



Accenture Life Trends 2024

Accenture Song

A word from Accenture Song

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

It's now commonly accepted that customer-obsession is the best growth strategy. Superb customer experiences are expected. It takes meticulous orchestration to play a meaningful and relevant role in your customers' lives.

However, customers are messy. They're emotional and they're changing faster than you can change your business, so keeping pace is a constant challenge. These trends examine these shifts, and seek to help businesses define how to catalyze growth by staying relevant to customers—which is Accenture Song's mission.

Where should we begin?

There are various layers that mediate between people and the way they live their lives, influencing what they think, how they interact, and how they feel within the world around them. Whether driving consumption, maintaining authority, progressing culture, or sharing information, organizations are part of a matrix of intermediaries on which economies are built.

There's undeniable fragility in the relationships between people and these influences, because they're changing. Some are emerging, some declining, some adapting—and all hold significance to people's lives. This is putting society into a state of flux, where people are now deconstructing everything as they try to figure out who they are in the world. And that goes into the heart of Accenture's Life Trends this year.

So... where should we begin?



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Where's the love?

Necessary cuts across enterprises have shunted customer obsession down the priority list—and customers are noticing.

For years, the correlation between customer experience and revenue growth inspired organizations to hold the customer at the center of every decision.

Now, economic considerations are forcing cuts throughout enterprises, driving friction between customers and brands across channels—in the form of price increases, quality cuts, illogical subscriptions, and poor customer service.

Customers are noticing, and some feel hard done by. The key question: How do brands keep their product in the basket in the long term?

37%

of people worldwide think that many companies are prioritizing higher profits over better customer experience.

40%

of CXOs say they plan to raise prices to pass cost increases to customers.

Accenture CXO Pulse survey, June 2023 ¹

What's going on

Businesses are scrambling to cut costs and protect profits against a strained economic backdrop.

They've made tough decisions to survive, with one major consequence: the erosion of customer experiences. Like it or loathe it, consumerism is a socio-economic fact of life for billions of people, with much of their day-to-day experience influenced or mediated by consumer culture. The changes described in this trend are having a significant impact across multiple aspects of life, affecting how people feel every day.

Until recently, the direct link between profit and customer experience made the latter top priority, often at the expense of other factors.² Widespread digital adoption in the 1990s—particularly the internet and, later, smartphones—pushed focus onto experience, which hadn't previously been emphasized by many businesses outside hospitality. Screen-driven interaction expanded design's scope beyond physical and graphic design to include usability and desirability.

Pine and Gilmore’s seminal 1999 book, *The Experience Economy*, brilliantly captured this shift.³

Designers realized that a user-focused approach yielded the best results, and people began comparing everything to their best digital experiences, fueling liquid expectations.

Without profitability, organizations won’t survive long. As the economic climate sharpens investors’ focus, leaders are seeking ways to reduce expenses and increase operating margins across their business. People feel the impact in multiple aspects of daily life, with many micro-disappointments adding up to a big dent in their lived experience. It seems the promises of value, choice, ease and empowerment are being downgraded, and it stings.

For over a decade, brands seemed obsessed with their relationship with customers, flooding social media with relatable content in a tone of voice that drew people in. With unfathomably quick delivery, delightful personalization and customizable subscriptions, brands raised expectations to levels that were costly to maintain.

From there, customers came to expect brand relationships that far exceeded the transactional. That hasn’t changed, but the reality of what brands now offer is feeding a tension that shouldn’t be ignored and is manifesting in a few ways. There’s evidence of brands deprioritizing customer experience, with some companies cutting quality or quantity but maintaining prices. Some people understand—others find it dishonest.

Leading reasons why customers feel less valued:



“Shrinkflation” describes a reduction in the quantity or size of a product, while retaining its price.

An example is charging as much or more for a chocolate bar that looks the same but weighs less.⁴ This trade-off forces consumers to pay increasing prices for diminishing returns.⁵ While this isn’t a new practice, the cost-of-living squeeze heightens consumers’ attention to value—and they can easily shout about it to alert others.⁶ Reddit community, r/shrinkflation, documents changes in sizing and quantity of products, and compares to the original.⁷

A newer practice has been labeled “Skimpflation” by National Public Radio’s Planet Money in November 2021, describing a decline in the quality of service throughout the global economy, among travel companies, retailers and restaurateurs.^{8,9} It might mean swapping quality ingredients for cheaper alternatives, or compromising on quality-assuring manufacturing processes to save time and money.¹⁰ As people’s wages aren’t rising in line with inflation, the drop in value for their purchases hits hard.¹¹

“You notice they put less crisps in a packet which I think is robbery.”

Nasser, aged 52, France





“When they lower the quality but keep the price the same, I simply stop going there.”

Pedro, aged 22-29, Brazil, commenting on a practice he’s frequently observed in food stores and restaurants

It’s not just sizing and quality—it’s also surge pricing in places like restaurants and bars, based on peak moments like major sporting or cultural events. Fixed pricing has evolved to dynamic models in places where people wouldn’t expect it.¹²

Customer service is taking a hit, too. A third of the respondents to Accenture’s global survey say it’s been difficult to get help from or even reach customer service agents in the past year, and a National Customer Rage Survey revealed that US citizens’ experience of dealing with companies over problems is getting worse. They’re unimpressed with lackluster resolutions and have become more aggressive.

The potential revenue loss for businesses failing to manage complaints properly could reach US\$887 billion, up from US\$494 billion in 2020.¹³

“A lot of companies don’t train their customer service agents properly. I often encounter agents with a very rigid attitude and totally ignorant to my questions.”

Shu, aged 40-49, China

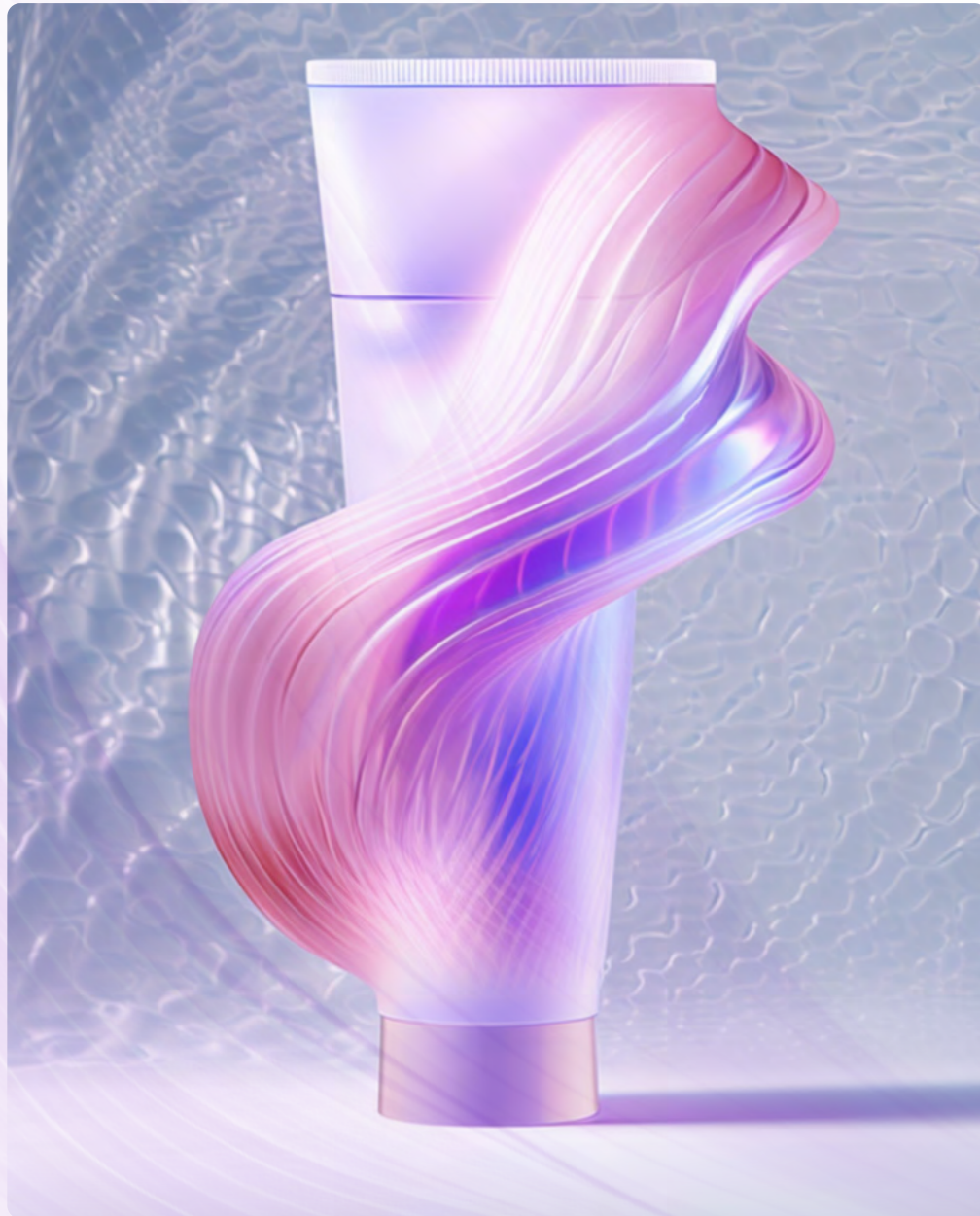
When customer service falls short, the small stones most customers can afford to throw at big companies in a battle for justice will simply bounce off. Services are starting to emerge to support customers with their grievances, from refunds for canceled flights to repairs under warranty.^{14,15}

Once hailed as a source of recurring revenue, subscriptions are becoming tedious to customers, and uptake is slowing down worldwide.¹⁶ People may become annoyed with subscriptions for products or services that shouldn’t need regular renewal—in some cases, the saving offered on subscription is clear, making it galling to pay more for a logical one-off purchase.

"Trying to leverage even more profit out of subscription services is a worrying trend and I hope there is a consumer backlash against it," says Jack McKeown, motoring editor at *The Courier*.¹⁷

People’s perception of purpose-led initiatives in today’s context is becoming less favorable. While it may not be this simple, customers can find it contradictory to see brands sinking money into surface-level support for a cause while shaving value off the experience they’re buying. Further, many of these messages are transparently insincere attempts to co-opt a current, high-profile cause, which often doesn’t reflect the brand.

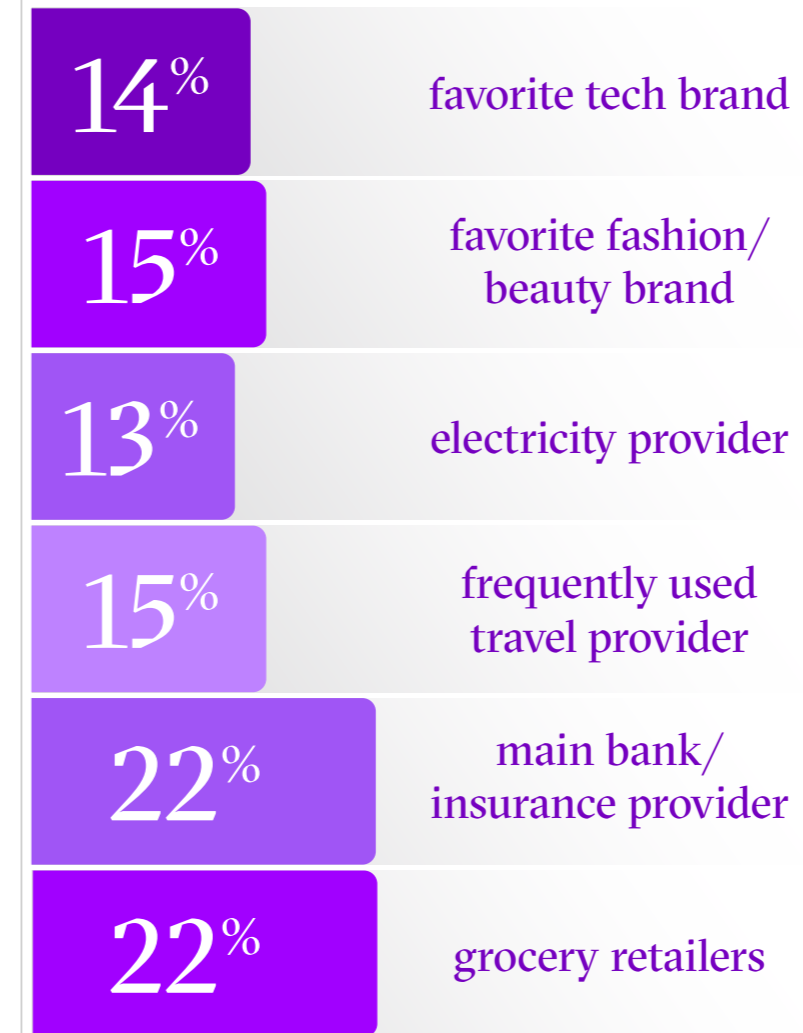
In extreme cases, these actions polarize and alienate customers. They perceive that brands use purpose messaging to distract from measures to degrade their experience, helping to fuel anger over such campaigns. It’s particularly damaging brands with mass appeal, who risk millions of dollars if they lose even a small percentage of customers. Whatever they do around purpose, companies could attract criticism from somewhere. Solving this is front of mind for CMOs, but is it too late to row back?



Brands have long been on a customer-obsession bandwagon, earnestly lauding the importance of their customer relationships.

Now, people see them quietly reversing these promises and feel the impact on their finances and quality of life. Where's the love that was such a priority a short while ago? Brands will need new strategies to present their value, and a new way to define and develop their relationship with their customers.

The extent to which people feel these have their best interest at heart:



This reveals a lack of trust across all sectors.

What's next

At the center of this trend is a critical perception problem: where companies see moves to ensure brand survival, some customers see greed.

Most brands do what they must to remain viable in a difficult economy, but customers who don't see behind the scenes often view those actions differently. For customers, it doesn't make sense when essential service providers publish record profits after hiking rates, and this heightens their suspicions that other price rises or quality compromises are intended to short-change them.

Both brands and customers are having to reduce costs. If brands continue to offer customers less for more, resentment will quickly build and places like Reddit will become awash with dissatisfaction, fueling a negative impact on the brand's long-term health, growth, and viability.



Companies should find a way to balance cost and profit without passing the price increase onto the customer.”

Yaotao, aged 30-39, China



While consumer behaviors are complex, tweaking the dials on customer experience will impact brand desirability.

Customers will always try to create their desired lifestyle. When finances are squeezed, their brand loyalty will become weaker, so price and value become the most influential levers. A major brand challenge becomes how to keep their product in people's basket.

When pushed hard enough, more people might turn to illegal means to acquire what they want for a price they can justify. IPTV services, an illegal form of content piracy, have grown in popularity across Europe in response to prohibitively expensive subscriptions for sports programming.¹⁸ While users may be relatively few, these behaviors often prompt larger shifts to combat them, just as Napster, a workaround for music fans, inspired the worldwide streaming model in place today.¹⁹

Customers will continue to budget (as they've always had to do)—it's almost inevitable that they'll cancel subscriptions, cut back, trade down if they don't feel the value. As they do, a new risk arises: the flip side of the concept of liquid expectations, "liquid suspicions" describes the idea that when customers are let down by one brand, they'll be wary of all others.

Meaningful, competent customer experience will probably become a critical factor that defines their relationships with brands. They will only be persuaded by initiatives that earn trust through tangible support and stability. Discrepancy here is most evident in the declining efficacy of cause-led marketing, where risk of backlash can outweigh possible gain. For some brands, what was once a differentiator is now a hazard.

To rekindle customer loyalty, organizations must renew their focus on customer experience as a route to growth.

We expect to see the essentials of great marketing returning to brand strategy.

When effectively managed to serve the customer, the four Ps of marketing—price, product, promotion, place—are a winning formula for growth, and a reminder that growing a brand means balancing value with sales volumes. Marketers appear to have been so focused on promotion, that the other Ps have fallen through the cracks—particularly price. Revisiting pricing with a careful eye on perceived value and fairness is key, as making considered sacrifices in margin could translate to gains in trust and loyalty.

Building a strong, trustworthy brand while trying to convert sales is the job of every marketer. The emotional value of a brand can be an effective tool in times of economic difficulty. Companies like Airbnb and PepsiCo have found success by investing in brand, marketing, creativity, design, and storytelling, which has been attributed to a growth in sales.^{20,21}

Costco’s decision to keep prices steady yielded a 15% jump in sales in 2022’s third quarter.²² The retailer is maintaining loyalty and providing small moments of joy—just what’s needed in a recessionary climate. Speaking to Canvas8 for the 2023 Expert Outlook, Karen Barnes, the editor of Delicious Magazine, said: “There is a need for security and comfort because people still want to have treats and small luxuries, even if they’re not the kind people would’ve had before.”

To rekindle customer loyalty, organizations must renew their focus on customer experience as a route to growth. Joint ownership of the experience should harness the best efforts of service, marketing, and design to deliver consistent value to customers. Successful collaborators will quickly discover the value of having an advocate for customer experience in efficiency discussions. The path forward means identifying and eliminating the breaking points that lead to resentment, and returning to the four Ps of marketing to find new balance.

What to think about next

- 01** Are compromises on customer experience across touchpoints in the marketing funnel jeopardizing trust, conversion rates, and long-term loyalty?
- 02** Are you aligned organization-wide on what is required to keep your product in customers' baskets?
- 03** How do you balance cost-cutting measures that might compromise customer service and quality with long-term customer relationships?

What to do next

- 01** Explore the potential of Generative AI as a long-term solution for enhancing meaningful customer experiences.
- 02** Assess your brand's "elasticity of forgiveness" to determine the extent to which your customers are willing to overlook and forgive negative experiences with the brand.
- 03** Connect sentiment feedback to responsive systems. What tools do you have in place to track shifts in customer sentiment?

The great interface shift

Generative AI is upgrading people's experience of the internet from transactional to personal, enabling them to feel more digitally understood and relevant than ever.

What shapes people's views on the world?

The information they consume, perspectives they create, and ways they communicate are heavily mediated through the internet. Generative AI is upgrading the internet from informative to intelligent, and the experience of using it from transactional to personal. Benefits are on both sides of a key relationship: customers will be more deeply understood than ever, while brands will use that understanding to shape hyper-relevant products, services and experiences. Smart brands will see a huge opportunity for responsive brand development here, too.

Conversational AI (like ChatGPT) is a prime opportunity for enhanced customer engagement and personalization.



Source: Accenture Life Trends survey, August 2023

What's going on

People and machines will never interface in the same way again, because it's not the same machine and people's behaviors have changed.

Through conversational interfaces, people will be able to steer machines in new ways and machines will be able to interpret people in finer detail, unlocking new behaviors, attitudes, and expectations for their digital interactions—and brands will be caught in the middle.

The way people use the internet to find information is largely dispassionate. It's a transactional relationship, with a browser serving as the middleman between the person and the task they want to complete, connection they want to make, or content they want to consume. That middleman is set to become more intelligent, more informed, and more empathetic, thanks to generative artificial intelligence (generative AI). Specifically, large language models (LLMs) are powering a radically new interface through which people access information, and prompting a significant shift in how people relate to the world around them. It promises to make people feel understood digitally, and therefore have more relevant experiences.

The ability to create a sense of being understood is powerful and much needed.

Being truly understood validates people's thoughts, emotions and experiences, and affirms their worth. It strengthens their sense of connection and belonging to a community, making them feel relevant within social contexts. As people interact with machines in new ways, it changes the way they interact with each other, and gives companies an opportunity to connect meaningfully with customers, creating relationships that feel personal.

How is this shift playing out? The journey for LLMs is only just beginning so there's plenty more to discover than is explored here, but it's clear that information discovery is moving from a search mode to a conversational mode, which is far more flexible, nuanced and personalized than its predecessors.

Companies like Google have already set out their ambitions in this area.²³ People are adding complexity and context into their conversations and new tools like ChatGPT are merging search and service into a single response by using plug-ins with third-party applications that aren't controlled by OpenAI.²⁴

This represents a new way to get answers: it's a leap from "I want a" to "I want to." Where they would once have searched, "best restaurants central Barcelona", people can engage in a two-way chat that will ultimately lead them to ask for "highly rated traditional tapas restaurants in Barri Gòtic, popular with locals, with availability for four people to dine outside at 9pm on Friday". Other examples include Instacart, which enables people to place orders from their favorite local grocery stores using ChatGPT, while Expedia helps to build all elements of a trip.²⁵



Because of ChatGPT and AI, I can search for information faster and search for more accurate information...I see that with the new AI there are new ways of working, new ways of researching and new ways of discovering the world."

Pedro, aged 22-29, Brazil

AI is now doing things for people through autonomous agents—trained AI entities that can complete tasks independently.

Examples include Auto-GPT, which can take a goal, write its own “to do” list, and connect with other services to check off tasks on the list towards achieving the goal.²⁶ It needs less human intervention than ChatGPT and can set itself new tasks as it goes along. Even in its early days and despite teething problems, it’s incredibly impressive.

Further capabilities include translation, where this latest development in generative AI proves its worth. Chat interfaces with real-time translation make it easy for those who don’t share a common language to communicate, and AI-powered Speak teaches people foreign languages.²⁷ This breaks down barriers, enabling effective understanding and collaboration—including cultural nuance and idioms. It promotes inclusivity and facilitates global interaction.

One example is in South Africa, where generative AI is translating educational materials into the country’s eleven official languages, helping students who struggle with educational content taught only in English.²⁸

Chat interfaces with translation capabilities can also enhance communication for individuals with language-related disabilities, such as hearing impairment, by providing real-time translation into accessible formats, enabling them to participate inclusively.²⁹ This feature helps bridge the language gap and promotes accessibility, removing a key barrier to effective communication and engagement.

Less than a year after the launch of ChatGPT,

12.9%

of people globally who have tried the technology said this tool or similar would be their main method to help planning a vacation.



A virtual companion that can chat about anything in a natural way, Pi and tools like it have brought emotional intelligence into chatbots by providing empathy in its personalized responses that acknowledge the user's situation, within context.^{30,31} Be My Eyes is a generative AI-powered digital assistant that helps visually impaired people navigate their surroundings, complete tasks and live more independently.³²

Adoption of LLMs continues to grow, with more uses being explored. Soon, there may be a proliferation of open-source LLMs that people can use on their own devices. Hardware giants are already building devices, including Apple's M-series laptops, powerful enough to support processing needs without connecting to the cloud, bringing performance and privacy benefits.³³

A shift is emerging, and it could be a big one. Moving from search to two-way chat with generative AI allows for conversational experiences, providing a more engaging interaction, and driving inclusion. People can seek clarification, ask questions and receive real-time support, fostering deeper satisfaction. Using natural language processing, the chat interface enhances engagement, eliminates the need for specific queries, and creates more intuitive experiences.

39%
of people aged 18-34
are excited about
conversational answers
over standard
internet searches.

D-ID launched an interface for chatting face-to-face with a digital “person”, which can be integrated with LLMs.³⁴

One day, every connected person could have their own AI companion that can predict their preferences based on past choices and become the mediator between them and the internet. This represents a potential transformation in the way people are heard and understood by machines, the importance of which shouldn’t be underestimated.

The depth of understanding should enable people to find and access highly personalized experiences that are entirely relevant to them. In certain contexts, AI companions will use their knowledge of an individual to prioritize the most relevant products, services, media and experiences.

It’s early days, but this is the potential human impact of what’s unfolding—a world in which each person is deeply understood for who they are and what they want, and then able to build an experience of the world that’s highly relevant to them.

What's next

Intelligent conversational interfaces can enable brands to understand their customers on a more granular and flexible level than ever, fueling strong, personal relationships.

The implications for brands are huge, as people will start to expect them to offer increasingly personalized, relevant products and services. To be clear: this is an entirely new level of personalization, capable of flexing around each individual rather than algorithms.

Generative AI has moved on from its one-trick pony days, and is developing something seriously impressive: multimodal capabilities. Rather than handling elements separately, it's learning to juggle text, images, sound—everything—simultaneously. This upgrade lets AI make sense of information in a more human way, resulting in content that's cleverly written, visually appealing and audibly engaging.

It's expected to unlock the door for next-generation sensory experiences where AI can create content that resonates with people in ways never seen before.³⁵ It will transform physical experiences, like Paragraphica Camera, a lens-free camera that uses location data to produce AI-generated images.³⁶

We expect LLMs to change the relationship between people and brands. Whether they manifest as a virtual person, or in other creative ways to present content to customers, brands can come alive through conversational AI interfaces. Adding these human-like dimensions to digital channels requires an extension of the brand identity. Every brand should ask itself: How should this incarnation of the brand sound? What is its personality? How (if at all) is it embodied?

These are all elements of the underlying question: Who are we as a brand? This creates a conundrum. If the brand becomes hyper-personalized to every customer, does that effectively mean managing a million brand variants? How do they preserve DNA? It'll become important to find a new balance between maintaining global consistency and delivering relevance for each customer.



Today's chatbots can't fully interpret requests, which is frustrating.³⁷

Generative AI's understanding of context promises to enable a non-human entity to respond to people's changing needs, preferences and moods in an increasingly insightful way. However, while LLMs are being refined, delivery may be patchy, so companies will need to craft a strategy to minimize disruption.

We expect to see LLM-native brands set up to take full advantage of this shift in the perception of brand. For instance, a sportswear brand could be shaped from the outset as a super-smart, perceptive, empathetic fitness coach, offering tailored conversations that build a relationship on trust and personal connection.

Personalization in commerce will likely be redefined. Customers might tell brands what they want, with context, personalizing their own commerce experiences through conversation. Interpreting those conversations and delivering the right answer/product/service in the right moment will enable organizations to deliver real-time relevance.

Interfaces may soon be able to roll the sales process, the act of buying and customer service into one digital breath, making the customer's experience more fluid than ever. Instead of searching "42-inch TV", they could ask, "my space measures 1m x 1.5m and my couch is 2.25m away – what size TV is best?" This has implications for the way businesses are organized, as the interface may drive structural change.

It'll be fascinating to see the aesthetics of generative AI evolve.

Will it remain a chat interface, or will brands do something more interesting—more human—with it? Visual design will have a substantial role. This development will take time but within five years, we expect people's interactions with the internet to look very different from today's apps and websites.

It's hard to overstate how different this technology is from what's gone before. It represents a new frontier, where the experiential overtakes the theoretical, and we haven't even discovered everything it makes possible yet. We know it's multimodal and that it can help people search, and complete tasks, but people are still experimenting with it, exploring new uses and risks. Right now, it's certainly applicable for all parts of customer-interfacing services—and will serve as a differentiator for brands that use it—but soon, we see it becoming a necessity for relevance.



What to think about next

- 01** Common user pain points across all digital interfaces will become opportunity spaces for brands and platforms—from search to visibility to service.
- 02** Do you want to lead in creating a new interface paradigm or wait for others to do so? And is your data ready?
- 03** How fast will user expectations of your brand experience change as the ecosystem integrates generative AI into everyday interface interactions?

What to do next

- 01** Scan your data to identify unique value that is created when built upon a large language model (LLM).
- 02** Dive in now but remember that this is more than just a technological innovation. Shifting human behaviors and expectations will be a significant and rapid change for businesses to adapt to.
- 03** Integrate your approach and expertise into your core teams, rather than isolating them in a separate “innovation” squad.
- 04** Organize and plan for seamless customer engagement that will unify your marketing, sales, and service processes through conversational interfaces.



Meh-diocrity

Creativity was once about the audience, but has become dependent on playing the tech system. Is this what creative stagnation feels like?

Audiences are bored—and so are creators.

Entertainment and brand content seems to have lost its edge, leading to a feeling of blandness. Creativity was once all about the audience, but it's become inhibited by efficiency mindsets, and by middleman technologies playing tastemaker and gatekeeper. With potential cultural stagnation on the horizon, those willing to invest in genuine innovation and creativity have a powerful opportunity to stand out.

Differentiation will mean pivoting away from the safety of the familiar and restoring faith in novelty.



These days, products seem indistinguishable. Technologies often offer similar functionalities.”

Max, aged 25, UK

What's going on

Novelty drives excitement and emotional connections, but much entertainment and brand content feels unimaginative at the moment.

There are more apps, experiences, content, and products available than ever, yet there's a feeling of disappointment in the mediocrity of what's on offer. The larger pool of content means that standouts are harder to find, and special no longer feels special.

Have we reached a point where technology has become dominant as cultural tastemaker and gatekeeper—once exclusively human roles (for all the good and bad that came with that)? It's widely known that algorithms control the way people discover brands or products, but their governance over design of content and products is problematic. This marks a change in intent: once, breaking the rules to be original was something for which designers were celebrated, but now the risk of not being discovered clips their wings.



Brands' success has long relied on their ability to differentiate from competitors—to offer products, services and content that truly stand out for being better, more convenient, or more creative.

Customers are looking out at a landscape of blandness that presents creators with an opportunity to break through, but few are managing to do so.

Efficiency culture has a hand in this shift. When economic conditions are tough, businesses seek to drive up efficiency, and to squeeze maximum value from every invested cent. Efficiency and creativity often make for a counterproductive partnership, which today can result in lower-quality work fueled by data rather than human imagination.

“The lack of original content is frustrating; it’s just reboots and film series now. It’s become boring and seems lazy.”

Matt, aged 22, UK

As CFOs need to manage costs, organizations across sectors usually start reducing budgets for creativity and innovation. In entertainment, large media conglomerates are knocking more impactful (and expensive) “prestige” television down the list in favor of reality TV, which is cheaper and faster to get on air. Advertising budgets have also taken a hit throughout the industry, affecting even the largest spenders in digital media and creative.³⁸ Yet these constraints can create the conditions for exceptional inventiveness, if allowed to flourish.

Efficiency mindsets and squeezed budgets have made many cautious about taking risks on new approaches, settling instead for what's worked in the past.

In many cases, creatives know that if something that worked before suddenly flops with customers, they won't be questioned for trying it, but the same cannot be said for trying out radically new ideas.

The incentive, therefore, isn't to be bold and imaginative, but rather to recycle old wins.

In entertainment, the balance between novelty and familiarity is important. However, the scale has tipped towards the latter, as the proportion of popular movies that were sequels, spin-offs or remakes increased from 16% in 1981 to 80% in 2019. Studios have been leaning on formulas that have worked before rather than pushing new ideas, and people are noticing.^{39,40} Boundary-pushing creativity is being pushed aside in favor of its less talent-led cousin: design by data. Businesses are building what the data says people want, and the data tends to point towards familiarity.

“ There are sequels to films that never end. They're trying to make money using the same codes.”

Maxime, aged 25, France

Another factor that constrains creative output is technology templates. For this trend, that's a catch-all term for the guardrails of tools used to transform idea into reality, the platforms through which they're distributed, and the algorithms that dictate how they're discovered. In many ways, these layers of mediation between creator and audience tend to exert a soft control over the output itself. Increasingly, this leads to a feeling that everything follows a template or formula, and that designers must design for algorithms rather than audiences.

TikTok is an example that brings this to life, since it makes it easy for people to create their own content, but the sounds and visuals are often reused many times by many creators, until the next trend captures a new moment's zeitgeist and away the cycle goes again.



35%

of respondents
find app designs
indistinguishable
across brands, a
sentiment that rises
to nearly 40% among
18-to-24-year-olds.

The algorithm has become visible in how it shapes culture. It isn't just influencing content production choices, but also the format preferences of dominant platforms, such as the preference toward short form vertical video. This form of soft control forces creators to compromise to fit a specific mould to maximize discoverability and engagement.

Streaming services like Spotify, Apple Music and Tidal pay artists according to how many times a song is played all the way through, regardless of how long the song is. The knock-on effect being that pop songs are becoming shorter—after all, why bother crafting four minutes of music when 90 seconds will earn as much income?⁴¹ Conversely, YouTube's advertising rules incentivize creators to make sure their videos exceed 10 minutes to maximize income.⁴²

The circumstances set out above put brands in a position where they must devise strategies that enable them to stand out and drive revenue simultaneously. With technology placing a certain level of creativity within reach for everyone, originality and creative skill are at risk of being undervalued.

What's next

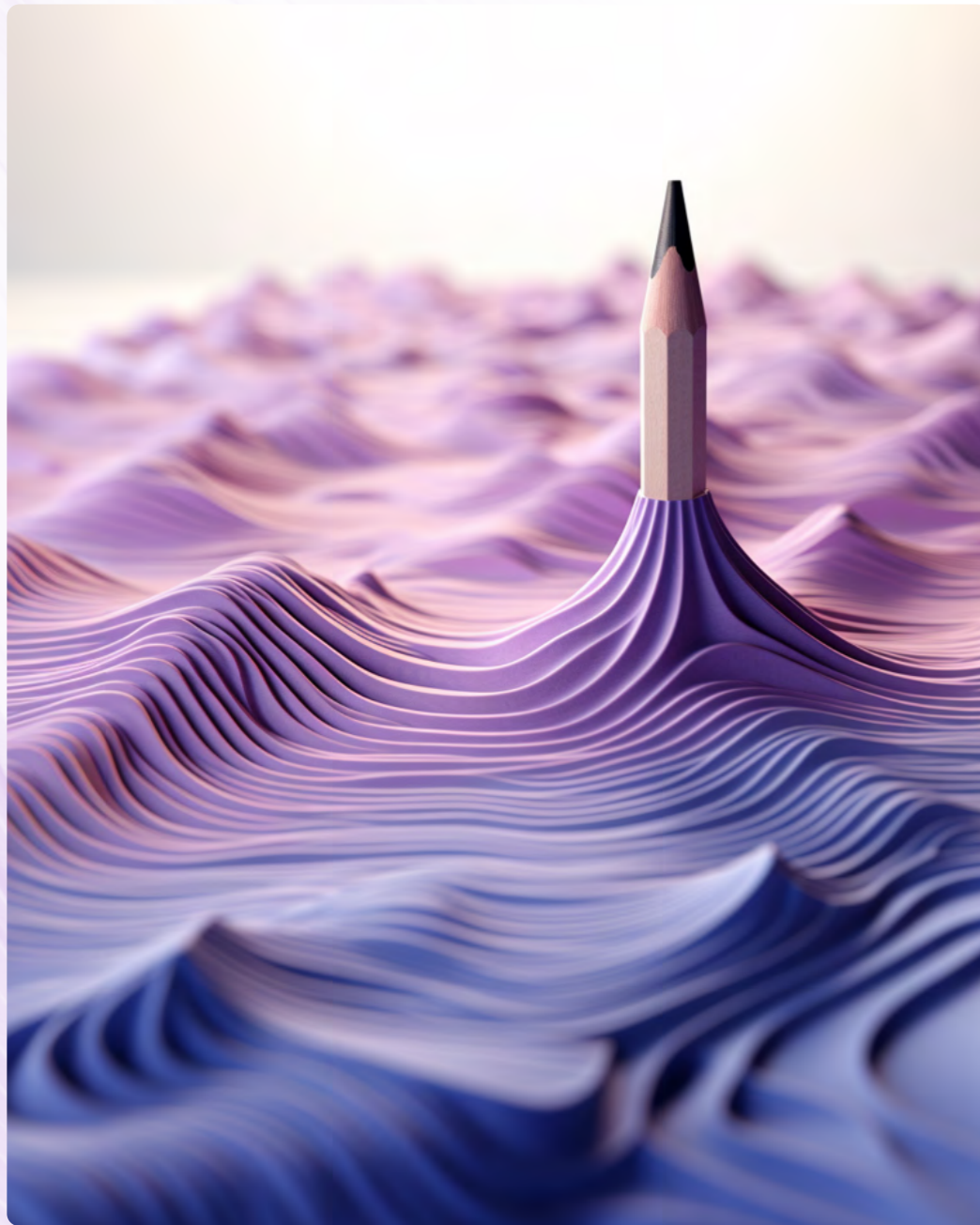
Customers actively seek out novelty for its inherent ability to captivate and engage. As the saying goes, “too much of a good thing isn’t a good thing.”

Familiarity—while comforting—can breed complacency and diminish excitement. According to a YouGov survey, 45% of global respondents find shopping experiences dull.⁴³ In a rapidly evolving landscape, people are drawn to experiences that sate their desire for uniqueness. Whether in the form of cutting-edge products, immersive campaigns, or unexpected collaborations, novelty delivers sustained interest and emotional connection. Customers yearn for the thrill of newness, underscoring the imperative for brands to infuse their offerings with a well-calibrated blend of familiarity and innovation.

The likelihood is that the mediocrity problem will not fix itself—in fact, the conditions are right for it to become increasingly complicated, particularly as we fully expect more organizations will deploy generative AI in their creative processes. With this rise in generative AI for content, an algorithmic aesthetic is emerging—novel at first, but quickly becoming commonplace.

This approach will continue to flood an already saturated ecosystem with content. On one hand, it could become more difficult to stand out, as competition for attention becomes insurmountably fierce due to the sheer volume of content being churned out. In other words, the haystack will keep growing while the needle stays the same, making it harder to find.

But on the other hand, differentiation could become easier because as more organizations lean heavily on generative AI, human creativity could set others apart. Where there’s a void of novelty, there’s opportunity—in a sea of familiarity, originality truly stands out. Photography is a good comparison: everyone with a relatively recent smartphone now has the technology to create decent images, but few are on display in the world’s finest galleries. It takes talent and a commitment to honing a skill to be able to craft something excellent.



The major opportunity here is for creatives to learn new ways to use this technology to their advantage.

Used well, generative AI can come up with an idea that creatives can build out, make creatives' own ideas reality, or both. We expect to see more creatives producing better work faster, with this technology and technologists as new co-creators. It can automate the boring tasks, help with development tasks and be a major contributor to innovation.

With technology democratizing the ability for the masses to produce a flood of average content, the ambition for creatives and artistic craft skills will be consistently to beat "average". The bar will continue to be raised, but creatives can transcend that bar with enough time and freedom to be audacious with their ideas and experiment.

While working with generative AI, creatives must remember two golden rules: firstly, it's critical to care about the work and about getting to the best result for the right people; and secondly, they must keep a razor-sharp focus on their brief, to avoid getting lost in the endless possibilities suggested by the technology.

The implications for the craft of creativity are enormous, and creatives are terrified that the temptation to save money through delegating to technology will outweigh the benefits of employing people to produce output that will inspire, surprise, or delight their target audiences or customers. Organizations should be interrogating what modern creative excellence is, and what it looks like for them.

There are some key principles to follow

A budget for lunacy is critical

Creativity means hands-on time for creatives—time to ideate, experiment, develop and test. Creativity is expensive, and the investment usually pays off in richness of quality in the result. A brand is, in essence, a bundle of promises that creative work can help deliver—alongside a strong voice in the market. Airbnb is an example of a brand doing just this, with a pivot away from sales-focused marketing to brand-led PR.⁴⁴

Make friends with risk

The kind of creativity that produces effective results is not efficient. Many brands appear to have sacrificed quality for speed. Reintroducing craft, creativity, fun and attention to detail will lead to profit. When discussing advertising through a recession, Marc Pritchard, Chief Brand Officer of Procter & Gamble said, “As we continue to face disruptions in the world around us, it may be more important than ever to double down on our core job, our collective priority and responsibility, and the superpower that no other industry has—creativity for growth.”⁴⁵

Break the technology templates

The growing adoption of creative generative AI threatens to compound the issue of templated design output. To avoid efficiency-first, recycled content, skilled creatives must be involved in the use of generative AI, as those without expertise may be able to make something passable but not truly creative content that breaks through.

Know thyself

In the end, deep understanding of the brand makes it possible to take creative risks, to try something new, and to focus on the right metrics rather than all metrics. Before budget, and before deciding on which risks to take, it’s critical to have clarity on the brand’s identity and culture.

Differentiation has long been a core challenge for businesses, but arguably feels more acute than ever. People will always seek out novelty, and people want to create. Whatever business they’re in, brands need to believe once more in the power of creativity to set them apart from the competition, and give creatives the budget, time and opportunity to renew their focus on the craft and learn how best to harness technology for good.

What to think about next

- 01** Are you being tech-led? Are the metrics you use effective?
- 02** How can you be bold and differentiate while staying true to your brand identity and positioning?
- 03** In a sea of excessive content that often leads to user overload, how can you make your brand distinctive?

What to do next

- 01** Bring focus back to creativity (and champion it), whether that's in product or service innovation, branding and marketing, design, or content.
- 02** Use new and emerging tools to push the boundaries of craft, not to replace it and cause a permanent shift to average.
- 03** Ensure generative AI does not become railroad to cliché.

A smartphone lies on a dark wooden desk. The screen displays a vibrant, wavy pattern in shades of pink, purple, and orange. Overlaid on the screen is the text "Error 429: Human request limit reached" in a white, sans-serif font. In the background, a small figurine of a person in a red shirt and blue hat stands on the desk. To the right, a pair of glasses is partially visible. The overall scene is dimly lit, with a warm, ambient glow.

Error 429:
Human request limit reached

Technology feels like it's happening to people rather than for them—is a shift beginning, where they regain agency over its influence on daily life?

Humanity's interaction with technology stands at a pivotal juncture.

With the acceleration of innovation, people's sense is that technology is happening to them rather than for them. Looking ahead, the tech industry and all who rely on it need to upgrade their responsibility from compliance to care, and work towards contributing positively to people's wellbeing rather than draining their resources.

Businesses can't hide from the oncoming tide of people seeking control of their relationship with technology, so their best approach is to become part of the solution.



We already feel overwhelmed even when watching a film where tech overtakes humans but this is already starting to happen. ChatGPT is smarter than you because it knows more.”

Maxime, aged 25, France

What’s going on

Digital technology’s relationship with humanity has been incredibly positive, as it continually generates numerous benefits, including access to information, the ability to communicate instantly across vast distances, on-demand entertainment and art, healthcare services, convenient financial management, and new employment opportunities. But, as with many relationships, things are not straightforward.

In return for such advantages, there are demands on people. Benefitting from innovative technologies means keeping a level of digital literacy, being attentive and open to learning about developments, and having the ability to adapt to rapid changes. It also comes with a burden of responsibility to exercise self-control and limit negative impacts on wellbeing.

Analysis of Accenture’s Life Trends survey data found that the more technologies people used regularly, the more likely they were to agree that technology had complicated their lives as much as it had simplified it.⁴⁶ Each time something new launches, people must evaluate the balance of give and take.

As a point of clarity, the types of digital technology this trend focuses on are those that battle for people’s attention, or that sit between them and their goals or tasks.

Amid extensive public debate around generative AI, there’s a growing unease that technology is becoming something that happens to people, rather than for them. Changes feel too fast to manage—or even to understand—and the future seems daunting. Ipsos Global Trends 2023 found that in the UK, people are increasingly agreeing with the statement “I fear technological progress is ruining our lives”.

In the three decades from 1990 to 2020, the rise here was four percentage points, while it rose by ten percentage points in just three years from 2020 to 2022.⁴⁷ And according to a poll by Ipsos and Reuters, 61% of US citizens believe “AI threatens the future of humanity”, while only 22% disagree.⁴⁸

Society has long been wary of how technology shapes the future, but the past two years have seen the arrival of technologies that promise to transform people's lives. First came rapid advancements in spatial computing, Web3, devices and biotechnologies. Then came generative AI, signalling a massive acceleration in technology's power to remake the way individuals live.

People are understandably fearful for their jobs, and clueless as to how to advise their children on their future careers.^{49,50} What should they study? How can they build a secure income? Technology is completely changing how people approach their life journey.

Intense hype cycles of technological innovations make people feel like passengers. Something new pops up, there's excited speculation about its game-changing potential, then it often finds its natural place among a smaller audience and everyone else moves on.

People are becoming more confused about the possible impact of new technology, as these hype cycles seem to happen increasingly often, but the long-term reality rarely matches the short-term promise. Echoing this sentiment, the Accenture Life Trends survey found that 38% of people globally believe it's more crucial than ever to apply critical thinking when choosing technologies.

Technology's role in contributing to widespread loneliness has become a worrying issue, leading the US Surgeon General to label it as an epidemic, particularly impacting teenagers who are experiencing rising rates of depression, suicidal ideation, and suicide.⁵¹ In Japan, services have started to emerge in response, including chatbots to combat loneliness, and programs to help landlords insure against and manage the aftermath of solitary deaths.^{52,53,54}

A large, stylized purple number '47%' is centered on the page. The '4' and '7' are thick and blocky, with the percentage sign to the right. The background behind the number consists of soft, wavy purple lines that create a sense of motion and depth.

find the speed of new
technology overwhelming.

Source: YouGov Global Profiles Q2, 2023
(n=400,454)

A common theme here is a feeling of losing control or a crisis in human agency.

This is illustrated in the 2023 CoreCore trend on TikTok, using post-modern imagery and voiceover to articulate the disconcerting reality of modern life, which has become so entangled with technology. More than ever, people appear to have lost faith that they, as a collective, have the power to shape their own future. They can no longer rely on what were once absolutes. Even the inevitability of death is being challenged by accelerations in anti-ageing science, which could have a questionable impact on society.⁵⁵

During the emergence of web 2.0 and social media, there was some sense that what was happening was the result of millions (and then billions) of individual actions, and the results were emergent properties not really under the control of anyone. Now, though, this AI revolution feels like an enormous, poorly understood power directly in the hands of a tiny number of tech leaders.

Individuals increasingly feel they want to take back some degree of control over the trajectory of their lives, but the challenge is how to do it. And, in fact, is it even possible?

Technology has catalyzed an erosion of trust in institutions, further straining users' relationship with it, as the bodies that manage online platforms face freedom-of-speech complexities when trying to identify and control spambots, disinformation or propaganda.^{56,57} This has prompted concerns about technology's impact on democracy, which strikes at the heart of what it means to belong to a society.⁵⁸

In reality, it's impossible to judge whether people have reached their limit with technology. They have, on average, 16 waking hours in the day. Both psychological and practical factors are at play, be it complexity in tasks that were once simpler, the rapid pace of change, or feature overloads. They're mentally and physically strained sitting in front of screens, and the cognitive load of managing multiple devices, apps, and platforms to get through the day feels the opposite of life-centered.



What's next

With the exponential pace of technology's advancements showing no sign of slowing, a critical moment approaches: people will soon have to make important decisions about how to create the type of future that ensures the wellbeing both of themselves and of the planet.

Can a new harmony be designed, achieved and maintained, with challenges arising at an unparalleled pace and scale?

We expect to see more people trying to boost their own personal resilience against the power of technology. Many can (and do) step away from technology, which may signal a larger societal rebalance in favor of a more analog life. We're already seeing users regulate their behavior. Some use screen time management tools like Opal, others switch to alternative, less demanding platforms or use more nostalgia tech—dumb phones, film cameras, tape players—as a route to more meaningful, intentional and soulful interactions.^{59,60}

We don't expect these to go mainstream—they indicate a desire worth noting and may turn out to be a market, but not a wholesale return to analog.

Observers like David Mattin and Ben Thompson are asking big questions, like: How does humanity find more harmony than harm in the relationship with technology, and (re)discover the right balance of benefits and costs? Where are people's limits now? Can they be extended through technology, or have people had enough? And most importantly, are individuals going to continue letting technology happen to them, or are they going to take back control?^{61,62}



I limit time spent especially on my phone because I was out of control. I overused it and it affected me physically—I had to see an ophthalmologist and learnt my eyes were tired.”

Cristiane, aged 40-49, Brazil

35%

of respondents believe everyone has a shared duty to discuss responsible and healthy technology use in society.

Society should have a voice in the definition of its desired future, and resist technology shaping it without a vision.

Corporate responsibility is more than merely being legal or compliant—it’s a perspective change on whether it’s actively improving wellbeing. Should the 8 billion individuals of the world take responsibility for this, or is it a task for an organization that can provide guardrails on positive human wellbeing?

As things stand, it seems people must take responsibility for their own wellbeing, but in August 2023, the European Union announced incoming, strict regulations that will significantly affect some of the world’s biggest tech companies. We expect this huge change will ultimately have a global impact. Referring to the Depression-era law that regulated banks, tech analyst and former investment banker, Brian Wieser, commented, “This is a Glass-Steagall moment for big tech. They’re going from effectively no regulation to heavy regulation.” Eventually, officials hope the changes may reduce the addictive properties of social media platforms, and force a more fair and open digital market.⁶³

While some changes will immediately change how people use the internet, others will be slower to take root as markets adjust to the scope of the regulations.

In an ideal world, technology would be harnessed and controlled in the pursuit of a better quality of life, where societal challenges are properly addressed. Advanced technologies would be designed with a life-centric approach, aiming to enhance individual experiences, improve connectivity, and create sustainable solutions. People would have easy access to information, allowing them to stay informed, make educated choices, and participate actively in shaping their own lives and society.

But this isn’t an ideal world. The pandemic revealed vulnerabilities in global technology systems and consumerism, showing that even the largest, most influential institutions are not bullet-proof. With that and the rising concerns relating to technology, many people want to limit their dependence on them, and reclaim a slice of control over their own futures.

The responsibility shouldn't fall entirely to people—regulation needs to step up the pace.

Regulators were slow off the mark when social media started to take off, so generative AI is being proactively legislated in a bid to avoid making the same mistake twice. In the EU, a social media law was passed in 2022, 25 years after the first social network was launched, while the first regulation on AI was passed in 2023, which is comparatively very early in its relationship with users.^{64,65,66}

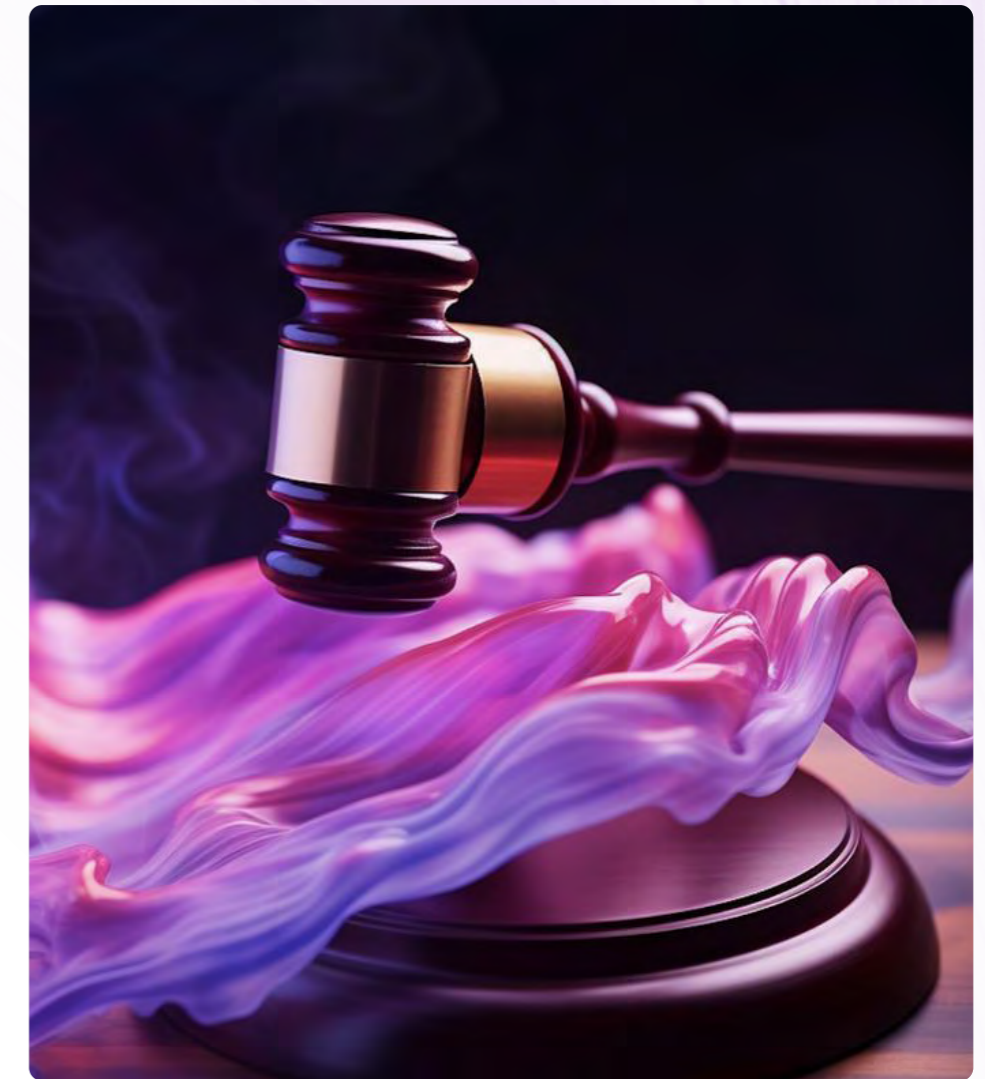
Governments and tech giants should be investing substantially in digital literacy to better educate users on the effects of technology on their lives and their health—particularly in children and teenagers seeking to avoid a digital divide. People can and arguably should demand better than the current regulatory setup, but it's not clear who would answer that call. Social debate rumbles across big tech, media, politics, non-governmental organizations and global institutions, and will need to yield an action plan soon.^{67,68,69}

The approach to problem-solving for the past century has been to identify challenges and solve them through innovation.

However, this has created a pile-on effect of new technologies, channels and complexities, further stretching people's limits. They feel the impact both at work and at home, as they juggle multiple communication and collaboration tools with an overwhelming number of notifications.

As new technologies emerge, organizations must be thoughtful about how they will fit in to people's lives. Will it replace or slot into an existing allocation of time, or will users need to ditch something to make time? Does it function in a way that means they have to train themselves up, research shortcuts, learn about new functions? Is it a new app or interface they need to make space for?

Businesses cannot hide from the oncoming tide of people seeking control of their relationship with technology, so their best approach is to become part of the solution. Those who facilitate the much-needed conversation on how technology should support rather than dominate a shared future will likely become people's trusted partner. It will mean offering people a greater choice in how they use technology to interact with a brand, so they can have a more intentional experience that makes them feel a sense of agency.



What to think about next

- 01** Is new technology alleviating tasks or just adding another layer of mental load for your customers and employees?
- 02** The rapid pace of technological innovation demands careful decision-making now, as choices will have long-term impacts on both your business and society, especially since ethical considerations often lag new tech waves.
- 03** How will you be able to accommodate the new digital divide between those that embrace the pace of tech changes and those that can't keep up or don't want to?

What to do next

- 01** Check for reputational risks around mental wellbeing as this goes up the agenda.
- 02** If it's in your power, simplify the technological introduced friction points in your processes.
- 03** Be careful with how you bring updates and new technologies to your employees and customers. It's not people's job to adjust to the technology—you and the technology should adjust to them.

Decade of deconstruction

Traditional life paths are being rerouted by new limitations, necessities and opportunities, significantly shifting demographics.

There used to be a path—a clear set of parameters and achievements that would almost certainly add up to what was deemed to be a successful life.

Now, whether through necessity or opportunity—and whether consciously or subconsciously—people are questioning everything that was once considered obvious, challenging long-standing ideas, and shaping new ways of thinking, acting and living. With macro and technical forces changing things so rapidly, it's difficult for societal systems to keep pace.

It feels like a decade of deconstruction has begun, and the impact on systems and services will be far reaching.



My future planning horizon has shrunk; I now focus on the next one to three years. I rarely think about five years ahead, given the rapid pace of societal change."

Jiangfeng, aged 22-29, China

What's going on

Go to school, get a job, climb the career ladder, get married, buy a home, have a family, and save for a stable retirement.

These were once some of the features in people's image of a successful life—there was a degree of flexibility, and variations in different cultures, but most people broadly followed the same template. Now, it feels like a decade of deconstruction is underway, and billions of life paths are being rewritten—each of them unique. Reconstructing those paths will be faster for people than for the systems that influence their lives.

These life milestones and societal norms are formed by systems of dependencies between individuals, groups, and institutions. As strains within these systems have become pervasive in people's lives, they're having to adjust their mindset. Decisions must be based on the cards they're dealt, so they're reassessing the desirability and feasibility of what they always thought was their path.

The value placed on traditional milestones has shifted in the past three years.

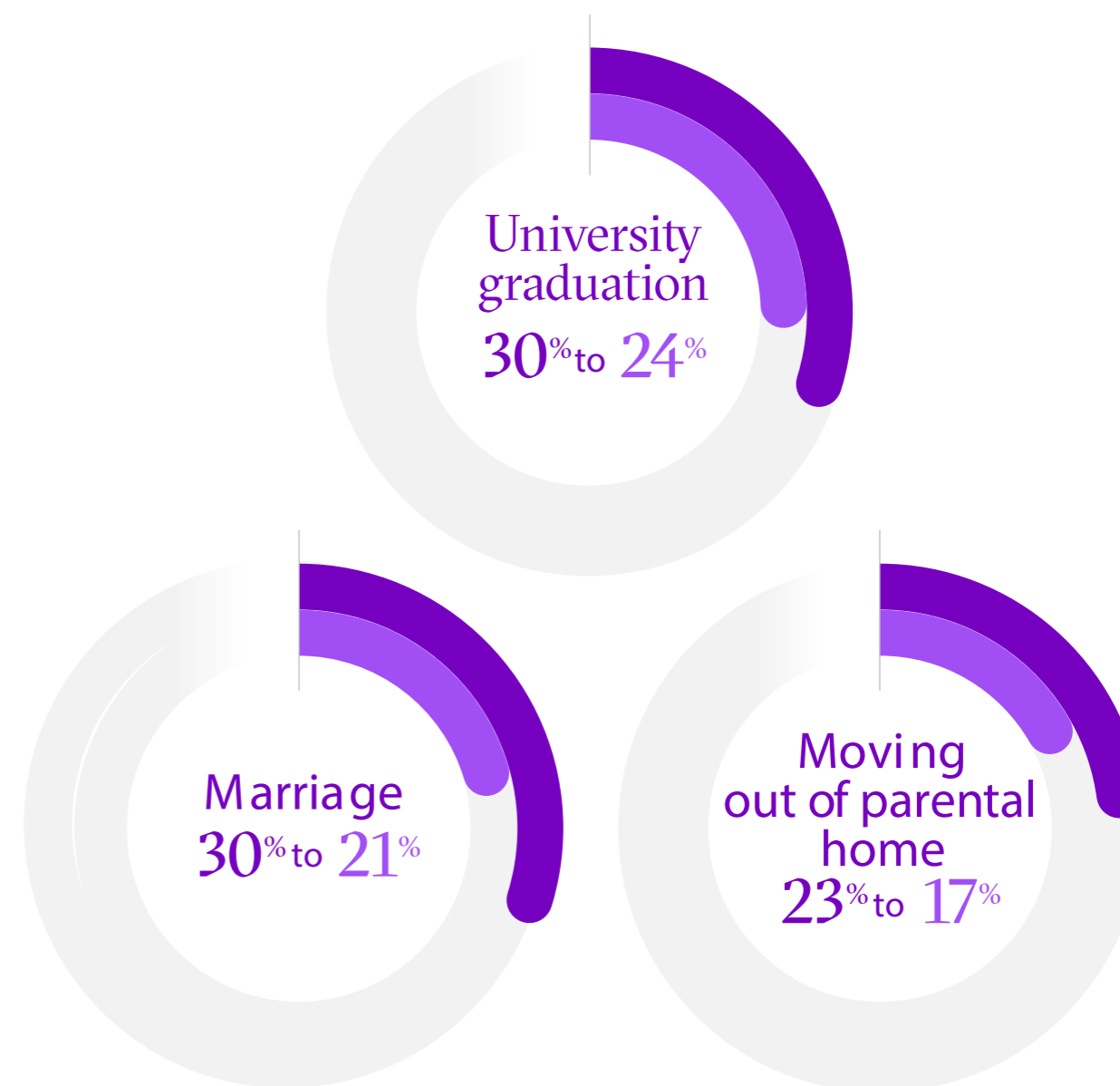
On individual and societal levels, people are rethinking the features or milestones of life and crafting different paths.

A similar shift started in 1963, prompted by cultural, medical and societal developments. Sixty years later, the driving forces behind this change are also a mix of new necessities and freedoms, which overlap in complex ways and collide with triggers including the shock of the pandemic and an imbalance of generational wealth. The result is a quest to interrogate traditional definitions of success and identity, and the social structures on which they were based. Consequently, demographic changes are becoming obvious.

The old template was shaped when life expectancy was shorter, few women worked, most women's value was in keeping a home and raising children, and few people pursued education beyond school.

Companies and employees were mutually loyal, so a job was for life, and one salary was enough to provide for an average family. Today, thanks to progress, the picture has moved forward in thinking, inclusion, and equality. However, due to rising costs and changes in attitudes, long-term planning now feels like a luxury to many.

Whether through systemic limitations or a growing sense of individualism, these big moments are becoming more diversified, scattering demographics in turn. These milestones are expensive, and increasing numbers of people either can't afford them or choose to funnel their resources elsewhere.



48%

make plans less than a year ahead, or don't plan at all.

29%

have delayed major life decisions more often in the past three years.

Education represents a microcosm of much of this trend. Though many people must accept life-long debt to do it, a degree is more widely accessible than ever. In 1950, 3.4% of British 18-year-olds went to university, versus 38% in 2021.⁷⁰ Access to education is always good news, but this does make a degree a weaker differentiator when trying to secure a dream job.⁷¹

Further, the rise of generative AI could render an expensive degree almost irrelevant. The internet now offers people different routes to success, deconstructing outdated models and inspiring new career trajectories. Some who may once have dreamed of corporate superstardom now have online influencer/creator/innovator as an option. The value of a degree is under question, as we see a shift towards skills-based hiring. According to TestGorilla's report, The State of Skills-Based Hiring 2022, 76% of employers use some skills-based hiring to find new talent, with almost 55% using role-specific skills tests.⁷²

Personal milestones like buying a home, getting married, and having children are being challenged. Some feel out of reach, some feel out of touch, and some conflict with other goals.

In many countries, house prices are rising significantly faster than the salaries needed to pay a mortgage, placing this life goal out of reach for many and prompting a fresh approach to living arrangements.^{73,74} Communal living is on the rise, including new ideas like "mommunes"—collectives of single mothers sharing the financial, emotional and time burden of raising children between themselves.⁷⁵

Repaying debts, building savings, acquiring assets and achieving financial stability simply isn't possible for many.

An Ipsos poll found that more than half of Gen Z are concerned about rising inflation and the cost of living, with just 39% saying they earn enough to live on—and a percentage of them don't yet have families to support.^{76,77} No coincidence, perhaps, that birth rates are falling in almost all countries outside Africa.^{78,79}

People choosing whether or when to have children are now deciding based not on what's expected of them, but on their shifted values. Some are struggling with the conflict between a desire to have children and an understanding of the consumption impact a child has on the planet.⁸⁰ Others are waiting until their finances or careers reach a level that would afford them more control over their life and work later.





“Given the current state of the economy, traditional milestones like buying a house or starting a family seem increasingly unattainable.”

George, aged 41, UK

It’s not just the young who are rethinking long-held norms: older generations are reimagining what it means to be a senior. The good news is that people are living longer thanks to medical technology—life expectancy in the US was 47 years in 1900, and is now 78—but when coupled with stagnant wages, retirement in their early sixties is becoming less viable.⁸¹

The demographic definitions of what it means to be older are no longer useful. Retirement is now a pipedream for some and a more advanced age for many. If work doesn’t lead to financial stability, what use is it? A knock-on effect of longer life expectancy is that funding retirement is different from how it was even 20 years ago.



Furthermore, societal safety net infrastructure is showing cracks.

Healthcare access challenges in the UK, rolling blackouts in South Africa, water shortages in France, National Grid strains in Texas, and wildfires all over the world are deepening concerns that institutions responsible for societal services can't keep up. Financing the long-term fight against climate change is a priority, but will these systems be able to move fast enough?

Investing in sustainability-related behavior change is becoming more important, exemplified by the transition to electric cars as a medium-term strategy in places like Indonesia and Thailand.^{82,83} There's a tension between acute awareness of climate change and muted willingness to change habits or accept the costs of net zero. People expect "the system" to help, and it's not yet clear whether it can or will.

Society is rethinking what was once a given. It's becoming common to reject or question the norms, milestones, expectations, and political legacies of the past.⁸⁴ It's important not to become mired in generalities around the shape new life paths take.

The focus should be on disruption to traditional templates and the emergence of new paths, whether driven by necessity and/or opportunity.

The point, for brands, is that traditional milestones have always been critical to defining customer journeys and building personas and cohorts, but now, customers are changing dramatically, adopting unconventional mindsets that will trigger a new perspective for products and services. As citizens, employees and customers, people will look to brands to inform, support and empower them as they navigate new realities.

What's next

Today's adults have experienced strange times, the legacy of which will remain with them. They're multifaceted, changeable, and almost impossible to pigeonhole.

People have always had to make the best of suboptimal situations or circumstances, but with traditional milestones having less prevalence than ever, demographics are being deconstructed. Instead of defining success by the milestones they achieve, people are shifting their focus to less clearly defined goals like mental wellbeing, personal enrichment and contentment.

The flexibility people now exercise enables them to pivot in their ongoing pursuit of their goals, but makes it harder for brands to assume needs and wants based on factors like phase of life. For some, goals include cultivating a fulfilling career and/or enjoying adventures instead of/before having children.

Financially, we expect to see a faction of people spending whatever they have on fun and travel, and worrying about family, career and housing later.⁸⁵ They may—consciously or subconsciously—deprioritize traditional milestones like buying a home in favor of investing in experiences that feed their souls and shape their characters. We expect others will find stability in preparing now for concerns of the future. People are already embracing the FIRE Movement (Financial Independence, Retire Early), living frugally and sinking up to 70% of their income into savings.⁸⁶

Flaws in the systems that are supposed to support people's lives mean they can't keep pace with their ever-changing demands. They're no longer fit for purpose, and we expect there will be constant pressure for change. Aiming to regain a sense of control over their own lives, people in regions where systems and processes are failing them will minimize risk and reliance on authorities, and try instead to become self-sufficient with whatever they have.

In South Africa, for instance, in response to rolling energy blackouts, an "Ubuntu" movement is gathering momentum. Ubuntu focuses on interconnectedness and communal responsibility, encouraging people to unite and collaborate to become self-reliant.

A life-centric approach enables brands to craft seamless experiences that challenge norms.

We may see a rise in spiritual practices that have always brought stability and comfort, but that have been in decline.

People's return to spirituality might be on their own terms, perhaps accepting the lessons and rituals they find helpful but quietly discarding aspects that feel less applicable. Though religious affiliation continues to fall, spiritual openness and curiosity are on the rise.⁸⁷

Mindsets that redefine what people want and need from brands are emerging, prompting short- and long-term shifts. Brands must retire assumptions about how people choose to live, and adapt to customers' evolving needs. They must offer solutions, become integral to people's lives, and promise reliability.

Understanding customers individually is key, as they break old molds and develop their expectations of personalization. Cultural reference points will evolve, affecting imagery used in advertising and story lines in

entertainment, and new services will likely emerge for a more active generation of older people, retirees aged over 70, and those working multiple jobs.

As birth rates fall, we'll see a degree of adjustment in the balance from young to old in society.⁸⁸ It will affect culture, expectations and habits on a fundamental level, and we expect technology to play a major role. Innovative products and services—many enabled by data and artificial intelligence—will be embraced by people carving their own path. Shifts that support new lifestyles will resonate as marketing stories that represent customers' reality.

A life-centric approach enables brands to craft seamless experiences that challenge norms.⁸⁹ Simply knowing a customer is 64, female, and lives in Sydney will never again be enough to support useful predictions. And make no mistake: people's expectations of personalized offerings will only grow. Organizations should adapt fluidly, and capitalize on opportunities to support people's unique paths.

What to think about next

- 01** How are shifting life milestones, narrowing planning horizons, and evolving lifestyles reshaping the relevance and demand for your products and services?
- 02** As people rethink major milestones like home-buying, marriage, or starting a family, how does this impact their spending power and willingness to engage with your brand?
- 03** As people's planning horizons shorten, how does this affect the timing of your marketing campaigns or product launches?

What to do next

- 01** Understand the new priorities and life milestones of your target demographics by revisiting market research, user journeys, and customer mindsets using the data to adjust marketing strategies.
- 02** Ensure that your brand messaging and offerings are aligned and agile enough for the changing consumer landscape.
- 03** As consumer behaviors and needs evolve, it's critical to adapt your engagement tactics to stay in tune with these shifts.



Closing

In the intricate landscape of modern life, how people perceive themselves in the world is shaped in part by mediated layers that drive their interactions and facilitate their experiences.

The speed of change in the world—from technology, from macroeconomic forces and more—has increased for both customers and businesses.

Whether it's defined as disruption or just plain change, there's a pressing need for brands to welcome these changes as an opportunity for growth.

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About the research

Crowdsourcing

Each year, we ask Accenture Song’s global network of designers, creatives, technologists, sociologists, and anthropologists to watch out for potentially influential signals and trends impacting their communities and countries. We run trends workshops throughout March in 50 studios around the world, then teams pitch their top ideas to the editorial team in March-April. This year we also expanded our reach and interviewed 10 thought leaders spanning academia, business and social enterprises to identify trends on their horizon.

Taking together all the crowdsourcing inputs, we developed a tool that would let us synthesize the content. We processed nearly 10,000 sentences of text and audio data and used them to develop a knowledge base for a custom Generative AI tool. The tool ran on-demand topic modelling, plotting, and summarization based on a user-submitted query about the trends conversations. The outputs from this tool were used to accelerate and inform the trend synthesis process. From there, the editorial team worked together to further create, shape, and refine the trends report.

Experience Innovation Radar

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

Validating our trends

We validated our trends externally in two steps. First, we video-interviewed 49 people in 7 countries to get elements of the trends described in their own words. Secondly, we ran an online survey across 21 countries with 15,227 respondents in August 2023 to validate the magnitude of the trends. Once the trends were refined, we put them to the test with Accenture’s own experts in Talent and Organization, Commerce, Technology, Sustainability, Research and Development, among others. Throughout the process, we have worked closely with our colleagues in Accenture’s Tech Vision team to build on each other’s findings and perspectives.

Throughout this report, all statistics are taken from our Accenture Life Trends survey unless otherwise stated.

Survey sample size by country

Country	Sample size
Brazil	500
Mexico	500
US	2000
Colombia	500
Indonesia	500
Vietnam	500
India	500
Malaysia	500
Philippines	500
France	500
Germany	500
Italy	500
UK	1000
Spain	500
UAE	500
Egypt	500
Singapore	1000
South Africa	1000
Australia	1000
Canada	1000
Japan	1000

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