

DIGIDAY

FALL 2019



The Big Squeeze



DASH HUDSON

THE SMARTEST WAY TO GROW ON INSTAGRAM

The world's most discerning brands and publishers use Dash Hudson to create and share photos and videos that people care about. Companies like Rent the Runway, OUAL, and Clique use our visual marketing software daily to make every interaction on social meaningful.

Visit dashhudson.com to see how the magic happens.

CONDÉ NAST

vevo

REVOLVE

EVERLANE

fresh.

HOURGLASS

FALL 2019

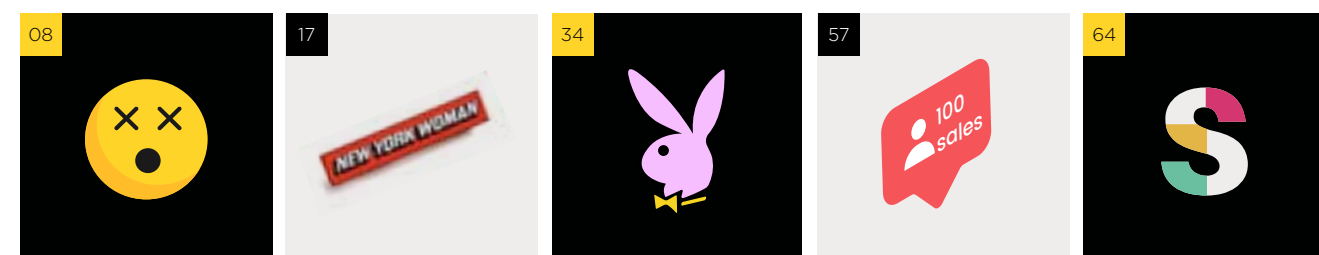


TABLE OF CONTENTS

04 Editor's Note

BIG IDEAS

- 06 Age of Anxiety
- 07 Equality, Inc.
- 08 Generation Doom
- 09 The Workplace Revolution
- 10 The Wellness Movement

CULTURE

- 12 The Rise of ASMR
- 14 How Chinese Consumers are Leading the Way
- 17 Tackling Corporate Feminism
- 23 Everyone is #Canceled
- 28 An Oral History of LonelyGirl15

MEDIA

- 34 Playboy's Extreme Makeover
- 39 Tidying Religion
- 41 The Lost Generation of Journalists
- 43 Growing Like Weed: How CBD is Changing Media

SHOPPING

- 45 The Fight to Save the Mall
- 49 CBD, The Everything Elixir
- 53 The Weird Wild World of Amazon Reviews
- 55 A Q&A with @EsteeLaundry
- 57 How Instagram Became the New Mall

WORK

- 62 Mocktail Culture
- 64 Slacktivism is Changing Work
- 65 Career Mulligans
- 67 How I Got Here: Sébastien Kopp, co-founder of Veja
- 69 Final Word

FOUNDER AND CEO
NICK FRIESE

PRESIDENT AND EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
BRIAN MORRISSEY

EDITORIAL

MANAGING DIRECTOR,
EDITORIAL PRODUCTS
SHAREEN PATHAK

MANAGING DIRECTOR,
MEMBERSHIP PRODUCTS
JACK MARSHALL

MANAGING EDITOR, EUROPE
JESSICA DAVIES

UK BRANDS EDITOR
SEB JOSEPH

MARKETING EDITOR
KRISTINA MONLLOS

SENIOR REPORTERS
TIM PETERSON,
LUCINDA SOUTHERN

REPORTERS
MAX WILLENS,
KERRY FLYNN

NEWS EDITOR
ILANA KAPLAN

SENIOR PODCAST PRODUCER
PIERRE BIENAIMÉ

EVENT PROGRAMMING
MANAGER
HOPE REICHARD

EVENT PROGRAMMING
COORDINATOR
CAYLEY PLOTKIN

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT
AND OPERATIONS MANAGER,
MEMBERSHIP PRODUCTS
BRIANNE KENNEDY

MEMBERSHIP PRODUCTS ASSOCIATE
NATASHA MALIK

GLOSSY

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
JILL MANOFF

BEAUTY EDITOR
PRIYA RAO

SENIOR REPORTER
KATIE RICHARDS

REPORTERS
DANNY PARISI,
EMMA SANDLER

MODERN RETAIL

EDITOR
HILARY MILNES

SENIOR REPORTER
CALE WEISSMAN

REPORTER
ANNA HENSEL

PRODUCT

CHIEF PRODUCT OFFICER
PETER SURRENA

DIRECTOR, AUDIENCE AND
PRODUCTS
AARON GOTTLIEB

AUDIENCE GROWTH AND
MARKETING ASSOCIATE
CAROLINE PHINNEY

UI/UX DESIGNER
JULIA CHOI

DESIGN

CREATIVE DIRECTOR
IVY LIU

DESIGNER
KEVIN KIM

EVENTS

GENERAL MANAGER
MEGAN KNAPP

EVENTS MANAGERS
ELAINE WONG

EVENT COORDINATOR
SAMANTHA CHEW

EVENT ASSISTANT
AUDREY POWELL

BRAND DEVELOPMENT

EVP GLOBAL BRAND
DEVELOPMENT
NANCY PICKER

VP GLOBAL BRAND DEVELOPMENT
GERRY HOUSER

BRAND DEVELOPMENT
COORDINATOR
EDDIE KRANKOWSKI

FINANCE

CFO
JOHN SOL

FINANCE MANAGER
MARY ANN BOYD

STAFF ACCOUNTANT
KAITLYN KROLICK

BUSINESS OPERATIONS

CHIEF STRATEGY OFFICER
DAVID AMRANI

VP, GROWTH & INSIDE SALES
MIKE CHOMA

VP, CLIENT ENGAGEMENT
NEIL STROW

SENIOR DIRECTOR,
CLIENT ENGAGEMENT
MARY DUMONT

DIRECTOR,
CLIENT ENGAGEMENT
SHAMBRY MCGEE,
ANDREW CARLIN
ANTHONY CAPALBO

COMMERCIAL DIRECTOR, UK
WILL JONES

SENIOR MANAGER,
CLIENT ENGAGEMENT, UK
CHRIS WILLIAMS

CLIENT ENGAGEMENT MANAGER
JESSICA SUGERMAN

CLIENT ENGAGEMENT MANAGER,
MEDIA SALES
ALEX BLUMBERG

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT MANAGER,
INSIDE SALES
ERICA TAYLOR

CLIENT ENGAGEMENT COORDINATOR
SAMUEL REED

OPERATIONS TEAM

DIRECTOR, ACCOUNT MANAGEMENT
JONATHAN MESSINA

ACCOUNT MANAGER
MATT RENALDO

DIGITAL OPERATIONS MANAGER
VERONICA ZEGARRA

PERFORMANCE COORDINATOR
MIKE RIVAS

CUSTOM PRODUCTION TEAM

HEAD OF CONTENT, EUROPE
MINDI CHAHAL

SENIOR CREATIVE STRATEGIST
MATT PASTORIUS

SENIOR EDITOR
DAVID TEICH

COPYWRITER
SAMANTHA DUPLER

MARKETING

MARKETING DIRECTOR
MIKE MADARASZ

SENIOR MARKETING MANAGER,
DIGIDAY
LAUREN LOROW

SENIOR PRODUCT MARKETING
MANAGER, AWARDS
MELISSA HAYES

MARKETING COORDINATOR,
GLOSSY & MODERN RETAIL
EMMA PAUL

OPERATIONS

VP HR/OFFICE OPERATIONS
ANDREA SONTZ

HR/OFFICE OPERATIONS ASSISTANT
CIENNA MAZZELLA

For all inquiries, please email
help@digiday.com

Editor's Note

By Shareen Pathak



Welcome to the Fall Issue of Digiday magazine.

At Digiday Media, across Digiday, Glossy and Modern Retail, we cover how the industries of media, marketing and retail are changing, thanks to the advent of new technologies, new consumer behaviors, and changing business models.

In this issue, we took a new approach to our examination of these industries. We stepped back to look at exactly how the way we work, live and shop today is changing the industries we cover, and the wave of cultural forces that are affecting them.

Our new, revamped Big Ideas section took a look at big themes upending our lives. In “Age of Anxiety,” Brian Morrissey writes about how despite an economic boom, people are more stressed out, and more anxious than ever before, while I delved deeper into the dark nihilism engulfing Gen Z, and how that’s leading to a new distrust of brands, authority figures and governments.

We’ve also restructured the magazine itself, with new sections covering Culture, Media, Retail and Work.

In Culture, Ilana Kaplan writes about how post-#MeToo, feminism has turned corporate, with the rise of companies like The Wing cashing in on a new brand of fempowerment. For Media, Max Willens dove into the content mills of journalism, and how it’s led to a lost generation of reporters who have internalized a business model that prizes virality over, in some cases, great stories. We also covered the ups and downs of American Dream, a new Dubai-esque mall being built in New Jersey, and why the wellness movement is driving everything from mocktail culture to the growth of CBD.

This is the 15th issue of Digiday Magazine, available exclusively to members. We hope you are enjoying your membership, and the new issue. As always, I’d love to hear your feedback.

Thanks for reading. 📖



1

Big Ideas

The Age Of

A N X I E T Y

Things couldn't be better, so why are we so unhappy? **By Brian Morrissey**

By most measures, we are living in an unprecedented era of good tidings. The economy has expanded for a record 122 months straight. Unemployment, in the United States, is at levels unseen since the Kennedy administration. The S&P 500 has nearly tripled in the last decades. Even the tyranny of the cable companies has been eroded. Thanks to Netflix, and other streaming services, an unprecedented bounty of entertainment is everywhere. And to top it all off, Popeye's and Chick-fil-A are battling to perfect the chicken sandwich. By all the regular measures, things are going swimmingly.

And yet, anxiety is the new normal. Sure, the economy is doing great, but the unceasing trade war with China is eroding consumer confidence. Turn on CNN and you'll be treated to wall-to-wall coverage of the supposedly impending recession, done in a style previously reserved for major hurricanes. The inverted yield curve has jumped from economics textbooks to a solemn article of faith in popular discourse. The slump in RV sales? Recession predictor.

Beyond issues of the wallet, the very new "superstorm" reminds people of the toll climate change is taking to the planet. Decades of inaction are building the urgency to address what is truly an existential threat. Greta Thunberg, a 16-year-old Swede, has emerged as a star of Gen Z for bluntly calling bullshit on world leaders who have done little to nothing to arrest the inexorable climate changes that are wreaking havoc on the world.

The pessimism many feel when it comes to addressing a challenge on the scale of climate change tracks to the fecklessness of much of the world's politics. Donald Trump has tapped into deep-seated anxiety that goes beyond economic indicators. Identity politics, normally relegated to the sidelines, have become central. Societal division are hardening. Rancor has replaced reasonable disagreement. Migration has emerged as a hot-button political issue that is more emotion than policy disagreement. Any economist would point to the benefits of rising immigration

numbers in balancing for aging societies. But the perceived loss of identity trumps that.

Technology, once regarded as an infallible sign of progress (and American exceptionalism), has come under a harsher glare. The role of Facebook in the manipulation of elections and incitement of ethnic pogroms has given lie to the idea that connecting the world would lead to a better world. Not long ago, Twitter was hailed for bringing down dictatorships; now, it's a favored tool of wannabe dictators and thuggish trolls. The always-on era was originally an unimaginable luxury. We could have a world of communications and connectivity with us at all times on our phones. Instead, we've become addicted, mindlessly scrolling feeds and returning again and again to our Instagram to find how many likes our sunset photo got and how many people checked out our Instagram Story.

Instagram seems to recognize the issue. It is testing not showing likes to users or how many people viewed their Story. Apple has built in screen time reminders to get people to stop looking at their phones constantly. The rise of TikTok can, in some ways, be seen as a backlash to the social preening of Facebook and Instagram. On TikTok, there are no likes or follower counts, just mostly people acting goofy and being creative. For now, it is one social network not overrun by trolls (although the creeps have, naturally, found it).

Mental health, barely discussed a decade ago, is thought of now to be an epidemic. The World Economic Forum estimates that mental health disorders have direct and indirect costs equal to 4% of the world's gross domestic product. The price tag could amount to \$16 trillion from 2010 to 2030. Everyone from NBA players to hip-hop stars are speaking out about their own struggles with expectations and pressure. The idea of "toughing it out" has gone by the wayside. Much of the current anxiety springs more from an openness to acknowledging the toll uncertainty takes. ▣



Corporate feminism is on the rise, but are there brands that are authentically speaking to women? **By Ilana Kaplan**

Throughout the past few years, empowering women has increasingly become a central marketing ploy for brands, media companies and even celebrities. Pink knit “pussy” hats, T-shirts emblazoned with “The Future Is Female” and the Sheryl Sandberg-branded concept of “leaning in” appear more cringeworthy than feminist. And in an era where women’s rights are at stake, it’s becoming easier to see which brands have co-opted the idea of female empowerment vs. having it authentically ingrained as a part of its brand ethos.

The idea of corporate feminism -- which caters to wealthy, white women, and neglects diversity and inclusion -- has been more visible than ever since the 2016 presidential election. There are two key elements that seemingly propelled this trend even further: Donald Trump and the 2017 Women’s March.

In a debate with presidential candidate Hillary Clinton in Oct. 2016, Trump famously went on a tirade where he called his female opponent a “nasty woman.” Trump’s comments went viral but incited a gamut of merch with “Nasty Woman” screen-printed on it. Brands largely donated a portion of their proceeds to nonprofits, but it sparked a trend that brands latched onto that didn’t always have altruistic intentions. In 2017, the first Women’s March took place in Washington D.C., a protest that gave visibility to women, but also seemed to be an opportunity to buy and show-off feminist merch rather than enact change.

The start of The Wing is worth mentioning: a co-working space and social club solely for women formed by Audrey Gelman in October 2016. The Instagrammable millennial pink space, which has since expanded to eight locations throughout the U.S. -- functions as an office or meeting space and also hosts regular events featuring everyone from Clinton to Kerry Washington. To be a member, there’s a \$215/month membership and an application process. For those who can’t afford the hefty price tag, there are two-year scholarship opportunities. The company touts diversity and inclusion like -- having hair products for women of color in the bathroom and a diversity and inclusion team -- but the social club has been criticized for being exclusionary with regards to its membership. While The Wing has had no problem selling merch with phrases like “Sisterhood” or “Pay Me” on it, equal opportunities -- and lower-tiered membership prices that would be accessible to underrepresented women with lower incomes -- still don’t exist (according to Vox they are working on it at the moment).

Underpinning all of this is how “branding” has infiltrated all aspects of culture. Causes quickly become brands, issues become platforms and monetization quickly follows. ■

Generation



Beset by climate change and fractured politics, young people are wary of what comes next.

By Shareen Pathak

“It’s so hard to see the future right now,” says Maddy, a teenager from New Jersey. “I worry that the world is going to end. I worry because of climate change. I worry about my family’s safety.”

Nancy, 17, is from Boise, Idaho. She rates how excited she is for the future a solid 1 (not at all) on a scale going up to 10. Why? “There’s too much wrong with the world.”

Gen Z’s purported nihilism has become widespread enough. Research studies have looked at a variety of factors, such as the fact that this is the post 9/11 generation that’s been saddled with plenty of student debt, combined with trading information at the speed of light. It’s even commonplace in culture: the theme of “we’re going to die and life is meaningless” can be seen throughout music, in TV and in Internet culture. It’s just one of a growing number of what seems like darkly observed characteristics about this young age cohort, who marketers have dubbed Gen Z.

This mindset has a profound impact on culture, communities and corporations. Gen Z also doesn’t trust easily -- and certainly doesn’t trust brands, or governments. It’s the kind of mindset that makes millennials, who want to buy

from brands with purpose, seem more like eager consumers. It’s also impacting entertainment, bringing to the forefront artists specializing in emo rap and popularizing dark comedies like “Rick & Morty.” Gen Z brings new challenges for marketing, leading to approaches like Doritos’ “unbranded” ad campaign, tailored, so the company says, for a generation growing up in an era of ad-free content.

One of the effects of this also means more emerging leaders coming from this generation, such as 16-year-old Swedish student Greta Thunberg, who is a climate activist raising the issue of climate change via school strikes, or Parkland school shooting survivor David Hogg, who is spearheading an online campaign for gun safety. For many of this generation, these issues are pressing and real -- and they are the ones who will solve it.

The reasons, according to researchers, are many. Noreena Hertz, a researcher and author who studied the phenomenon, found that Gen Z is the first generation to grow up in an age of perceived decline. It’s marked by everything from increasing inequality to concerns about melting polar ice caps. In the U.S., particularly, this generation came of age in a childhood marked by “active shooter” drills. Hertz’s research asked Gen Z if they think their lives are likely to be more of a struggle than those of their parents -- and 79% of them said they worry about jobs, while 72% worry about debt.

Of course, nihilism isn’t exactly only

the arena that belong to this generation. Plenty of those who came before, especially kids growing up post World War I, felt this sense of disillusionment. But what makes this more apparent is of course technology: Gen Z is also the first generation to grow up with smartphones. So it’s not necessarily that they’re more worried, although that’s the case, but they’re also approaching this worry with a sense of acceptance that previous generations simply didn’t.

Nowhere is this on greater display than with r/dankmemes, the multi-million-follower subreddit favored by both millennials and Gen Z. As of writing, one of the top memes (posted by username “I Want 2 Die”) was of “Spongebob Squarepants” character Patrick Star, asking “God” to pick him up because he was scared -- thanks to the “bees dying, coral reefs dying, plankton dying.”

And one of the most popular memes on Tumblr in the last six months is about a fourth-grade teacher, whose art class, when discussing work, frequently says things like “Even if you work hard all your life... it means nothing.”

Skylar, who is 13, says she’s not “at all optimistic.” Her reasons: “I think doom is going to come because of world pollution and the environment.”

After all, when your youth anthem is “All my friends are dead,” it’s hard to see it any other way. ■

The Workplace Revolution

Younger generations want to work differently, as companies struggle to adapt. **By Jack Marshall**

When WeWork announced plans to go public this summer, it didn't hold back when stating its intended impact on the workplace. "Our mission is to elevate the world's consciousness," it wrote. "We believe our company has the power to elevate how people work, live and grow."

While it remains to be seen how many lives an office rental company can revolutionize, the company's words reflect how younger members of the workforce -- particularly in the U.S. -- increasingly expect something very different from work and employment than previous generations. Owing to changing social attitudes, continued advances in technology and an ongoing shift towards freelancing and the "gig economy," these expectations are evolving quicker than ever before.

For many Millennial and Gen Z workers, the idea of putting in eight hours a day in exchange for a paycheck now seems somewhat antiquated. Employment has become as much about lifestyle and identity as salaries, benefits, and promotions. WeWork's promise of community, foosball, beer on tap and "DO WHAT YOU LOVE" exhortations is part of a shift in expectations. Brands want to be movements, and to attract workers companies are promising something more than a steady paycheck and free bagels on Fridays. A new generation of workers has arrived on the scene with a set of expectations that far exceed those of their more senior peers. Work stress is no longer viewed as paying dues but a serious risk to mental health. The idea that work should have less meaning than other aspects of their lives is a distinction without purpose.

"They want their work to have meaning and purpose. They want to use their talents and strengths to do what they do best every day. They want their jobs to fit their life. And they are less interested in settling," says Ed O'Boyle, global practice leader at Gallup.

These expectations are having important repercussions for companies with more "traditional" structures and processes. Gone are the days when concepts such as remote working, flexible hours, and a keen eye on work-life balance were viewed as desirable perks. For many in the workforce today, these are simply table stakes.

Gallup's latest State of the American Workplace report

found that 53% of American workers said greater work-life balance was "very important" to them when considering a new job, while 54% said they would change jobs simply to have more control over the hours they work.

These attitudes have also helped fuel the rise of contracting, freelancing and the so-called "gig-economy" in recent years, from which companies such as WeWork hope to benefit. Gallup estimates that 36% of all workers in the U.S. now have such "alternative work arrangements" as their primary job as opposed to full-time, permanent employment.

For many, these types of arrangements deliver on the promise of flexibility, focus and work-life balance. But for some, they also satisfy cravings for the feeling of greater control over their destiny.

"I'd rather create the work environment and schedule that suits me than rely on an employer to do it for me," said one marketing executive who, five years ago, quit her job at a holding company-owned media agency and renegotiated a more flexible freelance contract instead.

These types of arrangements are, of course, being enabled by new technologies and tools. Collaboration software, video conferencing and a growing list of project management tools are obvious difference makers.

But for employers, an increasing reliance on a more flexible and transient workforce introduces other considerations and challenges, which aren't necessarily easy to adapt to. In many cases it requires the development of new approaches to training, communication, employee engagement, compensation, management structures and more.

It's one of the reasons young people in the workforce are increasingly gravitating towards startups or digital-first companies, recruiters say, which are typically perceived to be inherently more flexible and less bureaucratic.

And while changing entrenched practices and approaches may not be easy for many companies, those that fail to adapt could find themselves at a competitive disadvantage sooner than they realize.

"I can't see myself taking a permanent full-time role again if I can avoid it," the marketing executive said. "The way things are headed, I think that will become easier, not harder to do." ▣



"I can't see myself taking a permanent full-time role again if I can avoid it."

Desperately Seeking Zen

The age of anxiety is making wellness a generational obsession.

By Priya Rao

When Sustain Natural launched in 2013, the idea for a sexual wellness brand was a nascent concept. "People laughed or were very uncomfortable with the idea of sexual wellness or period care when I started this company," says co-founder and CEO Meika Hollender. "I was seen as a pariah."

Though Sustain Natural's products were not new -- the company sells an assortment of lubricants, condoms, period cups and tampons -- its positioning of sex or sex-related products as wellness was. Today, sexual wellness items are merchandised in Ulta Beauty stores nationwide (inside larger wellness sections) and Playboy magazine, a title once-dedicated to the pursuits of male pleasure, is launching a sexual wellness line.

But sexual wellness is just one tangential segment of the larger wellness economy, which began gaining traction in 2008. Nowadays, clean beauty is wellness, CBD is wellness, pet care is wellness and, even, alcohol and funeral companies have a wellness angle.

"Wellness has become such a massive term and has massive reach," says Beth McGroarty, vice president of research at the Global Wellness Institute. "It was not a word you heard much about 10 years ago and there is no coincidence that it took off when the first smartphone came out. Wellness began being talked about as a response to issues like stress, aging and loneliness that the medical industry did not curb. A consumer industry was born."

While wellness was once associated with affluence and elitism in the vein of Gwyneth Paltrow's Goop, the category's expansion has fueled the market to be valued at \$4.2 trillion presently. For its part, the Global Wellness Institute only tracks 10 sectors within the larger landscape including healthy eating, the spa economy, beauty, preventative medicine and workplace wellness, but McGroarty admits that many companies are increasingly rebranding to "be a part of the wellness

conversation."

"Because of the success of the market, traditional segments are breaking down," she says. "The fashion industry has an argument when they are trying to make sustainable clothes a thing and sobriety has been repositioned in a way that a no-sugar diet might have in the past."

That stretchiness of wellness is to be expected, says Stephen Sokoler, founder and CEO of mediation app Journey Live. "The generations before ours did not think about their well-being and now, there are so many ways to become mentally, physically and emotionally fit and happy," he says. Journey Live, which offers live meditation classes in app form, was born after Sokoler led workplace wellness sessions at Warby Parker and Facebook.

Still, the word's vagueness can be problematic, especially when products like a single-use sheet mask for "Self Care Sundays" can negatively affect an individual or in a larger scope, the environment and society as a whole. "We've seen pharmaceuticals pitched as wellness, making it seem like that decision is as easy or risk-free as to pick up a mascara at Sephora or take a workout class," says Tina Bou-Saba, founder of CXT Investments. "The trend of wellness continues to grow, but as regulations on CBD or supplements begin, that will affect investors and eventually the end customer."

McGroarty agrees. "Things like Flatbelly Tea can have harmful effects and that might cause a need for a wellness callout, like an Estée Laundry in beauty or Diet Prada in fashion," she says. "But one of the newest wellness trends today is in crystals, shamans, astrology and tarot cards; belief culture has very much become a part of wellness. No one is going to die if they do pilates or try a plant-based diet, so if the belief that it makes people feel good continues, the wellness market and what it means won't stop anytime soon." ▣



2

Culture

The Rise Of ASMR

Why watching whisper videos can help soothe stressed out viewers.

By Kristina Monllos



Organizing cleaning supplies, make-up or boxes of soap may seem monotonous: tasks so boring that you wouldn't film yourself doing them. But for Mary, or SouthernASMR Sounds, as she is known on YouTube to her nearly 205,000 subscribers, viewers enjoy watching her methodically tidy shelves in stores like Target, Dollar Tree and CVS, so much so that she's recorded herself sorting through store chaos nearly 300 times since creating her channel in 2015.

"They love to watch me organize stuff on shelves," says Mary, who doesn't reveal her last name publicly. "It's relaxing for them. It's a distraction, too. Like, if I want to take my mind off something I'll just watch you straighten deodorant

containers." Mary isn't alone. She's one of a number of YouTube creators who make ASMR videos, or videos meant to trigger the autonomous sensory meridian response, like a brain tingle, for viewers. Often associated with Bob Ross, the sensation is typically triggered by soft sounds like whispering, wrinkly fabric, tapping or fluffy brushes. In recent years, ASMR has gone mainstream with brands even creating ASMR ads -- Michelob Ultra's 2019 Super Bowl ad featured Zoe Kravitz doing ASMR -- to appeal to the growing and attentive community.

But the popularity of ASMR now has little to do with brands cashing in on the trend. Observers of ASMR's growth,

like cultural consultancy Sparks & Honey, and those in the community believe that the rise of ASMR is due to its wellness applications in a world where people may be more stressed than ever. In April, a Gallup poll found that Americans are the most stressed people in the world, according to The New York Times. For some, watching ASMR videos can be a simple remedy.

"It's a free way to get to the deepest form of relaxation," writes a financial analyst, who asked for anonymity so his coworkers don't think he's a "weirdo," in an email. "It's kind of like biohacking your way into a massage. Or maybe it's deeper than that and it's just nice to give up complete control when life can seem so

hectic at times.”

In June 2018, The University of Sheffield released one of the first studies on the effects of ASMR which found that when people who experience ASMR watch ASMR videos their heart rates slow and they show an increase in positive emotion.

“ASMR videos do indeed have the relaxing effect anecdotally reported by experiencers -- but only in people who experience the feeling,” says Dr. Giulia Poerio, a member of The University of Sheffield’s Department of Psychology, in a statement. “The average reductions in heart rate experienced by our ASMR participants was comparable to other research findings on the physiological effects of stress-reduction techniques such as music and mindfulness.”

“People are totally stressed out and I think we are desperate for something to help us relax,” says Mary, who started creating ASMR videos as a way to destress. “This is just one of the most recent new things that people have gotten into.”

Of course, the ASMR community wasn’t born out of a need for stress relief. Those who experience the sensation say that they found out about ASMR

by searching online for audio triggers or tingles in an attempt to define the sensation. Eventually, they stumbled upon Reddit threads about ASMR in the early 2010’s. It’s there that the community grew quickly. Per Reddit data, 2016 was the year that the ASMR community truly gained momentum on the platform. Now, the subreddit r/ASMR has 187,000 subscribers, with 50% year-over-year growth in posts. This past July, across all of Reddit, there were a total of 15,653 posts and comments related to the term “ASMR,” which is the highest it has ever been, according to the company.

While the community initially grew on Reddit it has since spread elsewhere, mostly to YouTube, where much of the ASMR content can now be found. “It probably wouldn’t have caught on at another point in time,” says Torin Geller, lead sound designer at the studio One Thousand Birds, which has in the last year-and-a-half fielded requests for ASMR-like sounds from clients. “The internet, specifically YouTube, gave it that place to exist as a community.”

As the community grew beyond the dark shadows of the internet to be more normalized -- W Magazine now

has an interview series where they ask celebrities to do ASMR -- it has also put a microscope on what was once niche. That attention can be a blessing and a curse. For those who experience the sensation, they believe making it widely known will help others become aware of its wellness applications. But that attention can also lead to mockery, as the content can appear strange for people who don’t get the sensation.

“The problem is that you end up with a lot of people coming to watch ASMR and they have no idea what it is,” says Mary. “It doesn’t work for them. It’s like it pisses them off or something and they leave these comments just raging at you, calling you names.”

Even with negative comments, the potential to help people feel better makes it worth it for Mary, who releases a new video almost every day.

“That’s the thing with ASMR, you have to buy-in 100%,” writes the financial analyst, of using ASMR to relax. “You have to let yourself give in completely, and I think there’s definitely something to letting yourself wholly enjoy something without any judgement from others, or even yourself.” ▣



The Next Wave

Chinese companies are leading the way in defining consumer apps.

By Kerry Flynn

Bart Baker desperately wanted to quit YouTube. Since 2009, Baker had regularly produced parody music videos like Jason Derulo’s “Wiggle” (62 million views), Taylor Swift’s “Blank Space” (68 million views), Nicki Minaj’s “Anaconda” (108 million views). But the Chicago native who had moved to Los Angeles to pursue entertainment full-time was fed up with Google-owned video platform by 2018.

“Brands don’t care as much as they used to. Everyone’s an influencer. I’m trying to figure out how people make money on Instagram when every single person is doing Instagram,” Baker says.

In October, Baker found an escape. A Chinese talent agency emailed him about growing on social apps in China.

Thinking he had nothing to lose, Baker signed on. As of August, Twitter bio reads, “F#ck social media. I’m more famous than Bieber in China now.” Of course, he hasn’t given up on social media. He’s just looked beyond the U.S. Baker has 12 million followers on Douyin, 6 million on Kuaishou and 2 million on Weibo. He also moved to Shanghai.

Chinese social media apps can be likened to individual U.S. apps, but they encapsulate an entirely different ecosystem. Bytedance-owned Douyin and Tencent-backed Kuaishou both offer short-form video, like Instagram and Snapchat, whereas Sina-owned Weibo is similar to Twitter. But they provide entertainment alongside the utility found within Tencent-owned WeChat, which hit 1 billion



monthly active users in 2018.

The U.S. tech industry has long been fascinated by China due to the sheer scale within and the innovation from the market. The interest has only gotten more visible as Facebook's pivot to privacy emulates WeChat and with Chinese-owned TikTok's popularity in the U.S. Facebook and Google have tried to work within China, but the platforms are both banned. In the meantime, they are watching and learning from the market.

Tech giants Alibaba, Tencent and Baidu once dominated China when it came to apps. But in 2012, Zhang Yiming found a gap. "Bytedance was able to rise so fast because they caught on this trend of second-tier, rural areas needing this [entertainment]. Alibaba has struggled with social networking. There was always a semi-vacuum in that area where Bytedance now plays," says Rui Ma, co-founder of San Francisco-based MindHero who previously worked on early-stage

investments in China. She runs a podcast on China tech news.

While some say other Chinese tech companies dropped the ball letting Bytedance rise, Natalia Lin, senior product manager at Baidu, says they weren't looking to compete in that way. Lin is behind Facemoji, Baidu's popular keyboard app, and says Bytedance's TikTok and Baidu's Facemoji also benefit from being quite different than Google's YouTube or Google's Gboard.

"Bytedance choose a very vertical area in short video. When we're on the way to the office, we can kill time with short video. At Facemoji, we choose another vertical area: users who love emoji and DIY," Lin says.

U.S. consumers love their phones, too. But social app demographics differ in countries. Ma, who grew up in China, says that it's not younger users -- like Gen Z -- who are early adopters to and spend endless hours on social media like some do in the U.S. It's more older workers,

outside of city centers, rather than busy students.

David Weeks, cofounder of Sunrise International, an education company based in Beijing, says there are several factors for the high level of China's screen time per day. "The average urban resident has much longer commutes than in the U.S., particularly in China's huge tier one cities. Many entry level jobs in China involve extended periods of inactivity or dreary tasks. Conventional media is heavily censored and thus tends to be more bland," Weeks says.

The videos on Douyin and Kuaishou are mesmerizing, but also censored. Baker has transferred his expertise in parody music videos on YouTube to singing English versions of popular Chinese songs. He's also creating food videos, one of which is him eating an egg. Baker sees the censorship firsthand.

"Douyin blocks so much stuff. I was in a mall once and there was underwear in the background so they blocked the



video. You can't skateboard. You can't show tattoos," Baker says.

Baker, like U.S. marketers, are amazed by social commerce. Baker says he's gone to events, thrown by Kuaishou, where influencers can sell "thousands of products every five minutes" on livestreams and take commission. TikTok has been experimenting with social commerce in the U.S. But it's nowhere near the scale of China.

"Social and commerce are closely intertwined in China. All popular social apps -- Weibo, WeChat, TikTok -- are doing social commerce in one way or another," says Xiaofeng Wang, senior analyst at Forrester.

When Bytedance bought Musical.ly and later merged it with TikTok, creators hoped it would bridge the U.S. and China. But the truth is the app have and will mostly remain separate due to

regulations. "Although they may see the same we are in fact talking about different apps, design and face is the same but the form of censorship is different. Userbase is different, all because of the Great Firewall," says Manya Koetse, editor-in-chief of What's On Weibo.

Though, memes do transcend the wall. Take Peppa Pig, for example. The cartoon pig dominated TikTok feeds in July and August, with U.S. teens users making the character appear in random, sometimes sexual scenarios. In the summer of 2018, Peppa Pig had become an icon on Douyin, again in inappropriate ways.

"Gen Z take is converging on both sides of the ocean. Meme culture is strong in China. Peppa Pig is really, really big in China, so big that the government at one point censored it because it didn't conform to Communist values," Ma says. ▣



Corporate Feminism

Many brands are hopping on the “female empowerment” bandwagon. But while some brands are solely focused on money, some are trying to make a difference. **By Ilana Kaplan**

Inside the walls of women’s social-networking club The Wing Soho is an Instagram fantasy with luxe beauty products, lush plants and millennial pink sofas. Events featuring everyone from Jennifer Lawrence to Kerry Washington have been hosted at The Wing. Following the events, attendees can leave and buy merchandise with the spirit of feminism weaved through: a \$17.50 Girls Doing WTF They Want in 2019 keychain, In Sisters We Trust Socks (\$15), The Joy of Sisterhood tote (\$30). The revolution will be branded -- and monetized.

The Wing, founded in 2016 by Audrey Gelman, is just one of many companies aspiring to empower women. It is noteworthy for its ambitions. The

Wing has raised \$117.5M in venture capital, with eight outposts and plans for 12 more in the next year in cities including London, Paris, and Toronto. The company boasts over 6,000 members, who pay \$215 a month.

While The Wing is just one example of where feminism and brands have become intrinsically linked, more and more brands are hopping onto the feminism bandwagon. Campaigns like Dove’s “Real Beauty” and Aerie’s “Real” unretouched campaigns showing diverse, regular people abled and disabled, have stunningly deconstructed traditional standards of physical beauty. But there have been missteps like Wrangler’s #MoreThanABum campaign whose

commercial featured close-up shots on, well, women’s bums.

Some tout feminist brand messaging and nothing else, but others are putting their money where their mouths are, regularly donating to causes or being inclusive just by keeping in contact with their consumer bases. So how do you know if a brand is deeper than its “empowerment” jargon?

More than underwear

One of the most attention-grabbing brands targeted towards women and the non-binary community has been period underwear brand Thinx. When the company launched its first subway campaign in 2015, they did it to start a conversation. “It was the first time periods had been mentioned in the subway and periods had been mentioned in the public in a very straightforward way that included our signature grapefruit image,” says Siobhán Lonergan, Chief Brand Officer for Thinx. “I think women were attracted to this very different way and approach to period branded period products, but also the straightforwardness in how we were talking about the topic.” The brand’s mission? “To empower everyone through innovative solutions and social change.”

Thinx has done so with no-nonsense branding. Initially, the brand launched an advertisement featuring a grapefruit that resembled female anatomy was deemed too racy for the NYC subway. Still, the brand has continued to be straightforward with their customers and has continued to

listen to their feedback. When their initial slogan “For women with periods” garnered backlash, Thinx realized they had work to do. “There are communities that are not women that also get their periods and they stood up and said, “Not only do women get their periods, so do trans people, and we started to think about what that meant in terms of inclusivity relative to our branding,” says Lonergan.

To address their concerns, they did so with inclusivity and action: they invested in creating a video where Thinx interviewed trans people and learned about their experience with periods, they created an alternative line of boyshorts designed with the physique of a trans person in mind and in 2016 they featured their first trans model in the subway campaign. Their new slogan? “For people with periods.”

“We realize there wasn’t a lot of visibility for [trans and non-binary people] on the subject. That’s how we started out in our initial approach to branding and how we started to think about that relative to inclusivity,” Lonergan says. Building on the feedback from consumers to be more inclusive has been at the heart of their business, and proving that it has been about consistency. “We’ve heard the term ‘femvertising’, and I think companies are jumping on the bandwagon relative to this,” she says. “How I would say to combat this is to build it into your brand DNA. If it is coming from an authentic place, that’s part of your mission statement and part of how you show up in the world.

Then, I think consumers will very much appreciate that and jump on board.”

Beyond cause marketing

Girlfriend Collective, a sustainable activewear line made out of recycled plastic bottles, takes a different approach. None of their brand messaging is about empowering women specifically -- instead, it’s focused on sustainability. At its core, Girlfriend Collective is a company of 98% women, and empowerment is the “backbone of our brand.” Girlfriend Collective has been subtle in empowering women. Last fall, the brand expanded its size range. “We found that people were emailing us saying you don’t make my size and so we would ask them for their measurements and make one-off leggings from them,” says Sue Williamson, editorial director at Girlfriend Collective.

That idea also fed into the advertising for extended sizes; Girlfriend cast their own customers who were local to the Seattle area where they’re based and had them in for breakfast and a hike before they did portraits of women in the new size range. For Girlfriend Collective, listening to their customers has been key to the empowering throughline in their messaging and branding. They’re constantly looking at all of their direct messages and talking with the community. What they wanted to do was keep the conversation going and address the needs of their community in a real way. “To be authentic you have to be authentic. There’s not really a way to fake it, unfortunately.

At the end of the day it's a gut-check," says Williamson.

Similarly, Tia -- a membership-based women's health clinic designed by women for women -- isn't about flair: the brand is focused on inherently focused on empowering women in the way that it approaches healthcare. "Everything we do at Tia has been done with the perspective of how do we build a platform that can actually engage women not just as users or customers and patients but as creators and co-creators of women's care from the ground up," says Tia founder Carolyn Witte. The healthcare platform aims to change how care is delivered, transforming the way women and providers interact and the care business model.

In short, Witte wants women who visit Tia to have the care model she's sought as a patient. "I personally have an aversion to a lot of the marketing tactics being used particularly in the realm of women's health and fertility where there's a lot of fear-mongering happening," she says. "At a time when women are being heavily marketed to by so many of these brands, women are starting to see through what that actually means in practice. It's one thing to have marketing messaging, it's another thing to have your business live up to those values."

Feminist ethos

Unbound -- a direct-to-consumer sexual wellness brand -- has never tried to be "outwardly feminist" but it has aimed for real progress with its marketing. The brand's CEO Polly Rodriguez saw a huge gap in the market in terms of the people who were making the products in sexual health and wellness "Historically because of the stigma associated with it, women didn't really have the ability to be a part of the [sexual wellness] industry," says Rodriguez. "What's happened with the third wave of intersectional feminism is women are entering the markets that maybe once were too taboo for them to be in. Our brand ethos is feminist in that we believe in equality, but I think really from a business perspective it was an overlooked marketplace."

Part of Unbound's success in empowering women has come from listening to them: the brand hired a third-party agency, did focus groups and sent surveys to their customers. What they learned was that 65% of their consumers said they didn't want to shop with a company that self-identifies as "feminist."

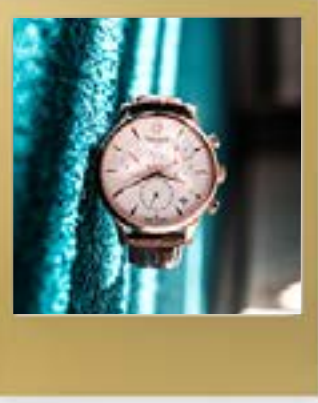
They didn't like the word "empowering" either. In that same survey, 98% of people said that they identified as "feminists." The word seemed to carry a stigma to it. "We didn't want to pander to women, and we didn't want to pretend that our products were going to empower them because we think our consumers empower themselves," says Rodriguez. "Not every product is empowering. If you have to claim that you are, it dilutes the message."

Unbound has also made a point of taking action when it comes to fighting for equality. "You can't just make money off of women being a marginalized group, you have to do the work," she says. With their campaign "Vibes for Congress," consumers who bought a vibrator could send one to any congressional member and all of the profits would then be donated to Planned Parenthood, giving women an opportunity to donate to an organization they care about. "It's about using your platform to give the customer an opportunity to be the hero," says Rodriguez. Along with the vibrator was a pamphlet that educated congressmen and congresswomen that every dollar into Planned Parenthood saves \$7 in Medicaid expenses. "For brands, it's about 'how do we take a back seat and support the organizations who are doing the work in a way that's meaningful and sincere instead of just selling t-shirts to make money?'" asks Rodriguez.

Lola, like Unbound, is focused on action, particularly helping promote change in legislation. The brand, a subscription service for organic tampons and pads as well as other sexual wellness products recently launched a campaign called Tax-Free Period which focuses on mobilizing legal action to eradicate the sales tax on tampons and pads in the remaining 34 states that tax them. "We're always thinking about how we can lend a voice to these issues, raise awareness and drive conversation so that people feel like they have a voice and can make a change in their behavior and have it feel a little more empowered and ownable," says Lola co-founder Jordana Kier

A brand doesn't need to buy into the idea of corporate feminism to be "feminist." Consumers know when a brand is pandering to women and they'll speak up when necessary. Through authenticity, action and inclusivity, brands can empower women in an authentic way. No "I'm a feminist" T-shirt necessary. ▣





GLOSSY

Exploring the evolution of
fashion and beauty

Glossy.co



#Canceled

Backlash is more ferocious, capricious and fleeting than ever before. *By Shareen Pathak*

Outside an Equinox club on West 92nd Street in Manhattan, members heading over to work out on a weekend in August had to step over a bunch of words written in chalk on the pavement.

“No kids in cages.” “Do better.” And above all of it, in bright red chalk: “Equinox is canceled.”

Equinox isn't alone. Soulcycle is canceled too. So is: Louis C.K., LaCroix, Kamala Harris, Joe Biden, Donald Trump (of course), pretty much every single Democrat presidential candidate, Taylor Swift, guacamole, In & Out's french fries.

In some cases, the ire seems deserved. After all, when someone does something outrageously racist, maybe they should be canceled. But as the list above demonstrates, being canceled is pretty easy to do. (Also, saying “canceled” also might be canceled.)

It's difficult to define cancel culture. At TBWA/Chiat/Day, a team called “Backslash” is devoted to figuring

out big cultural shifts that will, in turn, affect advertising, marketing and media. Cancel culture is a big one for the year, according to Sarah Rabia, global strategy director. She says she finds interest in even the word “cancel.” “The language of cancel is quite transactional,” says Rabia. “It's like applying a ‘cancel subscriptions’ mindset to a human being or brand.”

But essentially, it's a cultural, and perhaps financial boycott of any person, phrase, brand, company or concept that's made a mistake. In the year 2019, that mistake can be big, or it can be small. It can be real or it can be perceived. And as Rabia says, it can simply be an opt out: a withdrawal of your cultural capital or attention from the thing that is being canceled.

Equinox, for example, was “canceled,” at least on social media, after news broke that Stephen Ross, the chairman of its parent company, Related Companies, was getting ready to throw

a fundraiser for President Trump. That didn't sit well with those whose politics disagreed with Trump's -- and especially felt at odds with Equinox's hot bod community, mostly clustered in urban (blue) centers in major cities. Then, the effects continued, since Ross owns many, many things, including Momofuku, Hudson Yards and what seems to be half of Manhattan. It's all canceled.

Mob rule

In some ways, cancel culture is a reactive, rather than a proactive force. For Rabia, the issue comes down to how much “under attack” everyone feels today. “People are quick to voice opinions and gang up and have quick reactions because of some kind of fear that the other side will win.”

That's also a direct reaction to a host of other concerns -- the overwhelming feeling, for example, that governments aren't exactly looking out

for you, or that technological platforms, meant to democratize society, actually have myriad privacy and data concerns. "People feel kind of powerless. That fuels cancel culture. When you take away people's power, they lash out."

So on the surface, what feels like an attack -- think about Twitter "mobs" -- is actually less an attack than it is a defense.

For brands caught in the crossfire, it can obviously be a huge problem. Darin Archer, who runs strategy at Elastic Path, which works with brand clients, says that there does tend to be an initial outcry. "Brands have to decide whether or not those people who are angry and vocal about your brand actually matter to your business."

It's unclear if canceling something means actually canceling it. Equinox, after all, remains in business. Other figures who have been canceled, from Taylor Swift to YouTuber Logan Paul, are also still thriving. Even Louis C.K. has made a comeback. In an outrage cycle that passes swiftly (onto the next!), it's far easier for those who are the subject of cancellations to hope the storm simply passes, especially if it means that it's not actually affecting business.

"That comes down to knowing who your core customer is and understanding your brand's core values," says Archer. He pointed to, for example,

people "canceling" Dick's Sporting Goods when the company pulled assault-style guns from its stores. But it hasn't made a difference, at least so far, to the company's finances. "With a consistent, convenient experience, in all likelihood, your core customers are going to stick around," says Archer.

For some, the issue is paying entirely too much attention to the cancellation itself. Ya-Bing Chu, who runs product at an AI company, Formation, says that cancel culture feeds off "acquisition" -- finding the right target, selecting the right channel, providing the right incentive. But what companies, people, and institutions are better off focusing on is retention. "Retention is much more challenging because that's all about the brand relationship, which is complex and has so many facets," says Chu.

Death of the middle

Hand-in-hand with cancel culture, call-out culture, and the outrage cycle is also activism -- or more appropriately, activism as entertainment.

"It's fun to join a movement," says Rabia. "A rainbow filter, a hashtag meme, they're all forms of voicing an opinion. This is all the same. When you can cancel someone, it satisfies you immediately. We can take to social media, and make things

happen."

On one hand, those changes matter. Movements like #GrabYourWallet, founded by activist Shannon Coulter in October 2016, succeeded in forcing brands like Nordstrom to drop Trump-branded goods.

On the other hand, they sometimes don't make a difference, except to turn us all into trolls. That's where cancellation -- transactional, made for the subscription age of Netflix -- comes in.

"What's happened is we've lost all sense of nuance," says a top PR exec at a major brand, who declined to be named. "For something someone isn't directly responsible for, we get canceled. And unlike other things, where yes of course, your exec shouldn't say racist things, sexist things, we can't really guard against it. Even good intentions get canceled. It's too transactional. It's too sudden."

Rabia says she sees some cynicism here too. "This is a bit schadenfreude, where you see some of this cancellation of what is perceived as comeuppance of the elite, whether it's the global wellness elite with Equinox or the white males with what was happening with major actors accused and convicted of sexual harassment," she said. "This is our way of readdressing the balance." ■

"People feel kind of powerless. That fuels cancel culture. When you take away people's power, they lash out."

DIGIDAY

UPCOMING EVENTS 2019

digiday.com/events

OCT 07

Digiday Hot Topic: Email for Publishers
NEW YORK, NY

Digiday Media Buying Summit
KEY BISCAYNE, FL

OCT 16 - 18

OCT 21 - 23

Digiday Publishing Summit Europe
BUDAPEST, HUNGARY

Digiday Programmatic Marketing Summit Europe
MILAN, ITALY

NOV 04 - 06

NOV 18 - 20

Digiday Programmatic Media Summit
NEW ORLEANS, LA

Digiday Video Advertising Summit
PALM SPRINGS, CA

NOV 20 - 22

DEC 09 - 11

Digiday Brand Summit
SCOTTSDALE, AZ

Amazon Strategies
NEW YORK, NY

JAN 29, 2020



Authority and honesty on the reinvention
of retail from Digiday Media

There's a DTC brand for everything. The more crowded the space gets, the more unique the concepts. See if you can tell which of the below are real DTC brands and which are made up.

Hungry Harvest

Recovered produce delivered

Holy Cow

Beef from cows fed only grass from the Vatican

Desert Farms

For premium camel milk

Foot Cardigan

Because your feet deserve more than a 'sock'

Floss & Gloss

Finally, a subscription for 100% sustainable floss

Breathe

The DTC fresh air brand

Pretty Litter

It's about time someone disrupted the cat litter delivery experience

Tupays

A wig subscription service for the hair-challenged

Vapor Liq

Step up your vape game with this subscription discovery box of e-liquid

Paleo Snacks

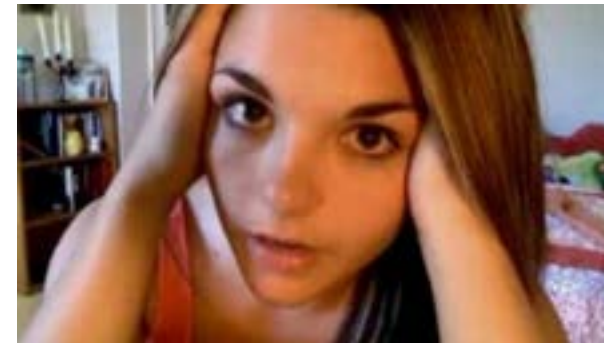
Snacks made exclusively from plants that date to the Paleolithic Age

modernretail.co

Answers: 1. Real, 2. Fake, 3. Real, 4. Real, 5. Fake, 6. Fake, 7. Real, 8. Real, 9. Fake, 10. Fake

An Oral History

lonelygirl15



First episode date: June 16, 2006

Network: YouTube

Production location: Marin County

Number of seasons: 3

Created by: Miles Beckett, Greg Goodfried

Going Viral

Over a decade ago, 'LonelyGirl15' set the stage for YouTube's emergence. **By Ilana Kaplan**

Before the Paul brothers and Shane Dawson ended up making careers for themselves on YouTube, it was a green platform where YouTube fame wasn't even on the horizon. Just 16 months after the platform launched, "Lonelygirl15", an online series about the life of a teenage girl named Bree (Jessica Rose) who went by the user-name lonelygirl15 -- ballooned -- becoming the earliest YouTube phenomenon. But the show, which appeared as a factual vlog, was later revealed to be fiction. It somewhat prophesized today's YouTube culture which has flourished with viral videos that have eventually been deemed fake or hoaxes. Still, the series would run from June 2006 to August 2008 and help pave the way for YouTube's current array of stars. However it served as a warning to not believe everything you see.

Below, the creators and stars of "Lonelygirl15" recount its significance within YouTube's history and internet culture.

In YouTube's early days, people were experimenting with different kinds of storytelling. Facebook had just launched and YouTube was still a mystery. Together, screenwriter and filmmaker Mesh Flinders, surgical residency dropout Miles Beckett, and attorney Greg Goodfried came up with "LG15" in 2006. The series, which focused on the "normal" life of a teenage girl, later became a bizarre story where she was entangled in a cult and featured a mystery surrounding the disappearance of her parents.

Miles Beckett, co-creator: It was my idea personally. I was a med student and I was a resident in a plastic surgery program and then I quit after my internship and moved back to Los Angeles -- this was in 2005-2006 -- and I was super excited about online video. Then YouTube started getting popular and I was obsessed with watching videos on YouTube, and I noticed all the popular videos on YouTube were either stolen clips from TV shows or basketball games or they were kids blogging in their rooms, so I was falling asleep one night and the idea was pretty simple: what if one of these kids wasn't real and they were blogging and there was a narrative and crazy stuff started happening to them. It would be this whole blurring of reality and fiction similar to what happened with "War of The Worlds" and "The Blair Witch Project."

Jackson Davis, Jonas: It was a huge casting call if I remember correctly. It was pretty unspecific as to what they were looking for and what it was for. I just knew it was an online show. There was a huge line -- I met Amanda [Goodfried] in line -- I asked if I could come back and she was like, "Yeah yeah come back." So I came back and they had me read lines there and talk

into the camera. There wasn't really a script per se. I think they wrote it by the seat of their pants. It was very week-to-week.

Greg Goodfried, co-creator: In the very early days, I came on as a legal, business partner. I was 90% doing that and 10% doing the creative. I thought it was an amazing concept. Then within the first month, I came on full-time to produce it with them. Then I took more of an active role in writing scripts, helping with production and directing videos and all that good stuff.

Yousef Abu-Taleb, Daniel: I found an audition under "gigs" [on Craigslist] and went. I had just moved out to LA, and I wanted to be an actor so I was taking any audition I could. So, I went into this audition for this character named Daniel, and he was supposed to be "not the popular kid." I went into the audition and everyone had their hair gelled and tried to look their absolute best. I did the complete opposite and tried to look as low-key as possible. They liked my look and they had me read with a few people.

Glenn Rubenstein, writer and director: I remember my first reaction being, "Somebody's done it, somebody has made that transformative property that is going to be synonymous with online short-form video content." I think it was something where I felt a little bit of professional jealousy, like, why didn't I think of this first? When I saw what "LG15" had done, it gave me the idea to make fan videos and take some ideas I'd been kicking around to get involved in the community, and through a whirlwind couple of weeks ended up working on the series itself. It was crazy to go from a fan waiting for the daily video to drop to working on the series, breaking story and shooting videos and directing.

Amanda Goodfried, writer and producer: Two weeks into the project, Miles, Mesh and Greg looked at each other and said, "Hey none of us have ever been a 16-year-old girl, maybe we should bring a female perspective in." At the time I was very active on Myspace, so I started writing all of the comments and responses on YouTube, so if you messaged Bree, I wrote back in Bree's voice. We only responded to people who spoke to her as a real person. I started a Myspace page for her and it became really popular and built a whole other identity for her.

Davis: I always got the feeling that ["LG15"] was just putting the rail down

just ahead of the train. It seemed that they were always playing catch-up trying to stay ahead of the whole thing. I do remember that web series were just not a thing then. My manager was pretty skeptical about it. They were like, "You should do it if you want to do it but we don't think you should do it." [But] it was something I was really proud of. I didn't know how big it was going to be.

"LG15" popped up when YouTube was becoming a cultural force. It was six months after The Lonely Island's "Lazy Sunday" went viral on YouTube and just a few months before Google bought the platform. But people were still unsure of how to use YouTube.

Rubenstein: The cultural impact of "LG15" was don't trust anyone. Anyone you see on YouTube. Anyone on social media. Don't believe it until you verify it.

Davis: I remember YouTube was nothing back then. I remember going to a meetup somewhere in San Francisco at a bar, and I think the creators used to go there, and I remember this guy on the board of YouTube got up on a table saying "This is gonna be huge. I know one day YouTube is going to be huge." Man, was he right. I don't know if "LG15" had an impact on YouTube. But the show certainly would have never existed without YouTube and without the people who were actively participating in YouTube back then.

Beckett: There a convergence of a variety of different video mediums online: the whole podcasting community with audio podcasting, and the audio and video enclosure format RSS feeds that had just been invested in. Then, there was a bit of a video podcasting community. Then there were other people producing what came to be called web series and hosting them on their own websites or over podcasts. I think we took a lot of the techniques that were naturally and organically emerging from the video blogging community and professionalizing it to an extent and expanding on it.

Amanda Goodfried: No one I knew, knew what YouTube even was, and then suddenly our actress was on the cover of Wired and everybody was talking about YouTube. I think it became more mainstream, and it showed YouTube it could create serialized content that brands were interested in as well, and that there could actually be money in it.

Abu-Taleb: I think "LG15's" impact

helped legitimize web series. I think it gave courage to other people who wanted to finance bigger projects to go ahead and do something new because we were able to monetize it. A few years after that, I ended up being the lead on Lionsgate's first web series. I think without "LG15", not only would I have not been cast, but other companies like Lionsgate [and] like Crackle, wouldn't have thought about doing it had "LG15" not come out.

Rubenstein: "LG15" really had its impact on people that were creating serialized fiction on YouTube in that there was no playbook before in terms of how you do that. In addition to the monetization, "LG15" had some very public trial and error. For a while, we were telling stories across YouTube channels, Bree's, Daniel's and Jonas's, and I think people learned from that. Now when you see online series launched, it's around one channel and one consistent voice.

"LG15" being fiction was kept a secret from the start. But by August 2006, the show ignited a frenzy and fans began investigating the series at www.loneylgirl15.com determined to find out who Jessica Rose really was, if she was real and where she lived. By September, it was first revealed that "LG15" was a hoax by the Los Angeles Times.

Abu-Taleb: At the beginning, it was me, Jessica, Miles and Mesh. We had a set photographer and Amanda Goodfried works at CAA and she was helping out with responses to fan requests. But it was really a four-person operation. We'd come in and shoot our videos and we didn't know what to expect. They told us it was going to blow up, but it wasn't really the kind of thing we thought was going to happen.

Beckett: It was definitely not fun, it was really stressful. We had this idea [for the series] and obviously, the side effect of that was that we had this big secret. Pretty rapidly, the first video got half a million views -- it felt like it was a while but it was actually two weeks -- and from that point forward each video would skyrocket.

Abu-Taleb: I remember one day they told us we need to quit our jobs there are too many ppl talking that they think they sighted you or Jess so they wanted to keep us inside. It got to the point where we started getting 100K views a video then 1 million views a video and we were like oh it was something real I actually had a relationship tank because I was so devoted to not going out and not being discovered.

Greg Goodfried: For all of us it was terrifying, but for me personally, my whole family got dragged into it. My dad did some legal work for us so he registered the trademark in our last name and my wife Amanda at the time worked at CAA so there was this whole story of "LG15" at CAA. Somebody put IP software on a Myspace page and Amanda who's my wife clicked on my page. One day we saw this story come out that "LG15" linked to Ken Goodfried and CAA and then they started pouring in through my family. My sisters were kind of the same age as Bree and liked to hike and listen to good music. So there was this conspiracy theory it was my sister. My whole family is calling me each day being like "Hey this was fun watching you do this a month ago, but it's starting to get scary and weird and we're worried about people showing up at the house. I had to be like "It's going to come out any day."

Amanda Goodfried: It was crazy because at the time, we all deleted our online profiles. What we didn't know is that Google keeps a cache of every single thing that exists on the internet, so even if you delete your profiles, it still exists. When people started investigating us, there were clues, and they found out we filed a trademark application [through] my husband's father, so they had a last name and they started Googling him and posted his address and photos of his house online. Eventually, when they googled Goodfried they [found] my Myspace and my husband's Myspace. People started investigating us but we couldn't tell anybody about it except for this group of people I was in. So that felt just really intense -- like we were being stalked. When we finally took the show outside, people started looking at the plants and trying to investigate "what part of the country a plant could that be in because that kind of plant only grows in the Southwest." I remember how exciting it was [and] it was such a rollercoaster of feelings, but at the same time it had this twinge of danger.

Beckett: More and more interest and investigation was occurring. We were pretty distressed because we didn't know how people would take it or if they would understand the artistic approach and appreciate it. We honestly didn't know if people would keep watching -- we didn't know how much of the interest was real or not? Fortunately, generally people were excited about it and positive and our viewership went way up once the secret was

finally out.

From the get-go, 19-year-old actress Jessica Rose was who the creators wanted to star as Bree in "LG15," but Rose wasn't entirely on-board at first and took some convincing. [NOTE: Rose declined to be interviewed for this piece]

Beckett: Jessica Rose didn't want to do it. We held a casting session and did two days of casting. We didn't like any of the actresses we saw except for Jessica. Yousef we saw on the first day and we liked him a lot for Daniel. He and Jessica befriended each other and he told me, "I don't think she wants to do it. I think she's sketched out by the whole thing." I called her and was like, "let's go and get coffee."

Abu-Taleb: I remember Jessica Rose was pretty hesitant about the show. We spoke after we met with Mesh and Miles at Urth Cafe and what made her hesitant was what made me excited. It was something new being done in a space that had never done it before. I couldn't say no. I remember what they told us about how they wanted to roll it out how it was going to be a secret hat everything would disappear and then a movie would come out. I was really excited to do something I'd never done before.

Beckett: This was a time where there was no online video. YouTube was brand new. No one really knew much about it. The default assumption was that it was porn. So she had bad experiences, and I told her it's not porn, it's the opposite of that [and] that the character is homeschooled and introverted. [I told her] I'm a doctor, I'm from LA. You can talk to my parents they live in the Valley. So I just told her it's totally legit and I think it's going to be something big and big for your career. Luckily my passion pitch won her over. Jess was really authentic and very real and that's what video blogging was.

"LG15" ran for just over two years and spurred an array of spin-offs. But the show became a framework for how YouTube could and would be used moving forward. It also showed how extreme experimentation could be using the platform.

Mesh Flinders, co-creator: I'm extremely proud of "LG15" and will always look back on the times I spent with my colleagues working on it warmly.

Amanda Goodfried: What I took away from it was what an incredible time it was to experiment. At that time, everything we did was a first.

Davis: I think the people who

watched it still remember it, but I don't think people have heard of it that weren't of a certain age at that time. I feel like it's been forgotten because it's become lost in the shuffle of the internet.

Beckett: I wouldn't say that we created the "web series" or the techniques [we used], but I would say to an extent we popularized it because for many people "LG15" was their introduction to YouTube. There were a lot of video bloggers that took inspiration from it and took some of the techniques we used and the narrative formats.

Rubenstein: When I see YouTube series now, I see people are taking some of the best elements in terms of how often we publish episodes. It's not that LG15 broke new ground -- they certainly didn't invent the blog - but I think it was how do they use these pre-existing formats to tell a story.

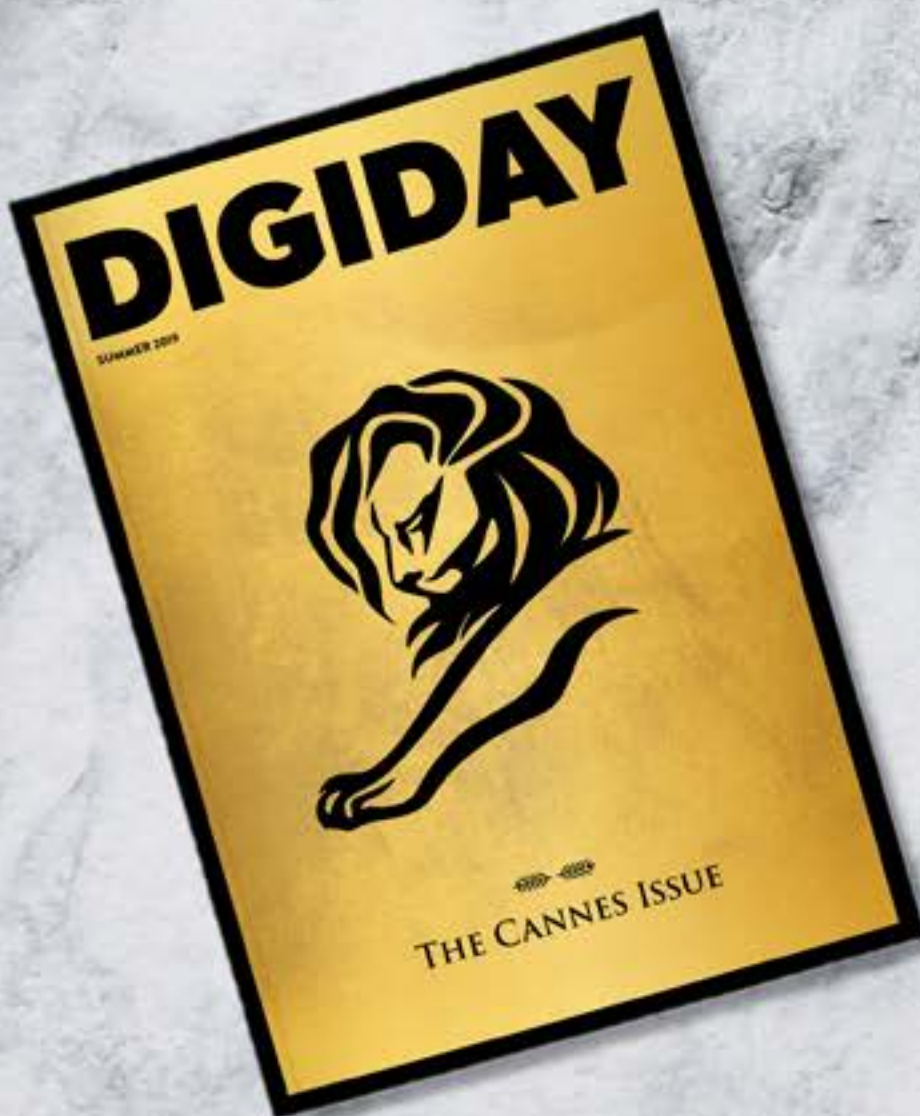
Greg Goodfried: Certainly it's viral marketing. I think it's a really interesting thing in terms of YouTube and video blogging -- the fact that you can have a sustainable channel, build a channel and monetize that channel.

Davis: I don't know if it was ahead of its time or just on time. I think it was on time. All the perfect elements were there.

Beckett: I wrote it with Mesh, we directed it together and it was truly an artistic creation of both of our personalities. I think sometimes it's thought of as this YouTube hoax, but I think most people recognize it as a narrative and a story. There's still a lot of blogging, [but] there hasn't been that much innovation around scripted, interactive narrative. There's been a little bit but it's a bit of a bummer from a creative standpoint.

Amanda Goodfried: I became the producer, and I ran the show for years. That's what the narrative never includes. I get cut out of every story. We did all of these stories and talked to all of these reporters for years, and I got cut out of every single one of them.

Flinders: "LG15" was a collaboration on every level and would not have been the success it was without all its various contributors' hard work -- including our many fans, who commented on the videos and worked diligently to sleuth out who was behind them. ▣



DIGIDAY⁺

Access unlimited content,
exclusive features and
more with Digiday+
membership

digiday.com/subscribe



PLAYBOY'S Extreme Makeover

3

Media

Playboy is more politically and socially conscious than ever, but is it sustainable?

By Ilana Kaplan

There was a time when nudes were the focal point of Playboy. But in 2019, that couldn't be further from the truth. Sure, you can still find the occasional provocative photo, but Playboy has gone from pin-up blonde bombshells to touting diversity, inclusion and feminism. It's an interesting move for a brand that built a multi-million-dollar business on objectifying women. If you've paid attention to Playboy's content -- in print and digital -- the past few years, the change has been happening. While it's been gradual, in 2018, the brand began ramping up its editorial and branding shift to find a place in a world where Heff's smoking jacket would seem grossly out of place.

At the helm of Playboy's cultural transformation is executive editor Shane Singh and Anna Ondaatje, vp of brand and marketing at Playboy Enterprises, who have been pivotal in bringing the brand up to the current era. "We're doing an evolution," says Ondaatje. "Around this time last year, we did a ton of soul searching to kind of figure out, 'OK, who are we? Who do we want to be moving into the future? How does this brand have an impact today, and what is our purpose in the world?'" What they saw was a cultural shift in society that made the kind of swaggering masculine-dominated sexuality championed by Playboy outdated. "There's a ton of conversation around sex positivity, and there's a conversation around sexuality, gender fluidity, exploration of pleasure, and what's the role of pleasure in a world today where we're increasingly kind of tied to our to-do list?" says Ondaatje. Playboy wanted to re-evaluate how the brand could incorporate all of these things, so it examined its core DNA. All of that work drilled down into its current mission: to create an inclusive culture where all people are free to pursue pleasure, "re-embracing these ideals of freedom of free expression, of sexuality, and appreciating pleasure without having to apologize for it."

Singh took on his role as digital director of Playboy.com in October 2017 when the #MeToo movement emerged. To help Playboy find its footing, he studied other men's magazines to see how they were covering conversations around #MeToo. To get to a point where Playboy was able to embrace change focused on consent, for instance, Singh began having conversations with writers working to determine what Playboy's place and voice could be. Two years since, it's evolved into having #MeToo founder Tarana Burke in their print magazine. "It's not something that can be done overnight," says Singh. "It's been a lot of conversations [and] takes a lot of listening to figure out how to approach this."

"What Shane and the editorial team have done; which I'm incredibly proud of, is they've created a space for questions for open dialogue, for non-judgment in a time when there's a kind of seed for change in terms of how we think about these issues and culture. So we've really focused on listening ourselves," says Ondaatje.

In December 2018, Playboy announced it would become a quarterly

publication in order to help them transform their mission and not necessarily be beholden to a news cycle. Instead, Playboy's issues now fall into four brand themes: winter is equality, spring is speech, summer is gender and sexuality and fall is about pleasure. "The idea is you're not really necessarily relaunching something, you're reintroducing people using knowledge that they already know," says Singh. "They're just not aware of it, if that makes sense."

While millennials and Playboy's primary consumer audience didn't grow up during the 1960s and 1970s of free love and sex and civil rights, the brand is trying to bring its newest audience back to the key causes that were a part of Playboy's origins. For instance, their Free Speech issue featured Lizzo in the same issue as Michelle Wolf, Seth Abramson and Yumna Al-Arashi. "There's no other way that we would have been able to include those voices, and we feel like bringing those voices together to further the work that we want to do," Singh says. "It makes it creatively and editorially really challenging, but really interesting for me."

The drop of a viral Ezra Miller feature in the winter 2019 issue was a clear signal of change for the brand. Miller, a queer actor musician and artist was shot by queer photographer Ryan Pfluger who has shot everyone from Barack Obama to Angelina Jolie. Miller came up with the idea to sport bunny ears, which Playboy believed in. "We really made sure that there was a lot of cohesion and a lot of discussion around it. It was a lot of discussion to make sure that we knew there was intention behind the creative direction of that piece," says Singh.

That ethos has since carried through to the way Playboy handles every shoot and interview. "With the photographer we really think through not just who's in front of the lens, but who's behind the lens and that interaction, and the environment that we're going to create on set," adds Singh.

Recently, Playboy did a Dolly Parton-inspired topless shoot with country singer Maren Morris where the crew and writer were all women. This is the kind of pivot the brand has made in order to make sure that the voice of the person being featured is heard. "We have a strong policy of no surprises," says Singh.

Much of Playboy's growth has been organic the past year. It has gained more than a million followers organically within the past year with zero paid media. With its new quarterly system, Playboy has 234 pages with no ads, so there's no need to curate the issues with advertisers in mind. With no ad adjacencies, they can dedicate the pages to photography and writing and they don't have the pressure to appease advertisers. From a digital clickbait news format, they're not beholden to what advertisers are comfortable with putting their media placements next to.

"We can take on really strong points of view without worrying about alienating a core piece of our business because we're not dependent on that anymore," says Ondaatje. "We no longer have this clickbait model. We also don't have to sell ads on our website, which means that we don't have to be showing how many clicks we can get per article." So Playboy doesn't need to create churn.

When asked about their main source of revenue, Playboy said that it comes from their "lifestyle-driven product" and that "more than \$3 billion is spent by consumers against the Playboy brand at retail, with Playboy's revenues split between subscription content, Global Licensing and select owned and operated consumer products businesses."

Barry Lowenthal, CEO of The Media Kitchen, believes that the "socially-based conversations" that occur will be a good barometer of the public's sentiment toward the brand. "This change gives Playboy permission to participate in conversations maybe they couldn't participate in before [and] might be a really important indicator that they've been successful," he says.

"Where we see this moving is ultimately sort of in the wings building out Playboy as kind of what it has been before, as a kind of the ultimate purpose-driven lifestyle brand where our perspective is really pleasuring for all," says Ondaatje. "And building a business around products and experiences that help us deliver on our mission of securing pleasure for all." For Ondaatje, that means focusing on a "psychographic versus a demographic." Something that needs mentioning is the opening of The Playboy Club in New York last year after a 32-year hiatus. Waitresses in bunny bodysuits are now known as "brand ambassadors" but there's still a

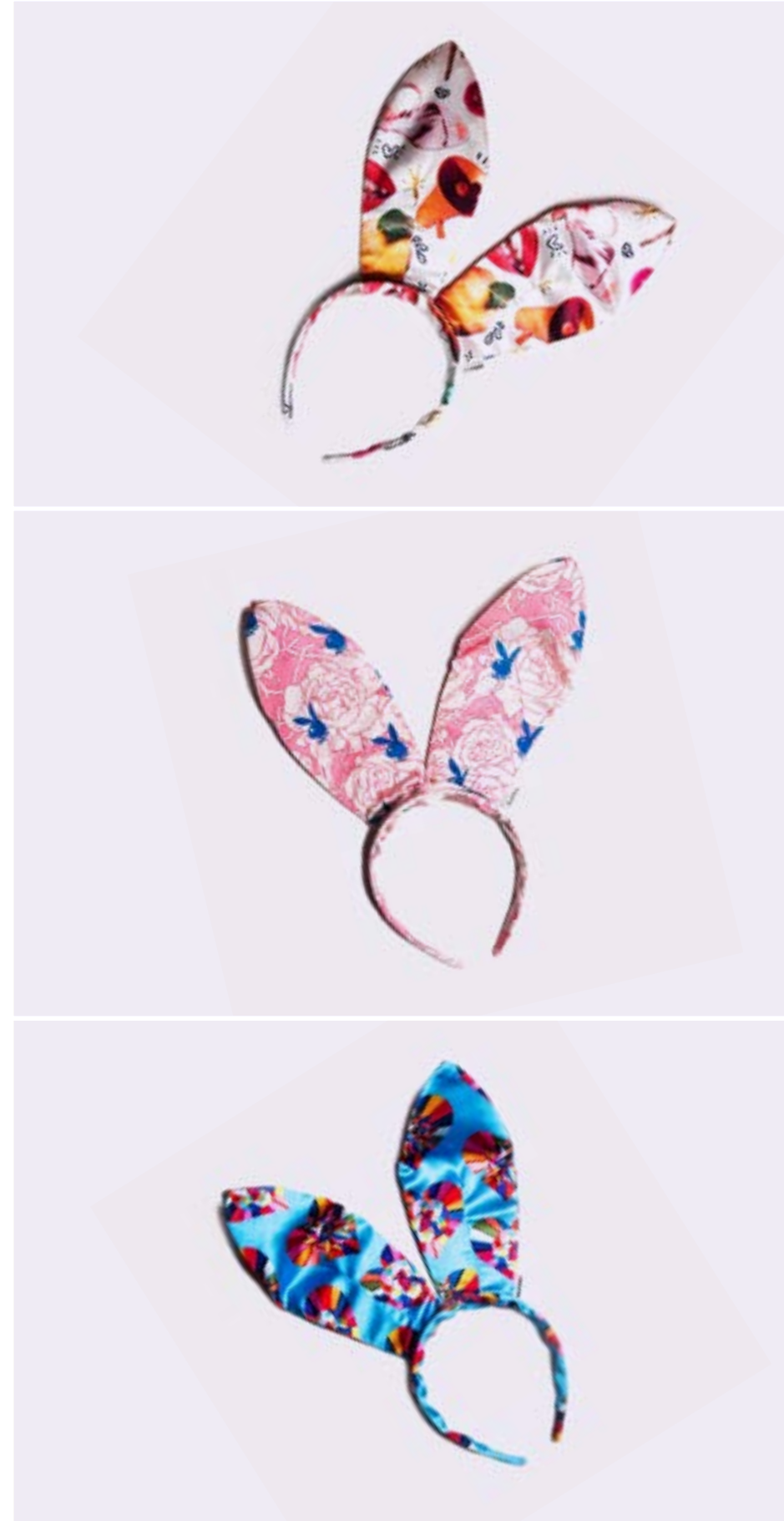
question of whether or not The Playboy Club's resurgence is contradictory to the way Playboy's editorial platform has evolved.

Singh is aware of this, which is why he refers to the brand's direction as a "work in progress" and an "evolution." But in terms of editorial, Singh sees print and digital as one entity. "Cohesion is really important for us, so [print and digital] are speaking to each other, but you can't do that by just taking the same image in the same headline in the magazine; everybody does that," he says. "You can't put that on Twitter and also put it on Instagram." Playboy's goal is to use their storytelling and amplify different parts for different audiences.

The way that Singh and Ondaatje see the Playboy brand and its long-standing bunny symbol is universal. "When you work at Playboy you realize you see the rabbit head everywhere. You see it on people of all shapes, sizes, ages, backgrounds. For us it is a symbol of something. The symbol of our themes, and we use the editorials to make sure; and the stories that we tell in the magazine as that was once our main product, and now it's within a very wide range of different products that we offer. We still have to make sure that rabbit head means something." Singh wants to ensure that Playboy as it stands is "universal" and upholds the brand's longtime legacy.


For many, the brand's pivot is commendable. "I'm really impressed with how they've rebranded and that they've really grown up. I felt like Playboy used to be for boys, and for boys that didn't grow up, and now it's for a more grown up audience, and by that, I also mean younger people today who have a much more mature and healthy view of sexuality," says Tema Staig, who's on the board of directors for non-profit Women In Media. Still, she thinks "Playboy had to evolve." "They were just too old-fashioned, and if they had continued the way they had been going, they would not survive," she adds.

There is, of course, the argument to be made that everything comes in waves -- brands pivot their messaging constantly. Will this surge of inclusivity stick? We'll have to wait and see. But the team behind Playboy's rebranding is dedicated to keeping up with the world's progress. "One might look back and say, 'What took Playboy so long?'" But hindsight is always 20/20. They've changed, they're changing or they're trying to change, and time will tell if they're changing enough," says Lowenthal. ■



DIGIDAY TECHNOLOGY AWARDS

The Digiday Technology Awards is the industry's annual recognition of the technology modernizing media and marketing. This year, judges from Microsoft, MediaCom, Situation and more selected winners in 21 categories. We've announced the first 14 winners, while the final seven will be revealed at the Digiday Fall Awards Gala in November. Congratulations to all the winners.



Best Personalization & A/B Testing Platform

According to Digiday Research, 70 percent of publishers say they personalize content

47
Number of markets Xaxis operates in



Best Content Marketing Platform




Best Email Marketing Platform





Best Influencer Marketing Platform

12 million+
Number of influencers spanning 30,000 categories on the HYPR platform




Best Content Management System

120,000
Number of customers


Best Native Advertising Platform

2
Seconds it takes for a site to load on Nativo's Edge Server




Best Marketing Analytics/Attribution Platform


80 percent
Of top 100 U.S. web retailers using Adobe Analytics to measure transactions



Best Affiliate Network

Best Digital Retail Technology



Best E-Commerce for Content Platform

200
Number of publisher clients
A Digiday Research report found that 45 percent of publishers generate e-commerce revenue, primarily through affiliate links




Best Mobile Marketing Platform





Best Data Management Platform

3,500
Number of brands using the platform



Best CRM Platform

Best Sales Automation Tool & Platform





| Marie Kondo

Tidying Religion

Organizing your sock drawer is now self-care. **By Shareen Pathak**

Karin Socci is a Westchester-based clinical psychologist who in 2014 picked up a copy of Marie Kondo's "The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up" when she was getting ready to move in with her now-husband. She says it "changed her life," and when Kondo came out with a consulting certification, she jumped on-board.

Socci got her first level of certification in the fall of 2016. This year, she became a KonMari Institute-certified "Master KonMari Consultant Practitioner." Within a month of becoming certified in 2016 she had enough clients that she was able to quit her day job. (Consultants set their own rates; Socci charges by the hour.) Her podcast, Spark Joy, now has 1.5 million listeners, double that of last year -- and she now has corporate clients. Socci also recently did a project with pharma giant Eli Lilly, helping the corporation declutter and organize their physical spaces.

Tidying up, has in short, gone big. People are more anxious than ever before, and more cognizant of the impact they're having on the spaces and the environments around them. The Internet has made space-envy real: Instagram makes it easy to voyeuristically gaze on other people's homes and marvel at how organized and neat they are. And all of this is aided by the explosion in bloggers specializing in organizing from Dave Bruno to Tammy Strobel.

Kondo, a 34-year-old Japanese organizing consultant, might be one of the more well-known faces of the movement. Her method, the KonMari method, became popular in the U.S. when her book was translated and published here in 2014. Her Netflix series, "Tidying Up With Marie Kondo," was nominated for a Primetime Emmy. The Marie Kondo business stretches to a blog, called All Things KonMari'd, a weekly newsletter, and soon, a book, co-written with Tim Ferriss about workplace productivity. In March, The Information reported that KonMari, the business, was also looking to raise \$40 million. (The KonMari camp declined to provide any comment on the growth of the business or to make an executive available for an interview.)

There are others too. The Minimalists are a pair of authors named Joshua Fields Millburn and Ryan Nicodemus, who have built up a cult following with free newsletters, the Minimalists Podcast and a documentary, as well as a touring and public speaking circuit. The origin story is that about 10 years ago, the pair was going through what seems like an archetypal midlife crisis about the amount of "stuff" they owned.

"And yet with all that stuff, we weren't satisfied. There was a

gaping void, and working 80 hours a week just to buy more stuff didn't fill the void. It only brought more debt, stress, anxiety, fear, loneliness, guilt, overwhelm, depression," the pair writes in their introduction.

They launched a website, focused on the principles of minimalism in 2010. It claims to have an audience of 20 million people. Last year, the duo also launched a podcast and film studio in Hollywood, California to create more content and are now working on a second documentary, called "Less is Now."

Minimalism has existed for years. But each proponent has their own twist on it. The Minimalists say theirs is less restrictive than most schools of thought, and actually can help people find a sense of freedom. Kondo's is focused on joy. For James Altucher, self-help guru, hedge fund manager and investor, author and well-known podcaster, minimalism (he reportedly only owns 15 things) is a way of life.

Many are extending movements that have existed in the corners of the Internet, on Reddit and on YouTube, where everyone from home improvement vloggers to fashionistas have espoused minimalism for years.

But everyone is more anxious now, and mindfulness of not just what you own, but the effects of what you buy on the world around you, has become much more mainstream.

The effects on businesses are also real. When Kondo's show aired, thrift stores saw a surge, they said, in donations. The resale market has also seen growth this year, with companies like the RealReal and Poshmark posting major growth. Big brands, including traditional retailers like Neiman Marcus and H&M, are pushing into resale, capitalizing on a growing number of people getting rid of their clothes and shoes -- and hoping to make a buck off it as well.

"One of my motivators, and in general, it was that in the early 20th century there was a real drive to acquire stuff, and a lot of pressure to maintain that," says Socci. "That's changed now. The things you buy and bring into your home aren't as important." ■

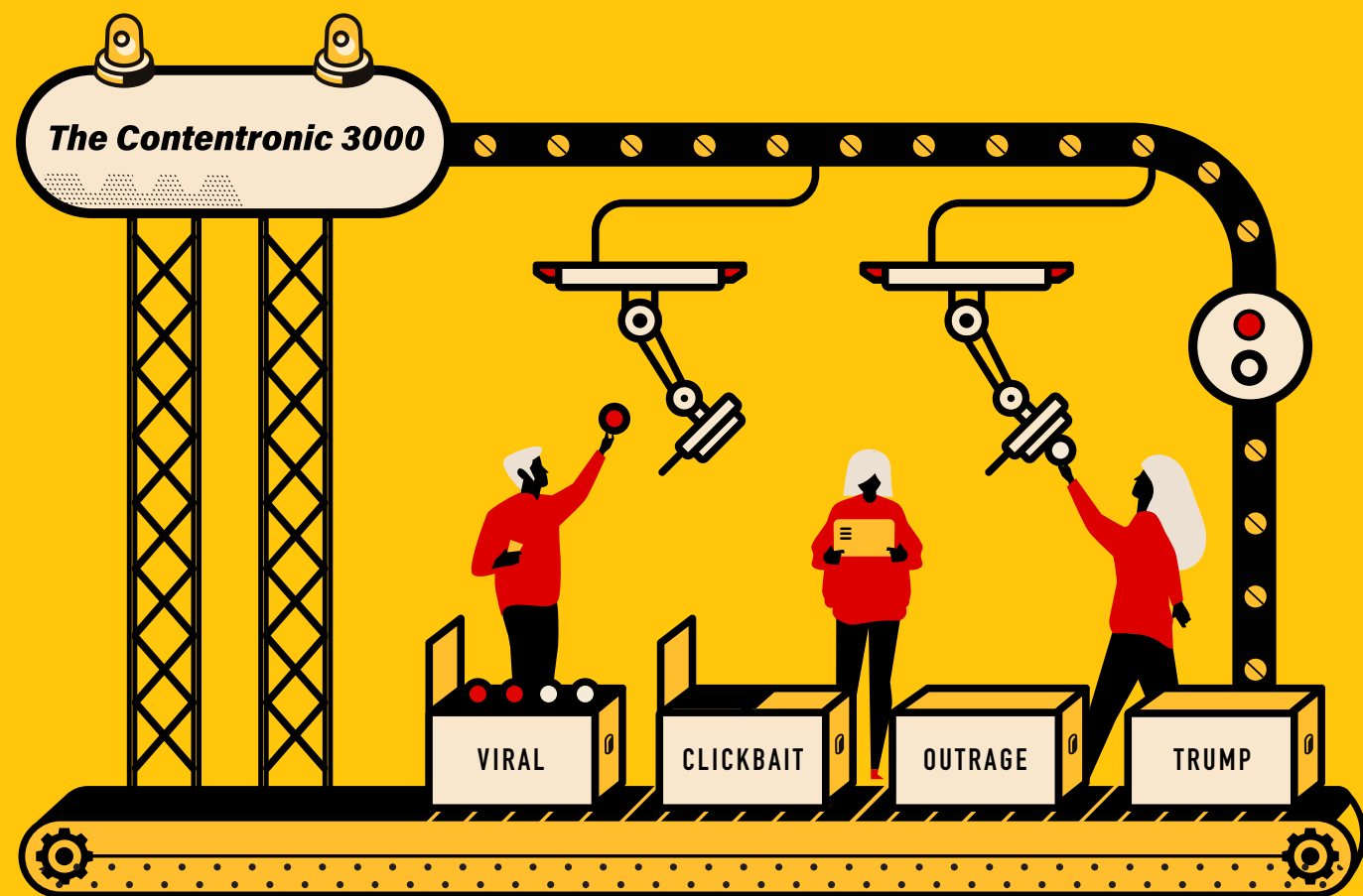
How to become a KonMari consultant

1. Read the books
2. Tidy your home, and submit photos
3. Attend a consultant certification course
4. Join the closed community of consultants
5. Submit tidying reports of at least 10 practice sessions
6. Pass an exam
7. Apply for certification

The Lost Generation

The cheap clicks era has left behind a jaded generation of journalists.

By Max Willens



Two years ago, Gail* felt like she was ready to step onto a bigger media stage. She had clips from a local alt-weekly and dreams of writing for a national audience, so she started hunting for opportunities at digital publications, eventually landing a job at Elite Daily.

It wasn't exactly The Atlantic, but Gail thought a turn at a digital-native title with a national brand would give her more exposure, plus an opportunity to learn how modern media works. Before the learning came, she got an awakening.

"I really knew how to report, that's what I wanted to do and that's what I was

promised," Gail says. "I ended up doing a bunch of aggregated stuff about the Kardashians."

Gail says she was expected to file between three and five 600-word stories every day. She was also kept in isolation, unable to connect with her other remote coworkers, because Elite Daily did not offer its writers access to any kind of internal messaging system like Slack, which made it hard to build bonds with colleagues or forge relationships that might have helped her to grow within Elite Daily.

After eight months, Gail quit without so much as a clip to use in the

search for future jobs, she says. What she left with, instead, was a more nuanced understanding of what terms like "high pressure" and "good with deadlines" mean.

"I'm better at recognizing things that are code for, 'We're going to work you to the bone,'" she says.

Gail, who's been freelancing ever since, has a much stronger understanding of the media ecosystem, so when I ask her to describe it for this story, she uses the term with confidence.

"Digital media is a clusterfuck right now," Gail says. "I knew the industry was in trouble, but I severely underestimated

how deep the rot went."

In the past several years, many different crises have erupted across media. But one of the least examined might be the dismal outlook and flagging resolve of the people that make it. A decade of constant upheaval -- and an uncertainty about what comes next -- has created a lost generation of reporters, whose outlook will have just as much of an effect on media's future as anything that Google or Facebook decides to do.

These writers esteem past greats and aspire to break stories and write things that leave a lasting impact. But they've also internalized the market logic that a viral collection of memes is, on some level, just as valuable.

A decade of enduring media's unforgiving economics has convinced them that organized labor is important, not just for raising pay but for righting a long list of wrongs, including classism, racism and sexism.

And buried at the bottom of it all, there lurks a deep uncertainty that there is a future for what most of them do, either for a living or because they love it. And that uncertainty is suffused through everything they make.

"I think eventually everyone does the math," says Kate Gardiner, who worked as a freelance reporter and led audience development and social strategy for media companies including Al-Jazeera and PBS before leaving journalism to found Grey Horse, a communications firm. "The fifth time you get laid off, the tenth time somebody skips out on paying your freelance check, the millionth time Vox changes your contract; every single one of us has had enough of those experiences."

The number one thing feeding this anxiety is layoffs. Most people in media are familiar with the numbers, or at least their dismal contours, but here they are again. Over the past 10 years, employment in newsrooms has dropped by nearly a quarter, according to Bureau of Labor Statistics data analyzed by the Pew Research Center. Strong job growth in the digital media sector has not done enough to offset the collapses in newspapers, which lost nearly 47% of its total workers from 2008 to 2018, Pew's analysis found.

And even the top-line increase of people working in digital media jobs, which has risen to 82%, to 13,500 workers in 2018, obscures the tumultuous ride that industry has had. Between January

2017 and April 2018, a full quarter of all digital media outlets examined by the Pew Research Center reported layoffs.

But the second-biggest problem has been the industry's seemingly constant pivots in strategies to find workable business models. As media companies lost control of their distribution and, by extension, their audiences, they have veered from one thing to the next in an attempt to grow their ad revenues: High-volume output in pursuit of scale; new content formats, from slideshows to videos to product guides, in a chase for advertiser dollars.

"To badly paraphrase W.B. Yeats, everything has changed utterly," says John Crowley, who served as an editor at newspapers including The Telegraph and The Wall Street Journal and, more recently, at digital-native publications including The International Business Times and the Daily Mail. "At journalism school 20 years ago, we didn't need to learn about page views."

The skills that journalists were told they needed to learn often wound up on the scrap heap just a few years later. Writers that learned how to crank out stories in under an hour have watched publishers centralize news desks and pull back on commodity coverage; video teams that perfected the art of 90-second videos are being stretched to make things that are longer.

The whirlwind has led to a wave of organizing. For example, the Writers Guild of America, East, which seized on the opportunity to help organize digital-native titles including Vice and HuffPost, has seen its membership grow more than 40% over the past five years. Of WGA, East's 5,000 union members, more than 1,200 of them work at digital media companies, according to a report the organization released this spring.

"There is something about the turmoil in the industry that inspires people to focus on their own workplaces," says Lowell Peterson, the executive director of WGA, East. "It's not like they're living in a workers paradise. There are real issues that have come home, and we need to do something about it."

What they want differs. Though some have fought for things like better pay -- Peterson says that many of the shops WGA East helped organize were paying writers working 60-hour weeks just \$30,000 a year -- a growing priority in

bargaining units is getting more information about where their companies are going, and how. Some have demanded seats on publishers' boards, or insisted on quarterly strategy sessions where the newsroom is kept in the loop about what is going on.

Those gains have been harder to win, though Peterson said individual publications have found it productive to use the demand in their negotiations.

But even if the newsroom managed to grab hold of the steering wheel, it's not clear that they'd know what direction to turn in. The cumulative effect of these disruptions is one of feeling like they don't know what to do.

Even the much-discussed idea of the benevolent billionaire, a figure that has played a pivotal role in rallies among local and legacy news outlets, does not inspire much enthusiasm among some veterans of these.

"Billionaires are not going to save journalism. And relying on them is extremely dangerous," says one former editor at The Village Voice.

This editor, who asked not to be identified, recalls a surge of enthusiasm that coursed through the building when Peter Barbey, the billionaire scion of the Barbey family, acquired the struggling alt-weekly in 2015, pledging to invest whatever was necessary to return the Voice to its glory days.

"At first, it was fucking incredible," that editor says. As the money materialized to hire more staff, pay freelancers more, and even overhaul the website, "We all felt like we had won the lottery."

But ultimately, the good times didn't last. After a few years of mounting losses, Barbey told staffers in the summer of 2018 that the Voice would no longer publish any material. (Barbey described the outcome as "sucky.")

In the stories that have been written about management miscues that have set media companies back, there is the implied mirror image of someone lower on the food chain who would know better, or see a solution that would succeed where so many others have failed.

Yet perhaps the defining characteristic of so many members of this lost generation is that they don't see one.

"If I knew the answer, I'd have made a lot of money and bought the Voice back," the former Voice editor says. ▣

Growing Like a Weed

Cannabis-focused media is exploding as legalization efforts progress. **By Max Willens**

Undeterred by platform ad restrictions, pot-focused media companies have sprouted revenue strategies focused on commerce, branded content and events. A few titles are sowing the seeds of what they hope will become marketplaces where willing buyers and sellers meet one another in directories.

The lifestyle crowd

Now that marijuana's legal in 11 states, plus the District of Columbia, it's lost a lot of its old counter-cultural potency. But plenty of publishers still think weed can anchor a lifestyle brand.

Gossamer

A glossy quarterly, which describes itself as a magazine "for people who also smoke weed," and has quickly diversified into its own line of consumer products: A CBD-infused tincture called Dusk, designed to help users sleep, sold out its first run and began shipping a second round of orders in early September.

Mary

Founded in 2014, Mary styles itself as the "mature" voice of cannabis culture. It has leaned into pricey experiential activations, such as \$100 dinners or Mary Talks, which focus on everything from masculinity to sex and intimacy.

Broccoli

If you have trouble monetizing digital ad inventory, don't bother trying to sell it. Broccoli, a magazine for and by women female cannabis enthusiasts, publishes three times per year, and uses Instagram, newsletters and in-person events to make money. No content is available on its site.

Merry Jane

The Snoop Dogg-owned Merry Jane has an unusually large Instagram audience relative to its competition, and shares a mixture of professional and user-generated content. Merry Jane also operates its own advertising agency, Gram by Gram, which is stocked with former Virtue execs.

The trades

U.S. retail sales of marijuana are projected to exceed \$25 billion by 2023, more than double an already healthy 2019 total of \$11.2 billion, according to data gathered by Headset and Cannabis Benchmarks. That growth is expected to occur despite a thicket of federal and state-specific regulations, a perfect opportunity for any business publication.

Marijuana Venture

A publication aimed at the space's growing class of entrepreneurs, Marijuana Venture claims to have over 12,000 print subscribers, who read content mostly written by consultants, founders and other professionals working in the space.

Cannabis Wire

The six-person team behind Cannabis Wire covers an ambitious range of issues surrounding cannabis, but its business model is fairly simple: Monetize through subscriber revenue. It delivers most of its news via newsletter, which will eventually become a paid product.

WeedWeek

Similar to Cannabis Wire, Weed Week is built mostly around newsletters filled with original reporting, separated by geography (in addition to its flagship newsletter, Weed Week covers California and Canada). But it also runs a recurring event, Recharge, and a kind of thought leadership program, called the WeedWeek Council, that is application-based.

Ganjapreneur

Since launching in 2014, Ganjapreneur has assembled all the trappings of a B2B media platform -- jobs board, professional directories, event listings, a news release distribution platform -- around a small team of aggregators.

The culinary enthusiasts

Anybody who's visited a dispensary knows that weed has moved way beyond brownies, and weed-focused food media companies have sprung up as a result. In addition to news and recipes, these sites are busy building events and commerce businesses. There is already a "Martha Stewart of weed."

The Herb Somm

A kind of media platform for Jamie Evans, an influencer who focuses on the intersection of cannabis, wine and gourmet cooking. In addition to a regularly updated blog, Evans also programs and hosts private dinners, often in partnership with other media companies.

Kitchen Toke

The brainchild of Joline Rivera, who's worked with publishers including Meredith and Food Network, Kitchen Toke serves up human- and pet-focused CBD recipes, sells merch and publishes a quarterly magazine.



4

Shopping

The American Dream



The mall seems like a relic of the 1980s, but it's making a comeback. *By Jill Manoff*

An audacious attempt to reinvent and reinvigorate the American mall is taking shape in the dreary swamplands of East Rutherford, just outside New York City.

In late October, developer Triple Five Group will open the doors to the appropriately named American Dream, a shopping center on steroids that's been 16 years in the making. This is not the prototypical American mall with a single movie theater, food court and Macy's. American Dream is more of a Dubai production. Sure, it will feature restaurants, a movie theater and fitness options. But it will also house the largest indoor theme park in the Western Hemisphere, the largest indoor waterpark in North America complete with a 1.5-acre wave pool, a 16-stories-high ski slope, an NHL-regulation ice skating rink, a trampoline park, a rock-climbing wall, an aquarium, a Legoland Discovery Center, a mirror maze, a ropes course and a 1,300-seat performing arts theater set to host movie premieres, among other attractions. If that's not enough, there's a 300-foot high Ferris wheel. This is less mall, more megacity.

“Developers in North America are 20 years behind the rest of the world in truly experiential, entertainment-based retail environments,” says Don Ghermezian, CEO of Triple Five Group, which is also behind the Mall of America and West Edmonton Mall, the largest malls in the U.S. and North America, respectively. “We’ve known for a long time that retail isn’t just about retail. Our experience has been that, when you create a nucleus of really cool entertainment and experiences, people are going to come. And when they come, they shop.”

While many American malls were built in the 1970s and 1980s, the world moved on from the staid American mall concept to make malls more, well, spectacular.

Sprawling, experiential malls have become the norm in Dubai and China, both of which Ghermezian has frequented and looked to for inspiration. In August 2018, plans were announced for Dubai Square, a tech-heavy mall set to feature 100 soccer fields worth of retail space -- double that of Dubai Mall, currently the world’s largest shopping center by area. In addition, it will house an entertainment venue, a cinema, a water park, a sports arena and a supermarket. Also underway, in Southwest China, is the Mall of China, portions of which are set to open next year. On-site will be 40,000 residential units, a hospital and a school, as well as a 92,000-square-foot Nickelodeon indoor theme park. Triple Five Group is a co-developer.

The Ghermezians aren’t the only developers taking notes on the next-level malls abroad. In March, Related Companies opened the first phase of New York City’s Hudson Yards, the largest private development in the U.S. spanning 28 acres. Along with retailers and restaurants, it features office and residential spaces, the Vessel interactive sculpture and the first Equinox Hotel.

As shopping moves online and staple retailers increasingly close their doors, developers have been working to revive the draw of the mall, rebranding “the M word,” as one called it, as a place for discovery, a one-stop shop, even a travel destination. In step, they’re minimizing the space dedicated to retailers, in favor of elements offering fun, convenience and Instagram moments. The resounding message is that reviving the mall means changing the focus from a place to buy



denim, for example, to a spot for taking a class or attending an art show that also sells jeans.

Fifty-five percent of American Dream’s 3.3 million-square-foot space will be dedicated to entertainment, a large leap from the 20% at the Mall of America and West Edmonton Mall, which together see 70 million visitors a year. Ghermezian said every detail of American Dream is based on learnings from the companies’ past projects, and its next, even larger project -- American Dream Miami, announced in 2015 -- will feature the same retail-entertainment split.

Other mall developers are starting to make retail a just-as-small piece of the pie. Stenn Parton, chief retail officer at DJM Capital Partners, which in July acquired with Gaw Capital 463,000-square-foot Los Angeles shopping center Hollywood & Highland, said the current ideal breakdown for his projects is 30% to 35% food and beverage spots, 20% to 25% health and wellness companies, and 15% to 20% service companies, like a Drybar or nail salon. The remaining balance -- 20% to no more than 30% -- is dedicated to retail.

“The key to being successful in this space is remaining curious and evolving with where culture is going, in order to attract innovative entrepreneurs as tenants and to keep customers coming in,” said Parton. He pointed to experience-based businesses Museum of Ice Cream and Two Bit Circus as tenants he’d want now that

he’d never have thought of collaborating with five years ago.

The mall frenzy is an unlikely comeback, but a reflection of the ebbs and flows of the economy in the past 20 years. In the wake of the mortgage crisis, mall stores closed, eliminating the draw of once-hot shopping centers until they closed and became condos, co-working offices and skate parks. Now, with a decade of economic expansion and low interest rates, these capital-intensive projects are proving attractive investments for those up for the challenge of starting a new playbook.

With American Dream, Triple Five Group has been bullish on taking on forward-thinking partners. The company is privately-owned by the Ghermezian family, with “Triple Five” standing for the generations of Ghermezians involved -- Don is among the third generation. It sealed the deal to take over the New Jersey Meadowlands development in 2011. At the time, the center, which had been in the works since 2003 under the name Xanadu, was 85% complete and at a standstill, thanks to back-to-back development companies failing to get it off the ground. After two years of planning, Triple Five Group kicked off its construction, which involved stripping the former project to the studs and starting from scratch.

Among the big ideas guiding American Dream’s development were the biggest and best versions of every included brand. “We had to turn down more tenants than we accepted,” says Ghermezian.



Retail tenants’ leases, specifically, state that they must offer an experience unique to their other stores. They’ve also been encouraged to make their American Dream store a testing ground for new concepts. Among them is a Lululemon flagship featuring a cafe and yoga studio, the largest mall-based Zara in the world, encompassing 40,000 square feet over two floors, and a store by It’sugar being dubbed the world’s first candy department store.

Special attention was made to include brands that have never had a brick-and-mortar presence or their own retail, and those opening their first U.S. store, like Korean concept shop Aland. Retail platform Fourpost, owned by Mark Ghermezian, will sell an assortment of direct-to-consumer brands, and Dream Drops, the center’s name for short-term pop-ups, will ensure shoppers find newness at every visit.

A luxury wing will have stores by Tiffany & Co., Dolce & Gabbana and Saint Laurent, as well as a two-story Hermes store with koi ponds and a bonsai garden at its entrance. It will also include New Jersey’s first Barneys and Saks Fifth Avenue stores.

Shoppers will be able to choose from 100 eateries, including 15 full-service restaurants located in a dining terrace; the world’s only Munchies food hall, created in collaboration with Vice Media; and a kosher food court. Options will range

from the Hard Rock Cafe to a champagne and caviar bar, which will offer champagne delivery throughout the center through American Dream’s app.

Other amenities will include a global travelers lounge, equipped with staffers speaking 37 languages, and an au pere service, allowing parents to shop and track their kids’ whereabouts while a babysitter takes them to attractions.

In March, Triple Five Group announced the appointment of Ken Downing, the longtime fashion director of Neiman Marcus, as its chief creative officer, making one of his key roles out of the gate designing American Dream’s six major atriums. The main event atrium holds up to 10,000 people and is set to host concerts, book signings and public appearances. In total, the center is planning to host 500 events annually. There’s also a garden atrium, which is an ode to the Garden State and features live bunnies; a fashion show atrium with a 60-foot fountain; and an atrium featuring communal charging stations that are enabled for international gadgets.

Downing placed social media at the center of his work and ensured a “big box” feel was avoided, leading the implementation of wide aisles, bright finishes, exclusive artwork and plenty of natural light. He also enlisted designer Jonathan Adler and his team to create custom furnishings, including the waterpark’s 31 cabanas and pieces for the luxury wing’s “sitting salons.”

In order to get to any of the events, atriums, parks or rides, visitors must first walk by several retail stores; the center was designed so that no parking lots are located adjacent to attractions. “You read all the time that people are spending more money on experiences and travel than clothing, but that’s because nobody has combined them properly, to complement each other,” says Ghermezian. “We build entertainment concepts in order to push traffic through retail. That’s the whole point.”

New pieces of the project will be added for years to come, including a number of hotels, set to start rolling out in 2022 and eventually expanding to 3,500 rooms. Once built, Ghermezian expects visitors will stay for an average of three days. Fifty percent will be tourists, and of those, 50 percent will be international. Plus, the center will cater to the 20 million locals within 50 miles by working with local transit to up the frequency of train stops to the area, add bus routes and offer a shuttle add-on to ferry tickets. Three helipads will also be available to facilitate smooth transportation from nearby destinations, like the Hamptons.

“The early 1950s to the 1970s is when the American mall was made iconic, because it was this gathering point -- for many, it formed their junior high and high school years,” says Downing. “But it lost its magic. For modern shoppers, everything they believe the quintessential shopping mall to be, we are not.” ■

The Everything Elixir

CBD is everywhere, seemingly in everything. **By Priya Rao**

From the seemingly obvious (inflammation, pain relief, sleep) to those a little weirder (lash thickness and gut health), CBD has become another-level, cure-all for every possible ailment one could face. Lip glosses have CBD in them, so do shampoos, gummies and sexual lubricant. Customers can supposedly ease anxiety, get rid of joint pain, boast glowier skin and, obviously, have better sex in one fell swoop -- however, it is unclear if that can all happen at the same time.

While the seeds of CBD seem to have been planted in beauty, wellness and CPG as early as 2016, soon after the Farm Bill was passed in December 2018, the beast could no longer be contained.

Now that the production of hemp was legal, national retailers far and wide began stocking CBD skincare, ingestibles, petcare and patches at a breakneck pace. Take for instance Sagely Naturals, who saw its retail door count jump to 5,000-plus locations over the last nine months, thanks to key partnerships with CVS and Ulta.

Of course, part of the hockey stick trajectory of CBD is directly related to access (The Brightfield Group estimated that the U.S. CBD market will hit \$22 billion by 2020). But, it also ties back to consumers

and brands' increased preoccupation with health and wellness. CBD arrived on the greater consumer scene at the perfect time.

"More and more people are focused on taking care of themselves, this idea of self-care has resonated so strongly with the millennial generation because they are realizing that you can proactively try to be well and not just think about wellness when you are sick," says Kerrigan Behrens, co-founder and CMO of Sagely Naturals. "People are interested in natural alternatives to the products they are accustomed to taking without thinking twice."

Anthony Saniger, founder of CBD retailer Standard Dose, agrees. "A stigma around cannabis exists, but the rise of CBD and the benefits to issues like sleeplessness, anxiety and inflammation has caused people to rethink the stigma. Society understands the power of plants and that they have been used medicinally for thousands of years; this can sometimes be better than turning to the pharma machine."

Though first and foremost Standard Dose is a CBD retailer, Saniger stocks Saint Jane's CBD beauty serum with Golde's turmeric powder and Corpus Naturals' clean deodorant. The point? To

underscore CBD's wellness positioning and not its Nancy Reagan-era D.A.R.E. or prohibition past.

Further cementing CBD's cure-all qualities is how its growth runs parallel to the rise in sober culture. Sanger himself is moving towards a sober lifestyle. "I don't like the feeling of being drunk anymore," he says. "Alcohol, like THC, is psychoactive, which is a feeling some consumers don't want. CBD has solved this gap."

"People are learning how alcohol and other substances when used in excess have a detrimental impact on one's body. Cannabis and hemp derived CBD could be an alternative for some people, so why wouldn't they try it?" says Cannuka founder Michael Bumgarner.

Though CBD use and drinking fewer alcoholic beverages may not be directly correlated, both trends' roots in healthier living is something that Green Growth Brands' CMO Jann Parish has also noticed. "CBD does treat anxiety and is perceived and proven to be anxiety lowering; alcohol had previously played that role socially when someone wanted to take the edge off," she says. "You used to have a glass of wine, but now you can have a tincture or put a patch on and you

don't have to wake up with a headache or a hangover."

This is particularly appealing to Green Growth Brands' target demographic of women in the middle of the country, many of whom who are juggling both work and parental commitments. The company's portfolio includes a variety of brands including Seventh Sense Botanical Therapy, Green Lily and Camp; it is also creating a private-label line called Mood for American Eagle Outfitters.

"Because of the flow of information and how people can get education online and on social media these women are not reliant on only television news or government-sponsored information like they were 30 years ago," says Parish. "That was what moms were looking to before and that is not the case today." Standard Dose's top markets echo something similar. While New York is its highest performing state, its other significant states (via its e-commerce site) are North Carolina, Texas and Illinois.

Increased information is obviously a good thing in neutralizing the social fear of CBD and possibly later THC and other cannabidiols, but as government regulations ease up there are still hurdles.



Facebook, Instagram and Google's lack of drug-related promotions is a high one, but perhaps an even bigger one is the disparity in pricing and amounts of CBD in products.

At Sephora.com, customers can buy purchase a \$125 Saint Jane product (the brand's hero serum is made with 500 mg of full-spectrum CBD and 20 other botanicals), while Cannuka's face cream that sells at Ulta retails for \$58. Cannuka's product is made with 100mg of CBD isolate as well as manuka honey, witch hazel and hyaluronic acid.

It might be easy to assume that CBD is akin to ibuprofen and a consumer would not find such a price differential between Advil and Motrin, but Parish says the customer appetite is also changing that.

"Full-spectrum CBD and CBD isolate is four times cheaper than it was in fall 2018 and as more shoppers want CBD products and brands can provide options, the price will continue to come down," she says. Proof of that is Green Growth Brands' Seventh Sense line, which just opened its one hundredth store and has ambitious retail and product plans for 2020.

Still, not all CBD is created equal as Saint Jane founder Casey Georgeson emphasizes. "Consumers have to understand what the right dosage is for them based on what their needs are and what other ingredients CBD is coupled with," she says. "They have to read the ingredient label like any other product, and that is the only way for CBD to be less scary and just as mainstream as it should be." ▣



"A stigma around cannabis exists, but the rise of CBD and the benefits to issues like sleeplessness, anxiety and inflammation has caused people to rethink the stigma."

2 Left in Stock

10/23

84 MIN

THE PUMP



"Best shoe ever"



"Soooo comfortable"



"Fits perfectly"



"I sleep in them"



"Feel taller"



"Keeps me balanced"



The Weird, Wild World of Amazon Reviews

Amazon's got a thriving market for fake reviews. **By Cale Guthrie Weissman**



Anna* first learned about it from her cousin: a way to make some extra money. Her cousin knew someone who hosted a group chat -- this person was essentially a middleman -- that would match sellers with "buyers." Buyers is in quotes because they all get refunds, and often some cash too. This was Anna's introduction into the wheeling and dealing world of Amazon product reviews.

This marketplace isn't new -- it's been around for nearly as long as Amazon's third-party marketplace. An easy way for sellers to maintain a competitive advantage is to have good reviews, and a lot of them. Free market economics would lead us to believe that the best products would receive the most good reviews. Alas, that's not how things work; a longstanding ecosystem of sellers -- many of whom are based in China -- have taken to online channels to solicit refunded sales in exchange for glowing reviews. It's not about whether the product is good, it's about how many people positively review it.

Up until 2016, Amazon even allowed for this practice -- so long as it was properly disclosed in the review. Then, the company changed the rules: the payola review world went underground -- but remained vibrant, living on various social networks and online forums. Though blatant perpetrators were penalized, Amazon has never had a clearcut system to really eliminate the problem. In 2018, it took its most robust action against "bad actors" -- as it described them -- and performed a large sweep of alleged violating reviewers and sellers.

Which brings us back to Anna, and tens of thousands of others. Despite Amazon's attempts to rein in a thriving economy of compensated reviews, it persists.

Anna, for example, is part of numerous group chats and Facebook groups that connect her with sellers trying to get an onslaught of 5-star reviews. She describes herself as a "review agent."

This black market lives mostly in chat and social platforms; Facebook is where it really thrives. Numerous private groups exist that state both implicitly and explicitly that sellers are giving products away in exchange for reviews. The groups contain anywhere between 300 and 25,000 members. Join one and you'll be bombarded by posts for hundreds of items -- Bluetooth speakers, baby monitors, hair care supplies. Sellers ask group members to either comment on the post or send a private message. When they do that, they are asked a few questions to verify their Amazon accounts and are then prompted to purchase the item. Once finished, a refund (and sometimes commission) is paid out -- either through Amazon or PayPal. The latter route will likely provide an extra few bucks too. Anna says the average commission is around \$5.

Facebook groups aren't the only online destination. Darcy* has been reviewing for the last few months. She found out about it by searching for product testing gigs on Google and then got sucked into this less-than-kosher subculture. She started in the groups, but it didn't stop there. Soon, Darcy began to get targeted ads for product reviews. "Now all my ads on Facebook are for free products," she says. The ads usually contain a button to send a direct message to the seller. An "auto bot" leads her through some prompts -- how to buy the product, personal information -- and as soon as the purchase is made, she's reimbursed. Thus far, she says she earned

a few hundred dollars -- and a lot of free things.

Facebook is an epicenter, but it's branched out elsewhere. Jason*, another frequent reviewer, has turned to Twitter, Instagram, Reddit, Snapchat and WeChat to find reviewing opportunities. It's "available in many places," he says.

According to Tommy Noonan, founder of the Amazon review analyzer ReviewMeta, while the initial 2016 crackdown did quell the problem, much of the marketplace is still teeming with fake or illegally compensated reviews. The problem is that the cutthroat nature of the Amazon third-party marketplace makes sellers do all sorts of things to gain a competitive advantage. "Amazon kind of created this ecosystem where the stakes are so high," he says. "What I've seen is that there will be a loophole that [sellers] discover and then exploit." Then, some time later, Amazon will shut it down. It's digital cat and mouse; If a seller can game the system for even just a short while, leading to a large sales influx, it's likely worth the risk getting caught.

Some sellers are even trying to solicit honest customers to join the review compensation masses. One Amazon listing for a mobile phone screen protector included a note saying they would provide a \$10 gift card in exchange for a 5-star review. Despite Amazon's regulations stating this is against the rules -- and numerous reviews reporting this maneuver -- the item remains for sale.

For Amazon, it's a headache. For sellers trying to do things fairly, it's hurting business. But to the reviewers, it's a game -- and a way to cheat the system. Anna says she's accumulated so many free items, she plans on opening her own eBay storefront. Darcy is more lighthearted; "It's more fun than anything," she says. "It's almost like a treasure hunt."

**Names have been changed over reviewers' fear they'll be kicked out of their groups. ☐*

"It's almost like a treasure hunt."



Cleanup

Estée Laundry is forcing transparency in the beauty industry. **By Priya Rao**

When the Instagram account Estée Laundry quietly debuted in late April 2018, the anonymous collective's goal was to provide a sense of accountability in the beauty landscape, specifically as it related back to beauty brands. One of its first posts called out founder Trinny London for ripping off RMS Beauty's Lip2Cheek pots in both her namesake brand's design and packaging. London's products, for its part, contained chemical ingredients and used plastic containers, while RMS Beauty is a non-toxic beauty company that uses glass bottles.

"We started Estée Laundry because we were tired of seeing the lack of transparency, authenticity, sustainability and inclusivity in the beauty industry," they said without revealing their identities. "We felt the need to provide a trusted voice for people in order to stand up to brands."

In 16 short months, the group has

taken on both mega-conglomerates and small companies with a devil-may-care attitude -- despite the serious matters at hand. Think about the backlash Rihanna's Fenty Beauty, which is backed by LVMH, faced when the brand dubbed a highlighter "Geisha Chic" or when Glossier claimed their mascara was vegan, when in fact it was not -- all of these flames were fanned by non-other than Estée Laundry. With 82,000 followers to date and its relevance growing stronger daily, industry insiders like Larissa Jensen, executive director and beauty industry analyst at The NPD Group, expects their following to be well over a million by year's end. Ahead, we discuss with Estée Laundry its impact on the beauty industry, the need for callout culture and if transparency is just a buzz word.

What was the rationale for starting Estée Laundry?

Our mission is to raise awareness among consumers, so that they can make more informed decisions and to inspire brands to do better and be better. It didn't take us long to fully form the idea. We thought of it one day and the next day we just went for it. We have a group of people from all across the globe that work on Estée Laundry on a day-to-day basis. We like to call ourselves a collective because we are a collective of beauty insiders, and we wanted to create a safe space for people to provide tips, thoughts and to share stories and experiences.

What was the first brand or influencer you talked about and shed light on in an impactful way?

The issue that put us on the map was with Sunday Riley [in October 2018]. At the time, Sunday Riley herself emailed her staff and directed them to write positive product reviews. We got a hold of Sunday's letter and shared it with our followers. Our followers felt angry about the brand's disingenuous and unethical behavior and many did not want to support the brand anymore. This was made worse by the fact that Sunday replied to our post and confirmed that they had, indeed, posted the reviews because other brands did the same.

Do you think brands are taking more accountability because of what you do or fear of getting caught?

We never thought our platform would get so big. It took us by surprise, but we are proud of how far we have come and that we are creating a culture of change. Our goal was never to instill fear in brands, but to educate and inspire them to be more authentic, inclusive and transparent in their business practices. We shed light on questionable actions.

Do you think your followers really care about these issues or is it also about the corresponding drama that ensues?

The issues that our followers care about most are the lack of representation and inclusivity, transparency and sustainability in the beauty industry, as well as cultural appropriation. They are tired of seeing beauty brands misrepresent different cultures as a means to sell products, the waste and harm to the environment that they create and their reluctance to embrace people of color and minorities. We believe that our followers care about these issues deeply; they resonate with them and our followers share the same passion about them that we do. Obviously, we don't expect all of our stories to resonate with all of our followers -- we are open to a constructive dialogue.

You have been accused of being a brand yourself or promoting a bully culture; what would you say to that?

We tell them that we aren't a brand because we are not. We don't love, hate or blacklist anyone. Our focus is on creating an honest beauty industry.

In the vein of transparency, would you ever consider revealing yourself?

We don't plan to. We believe that staying anonymous keeps us objective and unbiased as much as possible and lets us stand up to brands with infinite resources. We want the focus to be on the issues we highlight, not the people who work hard to highlight them.





The Insta Mall

The rise of the Instagram brand has created the Instagram mall. *By Hilary Milnes*

When digitally native apparel brand The Arrivals launched a limited edition tie-dye sweatshirt for Pride Month in June, the company posted an Instagram announcing the giveaway, prompting followers to comment for a chance to win a piece from the collection. The post garnered more than 3,000 comments and sparked an idea for a full, Instagram-only launch, which went live in August.

To buy an item from the tie-dye collection, customers were instructed to direct message the brand on Instagram

with their size, style preference and email. The 50-piece collection sold out in about 15 minutes. Jeff Johnson, founder of The Arrivals, said that the brand wasn't interested in setting up a glossy landing page that would prompt customers to follow a traditional path to purchase from Instagram to buy something in the collection. Johnson said the brand wanted to experiment with a new way to shop that better fitted how people currently liked to use Instagram: Attention has shifted to ephemeral Stories, which are inherently less polished than the main Instagram

feed. Even in the feed, Johnson says, he's felt fatigue set in around perfected posts, particularly the sort that customers have come to expect from brands' thoroughly manicured feeds.

"We thought, 'What is the most minimal amount of formality we can implement around this?'" says Johnson. "There's a lack of formality in how people communicate on Instagram, and there's social currency in being able to have an experience that's exclusive to you -- you knew about it, you had first access. It's easy for folks to slap a label on something as



for folks to slap a label on something as being limited edition, but what makes it actually 'special'? Customers can sniff that out now."

Through the Instagram DMs -- which Johnson says resulted in a bottleneck of hundreds of messages that the customer service team had to tackle for hours after the collection it sold out, making for an imperfect process -- customers could chat with the customer service team one-on-one. For The Arrivals, which sells online and has run temporary pop-ups but doesn't operate a permanent store, the intimate messaging format gave it a chance to offer a level of service to customers (albeit, in this instance, a select 50 who were quick enough to snag a piece from the limited run) that disappears in online

transactions. There was no other platform, Johnson felt, that the brand could strike the combination of tapping into a visually viral trend with direct messaging and commerce.

The rise of the Instagram brand has given way to the Instagram mall.

While The Arrivals backchanneled its Instagram launch, Instagram has been investing in corralling the commerce it's helped to facilitate through brand marketing and the rise of influencer links onto its platform. With tools like product stickers in Instagram Stories, the addition of a shopping channel in Instagram's Explore feed and in-app checkout through product tags in posts, Instagram is positioning itself as the best way for brands to get in front of existing and potential customers

and drive sales. Brands -- particularly fashion brands -- have harnessed these capabilities in acquiring new customers. Even as that's gotten more competitive and expensive, on platforms like Facebook and Google, Instagram's natural positioning as a place where people scroll through product images from brands and influencers alike, swapping comments and asking questions about where to buy them, has pushed it to evolve to the closest online incarnation of the shopping mall.

Unlike the online marketplaces, like Spring and Orchard Mile that have tried to rethink department store retail by amassing product from as many stores and brands as possible in an effort to replicate the mall experience online, Instagram is curated by the users themselves. By giving

customers a 360-degree view of brands -- through feeds, Stories and influencer posts -- they choose to follow and pursue, and a direct line to where they can shop them, Instagram is evolving into what the internet's mall should be: a transient representation of current trends and users' interests that changes as dynamically as those trends and interests.

"In the context of Instagram, you're expecting to learn more and get nurtured down the funnel through the content," says Joe Yakuel, the founder and CEO of the marketing agency Agency Within. "But customers aren't thinking about funnels. They're thinking about an emotional connection with a brand that drives them to care enough that they're ready to shop. That can happen, top to bottom, all on

Instagram."

According to Johnson, Instagram's power is in establishing the brand's aesthetic and positioning, both in ways that the brand can control as well as the ways brands can't. Influencers who post about products unpaid drive sales in ways that brands can't predict. Johnson also noted the role of tagged photos on Instagram to help establish who a brand is and what they stand for, as well as who else cares about a brand. That type of social currency -- where customers promote and establish creative content for a brand unprompted -- can't be replicated in other settings, says Johnson.

"We've heard from customers who go directly to a brands' tagged photos to get a clearer picture of who they actually

are. There has to be cohesion on Instagram, and a brand can't control all of that," says Johnson. "I'm skeptical when you see a lot of paid media or beautiful content on a certain feed and then there's a lack thereof in the tagged content."

Instagram's version of the mall, then, is a reflection of the brand's currency in culture, from a community perspective as well as how aggressively it's pushing its way into the narrative with paid posts. Johnson says that the combination of organic and paid media on Instagram is the best signifier of a brand's success.

"Instagram's gotten to a place where brands can paint, and benefit from other customers painting, that full picture," says Yakuel. ■



5

Work

Mocktail Culture

Being sober, or sober curious, may be more popular than ever.

By Kristina Monllos

In July, freelance creative director and founder of Dream Nation, Love Yulia Laricheva, hosted a networking event at Reception Bar on New York City's Lower East Side. Fifteen attendees gathered, shared what they aspire to and swapped contacts to help them achieve their goals over drinks -- only this time those drinks were fancy yet alcohol-free elixirs rather than the booze that traditionally flows at networking events.

“I want to put together events that get people comfortable with being sober,” says Laricheva. “Holding a drink makes it more comfortable and easier to open up but I want to create a space where people don’t feel the pressure to drink, where they can come together and create a strong network, which is what people are missing in the end.”

Taking the most common and readily available social lubricant -- alcohol -- out of events like Laricheva’s isn’t a new concept. But exploring sobriety, like by doing a month free of alcohol a la Dry January and creating spaces to socialize while sober may be more popular than it has ever been as millennials and Gen Z are reportedly drinking less than the generations before them. In 2018, Berenberg Research found that Gen Z reportedly drinks 20% less than millennials and 64% of Gen Z respondents apparently believe they will continue to drink less than their older counterparts. While it’s hard to quantify exactly what drinking less looks like, as an article in *The Atlantic* detailed this



past spring, exploring sober culture has become popular enough to create sober influencers. And, over the last year-and-a-half, sober bars like Getaway, Ambrosia Elixirs and pop-ups like Listen Bar have cropped up in New York City.

"It's a direct correlation to the rise of wellness," says Quynh Mai, founder at Moving Image & Content, of the current fascination with sober culture.

"People are choosing \$25 boutique fitness classes over \$25 cocktails. Holistic wellness is the new luxury; purchasing and participating in wellness brands have almost usurped the bragging rights of having a great cocktail. It's better for your Instagram. Drunkenness has given way to mindfulness. The paragon of a life well-lived is more about achieving balance and piling up experiences over wild nights. After all, a raging hangover is hard to square with dawn meditation. It's no coincidence that sober culture is rising at a time when boutique fitness studios are popping up in every possible variation. Even the biggest substance abuse epidemic in America -- opioids -- traces its roots to people seeking relief from pain.

"Wellness is such an exploding trend as we are a lot more curious and concerned with our health, the environment, our well-being," says Radha Agrawal, co-founder and CEO of the early morning dance party craze Daybreaker. "We wanted to create an environment that wasn't a preachy sober environment but was one where they could practice being sober, being present with themselves, meeting other people and falling in love on the dance floor without being hopped up on substances."

Five-and-a-half years ago, Agrawal co-founded Daybreaker, after a trip to Burning Man where she had an incendiary experience while dancing sober one early morning. Unsure if it would become popular, Agrawal created the community on the assumption that people wanted a community like Daybreaker. She was right. Now, Daybreaker has roughly 500,000 subscribers to its email alerts for its parties and Agrawal estimates that between 70-80% of those subscribers have attended a Daybreaker event.

"At the end of the day, being drunk has to do with connection and belonging or lack thereof," says Agrawal. "I drink because I want to belong to the experience more freely. When I'm sober I feel like I don't belong, and I need to hop myself up on something. Belonging is the root cause of our abuse of drugs and alcohol and also the best friend to sobriety."

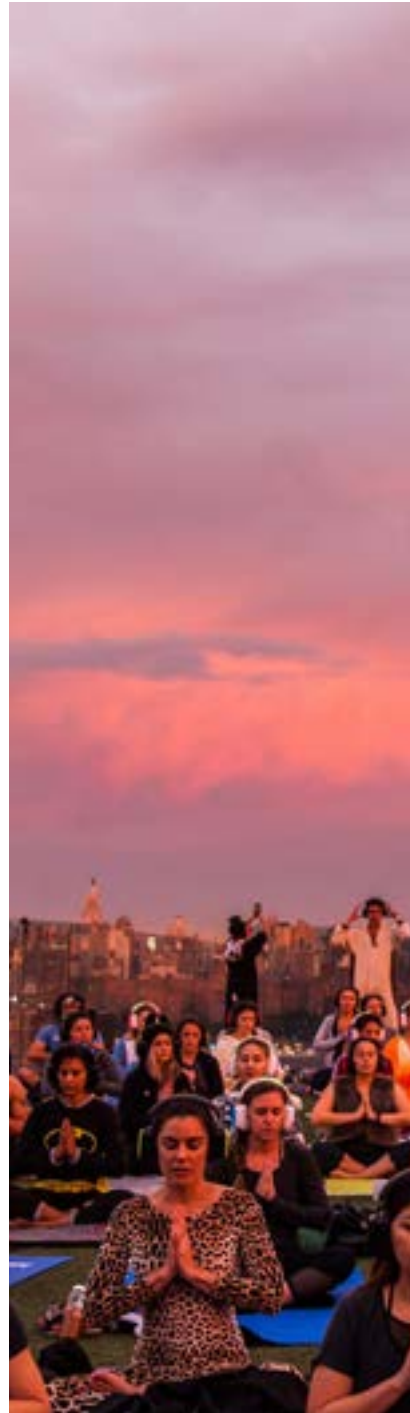
Alcohol-free brands, like Pepsi-Co's tea brand Pure Leaf and its seltzer brand Bubly, are starting to recognize the popularity of sober culture. In August, Pure Leaf hosted what it called a Modern Day Tea Social inspired by children's book "Eloise," which featured alcohol-free mixed drinks. At the same time, Bubly has teamed up with mixologist Julia Momose to create "spirit-free" cocktails to appeal to this cultural shift.

Cultural consultancy Sparks & Honey believes that we're likely only seeing the beginning of this trend, with bars, restaurants and beverage companies see the demand now and will start to offer a range of products and experiences to answer to it.

Still, the popularity of sober exploration comes at a time when what it means to be sober may be shifting. For those in recovery, sobriety has meant being free of anything mind or mood altering that affects you from the neck down. But that may not always be the case for those exploring sober culture now. "The definition of sobriety has somewhat changed, due to what's available," says Rebecca Rosoff, co-founder of LA-based The Kimbra Group.

Substances like CBD are more readily available now than they ever were. For one creative who has been sober for over 10 years, using CBD has helped them cope with anxiety. "It helps my mental health and helps me be my sober self," the creative says, adding that the use of microdosing psychedelics like mushrooms

has also become popular. "People who consider themselves sober may use substances like that, like a one-degree shift. The new definition may honestly be more about self-searching and be more in touch with, 'What is sobriety to me?'"



Slacktivism

Productivity apps are making us sicker and less productive.

By Lucinda Southern

In July, a magazine publisher sent out a proposal outlining a new content strategy to a client. The snag was this proposal skipped the usual internal sign-off process -- due to a wider team of people working on it remotely -- so the deck was replete with spelling errors, incorrect images and unapproved strategy.

Unusually for this publisher, the final deck was shared on Slack, the popular workplace tool.

Suggested edits were lost in a flurry of messages and not every team member had the app downloaded on their phone. It's an easy mistake to make and a common occurrence.

"Slack can make people hasty," says an executive at the magazine publisher. "I don't want to be in a group chat that spins between something pertinent and banal office banter. Sign-off processes for client briefs require a more meticulous way of working. With Slack, I draw the line."

Slack emerged in 2013, an internal tool for developers working on the now-defunct online game, Glitch. The goal: Unshackle office communication from the hierarchical structure of email to collaborative workflows glamorized by Silicon Valley's workforce. But not all corporate cultures fit that mould.

Since then, Slack has been criticized for fueling unproductivity, shirking privacy, allegedly not taking harassment seriously enough and, perhaps most unfairly, for blurring the lines between work and socializing. In a lot of cases these claims are not distinctive to Slack. But a broader emphasis on striking a better work-life balance means some people, and

companies, are communicating elsewhere.

A common critique of workplace messaging is that they distract. When Slack experienced an outage for a few hours in June 27, 2018, those who had RescueTime, productivity tracking software, installed on their browsers behaved in a more productive way.

"The structure of how time is spent within companies we see first in their Slack data, so it's a prequel and a sequel of all communication, and that's a good thing," says Jan Rezab, CEO and founder of Time is Ltd., which helps organizations improve productivity. The problem, he adds, is overcommunication, when people use Slack as a chat rather than a communication channel.

In a company of 1,000 employees, there is, on average, one channel per user, according to research by Time is Ltd. An average Slack user gets a message -- either direct or in a channel they are active in -- every two to three minutes. When it takes roughly 25 minutes to return to a task, this is obviously terrible for productivity.

It's worth repeating that it's not Slack at fault, but the way people use it. Companies can structure and monitor their Slack use. Notifications can be muted and basic hygiene factors -- like auto-deleting channels, restricting new channel creation and mentioning people in channels rather than direct messaging -- make it more manageable.

"There are many things that culminated to this culture of overwork," says Hannah Elderfield, senior behavioural analyst at consumer behavioral insights firm, Canvas8. "A lot of people don't have a regular nine-to-five where they switch off at the end of the day."

A study on 142 employees in 2018, co-authored by William Becker, a Virginia Tech associate professor, highlights the negative impacts of 'always on' culture. "Always on' organizational culture is often

unaccounted for or disguised as a benefit," the report says. "Our research exposes the reality: 'flexible work boundaries' often turn into 'work without boundaries,' compromising an employee's and their family's health and well-being."

There are moves to rein in the tyranny of Slack. A New Zealand real-estate firm has introduced a four-day working week. A Japanese construction company blasts out the theme song from "Rocky," ("Gonna Fly Now"), on loudspeaker at 6 p.m. to remind employees to actually go home. At the extreme level, France has passed a law banning work emails outside office hours.

Slack, with its GIFs, private channels and simple layout puts it alongside personal messaging apps like WhatsApp. When employees fall into using as such, without parameters, is where it becomes a problem.

"That behavior wasn't predicted," notes Elderfield.

For others, Slack also represents a much wider encroachment of tech Silicon Valley culture.

"I don't want to be 'always on', I don't want to be contactable at all times and I am not a profit-making robot for someone else to use up," says the magazine publishing exec. "Facebook at work, Slack, beanbags and free coffee gives me the chills."

Company culture, support and flexibility all play a role. According to Rezab, once a company gets to around 70 people it benefits from assigning specific hires to monitor and manage platform usage.

"Enhanced communications are beneficial, it's when you start not having any rules around the use where it becomes a problem," says Elderfield. "That lack of control, the blurring of boundaries, that's when people get stressed and it bleeds into unproductivity." □

Play it Again

The career “mulligan” isn’t something to be scared of.

By Jack Marshall

Attempts:
34865940



Three weeks after starting a new job in marketing for Condé Nast, Jane Ashen Turkewitz walked into her boss’s office and quit.

She wasn’t entirely convinced she’d made the right decision when she accepted the offer, and after just a handful of days on the job she quickly realized she should have trusted her gut. The role she’d walked into wasn’t what she was led to believe it would be, and despite an attractive salary and title, she was miserable.

Rather than stick it out and “put in a year” for the sake of her resume, Turkewitz decided instead that the best course of action was to accept she’d made a mistake and to move on.

“I took a mulligan,” she says.

Anyone who plays amateur golf is familiar with the concept of the “mulligan.” On the course, it’s an opportunity to retake a shot without penalty, typically following a regrettable decision, a lapse of concentration, a moment of ambition exceeding ability or -- as is most often the case -- a combination of the three.

In their work lives, as on the golf course, nobody gets it right all the time. Not every career decision pans out the way people expect, not every role they take is going to be a good fit and not every company is going to live up to their expectations.

“It happens at some point to most people. It’s extraordinarily common,” says Turkewitz, who now works as an executive search consultant for digital media and technology companies at Hi-Touch Executive Search.

What’s more, there’s less of a stigma now than there once was around trying new things or making bolder career leaps that don’t quite work out. In an age when athletes, actors and reality TV stars can become venture capitalists, DTC moguls and Presidents, going out on a limb and trying something new perhaps isn’t frowned upon the way it once was.

There’s a variety of reasons people may need to course-correct in their professional lives, of course. No two situations are alike and everyone’s circumstances, goals and expectations vary. For some, like Turkewitz, it’s a case of simply accepting the wrong role. For others, it’s having success in one area and overestimating their ability to apply it to a new one.

Meanwhile, situational factors are constantly changing, too. A company might reorganize and change roles and

responsibilities shortly after a new hire; a startup might pivot in an entirely new direction because of market forces outside of their control, or new management might come into a company with new views on personnel.

Randall Rothenberg -- who spent less than two months as Time Inc.’s chief digital officer in 2011 before bouncing back to resume his role leading the Interactive Advertising Bureau -- puts that situation largely down to unusual circumstances. Just days after joining the company, his then-boss and Time Inc. chief executive, Jack Griffin, was abruptly ousted, which subsequently spelled the end of Rothenberg’s short tenure, too.

“I loved it; I loved the people; I loved the guy who hired me; he got fired,” Rothenberg says of his experience at Time. He was subsequently offered his chief executive role at the IAB back, which he’s held ever since.

Rothenberg said he doesn’t believe in things working out for the best or for the worst, but said he learned from his Time Inc. experience nonetheless. “I’ve had a great career, and everything was either valuable in its time, or valuable in retrospect -- including the failures.”

Expressing a similar sentiment, one senior media executive said his own mulligan experience taught him some valuable lessons about where his passions and strengths really lie. Or, more specifically, where they don’t.

“Responsibility and the money you make are moot if you do not have the passion it takes to wake up every morning and deliver that extra 1% that separates good from great within any industry,” he said.

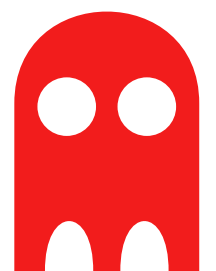
Despite the positives -- and changing attitudes towards short-lived roles -- multiple senior executives contacted for this article still declined to talk about their experiences on the record or asked to remain anonymous, which highlights their ongoing sensitivity to the issue. Most would opt to delete roles that didn’t work out from their LinkedIn profiles and pretend it didn’t happen than talk about them publicly.

But rather than attempting to scrub mentions of an ill-advised three-month stint at a blockchain startup from search results, those with mulligans on their records might be better off learning instead how to better articulate what they gained from those experiences.

“So many people just get up and move around. But if you’ve decided to leave quickly, you have to be able to explain why with confidence and clarity,” Turkowicz said.

But if you do decide to take a mulligan, Turkowicz would advise doing so as quickly as possible rather than attempting to save face by sticking around for a year or two. That’s something that more senior executives are typically more comfortable doing, she said. They can often tell sooner when something isn’t going to work out.

“If you’re not on a path you want to be on, waiting around is just going to take you further down the wrong path, she said. “It’s all experience. You live and learn.”



The Outsiders

Veja's Sébastien Kopp on creating the latest cult sneaker brand.

By Danny Parisi

In 2004, Sébastien Kopp and Francois-Ghislain Morillion started a tiny sneaker brand based in Paris with a radical idea: create ultra-sustainable and ultra-ethical sneakers and offset production cost by eradicating all advertising spend.

Fifteen years later, the brand is sold around the world and seen on the feet of royalty and corporate CEOs alike. Here, Kopp walks us through what the early days of Veja were like, what philosophies drove the brand's early decision-making and how he and Morillion got to where they are today.

When we first started Veja, we wanted nothing to do with marketing or market research or anything like that. We just wanted to make the shoes that we wanted to make in the way we wanted to make them. I didn't have much experience in fashion before Veja, and I don't think I could be a designer of another brand. We can only do what we do.

In the beginning we were students in political science and economics. We traveled around a lot, we were eager to see different places and meet different people. We were motivated early on by meeting people who made shoes in Brazil.

We started Veja with just the two of us and €10,000 (\$14,040) between us. At the time it was more of a test, or a kind of school project, just an adventure that we came up with with no idea how it would evolve or what it would look like. We spent two months in Brazil looking for partners, one month learning how to make the shoes. We did the first samples. I came back to Paris with a few samples in my luggage and took them straight to a trade show. The first day, there were a ton of orders and the brand took off from there. But the buyers didn't really care about the sustainability or the handmade in Brazil, they just liked the shoes.

I don't know what the biggest challenge was in the early days because honestly we didn't really think about the problems we would face. We had lots of people telling us that what we wanted to do would be too complicated or not viable, but when you're climbing a mountain, you can't worry too much about the snow or the rain. You just have to take it a step at a time. Some of the steps were more difficult than others at first, but we made it work. If you focus too much on the problems,

then at a certain point you start to create problems just to solve them.

With Ghislain, when one of us made a mistake, we didn't dwell on it or waste time on judgement, saying "You made a mistake." We just fixed it and moved on.

At the beginning, we did absolutely everything. Just us. Today we still do a lot of the day-to-day stuff but we also have 130 employees right now. Other than that, the company is still quite similar to the early days. Ghislain and I are heavily involved and doing different things every day.

We want everyone to work hard but also at 6:30 p.m. we kick everyone out and tell them to go spend time with their family, with their friends, with their lover. I have dinner with my family almost every night. Sure you can push yourself and work a lot for a few months if you have a big projects, but eventually you start to make bad decisions, you become crazy, you start to lose employees and that's not good. We have a very low turnover, plenty of people are still here from more than 10 years ago. Maybe that's not the way other companies do things, but that's what we do. ▣

"When you're climbing a mountain, you can't worry too much about the snow or the rain."



| Sébastien Kopp

Final Word

By Brian Morrissey



With the slow slummer over, publishing executives returned to their offices for the full sprint to the end of the year.

The fourth quarter, when years are made or lost, is looming large. This year's anxiety is heightened with a series of unknowns.

The big challenges facing publishers are well known. The ad pie is shrinking, Google and Facebook are as powerful as ever, efforts to diversify revenue streams are unproven. Add in to the mix the steady drumbeat of downcast economic forecasts, and it's a recipe for a tough end to the year. The struggles publishers have had over the past few years have taken place against the backdrop of a booming economy in an unprecedented recessions. The worry now is building defenses for a downturn.

Some of the doomsday talk is overrated, to be sure. Recessions are normal and usually aren't cataclysmic like the dislocation brought on by the financial crisis. They serve a cleansing role to market economies, freeing up resources and punishing the misallocation of capital. The long-awaited consolidation of big digital media players should in theory pick up pace in a downturn. The long-rumored combination of some arrangement of Refinery29, Vice, BuzzFeed and GroupNine could take place. (GroupNine's recent round of \$50 million in investment from existing backers Discovery and Axel

Springer doesn't necessarily affect the possibility of a merger.)

The pivot to paid has its standout success cases. Everyone wants to point to the successes of The New York Times and The Washington Post. But that leaves a vast middle of the market that's not at the top rung of premium or niche enough. The market is now flooded with low-cost digital memberships. It's hard to see how the math will work for most. Bundles, whether in the form of Apple News+ or new efforts like Scroll, have spotty track records.

Another unknown that remains is the impact of the wave of unionization on digital media operations when times are tougher. For the workers organizing, unions offer some reassurance of job security and pay raises. But for companies, management privately grumbles the union contracts will quickly become millstones on companies that need to react quickly to the market, particularly in a downturn. Studies have shown unions broadly lead to better conditions and pay for existing workers but shrink the overall pool of workers as costs rise for companies. At a time of record low unemployment, that's not much of an issue overall, but recessions typically lead to companies shedding workers.

A great uncertainty the industry is grappling with is the overall impact of

the shift to privacy. For years, privacy was dismissed as a fringe concern of professional activists and weirdos. Most in tech, advertising and even publishing ascribed to former Sun Microsystems CEO Scott McNealy's ethos: "Privacy is dead. Get over it." No more. The public has awakened to the vast amounts of data gobbled up by platforms. The resulting backlash by regulators and even the public could naturally lead to cures that are worse than the sickness. It's hard to imagine a good result from the Trump administration dismantling Google, for example.

Early efforts to rein in the free and easy use of data, in particular the General Data Protection Regulation, did not cause the sky to fall like many warned. But further measures to regulate the targeting of ads will have a profound impact on a digital ad system built on that very principle. Google, hardly a disinterested party, released a study showing that publishers would lose half their programmatic ad revenue without third-party cookie targeting. Many publishing execs pushed back, but the great unknown is how efforts to curb targeting will impact advertiser decisions. It is very easy to see a scenario where advertisers opt to pull money overall from digital media, with its bots and fraud and sketchy ad placements, in favor of the tried and true analog media. ■

Convince people you know what a **DSP** is.

Get the Digiday Daily newsletter in your inbox.

digiday.com/newsletters

“
**There are
some hurdles to
programmatic
efficiency we just
have to live with.**”



Constant Evolution in Marketing Technology

For over a decade the EMX leadership team has been improving the programmatic industry for marketers and publishers. At every level, we remain committed to constant evolution – solving today's challenges and anticipating those to come.



AN ENGINE COMPANY