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REIMAGINING

CONNECTION

/ A LOOK BACK AT 2023

A reevaluation of personal priorities

Reflecting on the past four years, the world and society at large have undergone a substantial transformation. Isolation and loneliness have peaked, fueled by the lingering effects of the global pandemic, evolving work patterns, and heightened political & opinion divides.

This past year, society endeavored to counter isolation, striving for increased moments of connection. That desire for togetherness caused a reevaluation of personal priorities going into 2024.

The joy of togetherness replaced busyness as a cultural symbol

44% of Gen Z indicate they are prioritizing more time for themselves and loved ones to connect.

Experiences were chosen over material items

4 out of 5 U.S. consumers stated that they have shifted their spending to experiences versus material items due to inflation.

Compassion culture was on the rise

As 75% of Americans believe incivility has risen to crisis level, a new drive to cultivate and inspire empathy and compassion with one another has emerged.



/ THE PHYGITAL EXPERIENCE

Digital communities seek experience and connection IRL

In the 1980s, sociologist Ray Oldenburg coined the term “third place” to describe a physical location aside from the home or workplace that facilitates social interaction and encourages public relaxation. These are places where people encounter “regulars,” as well as potential new connections.

In more recent years, the number of IRL third places has dwindled. It is no surprise that people are seeking spaces of connection through media, the new third space.

Podcasts create common ground for listeners

More than half of podcast listeners tune in to gain better understanding of the world and interact in fan communities of their favorite podcasts.

TikTok encourages sharing and connection IRL

60% of Gen Z who participate with trends on TikTok do so with someone else, and 47% of original content is done with someone else.

Immersive media era ushers in more social entertainment experiences

Consumers under 35 spend 30% of their media time socializing in non-gaming environments (i.e., watching livestreams together).

Connection > Rivalry

The simultaneous release of 'Barbenheimer' last summer had people racing to cinemas to experience both movies. Instead of picking one movie or the other, fans prioritized the collective experience and connection forged by attending both screenings.

Despite some groups' attempts to pit fans against each other, Taylor Swift and Beyonce orchestrated successful tours that not only showcased their talent but also boosted local economies. Fans flocked, putting a premium on experience and connection that surpassed any perceived rivalry.



/ REIMAGINING CONNECTION

In phygital experiences

In 2024, there will be a deeper fusion of physical and digital connections unlocked through media.

These five outlooks reimagine connection in phygital experiences

/ SIMPLIFY SHOPPING:
Data-fueled personalization

/ AGGREGATED EXPERIENCE:
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/ EXPERIENCE UNLEASHED:
Navigating the immersion era

/ TENTPOLES:
From broadcasting to bonding

/ GAME ON:
Leveling up immersion



/ SIMPLIFY SHOPPING: Data-fueled personalization

So what?

Rapidly evolving technology is enabling faster, more personalized experiences in the consumer journey. Brands using AI, AR, and shoppable experiences are streamlining the path to purchase, combating decision paralysis, and winning relevance among consumers.

Now what?

Success is a balance of data effectiveness and humanization of the purchase process. Brands should strategically blend technology and human elements to enhance consumer connectivity and create intentional, beneficial phygital experiences.

What consumers want

Each day, the average consumer has a seemingly endless amount of choices to make, leading to decision paralysis and fatigue. Despite concerns around data privacy, when faced with an overload of options, consumers prefer to be served with curated product suggestions.

Why this works

These technologies enable faster capture of consumer demand, precise targeting, and the creation of diverse ad copy to cater to distinct audiences. They also remove decision barriers and limit consumer exhaustion.



/ EXPERIENCE UNLEASHED: Navigating the immersion era

So what?

In the ongoing battle to gain and keep attention, media – and marketing – is becoming more immersive. Consumers are actively choosing to interact with content on a multi-sensory level and brands have the opportunity to create attention grabbing immersive experiences.

Now what?

AR has been cost prohibitive for many consumers since its invention – keeping the technology from reaching critical mass adoption. As the technology becomes more accessible, advertisers will need to pull, rather than push, consumers into immersive branded experiences.

What consumers want

As AR technology continues to improve, consumers expect a value exchange from brands for their undivided attention. Branded experiences, rather than product, provide the novelty that curious consumers are seeking.

Why this works

To connect in memorable ways with consumers in captive AR environments, brands must be willing to create content with consumer experience at the forefront. Designing for storytelling, unique visuals and/or content that cannot be found elsewhere.



/ GAME ON: Leveling up immersion

So what?

Gaming has solidified itself as a cultural phenomenon, bridging the gap between gamers and non-gamers alike. Marketers can now extend experiences and influence beyond the console.

Now what?

Consumers, both gamers and non-gamers, are increasingly hungry for more ways to experience gaming content and properties (The Last of Us became a hit HBO series, Super Nintendo World opened an IRL experience at Universal Studios).

What consumers want

Gamers are open to increased brand presence in their gaming ecosystem if there's something worth engaging with, while non-gamers will get a glimpse of brands engaging in the gaming space (the good and the bad) through media like social and streaming.

Why this works

In the gaming realm, brands can transcend real-world significance by offering authentic value: anticipate players' needs to level up, facilitate social connections, and introduce novel challenges and experiences for immersive interaction IRL and in-game.

The logo features the red and white LEGO logo on the left, followed by the word "FORTNITE" in a bold, white, sans-serif font with a registered trademark symbol on the right, all set against a black circular background.

Lego x Fortnite

/ AGGREGATED EXPERIENCE: The driver of seismic influence

So what?

Amid lack of authenticity and a rise in distrust from consumers, society is shifting their social media focus across the spectrum of creators to understand multiple perspectives on a wide variety of topics - from politics to Pilates.

Now what?

With a surge in niche creators on Instagram and TikTok, brands can authentically reach audiences at scale and potentially with lower investment.

What consumers want

Younger consumers seek authenticity, rejecting polished influencers for truthful accounts from trusted creators they've gotten to know online.

Why this works

Gone are the days of repurposing high production value video content across platforms. As attention spans are short, and BS monitors are strong, brands must stand authentically to stand out, by embracing (and in some cases handing over) a product narrative experienced by niche creators.



/ TENTPOLES: From broadcasting to bonding

So what?

Despite waning ratings, tentpole events remain a cornerstone to create meaningful connection to fandoms, providing opportunities to engage broad, diverse audiences.

Now what?

Brands associated with tentpole events can tap into cultural conversations to create relevance and authentic connections.

What consumers want

Consumers want to stay current and connected with pop culture phenomena and seek it out anywhere and everywhere they can.

Why this works

Beyond traditional megaphones, tentpoles are no longer about shouting to the masses. They are an opportunity to extend an invitation, fostering dialogue and crafting an immersive experience that enhances and elongates their engagement with the moment.



The PopTart Bowl



/ IN SHORT

Key takeaways for marketers

Make shopping personal.

Marketers have the ability to bring the personal shopper experience to the digital world to both enhance consumer experience and remove barriers to purchase. Make shopping personal again with improved digital personalization and curated product experiences online.

Design immersive experiences.

While some brands “appear” in immersive environments, it is critical for brands to deliver immersive experiences to consumers. Content that exchanges value in the form of entertainment, information or novelty for consumer attention will win both hearts and wallets.

Level-up gaming.

Gamers are open to engaging with brands in their native space, provided the brand can offer them something new and engaging to connect with. In order to attract and retain these consumers, brands will need to ensure they are providing a compelling value through honesty and connection. They will need to create safe social spaces, novel experiences and unique immersion to be successful with these consumers.

Drive genuine influence.

In a world where people are overwhelmed at every turn by sights, sounds and calls for their attention, the opportunity to engage an audience is short. In order to attract and retain consumers, especially Gen Z, brands must set themselves apart from their competitors. Bringing authentic voices to the forefront of their campaigns can drive influence and engagement.

Create relevance through tentpoles.

The primary role of tentpoles has begun to shift. Rather than shouting for attention, these events are an opportunity to extend a welcoming hand to consumers. Tentpoles can bring consumers into a brand’s circle of trust and make them feel valued and celebrated.



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