A POST-CORONA WORLD

10 emerging consumer trends that have been radically accelerated by the crisis

TREND·WATCHING

INTRODUCTION: WTF IS GOING ON?!

The prospect of a pandemic has been well-known for many years, but no one could have predicted the exact timing or nature of the current crisis. That's often the way with trends: the big shifts are obvious but it's impossible to know the exact shape of the bell curve that a trend will follow. Will it stay niche for one year? Or suddenly see mass adoption because of some external trigger?

At times like these, with everything in flux, it's useful to be able to look at trends that were already 'out there'. Which new behaviors have early adopters *already* been embracing? Which trends looked years away from the mainstream (so were easy to ignore), but now feel primed to become totally normal in months, if not weeks?

For organizations these moments can be both threatening and liberating. Most incumbents are very aware of the gap between their oil tanker-sized organizations and new, agile startup competitors. But change is hard without a big shock that means all the old 'rules' can be broken. This is that moment.

Good luck, stay safe & wash your hands,
Henry Mason, Managing Director

Here are 10 emerging consumer trends we've been tracking for some years, each illustrated with a recent innovation example.

Together they offer powerful early signals of what people will value and their priorities in a post-coronavirus world.

As you scan these trends ask yourself: are we prepared for these new behaviors? Are we ready to meet these new expectations?
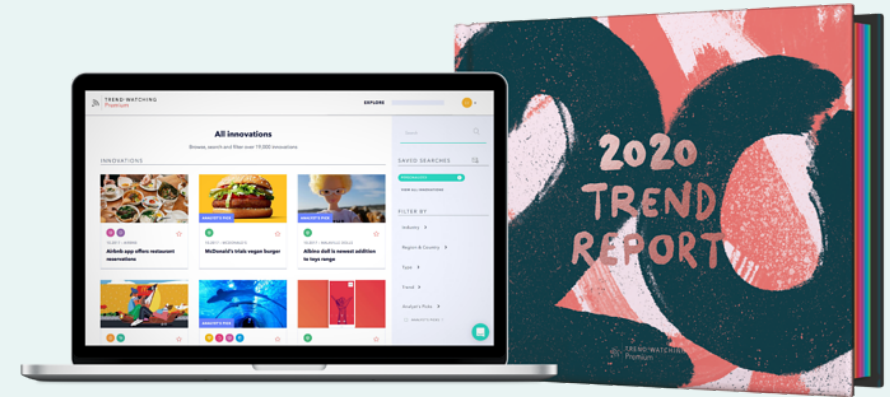
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At TrendWatching we spend our days scanning the B2C landscape for early signals of change. Our online **Premium Service** features 100+ further trends and 25,000 inspirational innovation examples.

Last year our team worked with 89 clients on 159 custom projects, helping them design winning B2C trend & innovation strategies. **Get in touch** if you want to discuss how we can inspire some new perspectives at this pivotal moment.

VIRTUAL EXPERIENCE ECONOMY

Digital experiences become a genuine status currency.

VIRTUAL EXPERIENCE ECONOMY

You know all about the Experience Economy. But immersive new technologies mean that people can increasingly get their experience-based status fixes from virtual experiences, too. Social media and esports are the obvious manifestations of how consumers accrue status in the virtual realm. But now watch out for other, less competitive virtual experiences – 'travel', retail, gatherings and more – will take on new levels of meaning.

Grain Processing
Ancient Egyptian Cultivation
Station 8 of 9

UBISOFT

Popular video game creates guided tours of ancient Egypt

French games brand **Ubisoft** released a free in-game update for popular game Assassin's Creed, allowing owners of the 'Origins' game version to access 'Discovery Tour' mode. In this mode, players can travel around the game's world (which is set in ancient Egypt), and visit locations such as Alexandria, Memphis and Giza.
The mode also features guided tours, allowing players to learn about the Great Pyramids, daily life in ancient Egypt and the reign of Cleopatra.

HOW TO APPLY THIS TREND?

Don't get hung up on the tech as you face a endless barrage of VR- and AR-powered experience pitches. While the tech is important, in the end it's not about the tech at all but about deep human motivations.

The bigger challenge: stop thinking about digital experiences just as tools or entertainment, and start thinking about them as platforms for status-accruing experiences.

Once you've made that mindset shift, the possibilities are infinite. How will you create virtual experiences that consumers value – and want to share – as much as their real world experiences?

SHOPSTREAMING

**Livestreaming + shopping =
a fundamental rewrite of the
'rules' of ecommerce.**

SHOPSTREAMING

When we first wrote about this trend in 2017, we said: 'two of Asia's biggest digital waves – e-commerce and livestreaming – are merging. The next direction for online shopping is interactive, experiential, and in real time.' The recent crisis has seen the Chinese livestreaming market grow even bigger, and this mix of entertainment, community and commerce will raise ecommerce expectations around the world!

TAOBAO

Online retailer wants to boost income of Chinese farmers

Starting in April 2019, China-based online shopping site **Taobao** will allow farmers from across the country to host their own live streams in an effort to help boost their income. The initiative hopes to increase their earnings by around RMB 10,000 (USD 1,487) a month by promoting their hard-to-sell products. A similar scheme was watched by over 400 million people in 2018. Taobao also plans to launch a series of television shows around the topic.

Amazon's functional design and relentless focus on choice and convenience have come to define customer expectations as to what online commerce is about in the 'West'.

But the next generation of digital commerce will be radically different. More engaging, more immersive, and more social. Yes, it's almost like the offline malls of yesteryear ;)

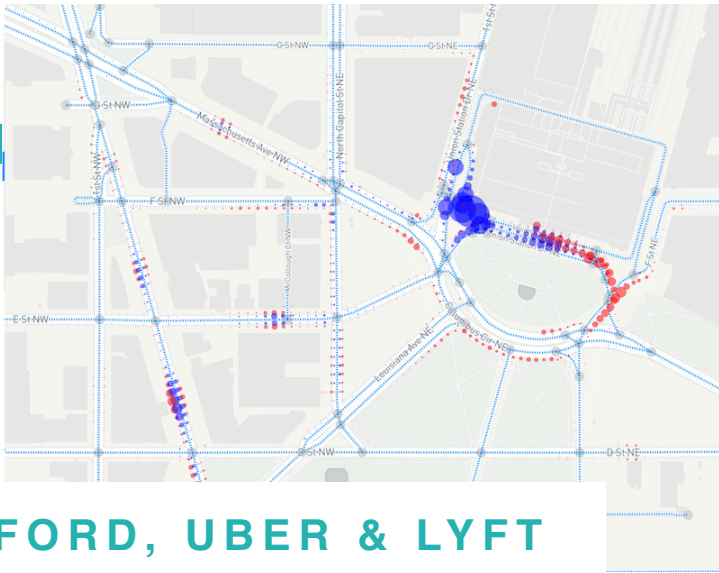Your challenge: **could you create an online shopping environment where people come just to hang out and chat?**

OPEN SOURCE SOLUTIONS

When we first wrote about OPEN SOURCE SOLUTIONS – the act of sharing and even giving away innovative solutions to our toughest shared problems – we termed this trend as a "bold new frontier for sustainability". The coronavirus is the most urgent transnational, cross-demographic problem in recent history, and it will remind people that the best organizations collaborate generously with others.

Analysis

Pick-up/Drop-off by Hour of Day

Total by hour for November 2017

Pick-up Drop-off

6am | noon | 6pm | midnight
Hour of Day

Filters

Days of Week

Mon | Tue | Wed | Thu | Fri | Sat | Sun

Hours of Day

12am | 6am | noon | 6pm

FORD, UBER & LYFT

Transport competitors join Shared Streets data platform

In September 2018, it was announced that **Ford, Uber and Lyft** were joining SharedStreets, a public-private data platform designed to help reduce urban transportation issues. The platform, funded by Bloomberg Philanthropies, will operate in over 30 global cities, including Paris, Melbourne and Washington DC. SharedStreets aims to create shared, machine-readable standards for data such as curb usage and traffic speeds, enabling cities to make better investment and management decisions.

HOW TO APPLY THIS TREND?

This remains one of the biggest and most impactful trends we've ever published!

It should challenge and excite you in equal measure. But it's actually a trend with a long pedigree: in 1959, Volvo invented the three-point seat belt, but famously made the patent available to everyone in the interests of public safety. It's estimated that since then the invention has saved over 1 million lives. The brand still (rightly!) celebrates this decision.

Ask yourself: **what could we do in 2020 that we'll still be talking about in 60 years time?**

AMBIENT WELLNESS

Right now, people are obsessively reaching for their hand sanitizer as they move through their daily lives. But as this moment starts to pass, they'll revert to less hygienic habits, although their desire to remain safe and well will be stronger than ever. This will create a huge opportunity for providers of physical spaces to embed health-boosting measures into the very spaces that their customers pass through, making staying healthy effortless.

Luxury fashion label opens clean air flagship store

June 2018 saw **Stella McCartney** open a flagship London store, featuring an air filtration system. The luxury fashion designer's Bond Street store includes an air filtration system which removes 95% of all airborne pollutants and traffic fumes. The clean air flagship store is designed to raise awareness of the problem of air pollution.
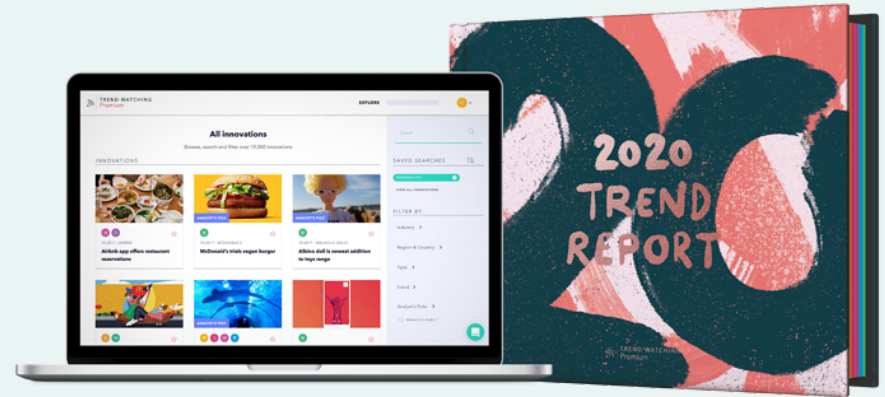
HOW TO APPLY THIS TREND?

Hand hygiene is front of mind for people today. But think expansively about how your customers interact with your physical spaces, and the impact those spaces have on all aspects of their physical and mental wellbeing.

Where are there opportunities to alleviate any negative impacts, or better yet, offer health boosting measures within the environments that your customers pass through?

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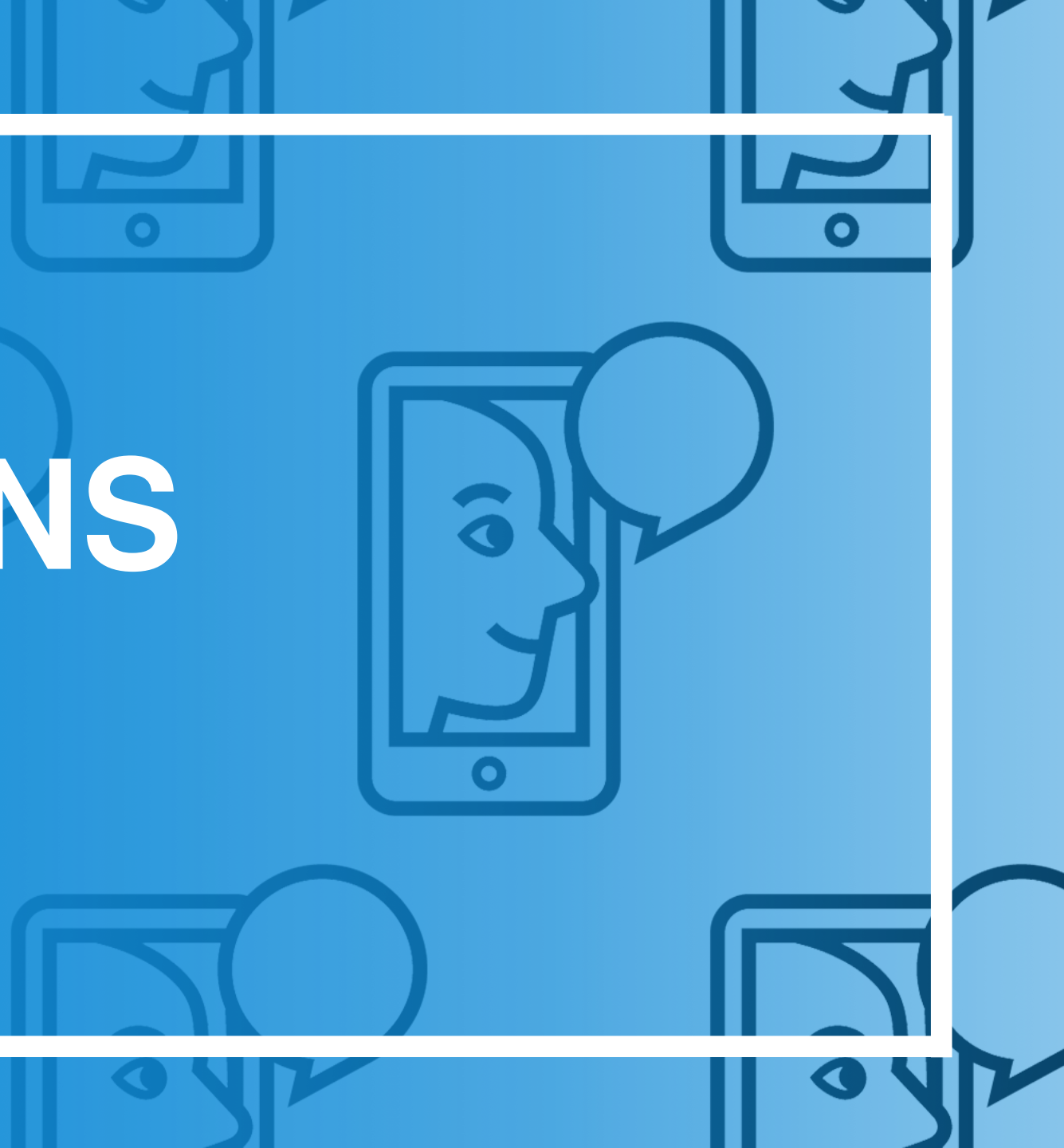
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VIRTUAL COMPANIONS

As consumers become accustomed to digital assistants and chatbots, their expectations will evolve and *some* people (not all!) will start to seek out virtual personalities that have the power to entertain, educate, befriend and heal.

The crisis will see people turning to these virtual companions, and once the genie is out of the bottle, these behaviors will persist.
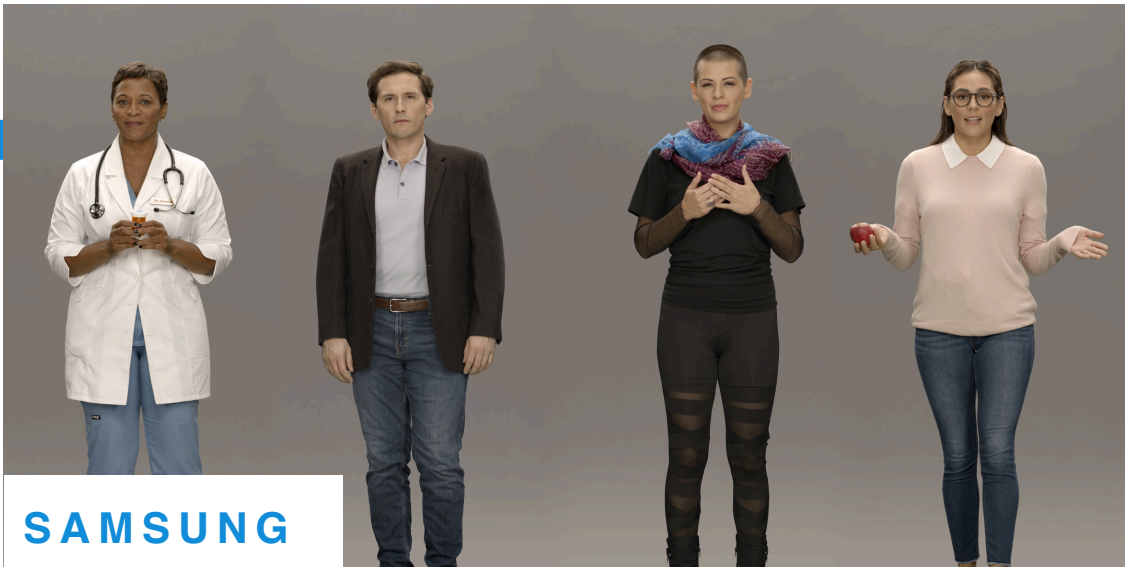
Virtual humans introduced to share life experiences

January 2020 saw Samsung introduce Neon: virtual beings that look and behave like humans, and can demonstrate emotion and intelligence. The avatars, which were unveiled at CES, are intended to work alongside people, sharing experiences and teaching skills rather than simply supplying data and information. Powered by proprietary technology CORE R3 ('reality, real time, and responsiveness'), the project remains under development with a beta version expected later in 2020.

HOW TO APPLY THIS TREND?

It would be easy to look at Samsung's Neon and dismiss this trend as a Black Mirror episode come to life. But it would also be a big mistake. Need more evidence? Witness the delight in reviews for the 'AI friend' Replika. Those are real (not virtual) feelings. Not every brand needs to offer people virtual companionship. That would be weird. And creepy.

But if you're a brand who people would welcome some companionship from, then this trend represents an exciting challenge for you: what personality should your VIRTUAL COMPANION have?

MENTOR-TO-PROTÉGÉ

Can you facilitate the demand for peer-powered self-improvement?

MENTOR-TO-PROTÉGÉ

Liquid online social connection, meet the very human desire for self-improvement. Yes, people will spend mindless hours online during this extended at-home period. But many will also yearn to use some of that time productively, and so will embrace platforms that connect them with teachers, experts and mentors in their quest to learn new skills.

DUOLINGO & TWITCH

Language learning made easier through live streaming

Language learning platform **Duolingo** partnered with videogame live streaming platform Twitch to launch the Duolingo Verified Streamer program in July 2019. The 12 multilingual streamers are part of Duolingo's Global Ambassador program and while not language experts or teachers, each is multilingual or learning a second language. They offer streams in Twitch chat on various topics, allowing viewers to practice their chosen language.

Obviously skill-focused organizations and services will be a natural fit for this trend. But any business with an online platform or community could experiment with weaving a self-improvement strand through their offering.

Just see how videogame platform Twitch offered its viewers a chance to brush up on their language skills! Ask yourself, **what skills would our community be interested in developing?**

UBITECH

A-COMMERCE

What's after m-commerce? The era of automated commerce!

A-COMMERCE

Another trend from a couple of years ago that has just received a powerful shot in the arm. Back in 2017/18, the increasing power and adoption of AI was the main driver of this trend. Now it's the sudden sharp increase in demand for contact-free interactions converging with advancements in robotics that is enabling a new breed of automated commerce, IRL.

DOMINO'S

Brand pilots robot car-powered pizza delivery

In June 2019, **Domino's Pizza** and robotics company Nuro announced the launch of a pilot initiative where a fleet of driverless robot cars will deliver pizza to customers in Houston, Texas. The deliveries are carried out by Nuro's R1 vehicle, which is roughly half the width of a compact sedan and does not allow for a human driver. The vehicles are being monitored by remote technology and human drivers in chase vehicles.

As the saying goes, necessity is the mother of invention. During the crisis both businesses and customers will welcome automated alternatives. They'll accept kinks that wouldn't be acceptable in less challenging times.

But don't assume this situation will continue indefinitely. Smart brands will use this period to experiment, but when making longer term plans think carefully about which parts of your customer journey to automate.

Your ultimate aim: let the robots and algorithms do what they do best, and free humans to do what they do best, too.

THE BURNOUT

Brands rush to help those burnt by the pressures of modern life.

THE BURNOUT

The coronavirus is hardly the only thing causing people mental anguish. Even before it triggered a global public health crisis and a raised fears of a deep economic slump, people were facing rampant inequality, always-on social competition, the looming existential threat of the climate crisis and much more. It's hardly surprising therefore that any organization that can help improve people's mental wellbeing will be welcomed with open arms.

MOXY HOTELS

Hotel offers in-room ASMR videos

The **Moxy NYC Chelsea**, owned by Marriott, announced in April 2019 that guests will have access to exclusive ASMR (Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response) videos in their rooms. The videos, which are part of the hotel's Bedtime Stories program, were co-created with ASMR experience providers Whisperlodge and feature performers using and interacting with a variety of different props to provide guests with a so-called 'mental massage' after a long day.

HOW TO APPLY THIS TREND?

Get ready to flex your organization's empathy muscle!

This is one of those trends that doesn't need to require a huge budget or highly technical solution. It simply requires you to **think about, and** *really* **understand, what's causing your customers' mental anguish.**

Now find a clever way to alleviate it! :)

ASSISTED DEVELOPMENT

One outcome of more time spent at home? Many will be prompted, or forced, to learn some life skills, such as <gasp!> cooking for themselves. Trend watchers love branding things as 'millennial', but the recent growth of the on-demand economy has seen rising numbers of affluent urbanites outsource basic domestic tasks. They'll gladly hand back some of these when the crisis is over, but others they'll find they actually *enjoy* doing themselves :)
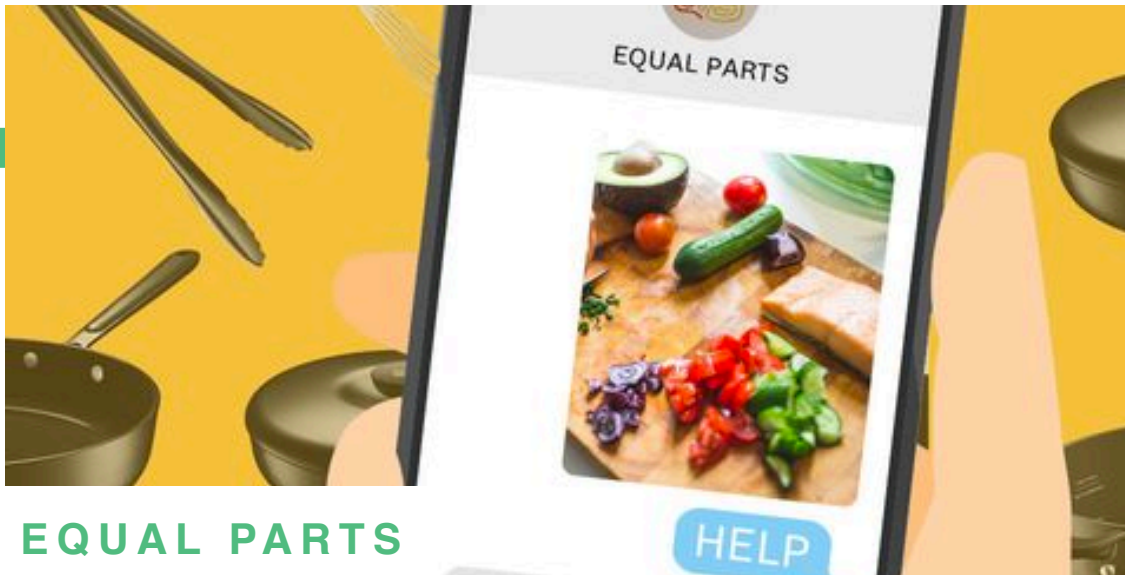
EQUAL PARTS

Cookware brand offers cookery advice by text

Cookery equipment brand **Equal Parts** offers customers the ability to 'Text a Chef'. People can text in to receive cooking tips, inspiration, and meal ideas. The on-demand text service is available seven days a week between 4pm-12am weekdays, and 12pm-12am weekends, Eastern Standard Time. The brand sells four different cookware kits ranging from a 13-piece accessories set at USD 199, to a USD 449 15-piece complete kitchen set.

HOW TO APPLY THIS TREND?

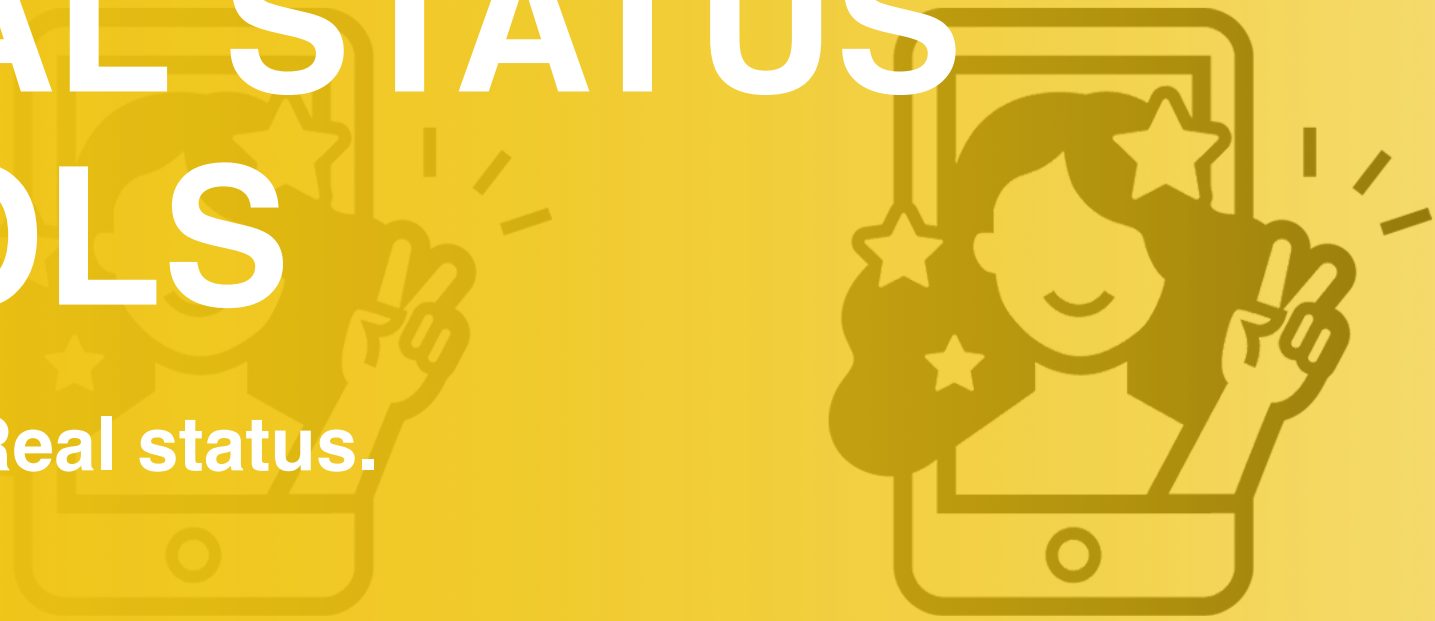Think about the #adulting 'jobs to be done' your brand enables.

Are you really only selling a product, or can you help your customers to become more independent, better versions of themselves?

As people emerge from a crisis, they'll appreciate those brands that supported them through it. Don't just think about support in purely survivalist terms. Aim higher up Maslow's hierarchy of needs, too.

VIRTUAL STATUS SYMBOLS

Physical goods have long had a monopoly on status: they can be naturally scarce or expensive. Younger consumers and videogamers have long embraced virtual goods; now expect the coronavirus crisis, new technologies (e.g. AR and blockchain), and the growing desire for sustainable consumption to converge and push the recognition that virtual goods can be genuine status symbols into other industries and demographics.
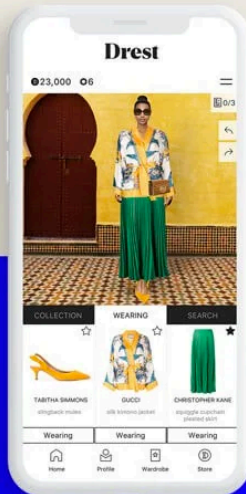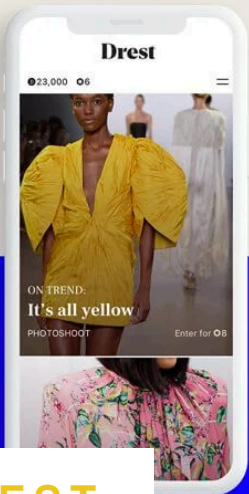
Gaming app turns fashion challenges into a sales opportunity

Luxury fashion gaming app **Drest** opened its waitlist in September 2019, ahead of a full launch expected in 2020. Available on iOS and Android, the game app provides users with styling challenges to execute on realistic-looking photos. They can then purchase the products either in-game or from online luxury retail platform Farfetch. Luxury brands featured include Burberry, Gucci, and Prada..

HOW TO APPLY THIS TREND?

The best place to start is to understand how your customers derive status from their interactions with your brand today, in the real world? Is it through price? Scarcity? Do you make them look accomplished or smart? What tribes identify with you?

Now dive into the online worlds – gaming, social media – where people are spending even more time than ever. **What are the social dynamics at play in these communities? And how might you help people in their quest for status in these virtual environments?**

TIME TO GET GOING!

Some of the trends here might feel challenging or far removed from your current offering or business model. But the world has changed. Your organization will have to change.

We hope you use these trends to draw actionable insights about how the expectations of your customers will be changing, and to inspire trend-driven innovations of your own. Good luck!

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