CONTEXT UNCOVERED

Beyond the algorithm

How brands can rehumanise the conversation in 2025



We Live Context

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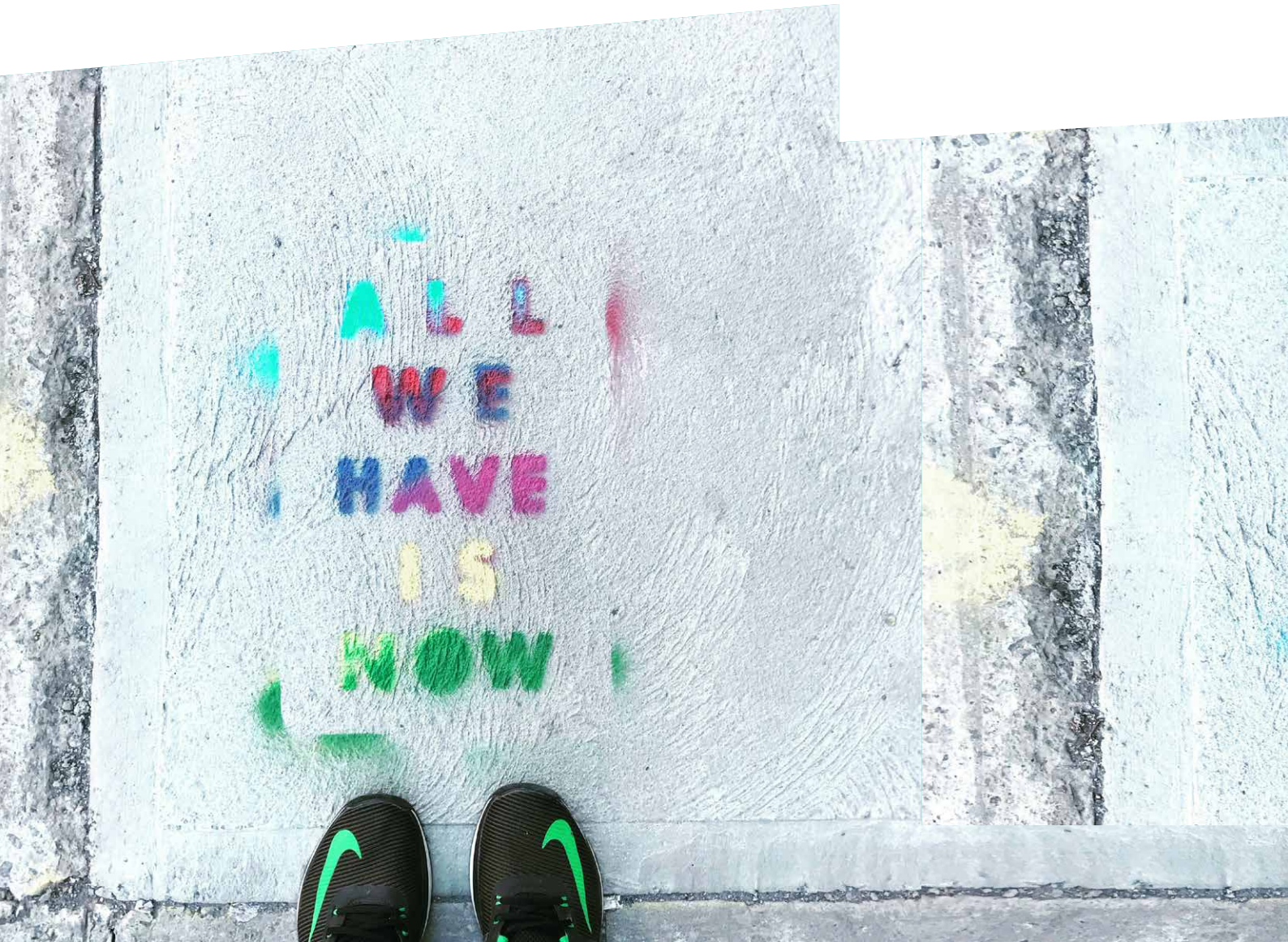
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FOREWORD

Defining a new era of digital culture



At We Live Context, we believe that the most powerful insights come not just from data, but from understanding the deeper forces shaping people's lives.

In 2025, consumers are no longer passive participants in digital culture, they are actively pushing back against the forces that seek to define them. We are hearing it again and again in our research. The rise of micro-trends, the exhaustion of algorithmic curation, and the growing desire for genuine, unfiltered experiences all signal a fundamental shift: people want their sense of control, creativity, and individuality back.

This whitepaper is a critical exploration of that shift. It examines the growing fatigue with algorithm-driven experiences, the rise of niche subcultures as refuges from digital sameness, and the ways in which brands must evolve to build authentic, lasting connections. It is no longer enough for brands to chase trends or optimise for fleeting virality. Those who succeed will be the ones that truly understand their consumers, champion their individuality, and help them navigate a world that too often seeks to box them in.

Now is the time for lifestyle brands to step up. Consumers are actively seeking out brands that empower rather than dictate, that curate rather than overwhelm, and that prioritise depth over superficial engagement. The brands that recognise this moment and act on it will not only win loyalty but will help define a new era of consumer culture, one that moves beyond the algorithm and back towards what really matters.

We hope this whitepaper sparks meaningful conversations and, more importantly, inspires action.

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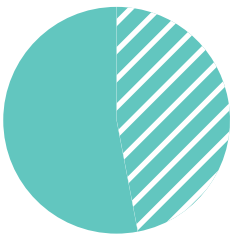
> "...people want their sense of control, creativity, and individuality back.

KEY STATISTICS



38%

of UK consumers are concerned about having too much screen time and are keen to have a "digital detox"[55]



47%

of 18-34 year olds view their online activities as more disruptive than beneficial to their well-being[30]



40%

of people who think the quality of content on social media has worsened over the past five years[26]



67%

of households believe that government and regulators aren't doing enough to combat harmful content online[30]

BEYOND THE ALGORITHM:
How brands can rehumanise the conversation in 2025

CONTEXT UNCOVERED

Key takeaways

1 Power to the consumer

Consumers are tired of recommendation loops that feel more like a trap than a service, with inescapable, ineffective recommendation systems that limit their personal agency and contribute to digital fatigue.

Instead of pushing content, let consumers control the experience they want in exchange of their data, giving them more value as part of a Data-Value Exchange. More choice, more agency, less digital fatigue.

2 Premium personalisation

Consumers are increasingly paying to escape algorithmic noise and forced recommendations, in favour of greater control and exclusivity.

Brands can offer high-quality, subscription-based models and partnerships that prioritise consumer experience over mass engagement, delivering experiences that feel genuinely valuable and intentional.

3 Curate meaningful moments

Consumers are aware of highly complex technology like algorithms and business/ marketing tactics. When brands jump on every viral moment it dilutes their cultural significance and makes brands blend into the noise, leaving consumers craving creativity.

Brands that invest in originality, focus on building long-term cultural relevance. Engage with trends in ways that add depth and meaning rather than reducing them to aesthetic marketing tactics.

4 Go Offline

Many consumers are also actively seeking offline exploration and entertainment as these feel most memorable to them. They relish in small spontaneous interactions as a way to break free from their echo chambers and the predictability of digital feeds.

To meet this demand, brands can invest in offline activations that are focused on curating spaces and places for genuine connection. Live, immersive, and unexpected experiences already stand out from the sea of screens.

5 Rehumanise insights

Existing algorithms fail to understand consumers at a human level, reducing them to patterns rather aemotions, and evolving needs. This lack of depth pushes people further into predefined boxes, limiting true self-expression and results in impersonal brand interactions that diminish trust.

Brands need to uncover the real value that consumers want delivered in exchange for their data and attention. To remain relevant, brands must go beyond the surface-level metrics and invest in insights that reflect consumers as real people.



INTRODUCTION

Understanding the shift

The lifestyle Industry constantly evolves to mirror the pulse of society: the changing norms, shifting trends, and cultural revivals.

Yet, in an effort to understand consumers' way of living, brands are finding it difficult to keep up with micro-trends[1] and new aesthetics that explode overnight on social media and are gone with the wind just as quickly.

2025 stands in the wake of another year of global political and cultural controversies - fuelled by social media and geopolitical and economic tensions that have boosted polarisation and everyday exposure to negative commentary. Government actions and platform changes, including TikTok bans/unbans[2] and Facebook's removal of fact-checking controls[3], leave consumers feeling increasingly unprotected against the misinformation and negativity invading social spaces. The USA banned TikTok as a whole, despite having 170 million US users, for just one day[4] and in South East Asia internet freedom is in continued decline, with governments dictating what people see and share online[5].

Moreover, 2025 marks a year into AI adoption, with governments, scientists, and researchers rushing to acknowledge the flaws of AI algorithms[6] and warn against the possibility of discrimination in several reports and thought leadership pieces[7].

From extensive research into consumers' digital lives, we know that they are no longer passive participants. They are keenly aware of trends mechanisms, often driving them forward, and they have a deep understanding of how sophisticated technology works, including algorithms. Consumers understand that it is not only algorithms that cause their echo chambers, but they deeply influence their consumption habits and direct their identity and creativity into rigid categorisations. This has contributed to a decreased sense of control as consumers navigate their lives.

In 2025, brands must understand the impact of this shift in consumer perception and how they are trying to hold onto control over their manifestations of self-expression and lifestyle.

PART ONE: THE CONSUMER

Algorithms in a shrinking world

Our research shows that consumers are struggling to feel safe and in control online and are taking cover as a result.

They are intentionally reverting to smaller social circles and forming safer microenvironments, as well as setting intentions to detox and limit time on social media.

Even trusted spaces, meant for accessing loved ones and community news like Facebook, have become invaded by constant AI-driven ads - a common complaint if you're running a community panel about a brands' social media.

They also feel that the mechanisms to control algorithmic systems, recommendations, and ads don't seem to work – Ofcom research highlights that more than half of social media users in the UK find content controls ineffective[8]. This algorithmic environment therefore feels inescapable, overwhelming, and relentless: consumers don't feel like they can opt out.



THE WHY

Consumer challenges

1

IT DOESN'T UNDERSTAND ME

Our research found that consumers expect more from brands and algorithms. If they give away personal data, it is a willing and expected exchange for better quality and value from their services. This is what we've coined the **Value Exchange**.

Yet, algorithms can be flawed by design and not tailored to the individual, offering inaccurate recommendations or serving up ads about something already bought. Seamless experiences are meant to remove barriers. Instead, they feel broken by the way algorithmic rules are defined, and this goes against promises of deeper personalisation and being understood.

> When consumers give away personal data, it is a willing and expected exchange for better quality and value from their services.

To read more about the Value Exchange, visit **welivecontext.com/valueexchange**

As technology and experiences become increasingly bound to people's sense of joy, escape, and fun if things don't work, it becomes deeply frustrating.

For example, more than 2,000 subreddit comments discuss Spotify's "broken" algorithmic shuffle feature, deemed "enough to drive someone insane"[9], as it repeats the same songs rather than pulling from the entire personally curated library.





2

SUPERFICIAL but SOMETIMES DANGEROUS

Trends, labels, and cultural moments shared on social media influence hobbies, fashion, and hairstyles, but also marketing strategies. As consumer's style, fashion and lifestyle is tied to their self-identity, it is important for brands to align with trends authentically. When brands or even political faces use the latest trend wrongfully, it can quickly be seen as turning meaningful messages into superficial aesthetics aimed at mass consumption, losing its bottom-up, user generated power.

Enter the biggest cultural moment of 2024: 'Brat summer' or just 'Brat'[10]: a movement propelled by Charli XCX's album release, telling the story of unwavering authenticity and choosing honesty over perfection. The black text over a radioactive lime green coloured album cover, designed by Brent David Freany, quickly became one of the most memorable in music history - and is incredible for replicability. This subsequently influenced everything from branding to fashion to packaging globally. In China, platforms like TikTok and Little Red Book saw a viral spread of user generated content, with #brat gaining over 18 million views[11].

'Brat Summer', initially a message to be ok with your imperfect self, was quickly commodified by brands and political campaigns[12], diluting its message and alienating its core audience - those that felt marginalised by society. What worked well was the authenticity of the message, it's ok to say something 'messy'. Like Sadiq Khan's political campaign taking on the iconic green to unabashedly say "ULEZ is working" - a controversial yet environmentally friendly policy for London's polluted streets[13].

However, when the artist herself tweeted "Kamala is Brat" led to Harris' meme-based US presidential election campaign and poor use by conservative media outlets and politicians, several people complained this marked the end of the authenticity[14].

Whilst initially looking good superficially, the message lost its power, which trends so often do. And when you take a step back, trends blur into each other, pretending to be carefree rather than offering something truly different and spontaneous. These fads are expected of the online world, but can be mindlessly repeated with little sincerity. While many are harmless, they contribute to a disheartening sense of cultural sameness. Advocates for these trends argue that they serve as a coping mechanism for navigating socioeconomic uncertainty, i.e., the tradwife can stay at home and cook and escape reality.

But this meme-ification - perpetuated by an insatiable algorithm - can easily propagate harmful cultural norms, with targeted content based on demographic interference algorithms. Tradwives, coquettes, mob wives, 'girl everything' all serve to regress the image of women[15]. A bit of fun with an insidious outcome for the wrong viewer.

Cultural phenomena are digested and analysed by the internet, including your consumers, such as the 'Crunchy to right-wing pipeline' [16]: described as people that subscribe to soft cults such as spiritual holistic health and get converted to full on conspiracy theorists.

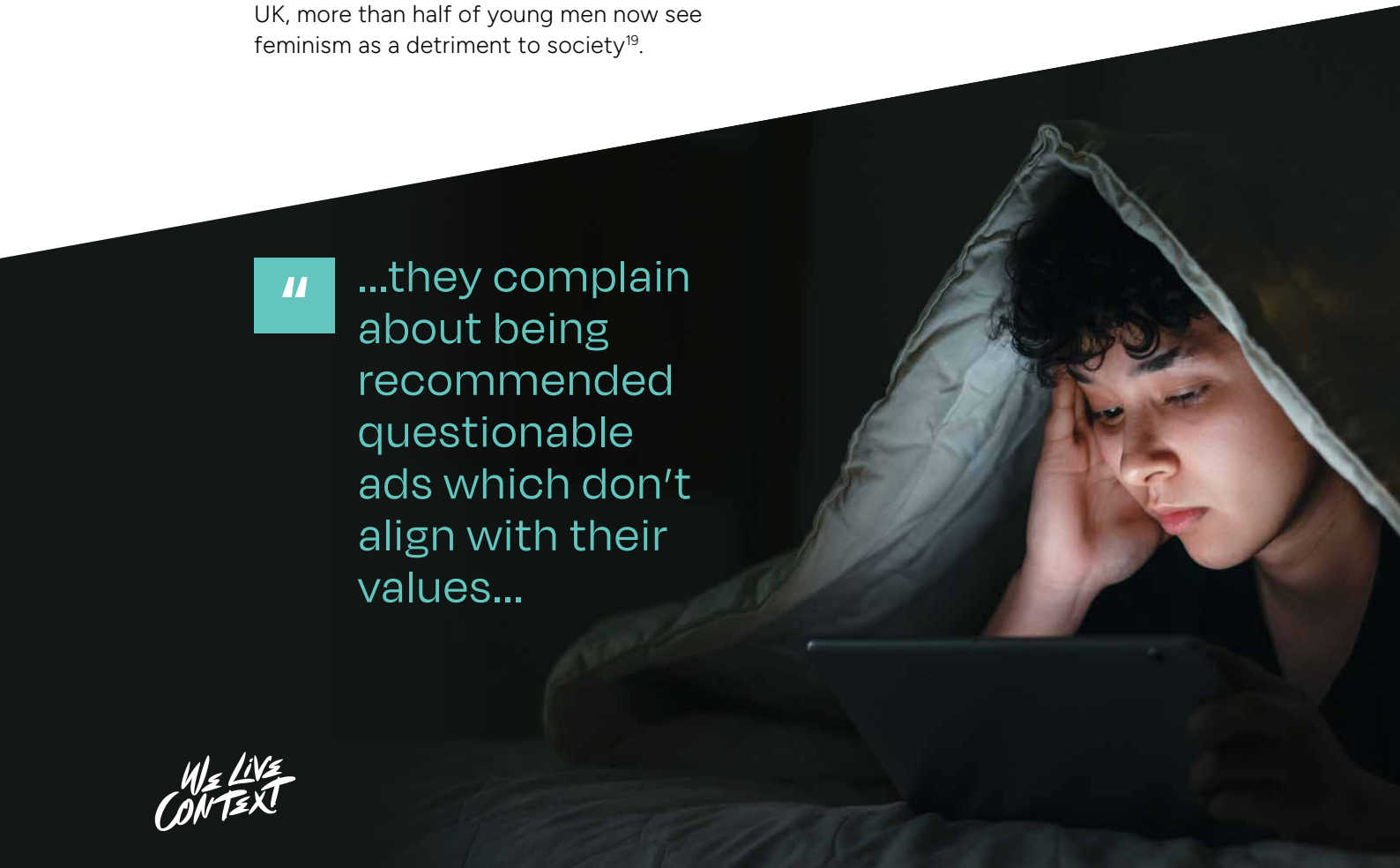
Recent examples of influencers in the news include yoga teachers like Katie Griggs, or online YouTube creators with huge fan bases like @RawBeautyKristi, that were seen to be 'transformed' into Q-Anon conspiracy theorists and anti-LGBT activists[17]. This is a phenomenon well discussed in the book 'Conspirituality' by Derek Beres et al. (2023), highlighting the dangers of algorithmic exposure to rabbit-hole inducing content.

Another prominent example is heard when talking to men, they complain about being recommended ads that don't align with their values, such as promoting male supremacist influencers or right wing channels[18] - based simply on their demographic data – including content from self-proclaimed misogynist Andrew Tate, or the 'Carnivore diet'. This can have dangerous consequences, especially for men at an impressionable age: In the UK, more than half of young men now see feminism as a detriment to society[19].

And not even the elite are immune to falling down the algorithm-induced rabbit hole: Elon Musk has become a victim of his own creation – In his pursuit of 'free speech absolutism' he rewired X's algorithm to amplify controversial voices and allow anyone access to paid blue check subscriptions to have their content promoted, no matter the accuracy.

His own posts are artificially boosted, fuelling erratic rants and online feuds, including recent obsessive tweeting related to Farage and the right of UK politics, forcing the UK prime minister to intervene[20]. The algorithm feeds his obsessions, and the world watches as he spirals. The result? X is haemorrhaging users, losing 7 million in the US every month[21]. Advertisers and media have turned their backs, and even Tesla – once untouchable – has seen profits plunge[22] especially in Europe. Musk thought he was controlling the machine, but like Frankenstein, he created a monster that's now turning against him.

> "...they complain about being recommended questionable ads which don't align with their values...





3

SEA OF SAMENESS

Consumers crave individuality and self-expression but are increasingly constrained by repetitive, uninspired content, trapping users in cycles of sameness. This sea of sameness erodes joy, leaving consumers longing for diversity and creativity. Digital spaces feel saturated with consumerism—unavoidable recommendations and ads—while "personalised", often amount to indistinguishable suggestions.

Moreover, content marketing and SEO have led to sometimes seeing the "best average" content from highest ranking overall website rather than content that provides the best answers. In trying to write compelling blogs that will rank highly, there is a monotony of writing within the same seemingly "optimised" blog structures, and clickbait-y tactics. Content is consumed, but little does the algorithmic-driven world care about whether it is enjoyed, or if it creates an emotional reaction.

In the book "Filter World", Kyle Chayka[23], refers to the algorithm-driven world and engineering of online and offline spaces for 'seamless consumption' as a key source of pervasive anxiety in people. Studies show consumers experience 'algorithm fatigue,' a mental exhaustion from constant algorithmic interactions, leading many to resist recommendations[24]. In our research, we often hear consumers are more anxious than ever, including about 'seamless' systems like contactless payments, which while convenient, make it harder to control spending. Fatigue leads many to purposefully resist algorithmic recommendations and disengage with platforms.

Ultra-optimisation risks creating a homogenised culture where even influential creators, like Gabi Belle, critique the dominance of algorithms and their impact on creativity[25]. Creators often compromise their originality to pander to algorithms, prioritising "going viral" over authentic creativity.

For example, making something too short that it has to be rewatched, therefore, increasing the video's importance to the algorithm. This has increased the level of low-quality content sweeping social ecosystems: in the UK, 40% of social media users believe the quality of online content has worsened significantly[26], where algorithms show most watched content, no matter the quality or emotional reaction given to the consumer.

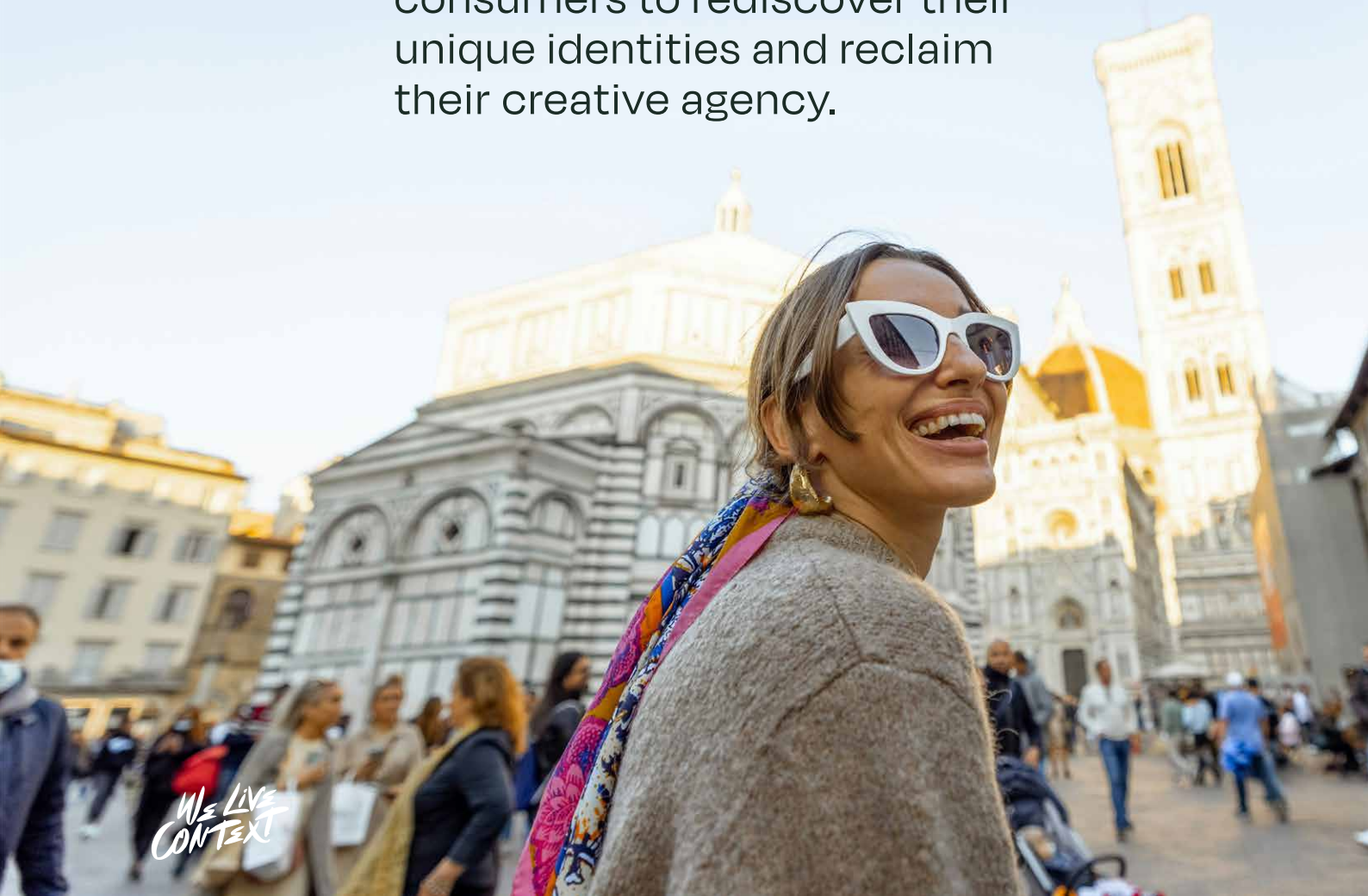
Creators and consumers alike recently complained of TikTok video trends that purposefully mislead and confuse the audience, creating a sense of exclusion and negativity from feeling like you are not included in understanding a reel, that seems to be trending at the top.

This sameness has real-world consequences. For instance, mass tourism, driven by algorithmic trends, has led to cultural and environmental challenges like overtourism[27] in hotspots such as Barcelona, where protests highlight the strain on local communities[28].

Cultural richness is diluted as unique communities are reduced to be oversimplified and marketable.

In this increasingly homogenised, algorithm-driven world, lifestyle brands face an urgent challenge—how to empower consumers to rediscover their unique identities and reclaim their creative agency.

" ...lifestyle brands face an urgent challenge—how to empower consumers to rediscover their unique identities and reclaim their creative agency.



PART TWO: THE CONSUMER

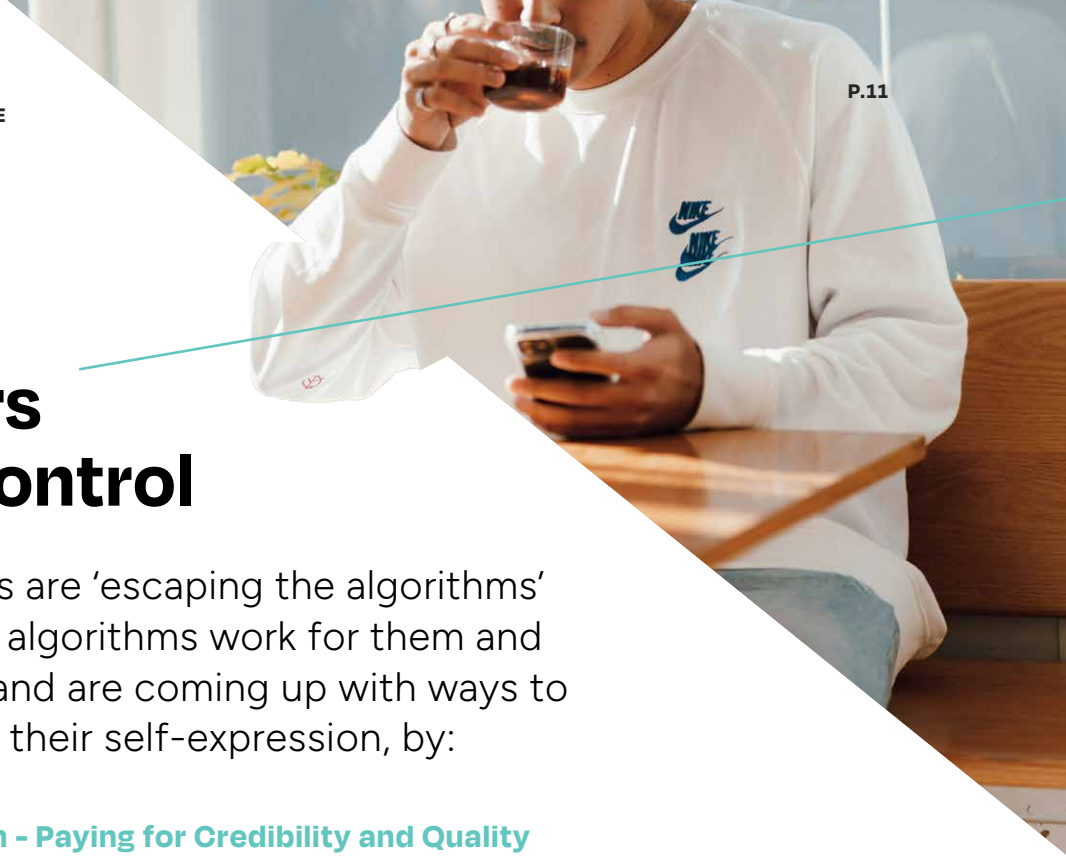
Escaping the Algorithm

In our research, we see that consumers are being more proactive in reshaping their lives.

We see consumers not only establish their social circles and comfortable microenvironments on and offline, but also relish in moments of real and human connections which break the monotony of echo chambers. One participant told us that the dog walks were an excuse to get to know the neighbours or have small chats, even if they acknowledged that they might have nothing in common, the contact felt simple and natural.

Furthermore, a majority of people are taking more action than they were a year ago to improve their wellbeing in some way[29]. This means they are actively adopting tools to detox, not a new behaviour but continues to be important, to manage screen time and protect their mental wellbeing. They go beyond disabling notifications, and are actively choosing which platforms to engage with to prioritise their own well-being over profit-driven engagement tactics.





THE HOW

Consumers Reclaim Control

In 2025, consumers are 'escaping the algorithms' i.e. making existing algorithms work for them and their goals better, and are coming up with ways to regain control over their self-expression, by:

1 Going Premium - Paying for Credibility and Quality

Consumers are trying to moderate poor experiences by paying for credible recommendations that feel more curated and specialised. Dating apps are the biggest example, with over 300 million people using dating apps worldwide and about 20 million paying for premium features[30].

Tinder and Hinge Premium showcase more meaningful and personalised options to subscribers: rather that swiping everyone available, you receive more tailored exposure and profile discovery. Consumers are also paying to have unique experiences, apps like, 'Hello Strangers' organise dinners with five strangers, through carefully selected personality-matching algorithms.

Whilst travellers use 'PlateCulture' to taste authentic local cuisine in the homes of local hosts.

Fashion girls are subscribing to trusted Substack influencers, the platform is becoming a haven for shoppers seeking reliable recommendations without the noise of overt advertising[31]. Creators use affiliate links and brand partnerships offering the feeling of a specialised shopping experience for true fashionistas.

To read more about these trends, visit **welivecontext.com/internationalspending**

2 IRL Discovery: more Spontaneous Moments and Connection

Our research explores what drives meaningful moments of connection. The authenticity of spontaneity and self-discovery is coming back to challenge the endless recommendations and social media posts. We discovered that spontaneous moments are the most memorable, and people just want to happen upon unique experiences. This is a clear attempt to reclaim wonder and joy as a much-needed antidote to digital fatigue. In travel, consumers are embracing immersion and nostalgia, reliving childhood interests with Polly Pocket-inspired Airbnb rentals, to exploring destinations like Miami for the 'Miami Vice'-era aesthetic[32].

Gen Z and Millennials increasingly favour unplanned discovery, with 90% of young US consumers finding local businesses by exploring neighbourhoods on foot[33], outpacing numbers of visits from social media discovery. In the UK, 68% of Gen Z and Millennials planned to do their Christmas shopping at small businesses and opted for more in-store discovery.

3 Maximising MY time: The urge to be niche and different

Our research shows that consumers have become experts at deciphering where they belong: they selectively choose the spaces and relationships that take their time or form their inner circle. Parents of any age, singles and couples, tell us they more readily prioritise moments that will be truly memorable for their children. They want to maximise their time and invest in their comfort, health and happiness. For wellbeing, consumers gravitate towards products that offer the best for their perceived needs, with the opportunity to access elite-level functionality and monitoring when it comes to wellbeing technology.

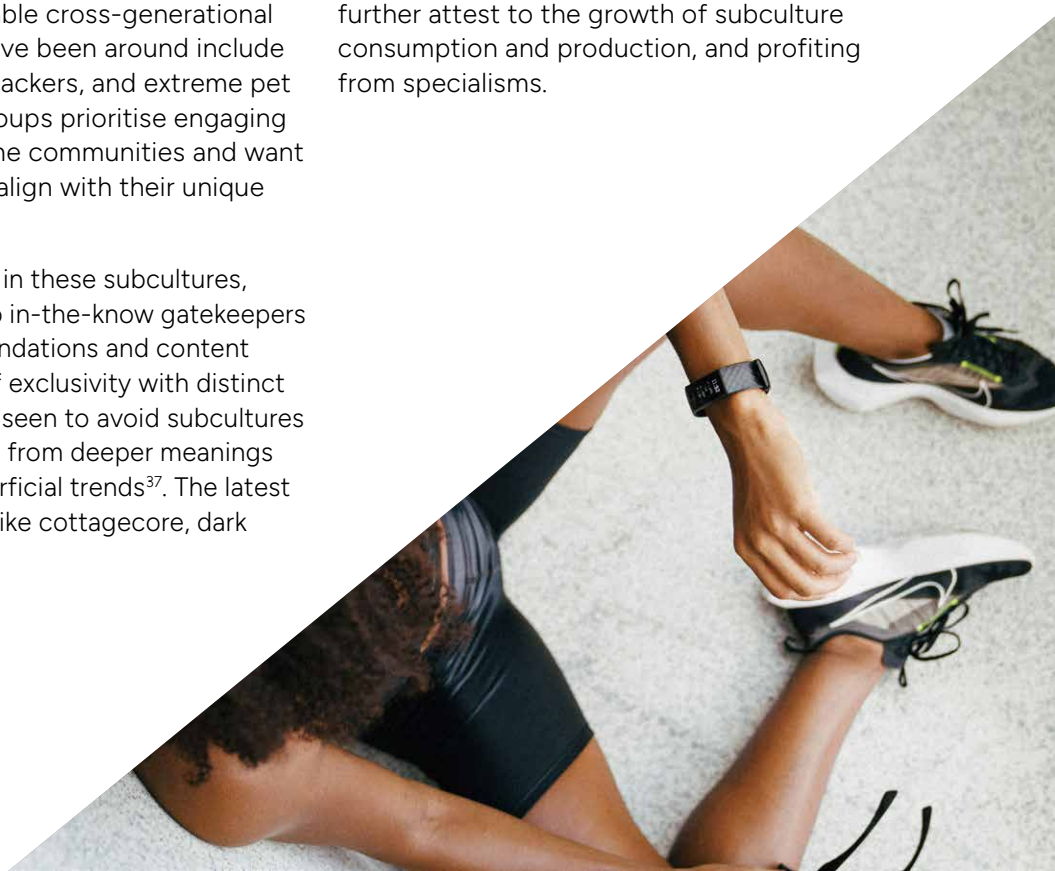
We see consumers being increasingly attracted to professionalism and develop expertise in niche areas they already consume. For example, a global study by Bain & Company[34] shows global gamers want to experience their gaming IP within other formats, with more than half of gamers watching a gaming-inspired TV shows and movies in the past year. I know we are all ready for The Last of Us Season 2 later this year[35].

People are finding a sense of belonging by differentiating themselves from the masses. Some notable cross-generational subcultures that have been around include – dirt trackers, biohackers, and extreme pet parents[36]. These groups prioritise engaging with authentic, niche communities and want to use brands that align with their unique interests.

In gaining expertise in these subcultures, consumers turn into in-the-know gatekeepers of unique recommendations and content and build a sense of exclusivity with distinct rules of play. This is seen to avoid subcultures from being stripped from deeper meanings and becoming superficial trends[37]. The latest niches from Gen Z like cottagecore, dark academia, and VSCO girls[38], highlight the desire to slow down, express their self, and seek artistic culture without being inundated with the usual content on Instagram. 'Aliyahcore' [39] started by Aliyah Bah gave a pioneering voice to normalise 'alternative Black girls' build community, and offer thrifting tips[40], and tells a story about going back to deeper meanings of self-expression in aesthetics and sharing ideological values as part of a tribe.

Subcultures now, are about connecting with trusted and relatable individuals, or finding curated sources that not everyone has access to. In our research, consumers tell us they pay subscriptions to Patreon, a monetisation platform for content creators to run exclusive services and perks to the most dedicated fans, at the same time offering a sense of belonging.

Popular YouTuber Ro Ramdin offers a book club to her Patreon subscribers and CJ the X's premium account, "The Bureau", allows subscribers get their questions asked and answered at a bi-monthly Q&A with the influencer himself. The growth of alternative social medias, including Substack, Discord, and streaming platform Twitch, with 7 million monthly streamers[41], further attest to the growth of subculture consumption and production, and profiting from specialisms.



> **I have Patreon for my favourite podcast so I can get exclusive content, 2 extra podcasts minimum a week, and free content earlier than everyone else. It makes me feel like I have something not many people have and it feels special, also because you can chat and interact with different people and feel part of a community.**
>
> **– Jordan, Gen Z Parent**

10 million fans
paying for Patreon memberships per month[42]

4x
monthly revenue from one-time purchases[43]

5x
more creators have started a community chat[43]



PART THREE: THE BRANDS

Great Intentions for Greater Expectations

We know consumers are aware of the sophisticated techniques used by brands to win their attention and they know the value of their personal data.

This means they are very quick to see through superficial attempts to engage with their lives.

Key to building long-lasting connections with your consumer - and providing them with the goods and products they truly need – is finding new and creative ways to breakthrough the sameness. This means being selective and not succumbing to every trends' fleeting virality, and thinking about values such as inclusion and self-confidence over mindless consumption.

So, as consumers become fed up with the growing monoculture within digital spaces and expect more from brands in 2025, what can brands do to truly connect with them and boost trust and longevity?



THE PLAYBOOK

Towards Brand Rehumanisation

1 Go beyond authenticity - live and breathe great brand intentions.

Intentions is an active word, it means continuing to work to prove your authenticity - not just talking about it as a given fact. Actions speak louder than words, it's about getting your hands dirty with consumers.

Several brands over the years have made headlines for contributing to some form of terrible societal or environmental truth which was covered up with marketing tactics. Just recently, global lawmakers and media sources have blasted Shein for declining to confirm whether they use Xinjiang cotton linked to forced Uyghur labour camps[43]. It is understandable that consumers say they don't select companies based on general policies when they cannot be certain of claims. At the heart of authenticity is tangible action and transparent proof. For example, they want to see the detail of HOW a company actioning a sustainability claim. This is why fashion brand Passenger, who included detailed information about clothing origin and % recycled material, are seen as highly trustworthy – contributing to their success as one of the UK's fastest growing online and private companies[44].

Ultimately, Gen Z already hold the most purchasing power in a lot of countries[45], and they are clear about their desire to make consumption decisions guided by values. So it's important to heed their wishes, and set greater intentions, going beyond authenticity.

To do that brands must:

- **Offer more value to the consumer than what is defined by your products and services.**

  Don't be afraid to support your consumers in their needs, even if it goes against selling more products in the short-term.

- **Don't be a 'do-it-all', be a 'do-it-well'.**

  Recognise your own limitations and deliver quality actions over quantity. Provide proof of what you do right. Don't talk about how good your consumer service is if you are not investing in making it truly better than your competitors.



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Our research uncovered that consumers value brands who have their backs as a true measure of authenticity and trust. For example, Huel is a brand that lives and breathes great intentions: they are seen to bring specialised advice from licensed professionals to their consumers, even if it could conflict with selling more of their products.

Similarly, the skincare brand Refy[46] has recently launched a reduced skincare range that combines minimal skincare steps whilst maintaining consistent, effective results[47]. Their success with the consumer - and the social media #Skintok followers[48] – is all about reducing the overwhelming pressure to do more and buy more, and instead focused on individual specific needs in beauty.

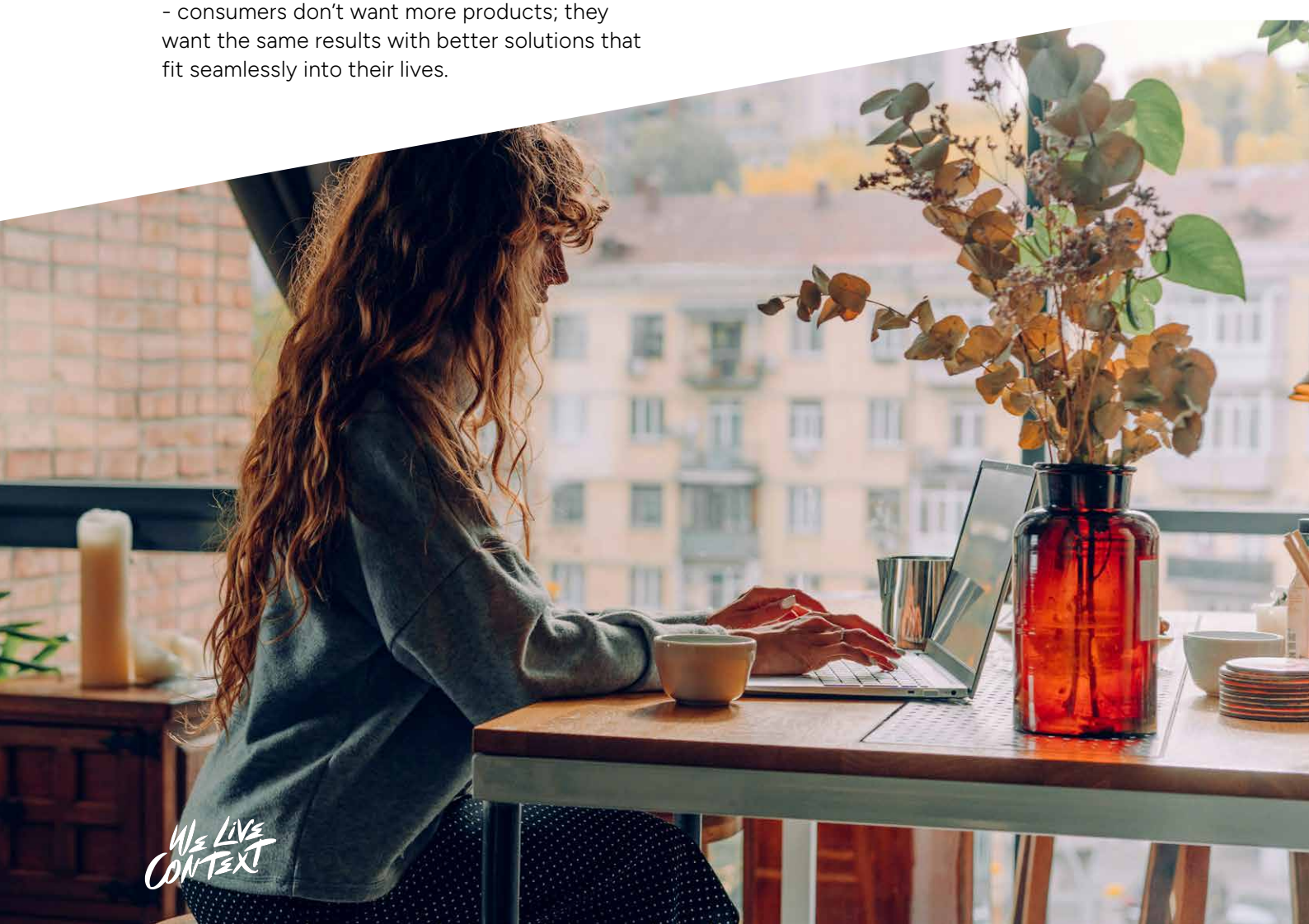
What could be seen as counterintuitive to selling more of their products, is actually seen as being truly authentic and having the people's (not "consumers'") best interests at heart. I.e., they prioritised the consumer over consumerism and delivered against a crucial research insight - consumers don't want more products; they want the same results with better solutions that fit seamlessly into their lives.

64% Gen Z **73% millennials**

want to invest more in quality purchases that will last[49]

75% Gen Z **76% millennials**

are willing to pay more for the reputation of the brand, reflecting the importance of trust[50]



> Huel recognise their own limits and are not afraid to refer people to other brands and collaborate with others. They debunk commonly held myths, like around carb-free diets on their podcast with licensed nutritionists, which could conflict with what they sell. They're not always trying to push people to buy their product, they come across very genuine and are changing the conversation around nutrition.

– Greg, Gen Z Consumer

3x

Huel profits in the 2024 financial year[50]

128% △

Huel's retail presence soared to more than 25K stores worldwide by August 2024, with producrs in over 70% of UK supermarkets[51]



2 Curate Distinctive Experiences – unlock memorability in moments of spontaneity.

Life is all about defining moments and nowadays, consumers are more discerning of where they spend their time. Brands need to break loose of their existing rules of consumer engagement and create distinctive moments and unexpected memories. They can do this by manufacturing novel and sometimes exclusive experiences that allow consumers to feel like they belong to a special group.

Second to sleeping, people spend the majority of waking hours immersed in entertainment - a reflection of their desire to escape, explore, and express. In life, consumers aim to craft unique identities, master their passions, and define themselves through expertise in the things they love.

For brands, this is an invitation to move beyond the routine of transactions and consumption, to transcend the ordinary and enter the realms of play, curiosity, and self-discovery. In a world that feels increasingly overwhelming, the most impactful connections are those that engage not just the mind, but the senses and the soul.

By creating holistic experiences that resonate deeply, brands can awaken emotions, spark joy, and leave lasting impressions. It's about more than selling—it's about stepping into the stories and lives of consumers, becoming a trusted companion in their journey to find meaning and delight in the everyday.

To build distinctive experiences, brands must:

- **Curate unique experiences that allow consumers to explore on their own terms.**

  This means surfacing "things I didn't know I didn't know" that both enhances consumers' expertise AND gives them social currency to share with others.

- **Elevate existing consumer benefits with deeper strategic partnerships and/ or cross-media expansions.**

  Netflix does this well by recently releasing games for their top TV shows on the same platform. This allows fans to relive their interests in new and exciting ways.

- **Surprise them by working with technology to elevate consumer touchpoints...**



At Audi Vietnam's flagship Q8 2024 model launch[51], they surprised consumers with EEG - a metal disk that attaches to your scalp to detect electrical signals - to test their emotional responses to the car to help consumers decide if they truly wanted the car.

Whilst in travel, airlines are already seeking ways to delight consumers with hyper-personalisation in movie and TV services. New airline start-up, *Beond*, started handing out Apple Vision Pros to people flying to the Maldives this year[52]. In fashion, tech advancements in clothing are creating a new era of self-expression and sense of professionalism for consumers. For example, *Myant Inc*'s Osmotex jacket features a controllable textile pump that adjusts to human sweat rates[53].

But it's not all about technological innovation. In 2025, Lifestyle brands curating offline experiences which are immersive, multi-sensory and high-energy will drive ultimate memorability and distinctiveness. And you don't get much more elusive than Amex's 'Black Card' i.e. Centurion Card[54]. While it can be difficult to see the value of a payment mechanism, Amex are experts in bringing exclusivity and one-of-a-kind luxury experiences to their consumers: offering entire catalogues of premium and complementary events, including family activities and parties full of whimsical fun.

> "Lifestyle brands curating offline experiences which are immersive, multi-sensory and high-energy will drive ultimate memorability and distinctiveness.



3 Get to the heart of your consumers: Understand the story behind the story.

To truly connect with your audience, you need to do more than scratch the surface. You need to understand the context and key emotional drivers that have led them to interact with your brand, product or service.

For brands – doing good research is not just a competitive advantage, it's a necessity to get to the heart of what really matters and innovate branding and consumer touchpoints in a way that is truly resonant with consumers' goals and desire for 'moments that matter'. To truly align your brand values with your consumers' expectations, brands need to understand the emotions, aspirations, and challenges that drive consumer decisions. It's not just about what they need - it's about why they need it and how your brand can make a meaningful impact.

For example, the pressure to live your best life is real for consumers, and often in our research we see that behind the motivations to use a certain product or service, is actually just a desire to feel good.

With half of the UK planning to reduce their alcohol consumption in 2025, the best example of lifestyle businesses understanding their consumers comes from the booming global alcohol-free market. Certain brands like Not Beer show commitment to lowering the social barriers to drinking water at a bar, enabling people to blend more easily.

But Tom Holland's Bero, released in the USA, goes a step further to elevate the experience of being sober in a bar. The premium non-alcoholic craft beer goes beyond aesthetics by understanding the need to be comfortable. It aims to help with feeling confident at a bar, and with what you are holding in your hand. By focusing on mastering taste they are sharing a passion for craft, and ultimately building long-term trust.

So, to get to the heart of your consumers, you need to:

- **Speak to your consumers frequently and in a way that feels natural to them - and most importantly, make them feel comfortable.**

  Step into their world by recreating familiar environments, mimicking cultural shifts or integrating friendship dynamics to mirror the way real conversations.

- **Prioritise making your consumers feel good.**

  This might be building your consumers self-confidence at the various touch points in which they interact with your brand or services.



MOVING FORWARD

"We're Breaking Free"

Existing algorithms don't understand consumers at the human level - what motivates them, their context, what makes them happy or sad on a given day or in reaction to the world.

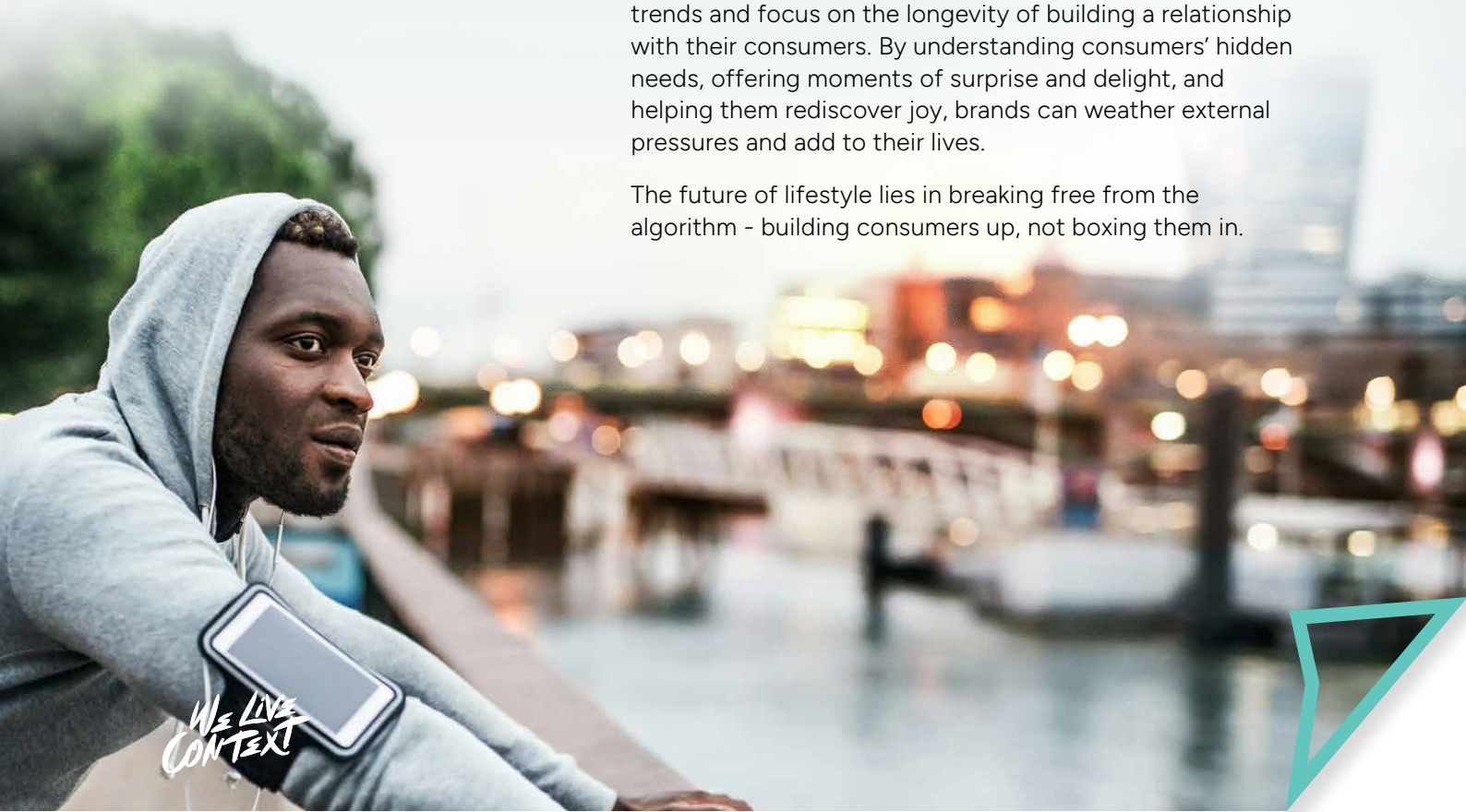
Existing systems reduce people to patterns and pushes them deeper into predefined boxes.

Consumers want their creativity back. They need to feel in control of their identities and free to express themselves authentically, without being overwhelmed by ads or trapped by trends. Brands that empower this individuality and offer genuine value will thrive.

In 2025, lifestyle brands must rise above the algorithmic sameness that fails to see consumers as individuals and instead be committed to uplifting their emotions, aspirations for uniqueness and desire for joy.

To stand out, brands must stop chasing fleeting social trends and focus on the longevity of building a relationship with their consumers. By understanding consumers' hidden needs, offering moments of surprise and delight, and helping them rediscover joy, brands can weather external pressures and add to their lives.

The future of lifestyle lies in breaking free from the algorithm - building consumers up, not boxing them in.



Ready to inspire action? Get in touch.

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