we see ways to unmake our world and reorder it so that it might be remade anew,”** says Somerset House senior curator Claire Catterall, in an interview with Wunderman Thompson Intelligence.

Witchcraft never really left the cultural narrative, and its influence is on the rise. 2023 has already seen a surge in “witch-lit” according to the *Guardian*, not to mention TV shows like *The Mayfair Witches* and Netflix’s *Wednesday*, while #witchtok boasted more than 41 billion views on TikTok as of May 2023. Celebrities like Kylie Jenner and Julia Fox are channeling so-called “succubus chic” and wellness brands such as Palm of Feronia and Kate Moss’s *Cosmoss* draw on mystical cues. The British perfumer Vyrro has even tapped a psychic to cocreate its scent *The Sixth*.





As younger generations come of age in an uncertain world, they are seeking meaning and control in practices like tarot, crystals, and manifesting, reinventing spirituality for the TikTok era. Among generation Z, 51% report an interest in non-traditional spirituality, compared to 34% of the total population.

The witch, says Catterall, also represents our ability to **“imagine and effect radical change.”** Traditionally associated with the feminine, it now **“seems to have broadened to embrace these new voices, and all marginalized and oppressed bodies.”**

The grotesque and monstrous can also point to this disruptive assertion of power. The fashion designer and artist Michaela Stark creates body-morphing lingerie designs that deliberately distort the body, creating looks that channel the grotesque and challenge convention. She recently styled the nonbinary artist Sam Smith for *Perfect* magazine. Italian surrealist photographer Giulia Grillo, aka Petite Doll, creates beauty in the grotesque and otherworldly, while makeup artists including Eszter Magyar and Aoife Cullen are exploring brutal, ugly, or monstrous beauty as a means of **“reclaiming power,”** as Cullen told *Dazed* in March 2023. The LGBTQ+ artist Oliver Sim is no doubt channeling his sense of being othered when depicting himself as a monster on the cover of his album *Hideous Bastard*. Almost half of generation Z (45%) and 38% of millennials express a liking for aesthetics that others might find grotesque, compared to just 10% of baby boomers.

This channeling of the dark, mystical, and monstrous is a tool of provocation and a way to call out the issues of our time, such as misogyny, racism, homophobia, and the climate crisis. In Catterall’s view, the 21st-century witch wants to **“break things down and build them up again in paths to inclusive post-capitalist, post-colonial, many-gendered futures.”**



“Our increasingly digitally dependent lives have shrunk into the palms of our hands and this has allowed us to find new ways of connection. It’s created a global coven of sorts and allowed new

Voices
to be heard.”

/ **Claire Catterall**, senior curator, Somerset House

Advaya is a female-led collective that aims to conceive this better future. A global transformative education platform centered on ecology, spirituality, and wellbeing, it advocates “radical regeneration and joyful revolution.” In raising awareness and empowering young people to become a voice for change, it aims to offer resistance while easing a transition to a better, kinder, and healthier world. Current courses focus on spiritual ecology, healthier relationships with technology, and a six-week Restoring Masculinity course that aims to re-imagine contemporary masculinities.

WHY IT’S INTERESTING

A new, better world is fighting to be born. These are its creative shoots, offering catharsis, and also hope and a glimpse of a better, more inclusive, eco-centric future.



Notty Stewart (she/her), United States

Notty Stewart identifies as a witch and is a practitioner of traditional African-American rootwork practices. Drawing from a diverse range of techniques, including manifestations, divination, and alternative approaches to healing, she claims to connect with spirits and ancestors. Stewart aims to help individuals who seek spiritual awakening and she has more than 216,000 TikTok followers as of May 2023. We asked her what drew her to this type of spirituality.

I was always interested in the occult. As a kid, I really liked ethereal things like fairies.

I wasn't really in tune with the religion that I was born into, being a Jehovah's Witness. I had this limbo for a couple of years where I was, like, "I know there is something bigger



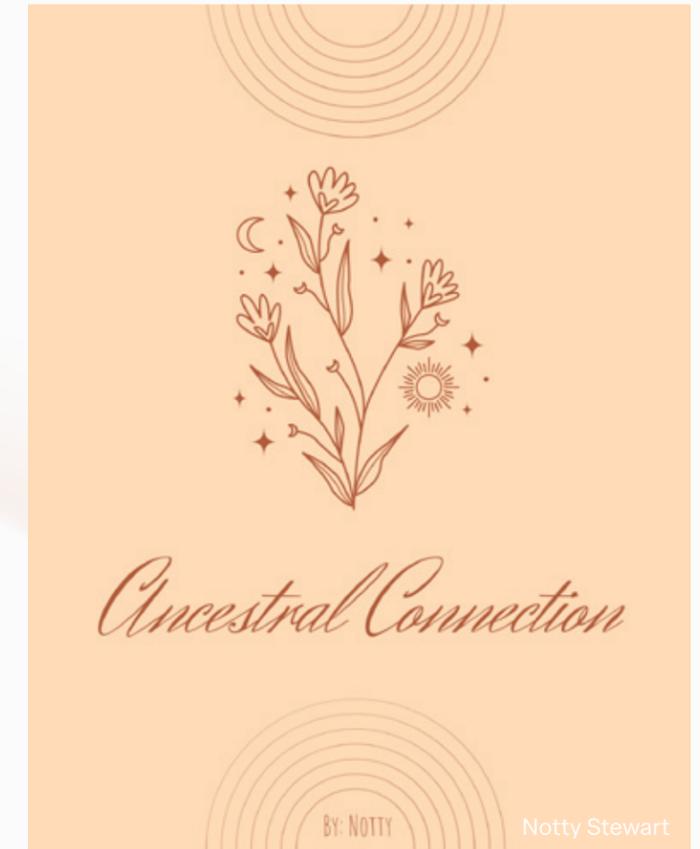
than me out there, but I'm not resonating with any of these religions."

What really brought me towards spirituality was the freedom in it and the non-judgment of it.

When my family found out this is what I practice, a lot of them didn't accept me.

From manifesting my desires, I started to cast spells and connect with my ancestors. One of the spells that I really liked to do a lot was connecting with the moon and using the moon's power to manifest my intentions or release things.

Ancestral work can give us a connection to something bigger than ourselves. When you need that secure guidance and you need wisdom, you can go to your bloodline and ask them for wisdom and guidance down your path, and they will help you get into alignment. They will help protect you. They will help you express your authentic self.



Spirituality can make a change in the world. We are seeing in real time how so many people are getting back into alignment with their higher selves, how they're finding peace within themselves, how they're finding freedom, and they're not afraid of expressing their truest authentic selves, especially those in the LGBTQIA community.

Everybody has different beliefs and it's time to be even more accepting of witchcraft and spirituality.

If brands can incorporate major religions into their work, they can incorporate witchcraft and alternative spirituality along with that.

Fear for good

Brands are using the arresting language of fear and horror as a catalyst to inspire societal change.

Years of economic, health, environmental, and political crises have left the world in a state of **“deep turbulence,”** as Claire Catterall, senior curator of Somerset House’s The Horror Show! exhibition, tells Wunderman Thompson Intelligence. Rather than shy away from the darkness, brands are incorporating elements of fear into marketing to tell important stories, expose societal issues, and act as a spur to action.

Released in October 2022, the “Stay Down” campaign from the UK-based Social Mobility Foundation calls attention to the insidious issue of social exclusion. Calling on companies to end class pay disparities, the campaign apes the look and feel of a typical horror film trailer. The short film follows an employee who is dismissed, patronized, and overlooked because of his background and accent, and held back while others with greater privilege thrive around him. The final message reads: “Unfortunately some horrors aren’t fiction. Classism is still holding people down.”

Racism and hate speech in online gaming has become all too ubiquitous. Hoping to change that is BIPOC-founded group Melanin Gamers, which launched The Watch in 2022 to call on big games companies to make it easier to report in-game abuse. Using real-life in-game footage of racial abuse and sexual harassment, the launch video confronts viewers head-on with the uncomfortable reality and calls on gamers to act by capturing and reporting instances of hate speech.



Similarly, the Women in Games collective in Argentina drew attention to the appalling abuse female gamers receive online by inviting male gamers to pose as women using a voice modulator. The violent comments made during the experiment were used in the promotional *Switch Voices* video, using shock value to highlight the need for change.

While eco-activists and experts have been recommending cigarette-pack-style climate change warnings on everything from fuel pumps to food products, the latest campaign from People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) takes a combative approach to get its message across. Channeling the more dystopian elements of the horror genre, its “The Don’t List” commercial aired during the March 2023 season finale of *The Last of Us* in the United States. The ad depicts a little girl in an abandoned cityscape berating her parents for never explaining the potential impact of animal agriculture on the planet. The warning is clear: if we don’t educate ourselves and future generations about the potential consequences of eating meat, eggs, and dairy, the child will ultimately be the last of us.

Another brand wielding fear in service of eco-awareness is Liquid Death, which packages its water in aluminum cans. In October 2022, the company rereleased its 45-minute scary movie *Dead Till Death*, in which its cans were cast as killers, terrorizing young campers in the forest and even resurrecting when crushed, to deliver an impactful sustainability message. The film (which is also available for free on YouTube) was released on VHS tape—the most terrifying format of all time, according to Liquid Death.



“In times of deep turbulence, horror’s inherent subversion and transgression gives us an opportunity to imagine the status quo torn apart, before we **rebuild** from there.”

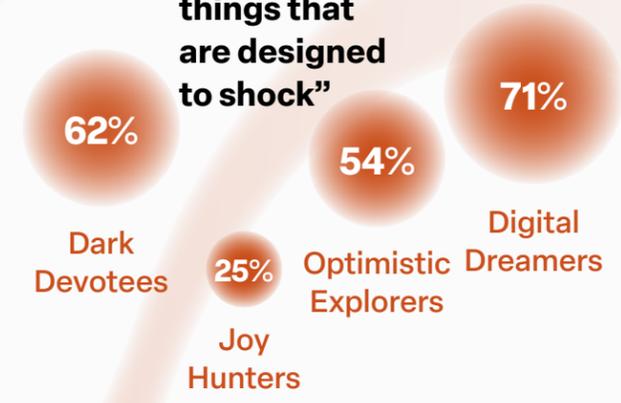
/ **Claire Catterall**, senior curator, Somerset House

Offering another lighthearted take, the award-winning “Eat Them to Defeat Them” campaign encourages kids in the United Kingdom to eat more vegetables. It features monstrous vegetables that are taking over the world, and only children can defeat them (by eating them, of course). Since 2019, the program states that it has led to 1.4 billion extra children’s portions of veggies being sold by retailers, proving the efficacy of this scary but fun approach.

WHY IT’S INTERESTING

As psychology professor Kenneth Carter tells us, **“You can be dark and unexpected as long as the end of the story brings you back to your humanity.”** As interest in fear-tainment spikes, 59% of people say they seek out experiences that will challenge them, either physically or mentally. By carefully using elements of horror in advertising, brands can subvert expectations and challenge the way people think, inspiring societal change.

“I appreciate things that are designed to shock”



Dark Devotees

25%

Joy Hunters

54%

Optimistic Explorers

71%

Digital Dreamers

Next-gen luddites

Generation Z are rejecting the overwhelming role of technology in their lives and seeking more real and enriching alternatives.

While technology and the era of the smartphone have revolutionized our lives, we're witnessing the emergence of a new political movement of people and brands questioning technology's unchecked impact. In what the *New Yorker* calls "The Age of Algorithmic Anxiety," people—led by generation Z—are voicing their concerns about the access and control technology has over our lives.

According to our survey, 67% of gen Zers believe technology makes us feel more detached from the real world, while more than half (58%) agreed with the statement "I feel like technology distracts me from living a more interesting life." Momo Estrella, head of design at IKEA China Digital Hub, explains to Wunderman Thompson Intelligence: ***"When I think of joy, wonder, magic, I think the physical world still has an advantage over the digital world. The digital world suffers a lot from distractions, from the fact that it's very hard to take you out of your context. It's really hard to transport you out of it, you rely on your mobile screen."***

In a bid to rediscover curiosity and spontaneity, some are turning their backs on modern technology and returning to analog alternatives. This is evidenced by a spike in paper map sales in the United Kingdom and the United States in recent years, and by research from Nielsen BookData, which found that 80% of books bought by British gen Zers are physical, not digital. In Argentina, rising sales of children's books are being attributed to the rise of gen Z bookfluencers on TikTok.



At the same time others are embracing “dumb” electronics, such as digital cameras, burner phones, and flip phones, which offer some of the benefits of modern tech, but without the addictiveness and the distraction, and with built-in anonymity. A group of New York teenagers known as the Luddite Club are exemplifying this approach to life. Taking its name from the Luddite movement in 19th-century England—centered on a group of textile workers who rebelled against the perceived negative impact of machinery on their livelihoods—the club promotes “self-liberation from social media and technology”. It started as a reaction to death scrolling and social media burnout, and was also influenced by the freedom associated with opting out of technology. The club meets weekly in a New York park, where members talk, draw in sketching pads, and read physical books to each other.

In China, brands have been responding by experimenting with “slow flash stores,” which encourage visitors to reconnect with the pleasures of the physical world. Luxury goods marketplace Xiaohongshu (Little Red Book) opened the Little Sweet Potato Slow Flash Store in Shanghai, prioritizing physical touchpoints and the ritual of eating a sweet potato over the speed and efficiency of hyperfast food delivery. The No Panic Life Memo Slow Flash Store, at the One Way Space cultural hub in Beijing, also encouraged this real-world focus. The scheme was run in partnership with Alibaba’s ecommerce site Taobao; any visitors who successfully read a book for three hours without looking at their smartphones were invited to take the book home for free.

Rather than requiring people to opt out of social media altogether, OneSec is a German app that aims to empower people to moderate and take control of their usage. Every time a user opens a social media app, it forces them to pause for 15 seconds, asking them to take a deep breath and seriously consider if they want to enter into a potential “mindless death scroll”.



59%

of gen Z worry that Big Tech algorithms are creating digital echo chambers

Another concern about technology is that it stifles our ability to broaden our horizons and discover new and interesting things. In our survey, 59% of gen Zers say they worry that Big Tech algorithms are creating digital echo chambers. Responding to this fear, French book, music, and consumer electronics retailer Fnac launched its “Unrecommended by the Algorithm” campaign, which purposely recommends products that contradict its algorithms. Customers could see their “anti-recommendations” on a special microsite alongside such messages as “The algorithm says that according to your profile you should not like this, but Fnac believes culture should be curious and free.”

WHY IT'S INTERESTING

Gen Z consumers are starting to weigh up the pros and cons of technology, and are walking away if they feel it does not allow them to live and think freely. Brands must embrace technology that enhances people’s lives without being overbearing. They must also consider how they can reinject feelings of excitement and authenticity into both their physical and digital experiences.

“I feel that technology distracts me from living a more interesting life”



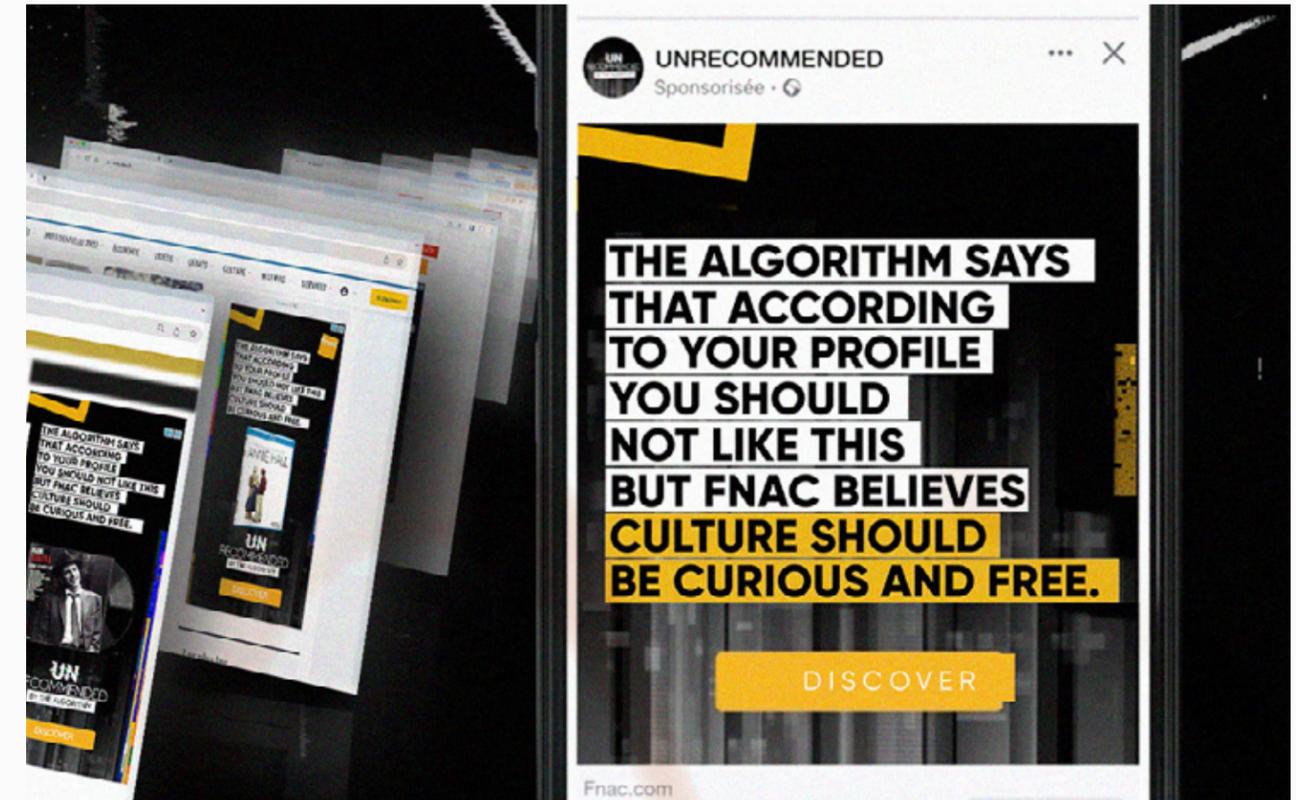
The generation Z take

“Technology itself is magic, actually. It’s a type of sorcellerie [sorcery] also, because we become addicted and we can’t stop thinking about what’s next.”
Indian female, 24

“The downside of technology is also one of its main advantages, which is convenience. It’s addictive and attention spans have gone out of the window.”
British male, 24

“If visualizing your goals hastens the process of getting there, technology helps visualize this alternate reality.”
Moroccan female, 18

“I feel like technology is an ingenious way to reach people who have been abandoned by traditional means, for example, people who have disabilities or neurodivergence, or minority audiences.”
Nigerian male, 24



“Unrecommended by the Algorithm” campaign by Fnac. Image courtesy of Publicis Conseil

“[Through technology] everyone’s constantly seeking that next thing, that next exciting development.

We’re getting into this cycle, rather than staying present and living in the

Moment.”

/ **British female, 23**

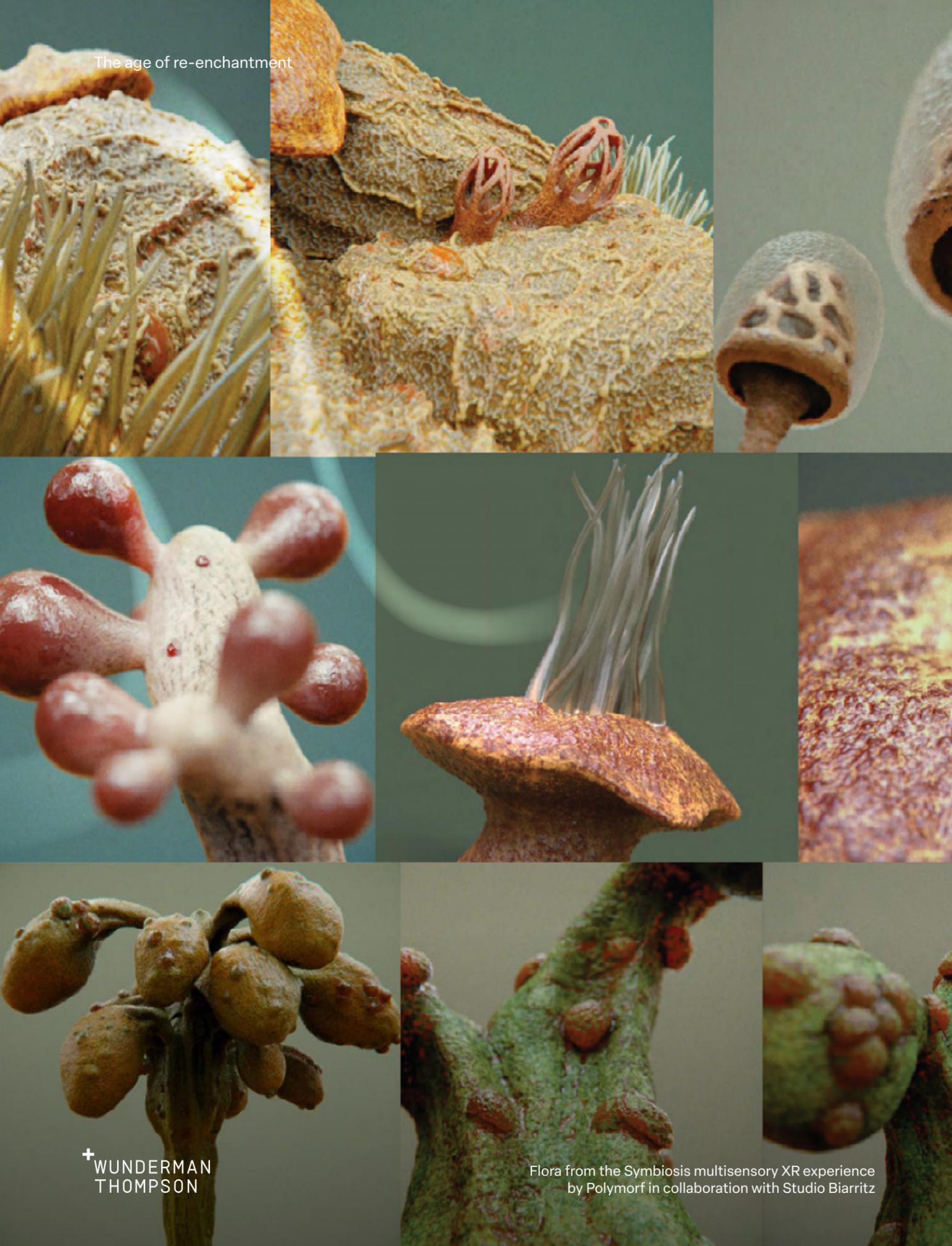
Design untamed

No longer about just welcoming greenery in, biophilic design now lets nature run wild.

Acute awareness of the plight of the planet is inspiring designers and storytellers to imagine a world in which nature is set free and running riot.

In March 2023, scientists from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) issued their final warning to limit global temperature rises to 1.5°C. **“Our human-centric position—only thinking from a human perspective—is toxic and we can’t sustain that in the current crisis with nature,”** says Marcel van Brakel, founder and lead designer at Dutch experience design collective Polymorf, and codirector of Symbiosis. Selected for SXSW 2023, Symbiosis is a multisensory, multiplayer extended reality experience that imagines a future in which man, nature, and machine all combine in new ways to live in harmony. Incongruously beautiful, this future world would be filled with genetically hybridized creatures, plant life, and humanoids working synergistically. Using individualized haptic suits and soft robotics, as well as taste and smell-based story elements, Symbiosis experientially redesigns the human body to merge with technology and nature.

Blockbuster HBO series *The Last of Us*, which aired in early 2023, also tapped into the notion of a world overcome by nature—this time through a fungus that invades people’s brains, turning them into zombie-like creatures. For the enemy plants, the designers took inspiration from nature, where often the most vibrant of flora is the most dangerous. The fungus is grotesque and yet stunning because, as production designer John Paino told *Dezeen*, **“Nature has taken over and there’s a beauty in that.”**



Auto manufacturer Rolls-Royce collaborated with couture designer Iris van Herpen on a nature-inspired bespoke Phantom Syntopia one-off commission. Van Herpen, known for designs that tap biomimicry, set out to capture the beauty of the fluid motion of water, and says, **“I wanted this to become a state-of-the-art experience being overwhelmed by the forces of nature.”**

Designers including Shanghai-based studio Spacemen are now incorporating overgrown nature into retail interiors. The studio’s store design for luxury leather brand Braun Büffel’s Malaysian flagship outlet included a giant tree-like structure covered in moss, which dominates the middle of the store. It bursts from the floor and through the ceiling, alluding to **“how it would grow out of a beaker in a mad scientist’s lab towards natural light,”** Spacemen founder Edward Tan told *Dezeen*.

Bringing this concept of a surreal natural world into buildings, architect Juan Manuel Prieto used artificial intelligence to create his Habitable Monsters series. These living eco-friendly future dwellings will be made from organic tissue, fur, and even fangs; spaces that are inspired by nature to be more sustainable, accessible, and in tune with the natural world.





Snøhetta's Under restaurant, which opened in 2019, is the perfect illustration of humans working in concert with nature to allow it to thrive. The restaurant is half-submerged off the Norwegian coast and was specifically designed to welcome in the marine life around it over time. Now, four years on, with the rough concrete exterior covered in algae and mussels, **"nature has fully embraced and inhabited the building,"** the studio told *Dezeen*.

WHY IT'S INTERESTING

In line with the Indigenous Innovation trend in "The Future 100: 2023," untamed design reflects a growing acknowledgement of the need to work in harmony with nature as well as a deeper respect for its power. With sustainability now rooted in people's values, brands and creators are choosing to visually articulate this concept in the customer experience.

"I always seek experiences that align with my values around sustainability"



“Nature

has fully embraced
and inhabited
the building.”

/ Snøhetta

Radical reconnection

Brands are channeling collective effervescence to build networks of connection.

Individualism has defined much of the world for decades, but could collectivism now be coming to the fore? In a bid to restore connections with each other and with the planet, some brands are adopting a prosocial mindset, advocating community, and even collective effervescence (the energy and harmony released when people enjoy shared purpose).

“I think the major human need that we are addressing is belonging,” says Radha Agrawal who, for the past decade, has hosted communal morning dance events under the banner of Daybreaker. In cities the world over, people of all ages, sexes, and creeds come together to lose themselves in dance. *“We are now returning to the collective consciousness we’re meant to be,”* says Agrawal. *“Dance is the most potent technology that exists to connect to both yourself, to each other, and to the divine, to the spiritual realm. Dance is the most healing technology that exists. It’s the most celebratory.”*



A Daybreaker communal dance event

For brands too, says Agrawal, focus should now be on building networks of connection that benefit their communities and networks at large. **“I think the number one KPI, the most important one, is the community, the collective KPI,”** she explains. **“Right now, everything is follower based, individual based, everything is moving to the toxic individual. The biggest opportunity that brands have is getting people to connect with each other. How can this brand serve a community as a collective rather than the individual inside of a community?”**

Peoplehood, the latest venture from the founders of group exercise phenomenon SoulCycle, responds to this need, carving out a communal space where the lost daily ritual of meaningful conversation can be revived. **“In a world that is more digitally connected than ever, there’s a human connection crisis,”** says Peoplehood cofounder Elizabeth Cutler. During 60-minute guided sessions called Gathers, lonely, disconnected, or overwhelmed participants meet virtually or in-person to “unload, share, listen, and connect.”

Even in Asia, traditionally more of a collectivist culture, a need for deeper community is manifesting. For the launch of its autumn/winter sports fashion series, Chinese fashion brand Peacebird dramatized the social isolation experienced by younger generations in a short film that shows a group of young dancers brought together by symbolic beams of light.

“The biggest opportunity that brands have is getting people to

connect

with each other. How can this brand serve a community as a collective rather than the individual inside of a community?”

/ Radha Agrawal, founder and CEO, Daybreaker



In South Korea, where the concept of heung, which means “collective energy and utmost joy” is central to culture and a defining feature of K-pop fandoms, charities are looking to embed this back into society. Neet People, a not-for-profit, was created to prevent young unemployed people from feeling isolated. Its community space provides a focal point where people who are unemployed can connect and support each other, while walking events offer bonding opportunities.

Wunderman Thompson data underlines this craving for connection: 85% believe that “people seem to have less time for each other these days,” while 56% agree that “there’s no sense of community anymore.” Four in 10 say they feel lonelier now than they used to, peaking among younger generations, a pattern that is replicated across all three countries surveyed.

Communal spaces and rituals hold the key to reigniting a prosocial mentality that could build stronger, more robust communal relationships. And it is not just human relationships that need some TLC. The United Nations’ IPCC panel recently delivered its final climate warning to limit global temperature rises to 1.5°C and 71% of those we surveyed say they are “anxious about the state of the planet.”

We Live In An Ocean of Air, which showed at the ArtScience Museum Singapore in 2022, is a virtual reality experience that highlights the connection between humans and the natural world. Created by art collective Marshmallow Laser Feast, the immersive experience visualizes the invisible yet fundamental connection created by the exchange of oxygen and carbon dioxide between the two worlds. More recently, the Symbionts exhibition at the MIT List Visual Arts Center calls for deeper understanding of symbiosis so that humanity can **“be better partners in caring for the planet,”** as exhibit curator Natalie Bell told *The Crimson*.

Brands are starting to embed collective-first thinking into their organizations. Community-powered tourism platform Fairbnb, which expanded from Italy, Spain, France, Portugal, and Belgium to the United Kingdom in February 2023, only promotes hosts who are truly embedded in their local communities, while a percentage of every rental fee is donated to a local community project.

WHY IT'S INTERESTING

The need for deeper connection, to each other and to the planet, is increasingly evident. Brands can support this by encouraging a prosocial mindset, and facilitating human and human-planet connections.

**“I want to feel part
of something bigger
than myself”**



The generation Z take

“I think community’s super-important, and I think we’re losing a little bit of physical community lately. So building real communities that are rooted in real spaces, I think is very important.”

American female, 21

“I think worship always gives me that sense of being part of something bigger than myself, because you’re with a community of people that all share the same beliefs. There’s something so beautiful about it.”

British female, 23

“[When I feel part of something bigger] I feel a sense of peace, serenity, and safety. I become much less stressed and reflective. I feel capable of sharing my ideas and emotions, and become open to giving.”

Brazilian male, 20

“Being a part of something greater than myself makes me believe that I am capable of achieving the impossible.”

Nigerian male, 24



A Daybreaker communal morning dance event

“There has to be feedback, especially for a live performance. There’s got to be some people to bounce that sound and energy off, to see what their emotional reaction is, because at the end of the day, it’s entertainment.

It produces an
out-of-body
experience.”

/ **British male, 20**



Unleashing the joyconomy

Advocating for moments of joy, play, and fun can be a powerful strategy for brands to uplift and engage customers.

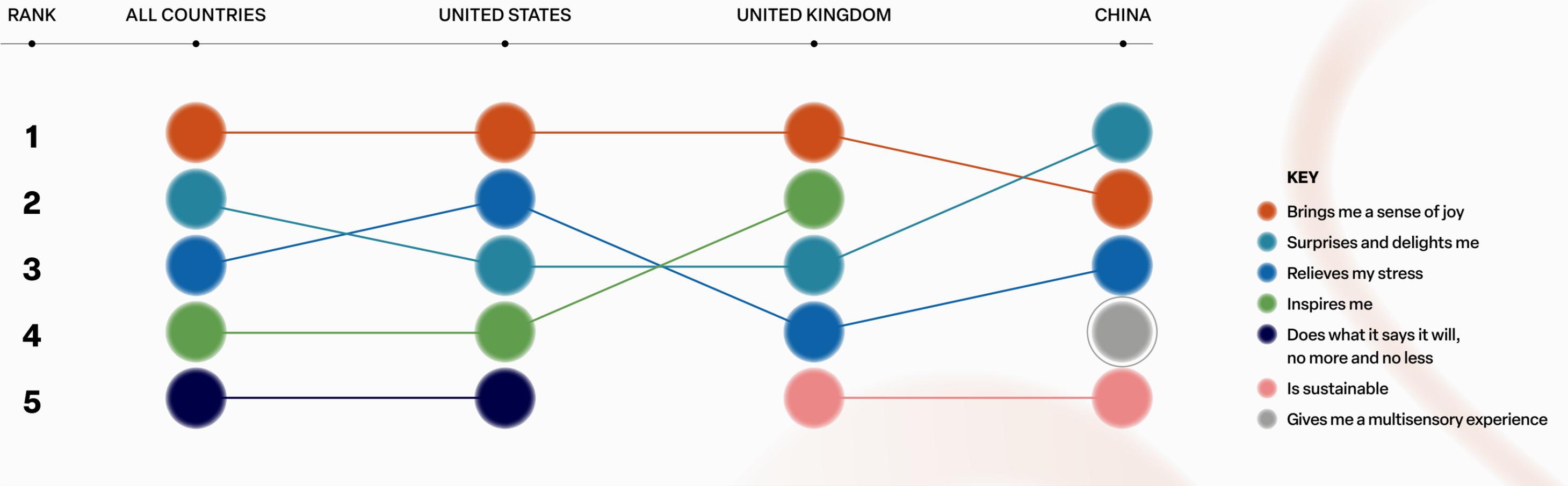
Amid the so-called polycrisis, it might seem counter-intuitive that people are seeking out opportunities for fun and playfulness. Yet the appetite for a “joyconomy” is increasingly evident. Wunderman Thompson’s latest study finds that 89% of people see fun as a necessity that keeps them going in tough times, while 83% seek out experiences that bring them joy and happiness.

As charted in “The Future 100: 2023,” the need for joy is apparent in everything from a surge in adults indulging in playfulness (Ageless Play) to the rise of joyful exercise (Joy Workouts). Sales of little luxuries that deliver a dopamine boost, from mini-candles to nail polishes, are booming in the United Kingdom, the *Guardian* reports. *Condé Nast Traveller* has identified “joy therapy” as an emerging wellness trend. Some even point to the symbolic revival of house music by the likes of Beyoncé and Madonna as a signal of joy. May we also add the *Barbie* movie?

For brands there’s a potent opportunity to deliver on the joyconomy: joy is the emotion most people want to feel more of, and 49% of people say they would even be more likely to purchase from a brand that brings them a sense of joy.

Unleashing the Joyconomy: Joy drives brand purchase intent

I'd be more likely to purchase a brand if it...
(top five ranking by country)



“We are
Fun-deprived.”

/ **Mike Rucker**, psychologist
and author of *The Fun Habit*



Loewe x Howl's Moving Castle at the Selfridges Corner Shop in London, UK



The great thing about fun and joy, according to psychologist Mike Rucker, author of *The Fun Habit*, is that they involve actions we can control and repeat. Unlike happiness, they are not a state we try to achieve. Fun happens in the moment, so **“you’re enjoying yourself or you’re not.”** Fun is also unique to everyone, so we never suffer by comparison. Fun also brings a slew of other benefits validated by research. It can make you smarter, improve your relationships, give you energy and even reduce stress, says Rucker: **“When we really bias our lives towards fun, and do that mindfully and deliberately, we avoid mind wandering, which we know creates good mental hygiene.”** There’s even a scientific argument for leisure as a restorative process to support brain function, just like sleep. The problem: we don’t make time for it. As Rucker says, **“we are fun-deprived.”**

Hyperproductivity is a major culprit, with the glorification of the grind now driving burnout. According to Microsoft global research across 11 countries, 48% of employees and 53% of managers report already feeling burned out at work. Some countries, like Belgium and the UAE, are making shorter working weeks official, but in most parts of the world limits on hours are notional.

The attention economy is also a villain, eating into our potential fun time. **“With the exception of television, two or three decades ago our attention wasn’t for sale,”** says Rucker. **“Now it’s for sale everywhere. So that does become problematic.”**

There’s an opportunity now for brands to help people “rechild” themselves, facilitating and advocating for play and fun, and 2023 is already seeing a rise in campaigns channeling joy. Fashion brands are tapping into childhood nostalgia: witness Loewe’s tie-up with Studio Ghibli or Mulberry’s collaboration with Dutch cartoon rabbit Miffy. Retailers too are foregrounding fun, including Liberty, which kicked off the year with its “Find Joy Within” campaign, and Nigerian-British designer Yinka Ilori, whose first colorful holiday season pop-up store in London was designed to instill joy and optimism in visitors.

Other brands are encouraging people to make more time for fun. McDonald's "Raise Your Arches" TV campaign (originally for the United Kingdom, then remade for the Gulf Cooperation Council region) depicts office workers abandoning their keyboards and marching off together to enjoy a lunch break. Heineken is also raising awareness of the negative impact of hustle culture by projecting messages advocating a better work-life balance onto Manhattan office buildings.

WHY IT'S INTERESTING

Fun might seem frivolous but in tough times it is no laughing matter. A key contributor to our wellbeing and driver of prosocial behavior, it's what we want more of right now: 89% of people say fun is a necessity. Joy is already a key performance metric for some pioneering brands. Daybreaker founder and CEO Radha Agrawal tells us that the core KPI for the business is **"tears of joy."**

"I want to feel more joy in my life"



Yinka Ilori's pop-up store in London, UK. Photography by Ed Reeve

“The purpose
of existence is
joy.
If there
is no joy, then what
is the point?”

/ Deepak Chopra,
SXSW 2023



Brand takeaways

These trends offer a rich territory for brands, with multiple routes to consumer engagement. Here are our top 10 takeaways to consider on the path to re-enchantment.

1. Set emotional KPIs

“One of our major key performance indicators at Daybreaker is tears of joy,” says founder Radha Agrawal. In the age of re-enchantment, brand metrics will include human emotions: heart swells, goosebumps, jaw drops, spine tingles, and more. Measuring these customer outcomes alongside business metrics will be crucial, says Momo Estrella, head of design at IKEA China Digital Hub, as people calculate the value brands are adding to their emotional lives: *“How much time are you helping me save? How much more are you teaching me? What do I know now because of you as a brand?”*

2. Prioritize connection

“Rebuilding community is the fundamental social challenge of our era,” says psychology professor Dacher Keltner. Daybreaker’s founder and CEO Radha Agrawal agrees that *“the biggest opportunity brands have is getting people to connect with each other.”* Our data aligns with this: 85% of people feel estranged, saying it seems we have less time for one another these days. Brands have an opportunity to facilitate meaningful connection, carving out rich opportunities for community and offering rituals and spaces (both physical and virtual) that bring people together.

3. Enthrall the senses

Multisensory stimulation is central to re-enchantment: 68% of people say they seek out experiences that stimulate the senses. This expectation holds whether IRL or not: 64% say they expect digital and virtual experiences to be multisensory too. While *“the physical world still has an advantage”* when it comes to *“joy, wonder, and awe,”* as Estrella tells us, the virtual world is fast building the capability to create sensory journeys. More than half of users of mixed reality, augmented reality, and virtual reality already say they find the experience more intense than reality, according to Wunderman Thompson data.





4. Promote full-spectrum emotion

Emotions are now a key component of wellness, in line with an increased awareness of the potential toxicity of the relentless quest for happiness. Darker feelings may be uncomfortable but they offer an essential counterpoint as well as opportunities for learning. Brands can help people navigate their peaks and troughs of emotion by advocating for and acknowledging the full spectrum of emotion.

70%
of gen Z and millennials
want brands to evoke
intense emotions

5. Stand up for fun

Fun is an easy win for many brands, but can often be dismissed as trivial. A powerful tool for wellbeing and resilience, it offers welcome respite in tough times. Fun also offers a triple win for brands, delivering pleasure not only in the moment but also in its anticipation and recollection. Brands can make a stand as advocates for leisure, championing playfulness and building moments of uplift and joy into the customer experience.

6. Escape the rational

Brands can offer a welcome respite from efficiency and predictability by building in moments of serendipity and the unexpected: 74% of our respondents say they enjoy an element of mystery and surprise in the things they do. Dark and fearful themes can be surprising in and of themselves, so long as they are authentic and consistent with brand values, while surreal and multiversal themes inspired by the digital world are trending in culture.

7. Go dark

Leaning into fearful themes can be a way for brands to cut through. While not a universally appealing territory, many people find darker themes thrilling: 32% of people enjoy feeling the rush that comes with being scared. For some, horror can also be a reaction, a tool to call out disenchantment with the status quo. It can even be cathartic and comforting. As experts Coltan Scrivner, behavioral scientist at Denmark's Recreational Fear Lab in Aarhus University, and Claire Catterall, senior curator at Somerset House, explain, recreational fear can offer a safe space to process anxiety.

8. Be a transcendent brand

Artist Jason Silva calls it *“the deep now,”* and it's also known as “flow,” “the mystery,” or “transcendence.” Those moments where our focus moves away from the self, and we feel connected to something bigger, are said to be transformational and powerful for our wellbeing. Late in his career, American psychologist Abraham Maslow even put self-transcendence at the peak of his hierarchy of needs. Brands can nurture transcendence via experiences that shift the lens away from the self, transporting audiences and encouraging a prosocial outlook.

“Horror

gives us a space to
voice our fears and stare
them down.”

/ **Claire Catterall,**
senior curator, Somerset House





9. Awe, quick and slow

Not every experience of re-enchantment needs to be a jaw-dropping affair. As psychology professor Kenneth Carter explains, *“You don’t have to be a thrill-seeker to be an awe or sensation seeker. It’s those everyday sensations that make the world beautiful.”* Psychologist Kirk Schneider also makes a distinction between “quick-boil awe,” which is brief, dramatic, and in the moment, and the “slow simmer,” which is linked to a longer-term commitment to conscious reflection and introspection.

10. Strive for better

Re-enchantment, at its root, is a yearning for a better life. Just 25% are positive about the way things are going in the world, and 71% would like a little more hope in their lives. As previous WT research has confirmed, people expect brands to play a key role in delivering a better future, by solving societal challenges. By centering key values around caring for planet and people, brands can foster some much-needed optimism.

“You don’t have to be
a thrill-seeker to be an awe
or sensation

seeker.

It’s those everyday sensations
that make the world beautiful.”

/ **Kenneth Carter**, Charles Howard
Candler Professor of Psychology,
Oxford College of Emory University

Methodology

Our research comprised several methodologies and covered the period January to April 2023.

In addition to extensive desk research, we conducted a quantitative study with SONAR™, Wunderman Thompson's research consultancy. In February 2023, we surveyed 3,009 adults in the United Kingdom, the United States, and China.

To uncover the four re-enchantment personas, we used Principal Component Analysis (PCA) to reduce 25 attitudinal statements into four key experience themes. People were assigned to the experience theme they were most positively associated with (the highest PCA score). Those who did not fit in a key experience theme (7% of total respondents) were excluded.

For the purposes of clarity, all statistics within the report, unless otherwise stated, are reported for a combined total population from all three countries surveyed.

In March 2023, we conducted two online qualitative studies of generation Z, speaking to 39 people aged 18-27. The first used our own proprietary qualitative research methodology and involved

eight respondents from the United States and six from the United Kingdom. For all other markets, we used Imagen Insights for our field research, which involved 25 respondents from 15 different countries (Brazil, China, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Egypt, France, Ghana, Guyana, India, Japan, Mexico, Morocco, Nigeria, Senegal, Singapore, and South Africa). Imagen Insights closes the conversation gap between brands and gen Z consumers and has helped the likes of Amazon Prime Video, Google, Shelter, and Unilever to engage their target demographic by providing gen Z insights within 72 hours.

We also conducted in-depth interviews with 20 experts and thought leaders from around the world, across sectors including science and technology, psychology, neuroscience, and brand strategy and marketing.

All data was correct and up to date at the time of writing in April 2023.

Acknowledgements

Wunderman Thompson Intelligence would like to thank the experts and academics who gave their time and insights to enrich this report

Nima Abbasi, partner, Maison Meta (he/him)

Radha Agrawal, founder and CEO, Daybreaker, cofounder, Thinx, and author of *Belong* (she/her)

Benjamin Benichou, CEO and cofounder, Drop (he/him)

Kenneth Carter, Charles Howard Candler Professor of Psychology, Oxford College of Emory University (he/him)

Claire Catterall, senior curator, Somerset House (she/her)

Jody Culham, professor and Canada Research Chair in Immersive Neuroscience, Western University in Ontario (she/her)

Oliver Davies, PR and communications manager, Feverup (he/him)

Momo Estrella, head of design, IKEA China Digital Hub (he/him)

Cyril Foiret, founder and creative director, Maison Meta (he/him)

Dacher Keltner, Professor of Psychology University of California, Berkeley, and author of *Awe: The Transformative Power of Everyday Wonder* (he/him)

Nell Lloyd-Malcolm, CEO and founder, xydrobe (she/her)

Torquil McIntosh, cofounder, Sybarite (he/him)

Simon Mitchell, cofounder, Sybarite (he/him)

Mike Rucker, psychologist and author of *The Fun Habit* (he/him)

Anton Sæten, student, content creator, and athlete (he/him)

Kirk Schneider, psychologist and author of *Life-Enhancing Anxiety: Key to a Sane World* (he/him)

Coltan Scrivner, behavioral scientist at the Recreational Fear Lab at Aarhus University (he/him)

Daniel Shambo, creative director (he/him)

Jason Silva, artist, filmmaker, storyteller, TV personality, and futurist (he/him)

Notty Stewart, witch and rootworker (she/her)

We'd also like to thank the following Wunderman Thompson people for their generous contributions:

Emma Chiu (she/her)

Hiroyuki Hosomi (he/him)

Jonothan Hunt (he/him)

Juwon Jang (she/her)

Joyce Ling (she/her)

Sebastian Martinez (he/him)

Shannon McCauley (she/her)

Diana Orrico (she/her)

Ernest Riba (he/him)

Emily Safian-Demers (she/her)

Guy Sexty (he/him)

Mark Truss (he/him)

Daryl Yeoman (he/him)



About us

About Wunderman Thompson Intelligence

Wunderman Thompson Intelligence is Wunderman Thompson's futurism, research, and innovation unit. It charts emerging and future global trends, consumer change, and innovation patterns—translating these into insight for brands. It offers a suite of consultancy services, including bespoke research, presentations, cobranded reports, and workshops. It is also active in innovation, partnering with brands to activate future trends within their framework and execute new products and concepts. The division is led by Emma Chiu and Marie Stafford, Global Directors of Wunderman Thompson Intelligence.

For more information visit:

wundermanthompson.com/expertise/intelligence

Contact

Marie Stafford (she/her)

Global Director of Wunderman Thompson Intelligence
marie.stafford@wundermanthompson.com

Editor-in-Chief

Marie Stafford (she/her)

Writers

John O'Sullivan (he/him)

Sarah Tilley (she/her)

Jamie Hannah Shackleton (she/her)

Francesca Lewis (she/her)

Carla Calandra (she/her)

Sub Editors

Hester Lacey (she/her)

Katie Myers (she/her)

Creative Director

Dee Harrop (she/her)

Visual Researchers

Jamie Hannah Shackleton (she/her)

Francesca Lewis (she/her)

Front Cover Artwork

AI generated using Image Creator from Microsoft Bing
by **Jamie Hannah Shackleton** and **Jonathan Hunt**

Fonts

Monkeg | Elza

© 2023 Wunderman Thompson Intelligence. All rights reserved.

The contents of this report cannot be replicated, extracted, or hosted without consent.

Sharing of this report is permitted only via link to the original report download page on intelligence.

wundermanthompson.com, unless explicit consent is otherwise granted.