

2026 GLOBAL CONSUMER PREDICTIONS



Every year brings fresh disruption. All is redrawing the boundaries of creativity and efficiency. Economic uncertainty is reshaping priorities. Geopolitical tension is changing the context in which brands operate. For marketers, this is the backdrop against which brand plans, campaigns, and innovation pipelines must be built.

That's where the 2026 Mintel Predictions comes in. Think of it as your launchpad for the year ahead, a set of provocations designed to fuel brand conversations, sharpen strategy, and inspire the next wave of ideas. At its heart, Predictions is about people. Amidst all the noise of change, they show you where consumers are heading by 2030 and beyond: how they'll balance control with creativity; blur the lines between ages and life stages; and search for connection in a more automated world.

As inspiration only matters when it leads to action, each trend concludes with **Questions Brands Should Be Asking**. Developed by our Consulting team, these questions and actions are designed to help marketers explore what comes next, what to prioritize, what to challenge, and where to push for growth.

Our hope is that these Predictions give you fresh inspiration and a few useful prompts to ask what's next? If you'd like to unpack them further and see what they could mean for your brand, we're here to help.



MOST INNOVATIVE

Don't Just Launch it. Celebrate it.

Mintel Most Innovative awards recognise the best new consumer products across food, drink, beauty, household and beyond. If your launch has made people stop, look, taste, or try, this is your moment to shine.

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Consumers are pushing back against algorithmic influence, seeking more control over their digital experiences and demanding brands prioritize human empowerment over efficiency.

Traditional life stages are blurring as longevity increases and milestones become fluid. Consumers are redefining what it means to be "young" and seeking fulfillment across an extended middle of life.

As interactions become more automated and distant, consumers are retreating into self-contained bubbles. Brands are uniquely positioned to rekindle the everyday connections people are slowly losing.



Once a behind-the-scenes tool designed to make life simpler and more personalized, the algorithm has become a powerful force that shapes – and sometimes distorts people's identity and worldview. Consumers must navigate the convenience they gain against the protection, empowerment, and self-expression they risk losing. Brands will have to decide whether their purpose is to empower people or simply feed the algorithm.

EVOLUTION OF THIS PREDICTION

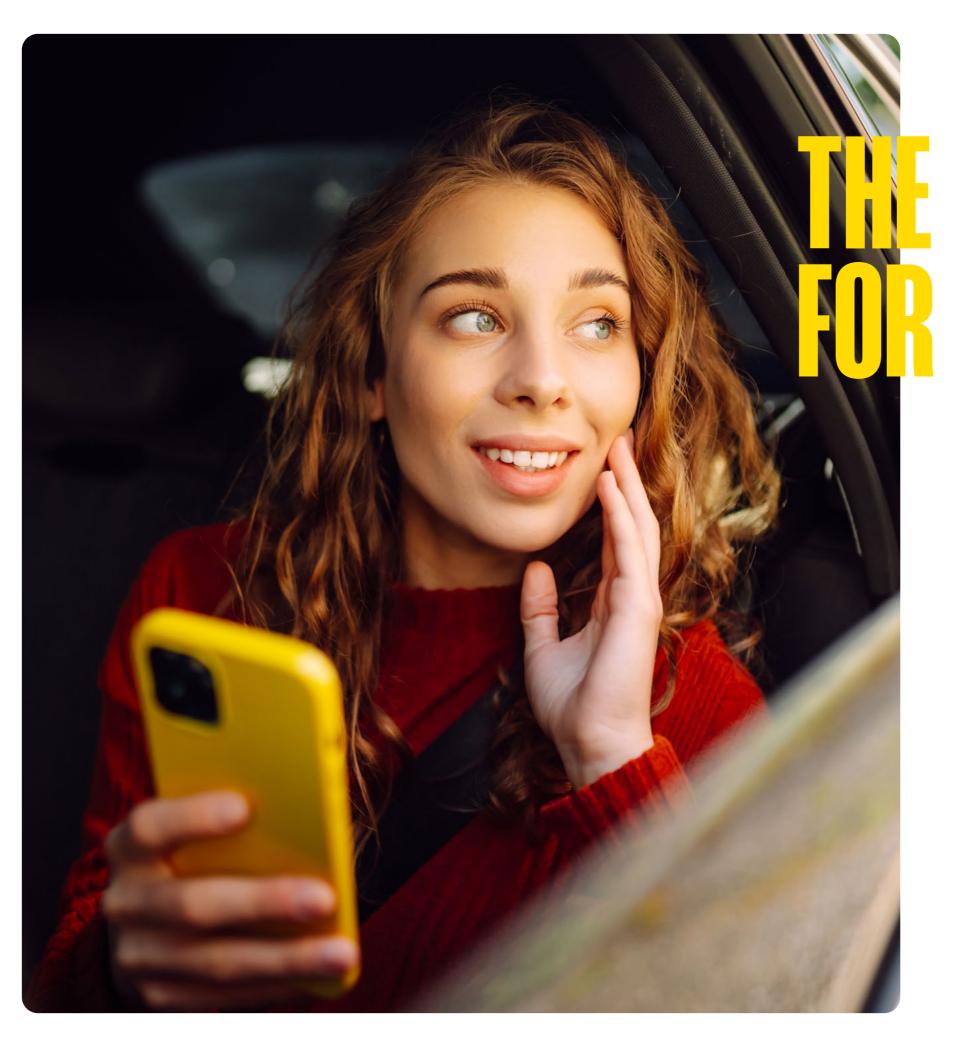
2010=2020

Consumers became increasingly aware of algorithms shaping social media feeds and streaming platforms. The convenience was clear, but Mintel Trends developed during this time (see Mintel Trends Make it Mine and Guiding Choice) revealed the optimism consumers had towards more personalized recommendations with little effort required on their behalf.

2020 - 2025

Misinformation and expansion of algorithms across everyday routines started to create tension, and consumers start questioning whether algorithms simplify their lives or overwhelm them. Mintel Trends **Enjoyment Everywhere** and **Flexible Spaces** signal a consumer desire to break out of routine and embrace novel experiences.





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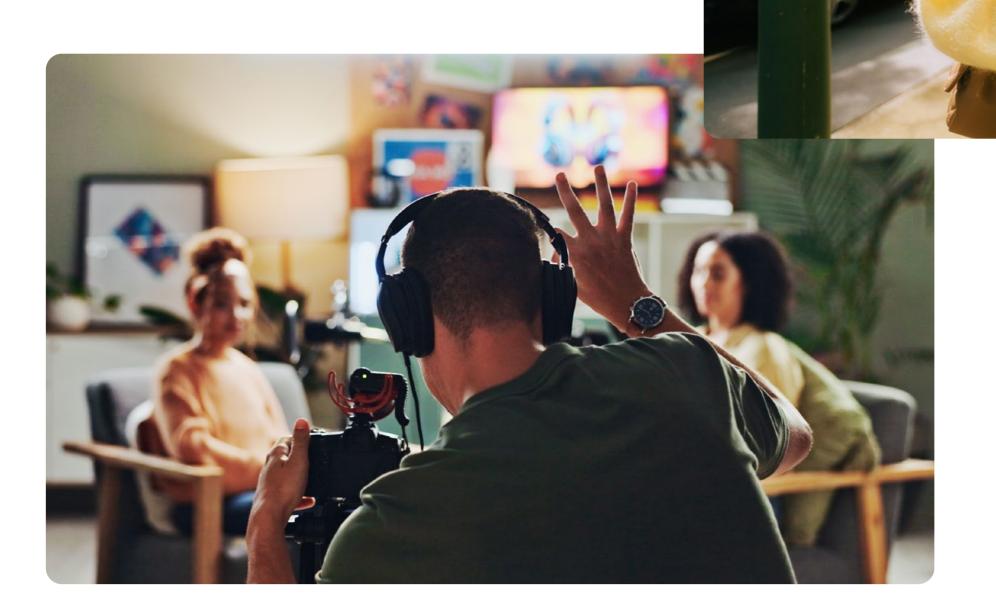
The Comfortable Algorithm

From a trip down the grocery store aisle to the scroll of a streaming platform, consumers are being presented with more choices and options than ever before, while having the same amount of time in a day. The algorithm developed with two inherent goals: to keep an individual engaged and get results quickly. This process has ultimately been successful, but it's not necessarily achieving the results brands desire. "Mindless scrolling" – and even "doomscrolling" – remain common turns of phrase as consumers stay addicted to their screens. While this keeps consumers locked within a pattern and routine, it leaves little room for processing and absorbing.

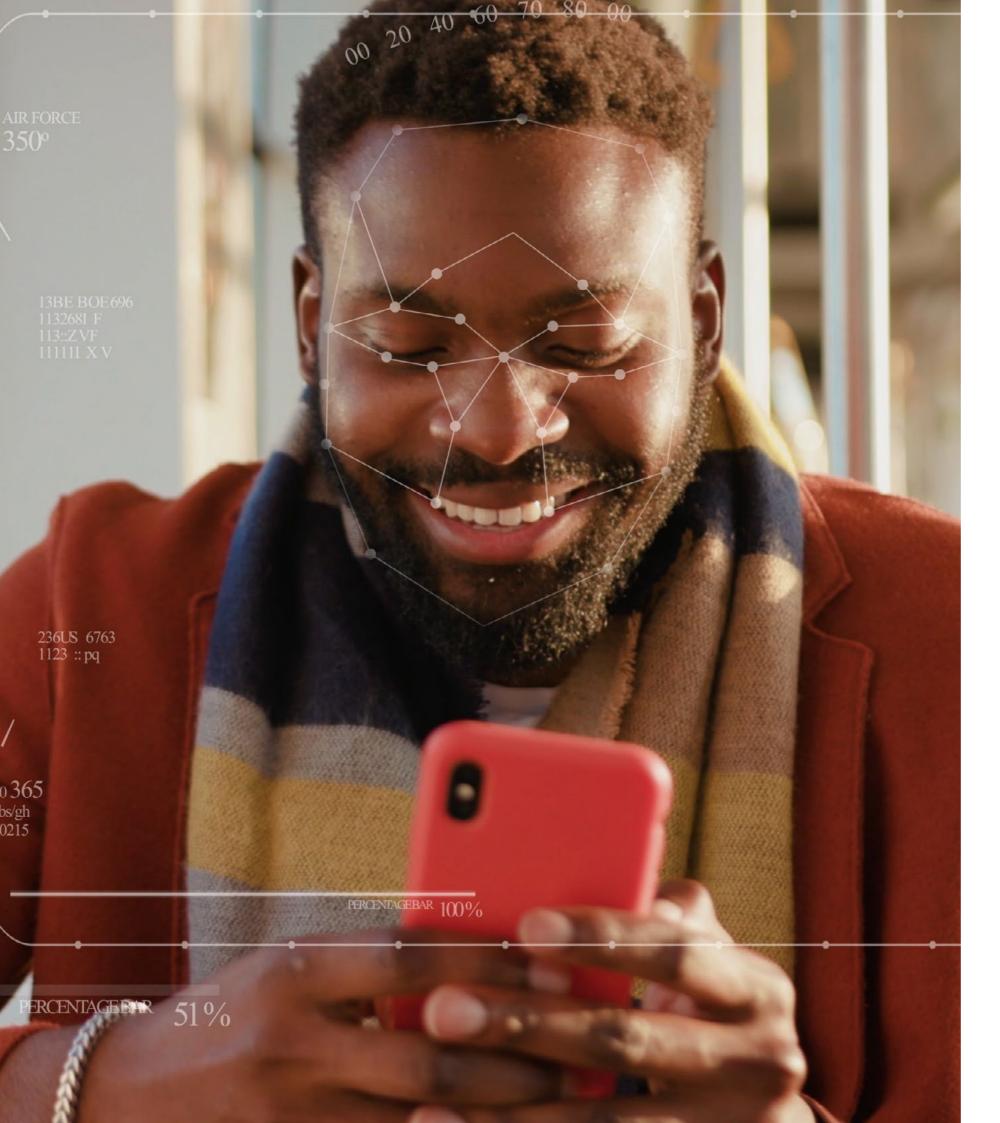
Consumers exist in a strong consumption mindset – "try this," "listen to this," "watch this" – and the sheer number of options has left consumers with an endless craving that has gradually become so comfortable they've lost sight of the beauty of creative randomness. The comfort that an algorithm once provided is being challenged by an innate consumer desire to feel like they are in the driver's seat, shaping their personal algorithms.

The Lifestyle Algorithm

Brands have become acutely aware that they are no longer just selling products, but a lifestyle, for better or worse. The algorithm is now incredibly skilled at assigning products to a lifestyle and mapping products to individuals who fit a designed persona. Products, brands and entertainment are now at the core of the lifestyle identities that many consumers embrace, and it's coming at the cost of individuality and personal style. The result is that brands all chase the same lifestyle, with little room to stand apart differently or with a unique point of view. The algorithm rewards virality, but virality is the antithesis to loyalty.



The process for building loyalty starts with looking beyond the virality and pinpointing the deeper emotion at play – whether it's joy, anxiety or strength – and enabling a partnership that speaks to a deeper constant and enduring relationship. Brands must learn to work with the algorithm without being defined by it and that comes from understanding the customer on a deeper level. Consumers gravitate to a lifestyle message because it offers expression, but when expression is lost to feeding an algorithm, the connection becomes superficial, and the opportunity to build genuine loyalty is diminished. When brands harness the power of algorithms to amplify genuine emotional connections rather than just chasing trends, they can create a synergy that drives both virality and lasting loyalty.



The Human Algorithm

Every human being has their own sense of intuition, but the pace of change is challenging internal voices. Individuals increasingly feel the pressure to make the quickest or most efficient choice or question if a better, more certain answer can exist. Intuition is like an internal algorithm. It processes inputs from external interactions and forms pattern recognition to guide our decisions. However, unlike the pure efficiency metrics that computer algorithms are held to, intuition is messy and, in some cases, isolating. It's not something that anyone else can see, and deciding when to trust yourself over external sources is a constant battle.

The value of more efficient processes for mundane decisions and tasks will ideally enable individuals to spend more time with the deeper and more personal questions they face, but trust is ultimately a lived experience and not an inherent one.

Consumers will establish a new benchmark of trust from interacting with digital sources, but the mind and heart will always keep the score of what feels right, not just what gets a task done. Deepfakes will persist and challenge the essence of what it means to trust what we see. It's within the contradiction of algorithmic precision and human intuition that progress will exist. Striking this balance will define not only the future of innovation but also the essence of what it means to be human in a rapidly evolving technosphere.

QUESTIONS BRANDS SHOULD BE ASKING

Al and algorithm overload means consumers are pushing back and now seek more human, intuitive experiences, meaning brands must ask deeper questions about how they service this.

These shifts are opening up new demand spaces, and with them, fresh opportunities for growth. Identify where your brand fits, and shape strategies that resonate in a world where empowerment, trust, and creativity matter more than ever.

- Are there emerging consumer segments that are actively rejecting algorithmic influence?
- Are we making things smoother for consumers without losing the human touch? And are our competitors doing it better than we are?
- Which moments in the consumer journey are most affected by algorithmic fatigue?
- How can we differentiate by aligning our brand with consumer empowerment rather than algorithmic optimization?

THE EVIDENCE HAPPENING NOW

69%

of US gamers/social media users believe algorithmic recommendations on social media are less interesting than those from friends

Source: Gaming Influencers and Streaming – US, 2024



of US consumers agree they like to stand out from the crowd in 2025 compared to 36% in 2023

Source: Mintel Global Consumer - 2023 & 2025

63%

of UK adults agree that Al makes them value things created by humans more

Source: Consumers and AI – UK, 2025

of German social media
users who engage

with social media
personalities agree
that content from
different social media
personalities is becoming
increasingly alike

Source: Influencers and Content Creators
– Germany, 2025

47%

of Argentinian consumers and 57% of Brazilian consumers are concerned with their reliance on technology to communicate

Source: Mintel Global Consumer, 2025

65%

of UK social media users follow brands on social media

Source: Social Media: Engaging with Brands – UK, 2025

76%

74%

of Canadian consumers

agree that deepfake Al

videos and pictures make

it hard to tell what is real

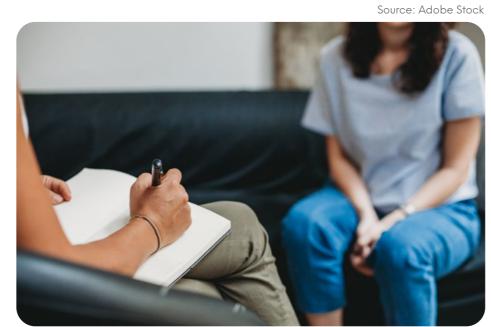
Source: Consumers and AI – Canada, 2025

of US adults who exhibit a form of trendsetting behavior say that it feels good when people ask them for recommendations about the categories that they're knowledgeable about

Source: Trendsetters & Early Adopters – US, 2025

BRAND TRACKING





US

Illinois bans Al in therapy, ensuring that mental healthcare is delivered by qualified professionals, not algorithms.

GLOBAL

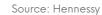
Instagram introduced a Friends tab in Reels, which enables users to view content their friends have liked, commented on or shared, fostering more personalized interactions and to prioritize meaningful social connections over algorithm-driven content discovery.





US AND INDIA

Google is testing a feature that allows users in the US and India to curate their own news experience when searching.





FRANCE

The Hennessy X.O \times Florian Zumbrunn collaboration offers a collection of 40 customizable bottles, each individually numbered. Customers can adjust the packaging design through an algorithm created by Zumbrunn, which is then painted onto a paper-based bottle cover by a robotic arm.

Source: Adobe Stock

Source: Character. Al

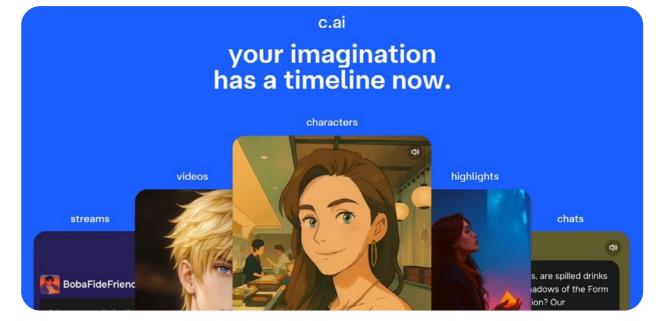


APAC

Johnson & Johnson has introduced 'The 3rd Opinion' campaign to encourage lung cancer patients to share their perspectives alongside physician opinions.



Source: Adobe Stock



GLOBAL

Character.Al launched an Al-native social feed where users can post, remix and co-create Al-generated content.



BRAZIL

Pepsi, in partnership with creative agency AMPFY and restaurant Pirajá in São Paulo, introduced "Your Bites, Your Rights," an interactive dining experience that puts creativity on the menu.



CHINA

Popularized on Douyin, with over 3.7 billion views and 100 million engagements in just 30 days, "summercore" was less a fashion look than a mood shaped by a freedom-seeking attitude.



The timeline of life is being redefined – and so is what it means to be "young." As longevity increases and traditional milestones become more fluid, we're seeing the rise of an extended middle of life where people are no longer bound by age-based expectations. Fulfillment is no longer front-loaded into youth or deferred to retirement. Brands that solely focus on the value of youth will miss the wealth of opportunity that exists in the extended middle.

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2010-2020

The adulthood that Millennials expected and the reality they faced created new timelines and goals for life stages, a disruption that has been documented in the Mintel Trend Redefining Adulthood.

Burnout and stress became everyday phrases to the point that individuals wanted to embrace life on their own terms and remove limitations associated with age (see Mintel Trend **Thriving with Age**). The shift of consumers moving away from traditional, structured adulthood has challenged brands to rethink their approach to marketing for different life stages.





A Wealthy Life

As the middle phase of life extends and milestones blur, more people will be seriously rethinking what it means to live well. Rather than saving and planning for a distant future, consumers will ask themselves: what future goals am I saving for, and what am I living for today?

The concept of micro-retirement has become a popular expression for young adults that are seeking to avoid burnout and sustain themselves across a longer lifespan. The result is a growing willingness to spend on experiences now – valued not just as indulgences, but as personal investments that compound over time in the form of memories, skills, and identity. Insurance plans and preventive healthcare will ease some fear of the unknown, and social media constantly makes alternative life paths visible.

Parents will rethink financial planning for the next generation as well, shifting from saving for tomorrow to creating more opportunities for shared memories today. Whether they're traveling with their families, exploring new hobbies or funding passions, the greater return for consumers comes from investing in the now, while they have the energy to enjoy it.

Consumers will need support in finding balance: a time to save, and a time to enjoy. Financial services, wellness, lifestyle, and travel brands that help people live meaningful, experience-rich lives will stand out. Keen brands will take the opportunity today – by creating everyday moments of joy, connection, and growth for people at every stage of life.



A Second Life (or Third)

We'll increasingly see people in their 30s, 40s, 50s, 60s, take on bold second – or even third – acts: moving to a new country, changing careers, re-entering the dating world, or pursuing long-postponed passions. Reinvention will become a normalized way to approach life, at any age.

People will seek support to explore new paths without feeling constrained by age or history. Flexible learning, career breaks, and like-minded community will help them reskill, relocate, or reimagine family and personal priorities.

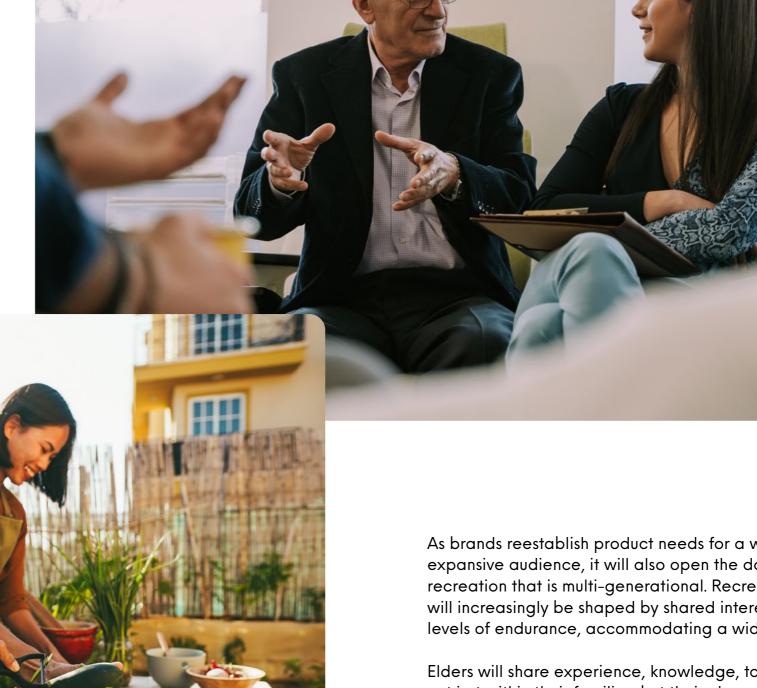
Forward-looking brands can respond by creating tools, services, and narratives that make reinvention accessible and rewarding. Fashion and beauty will embrace evolving self-expression over age-based conventions. Wellness and fitness enable people to start new routines and open new possibilities. Financial services, businesses, and lifestyle brands can provide practical tools to support pivots and restructuring – to help make transitions manageable.

The most powerful brands will be those that position themselves as allies in this transformation – helping consumers approach life with curiosity, confidence, and joy. Those redefining what it means to take a step into a "second life", and those that help shape how reinvention feels, will move with consumers – no matter where they go.

An Older Life

As people work longer and retirement is delayed, out of economic necessity, there will be a shift towards the tailing-off of retirement rather than facing a hard stop. Aging consumers, conscious that pensions might not be enough, will increasingly invest more in future healthcare and assistance – areas of increased opportunity for brands.

In the workplace, prolonged employment will mean a gradual shift from working to mentoring. Companies will see older workers' experience as a resource to value and avoid losing. There will be more need for an older workforce to take sabbaticals and have hours in the day to balance rest and play. Food and drink innovation will see layered functionality that moves beyond focusing on relaxation or productivity and prioritizes a holistic nutritional profile.



As brands reestablish product needs for a wider and more expansive audience, it will also open the door for outdoor recreation that is multi-generational. Recreational activities will increasingly be shaped by shared interests and varying levels of endurance, accommodating a wide range of ages.

Elders will share experience, knowledge, tools and culture, not just within their families, but their chosen communities.

QUESTIONS BRANDS SHOULD BE ASKING

Consumers are redefining what it means to be "young" and how to enjoy it. Fifty year olds want to party like it's (still) 1999, so brands must rethink how they innovate to stay relevant to that core consumer base.

Brands that respond with relevance and imagination will grow with consumers as they reshape how life is lived.

- How can we design products that reflect the evolving needs of consumers rather than old cliches?
- Which product attributes resonate with those seeking balance between long-term wellness and present-day fun?
- Which competitors are owning that category, what do the New Young consumers see in them?
- How can predictive insights help us develop attributes and claims in our products that will help us lead this transformation?

THE EVIDENCE HAPPENING NOW

39%

of Japan's population will be aged 65+ by 2070, up from just 5% in 1950 and peaking in 2045 – the highest proportion globally

Source: Seniors' Lifestyle – Japan, 2024

59%

of US consumers agree they would rather spend their money on luxury experiences than luxury brand products (68% for 18–34 year olds)

Source: Luxury Consumer - US, 2025

18%

of Brazilian adults have accomplished traveling to a dream destination, while 62% say they have not accomplished this but consider it a priority for the future

Source: Global Consumer, March 2025

of Canadian Millennials say a top priority for the next five years is enjoying life and making memories compared to 23% prioritizing saving for retirement

Source: Marketing to Millennials - Canada, 2025

54%

of US adults would take a job that doesn't offer a retirement plan

Source: Gig Economy – US, 2025

of Brits (and 58% of under-35s) believe that having children is less important today than in the past

Source: British Lifestyles – UK, 2025

52%

of single UK adults agree older singles are often overlooked when it comes to products/ events targeting singles

Source: Single Lifestyles – UK, 2025

89%

of Chinese internet users say when it comes to holidays and experiences, gaining an authentic local experience is important to them

Source: Luxury Holidays and Experiences – China, 2025



US Julia Louis Dreyfus promotes the wisdom of older women in the podcast Wiser Than Me.





UK

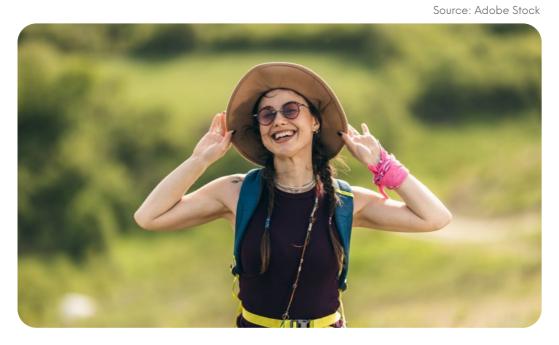
In the UK, Germaine de Capuccini has launched the Expert Jet system – a noninvasive dermafusion rejuvenation system designed to cleanse, exfoliate and rejuvenate the skin.

Source: Adobe Stock



NETHERLANDS

New mobile gaming app Lawa is designed to encourage users to walk more by gamifying exercise.



US

Camp No Counselors offers an all-inclusive weekend retreat for adults, combining fun, relaxation and community.





Source: Adobe Stock

THAILAND

Thailand's giant retailers, Lotus's and Makro, plan to recruit 400,000 employees aged 60+ by 2030.

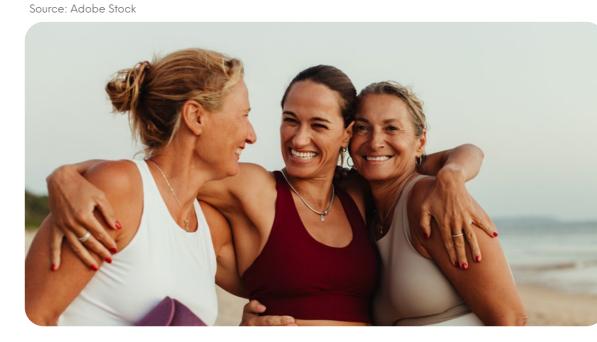
US

Pro-aging beauty brand Stripes Beauty launches a summer campaign celebrating midlife.



BRAZIL

Nutren Senior launched the "I See Myself Pro-Age" campaign to challenge negative stereotypes about aging and promote an active and fulfilling life for over-50s.



US

Prickly Pear Health empowers women facing perimenopause with an app combining Al and personalized brain health insights.

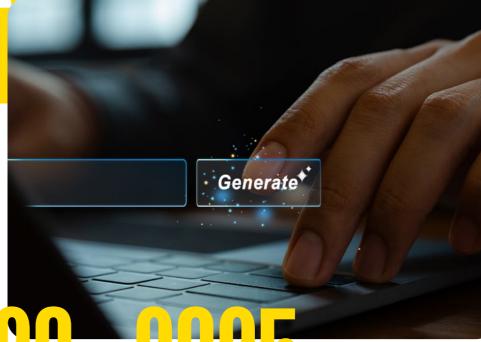


In a fragmented society where interactions open us up to a clash of values, many are retreating into self-contained bubbles, utilizing automation and avoiding casual connections in favor of efficiency and safety. As the social glue of human exchanges erodes, brands now stand at a crossroads: will they nurture affection as a vital thread in the fabric of modern social life or embrace efficiency at all costs?

EUGLUTION OF THIS PREDICTION

2010-2020

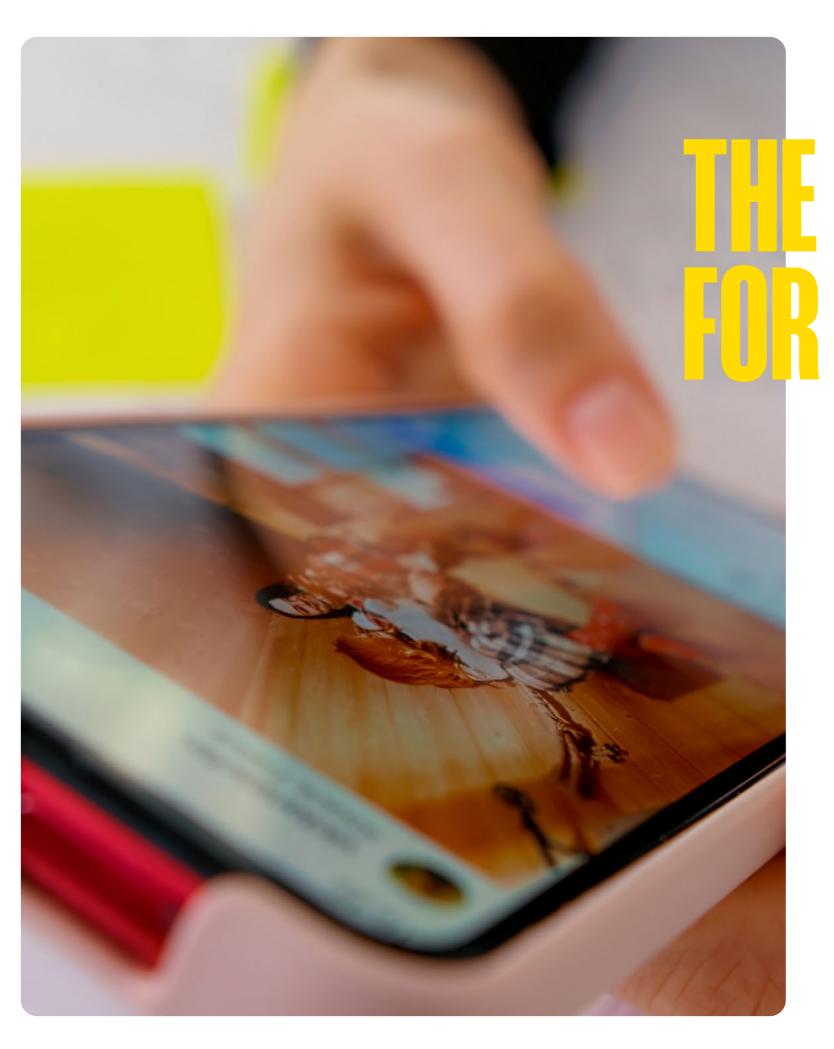
The development of online lives permanently disrupted socialization and consumers started feeling more isolated and disconnected from their physical realities, as documented in the Mintel Trend **Social Isolation**. Constant access to online conversations also exhausted consumers, depleting the energy they once had to dedicate to social events.



2020- 2025

Divisive politics compounded the sense of isolation, and the development of generative Al allowed consumers to communicate and seek advice without the need to consider any human emotions on the other side (see Mintel Trend Who Needs Humans?).





ROADNAP NHAT'S NEXT

Affection Economics

There is a question shaping modern society: "How far would a person go for the dopamine hit of attention?" Affection and attention are now evaluated through a cost-benefit lens, where the ease and immediacy of online interactions outweigh the effort and gradual rewards of real-life connections. Achieving 30 seconds of fame comes at the cost of maintaining the kindness and social ethics that inform everyday experiences and conversations. Brands play a pivotal role in shaping this dynamic, as their messaging and actions can either amplify social etiquette or fuel the pursuit of fleeting attention at any cost. Loneliness has set in, but the commodity of attention hasn't yet lost enough value to truly repair what is at stake. Brands are in a unique position to become facilitators of genuine connection, but if they want to maintain elements of physical community, it's paramount they help lower the affection cost. Tangible structure can help, and though it takes effort, fostering meaningful connections brings hope by making people feel seen and heard.

Consumers are intrinsically motivated to put in the work, as evidenced by dating app fatigue in the search for romantic affection. This fatigue signals an opportunity for brands to step in and create spaces – both physical and digital – that prioritize quality over quantity and foster environments where people can connect on a more genuine level.

Affection Automation

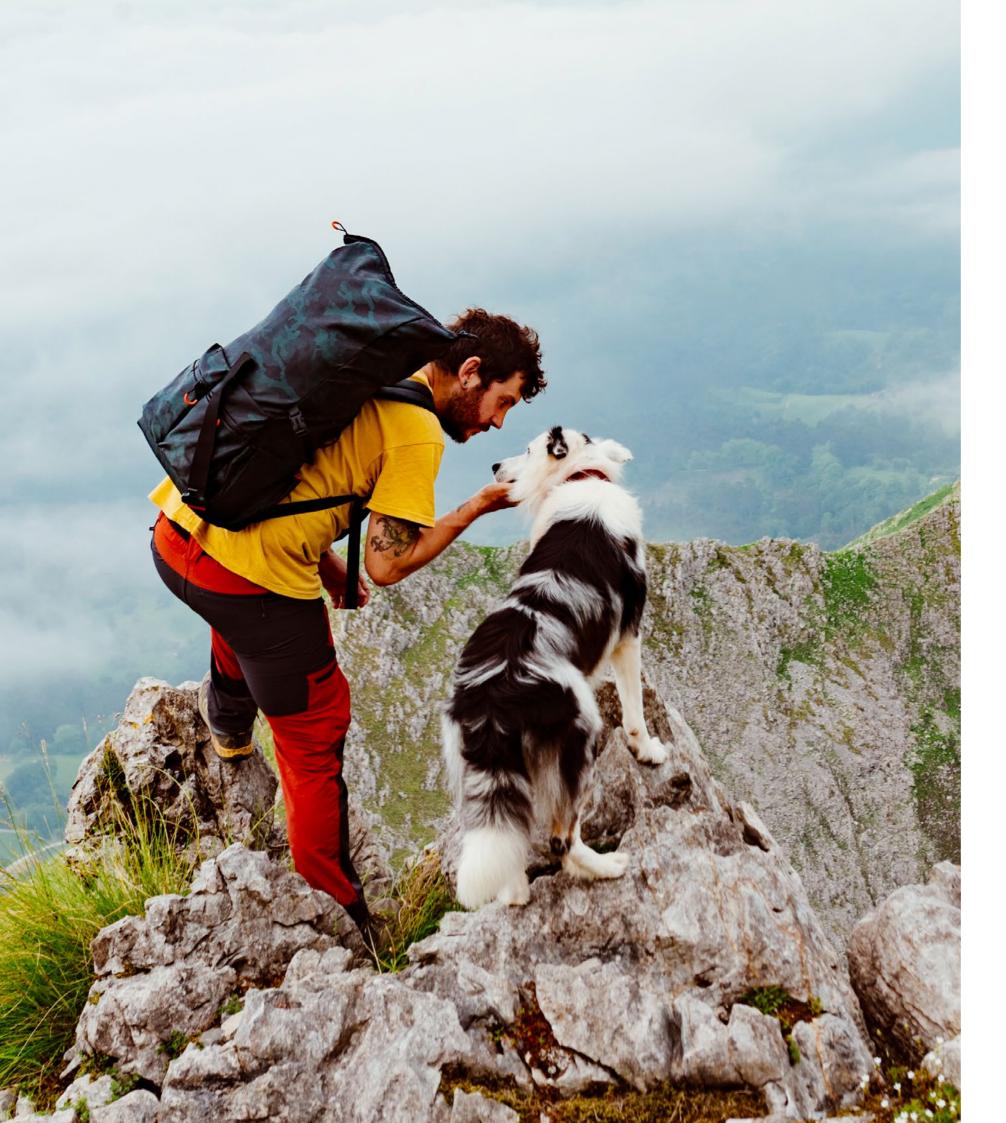
Affection from safe, frictionless sources, such as Al Chatbots and fictional characters, offers a level of comfort that can't be achieved from the unpredictability of human interactions. Fan fiction, books and movies offer a kind of idealized affection that feels nostalgic and familiar, leaning into the good and desirable while sidestepping the messiness of reality. These interactions create a prescribed script for what affection should look like in the real world but leave little room for the messiness and novelty of reality to provide a more unique and genuine story. Brands must balance the promotion of scripted interactions that drive strong emotions and fandom with still enabling a sense of fulfillment that can only come from lived experience.

Generative Al will continue to open avenues for intimate, low-risk conversations where people can be honest without fear of embarrassment or rejection. At this point, many might not consider these conversations to be sources of "real" affection but they're shaping what people expect affection to look and feel like: attentive, uncomplicated and always in their favor.

What we're trading off is subtle. A strong foundation for human affection grows from discomfort – the words we fumble, the texts we rethink, the jokes we worry will be misunderstood and, most importantly: the vulnerability of not knowing how the other person will respond. These moments prompt reflection and empathy that can deepen bonds over time.

Modern society is also writing out messy human moments in favor of convenience, efficiency, cost and control – not just in the digital realm, but in everyday scenarios, such as when ordering food through an app or a kiosk instead of speaking to a server. Affection thrives on unpredictability and imperfection; not in spite of awkward moments, but because of them. Visualize any romantic comedy that modern consumers are clinging to, and it's always the mess that creates the joy.





Affection Reflection

Spirituality is becoming a deeper internal reflection, creating more opportunities for society to receive affection through different mediums, including animals, the planet and self-love. Consumers are drawn to experiences and outlets that serve as direct mirrors of their inner world, offering a clearer sense of connection and personal meaning. Activities such as mindfulness, pet ownership, and nature retreats offer pathways to connect with inner emotions. Consumers are looking for broader ways to embrace affection as the timelines for more genuine partnerships grow longer. This opens a door for brands to prioritize the rise of chosen affection: intentional bonds formed through friendships, community care, pet companionship, and self-love, that offer emotional stability and meaning outside conventional relationship structures. The human need to nurture is proving to be relentless, but as a society we must adapt to an expansive view of what nurture can look like, which goes beyond simply catering to pet parents. The mindset must shift to the nurture of food, consumption and experiences to maintain a depth to what it means to be human. Brands can cater to this mindset by designing for affection in all its forms – they otherwise risk reducing it to isolated, commodified acts that reflect a timeline no longer relevant to how people truly connect.

QUESTIONS BRANDS SHOULD BE ASKING

As interactions become more transactional and distant, brand strategy needs to move beyond visibility and relevance to focus on emotional connection and cultural meaning.

Brands that prioritize emotional value will be better placed to connect with people in more lasting and meaningful ways.

- How can our brand identity deliver emotional connection in a culture increasingly shaped by automation?
- Are we designing brand experiences that invite vulnerability, spontaneity and human imperfection, or are we optimizing them out?
- What role can we play in lowering the "cost" of affection and making connection feel more accessible, not transactional?
- How can we build brand equity by reflecting the broader, more expansive ways consumers are seeking to give and receive affection?

THE EVIDENCE HAPPENING NOW

G20/o

of US adults who share their trendsetter knowledge online agree that the more online followers they have the more successful they feel

Source: Trendsetters and Early Adopters – US, 2025

75%

of Brazilian foodservice diners say they would be interested in placing an order at a restaurant using a tablet or cellphone without interaction

Source: Foodservice – Brazil, 2025

27%

of Chinese adults who have drank at home in the past six months, but not in an on-premise channel say it's because there are no or less occasions for social drinking

Source: On-premise Alcohol Trends – China, 2025

of Japanese Millennials rank enough time to spend alone as an aspect most important to them in life compared to 12% who rank good times with friends as an aspect most important to them

Source: Marketing to Millennials – Japan, 2025

56%

of UK singles aged 18-24 agree that online dating has made it harder to find a romantic partner

Source: Single Lifestyles – UK, 2025

of Canadian pet owners rely on their pet for emotional support

Source: Canada's Pet Owners – Canada, 2025

29%

of US adults familiar with Al have used it for chatting and companionship in the last three months

Source: Consumers and AI – US, 2025

56%

of US shoppers agree that self-checkout or cashier-less stores make the in-store shopping experience more efficient

Source: Tech in Retail – US, 2025

83%

of UK adults prefer to keep their personal life private compared to 17% that enjoy sharing their personal life with others

Source: British Lifestyles – UK, 2025





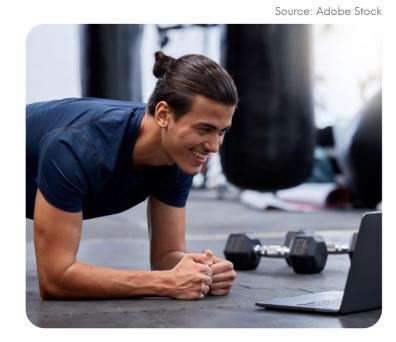
US

Source: Adobe Stock

A.E.R.O. bridges human creativity and robotic precision in tattoo design and application.

FRANCE

Invitin is a new platform that allows couples to sell tickets to their weddings to strangers.



UK

Sandwell Leisure Trust in the UK has introduced the Burn Lab, a content creator-friendly gym space.





US

The La Quinta Inn & Suites in Sunrise, Florida, gained significant online attention after a guest shared a video showcasing a tablet-based check-in system that replaced the traditional on-site front desk staff.

Source: Adobe Stock







CHINA

Beverage brand, Yidiandian (1点点), opened a pet-friendly outlet to deliver therapeutic experiences with furry companions.

Source: Quebec Eastern Township



BRAZIL

Heineken's "Bar Dating" app leveraged the swipe-right dating model to help young adults discover new bars and revitalize their social lives.



CANADA/US

Québec's Eastern Townships launched a heartfelt campaign to reassure Americans that they will always be welcome here.



BELGIUM

Carrefour Belgium has opened a new autonomous micro-store named Carrefour BuyBye in partnership with retail technology company Reckon.Al.



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