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Retail Futures

Culture-Coded Retail

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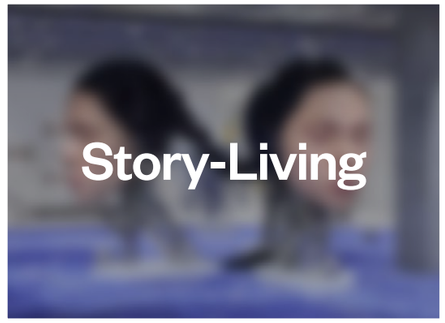
35 Strategic Worksheets



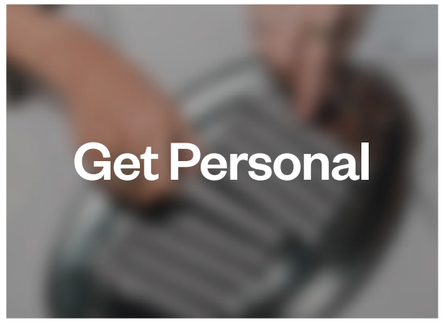
Front cover: Staging Modernity by **Formafantasma** for Cassina at Milan Design Week 2025, Italy; Above: Glossier Fleur experience by **Random Studio**, France

At a Glance

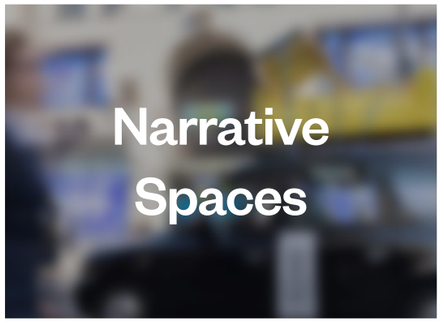
Key topics and takeaways from the report



In a culture-coded retail landscape stores will become ever-more immersive and personalised. These 'story-living' concepts invite consumers into spaces to both connect and participate



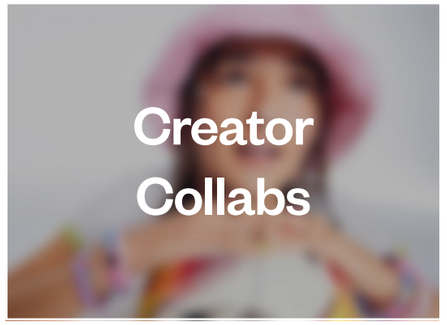
Brands will need to embrace the idea of empowering people to influence, curate and co-create their own store experiences. Creator communities are becoming innovation partners



Physical retail spaces will become narrative spaces in order to remain relevant. They should create a sense of cultural relevance, including content-worthy moments



Malls are seeing a resurgence in popularity among younger generations experiencing the community and entertainment that these shopping hangouts can offer



Creator communities are driving grassroots discovery for retailers, which are offering mentorship in return for a collaborative relationship that allows authenticity to thrive



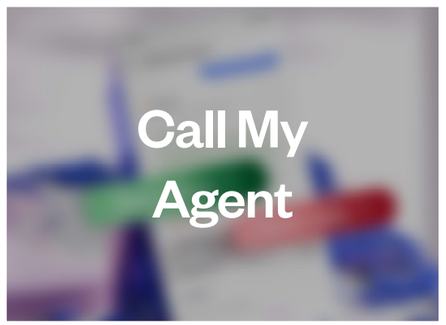
Third spaces are evolving beyond retail to offer social connectivity, build communities inspired by health and wellness, and create urban hubs that meet longevity goals



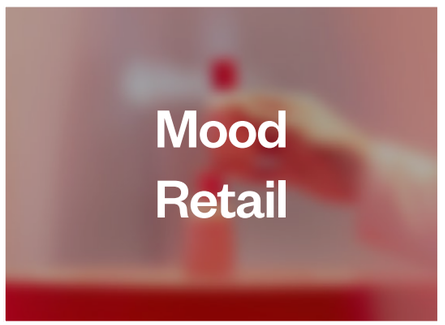
Consumers seek brand events to be with their local community, be the first to experience collaborations and feel a sense of belonging as cultural moments are offered as a reward for their loyalty



With the resurgence of global travel, brands are adopting tourism-driven experiences that offer consumers a 'fourth space' in which to seek brand connection



Agentic retail is the future of personalisation in-store and online, and consumers will value AI concierges for understanding not just their brand preferences – but their brand nuances too



Future-thinking brands will understand how to foster communities and how to build desire for products based on mood and the way people feel when they enter a physical space

Key Statistics

Images left to right: Kebab shop pop-up by Ikea and Lab 54, UK; Depop, UK

A brand's cultural involvement accounts for **25%** of a consumer's purchasing decision (Magna)

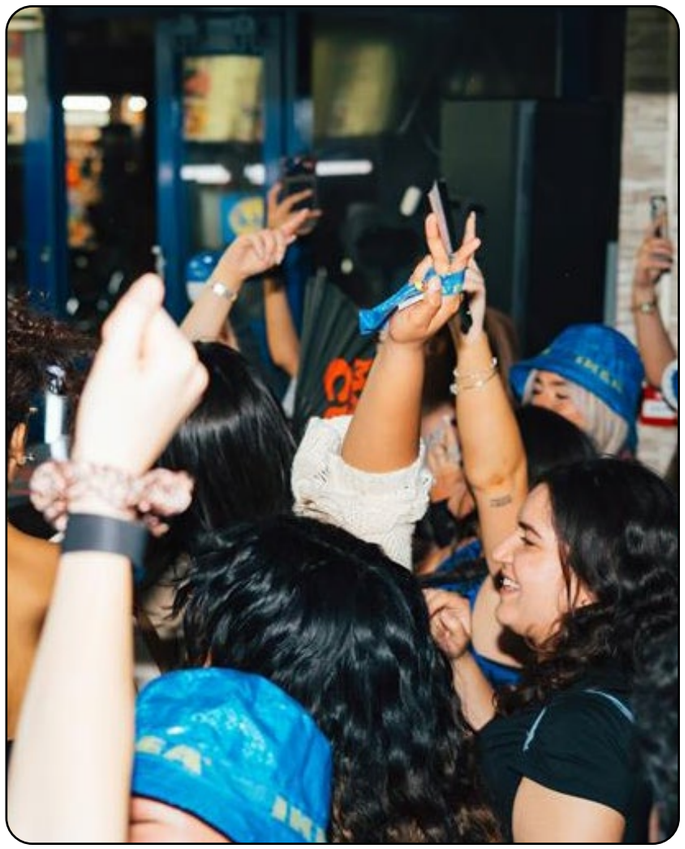
25%

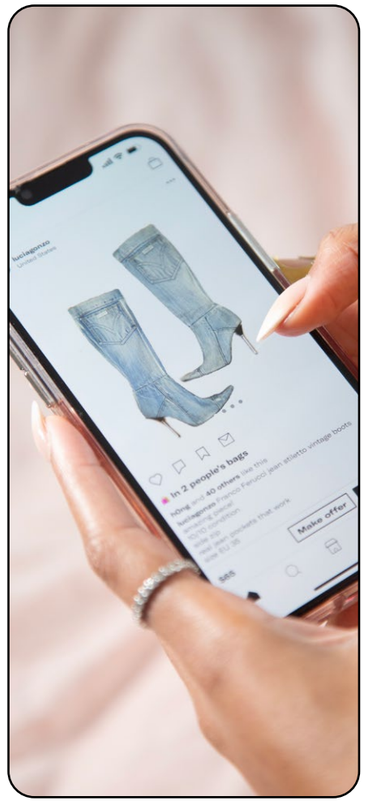
Working with relevant cultural partners has become increasingly important to a brand's influence, rising by **217%** since 2020 (Dazed)

217%

81%

of consumers say brands that build authentic connections attract their business (Alter Agents)





76%

of shoppers say online retail is dull, with **29%** calling it a 'chore' (Criteo)

1 in 5

UK ultra-high-net-worth individuals are Memory Makers – mainly Gen X and Millennials – who are **180%** more likely to see luxury as meaningful experience over status (Havas Media Lux)

Only **9%**

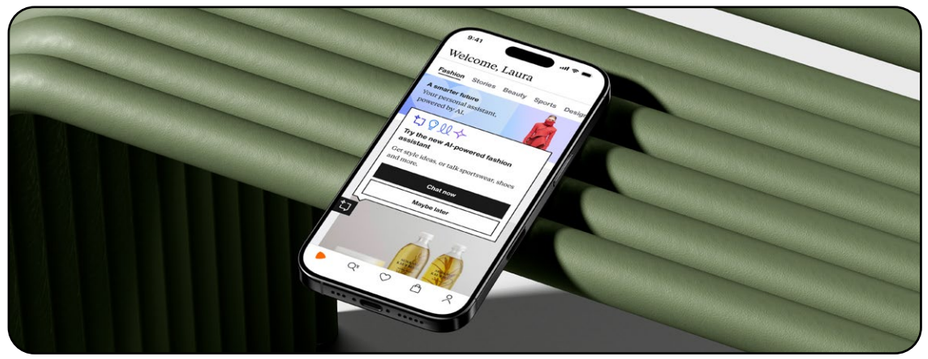
of consumers are satisfied with the physical store experience, citing lack of variety and availability (IBM Institute for Business Value)

Key Statistics

Images left to right: Zalando, Germany; Refy, UK

177%

was the increase in US indoor mall visits on the last Saturday before Christmas 2024, vs the year-to-date daily average (Placer.ai)



£378.6m

($500m) is Walmart's 2024 investment to build/expand 150 locations, remodel 650 stores and purchase Monroeville Mall for £25.7m ($34m) (Retail Dive)

70%

of emotionally engaged consumers spend up to two times or more on brands they are loyal to, compared to fewer than half (49%) of consumers with low emotional engagement (Capgemini)



76%

of UK consumers say AI makes life easier and want generative AI to complete tasks – including ordering products – on their behalf (Adobe Analytics)

38%

of UK consumers are seeking digital detoxes to address the negative impact of online activity (EY)

55%

of consumers want brands to use social media to connect like-minded people, while **36%** are looking for real-life communities (Sprout Social)

Introduction

Digital commerce may offer consumers convenience, but a new generation of in-person retail experiences energised by cultural relevance and built on brand community is luring them back into the store

Lead analysts

Fiona Harkin, *director of foresight*
Alice Crossley, *senior foresight analyst*
Emily Rhodes, *creative lead*
Alison Farrington, *executive retail analyst*

Consumer Foresight and Trends Intelligence, powered by LS:N Global

We are entering an era of Culture-coded Retail, where brands offer physical destinations tailored for the emerging transformation economy. The Future Laboratory's Hyperphysical Stores macrotrend outlined how hyper-stimulating, tactile brand experiences have engaged shoppers. Now, successful stores are evolving – still enriching, emotional, ethereal and exclusive – but increasingly cultural, connective and customised.

Consumers are tired of underwhelming, understocked stores and the online 'sell, sell, sell' of TikTok Shop or Instagram Reels, where influencer impact is waning. Instead, they seek retail that is culturally entertaining and emotionally connective.

These new spaces invite communities to connect deeply with brands, engaging with narratives and playing a role in campaigns. From cinemas to workshops, from cafés to festivals, they are storified, democratised destinations where customers can personalise their experience. This shift offers a version of screen-free entertainment, and ties into consumers' leisure and hospitality pursuits. Longchamp's Vegetable Garden in Shanghai (February–March 2025) embraced this, tapping into a chic gardening trend with workshops and gamified elements available on WeChat.

'We are seeing an evolution: from those successful stores that are not only *enriching*, *emotional*, *ethereal* and *exclusive,* but which are also increasingly *cultural, connective* and *customised*'

Brands have long tried to define culture – but real culture thrives on authenticity, connection and shared meaning. As technology advances, consumers seek experiences that are real, relatable and rooted in community.

The rise of hyper-personalised, community-driven interactions marks a shift: people want to participate, learn, co-create and belong through transformative experiences. The challenge for retailers is not only to embrace AI tools for personalisation but also to offer physical experiences that foster connection, collaboration and life-enhancing memories – creating deeper customer relationships.



Retail brands must now act as curators. Gemma Ruse, co-founder of Studio XAG, says: 'New generations are looking for brands that encourage self-expression through creativity and co-creation. Collective co-creation models invite customers to move from passive consumers to engaged, creative participants. Brands need to embrace the idea of empowering people to influence, curate and co-create their own experience.'

So, when your audience shows up, brands must show up too. Culture-coded Retail is about more than products – it's about innovation, co-creativity and human connection. Consumers want to collect experiences and knowledge, not just goods. Brands must entertain and engage, delivering a dopamine hit that offers a break from economic turbulence, polarisation and everyday stress.



Methodology

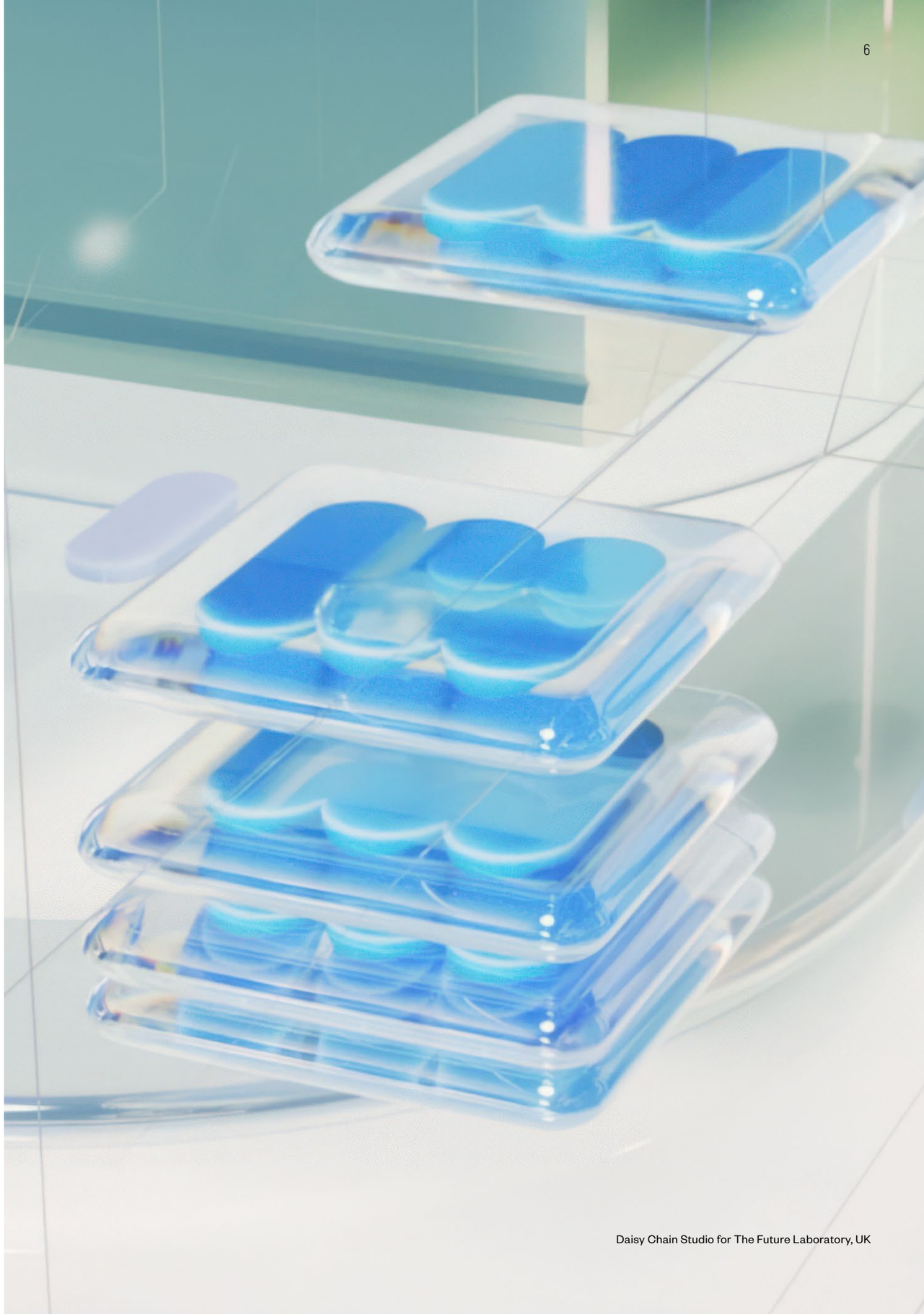
Strategic foresight is the most valuable tool you can adopt to identify future prosperity. Despite our reputation for getting it right, we can't predict the future. There is no crystal ball.

However, our methodology enables clients to interpret and frame all their decisions about future risk within a brand, consumer or organisational context that is **provable, practical** and **minimises uncertainty**.

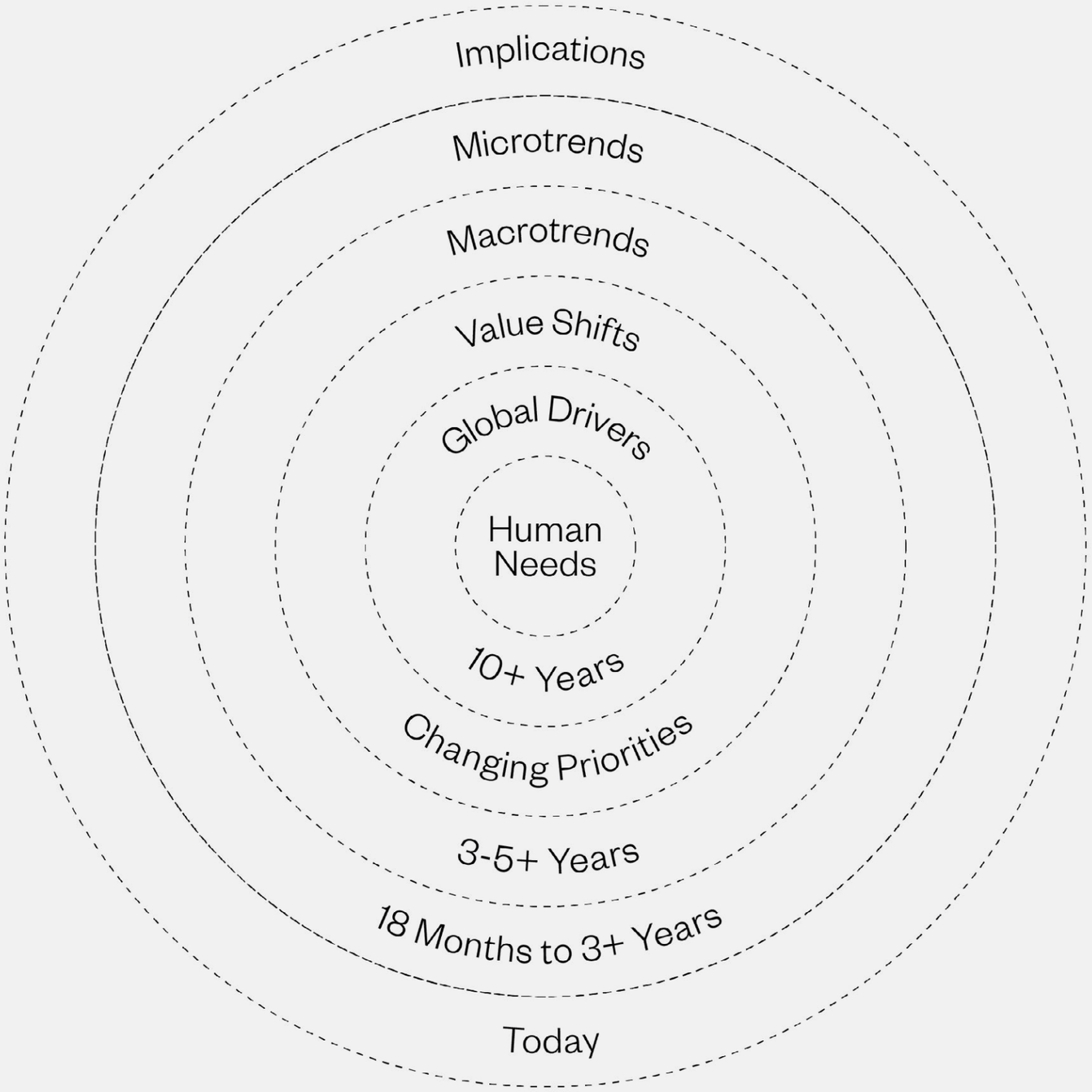
We do this by understanding the influence of **six global drivers** causing profound, consistent – and therefore relatively predictable – change.

Their impact is assessed against seven core human needs and the ensuing value shifts that change consumers' attitudes and behaviours.

This leads us to identify emerging **macrotrends** and **microtrends**, and ascertain what their implications are for the future landscape.



Daisy Chain Studio for The Future Laboratory, UK



The Future Laboratory's proprietary foresight methodology

Methodology: Foresight Process

At the heart of The Future Laboratory is a unique proprietary methodology that allows us to determine, define and track the key drivers of change affecting the future. We do this by tracking:

Human Needs : Universal

The foundation of our society based on a value system that supports human nature's physical and emotional programming.

Global Drivers : 10-years+ Horizon

Key global drivers represent the cultural, social, economic, political, technological and environmental eventualities reshaping the world we live in.

Value Shifts : Ever-evolving

The new ways in which we strive to meet these human needs, shaped by our contemporary context.

Macrotrends : 3–5 years+ Cultural and Societal Shifts

The cultural manifestations of new and emerging attitudes worldwide as shown by the behaviours of innovators and early adopters.

Microtrends : 1–3 years+ Lifestyle

Specific and tangible business innovations already emerging across key lifestyle categories.

Methodology: Global Drivers



Accelerating Technologies

For billions of people around the world, technology has become enmeshed with their humanity – often clashing as we adjust to this new Synthocene Era. Adoption and innovation continue to accelerate, specifically AI, and increasingly, quantum technology.



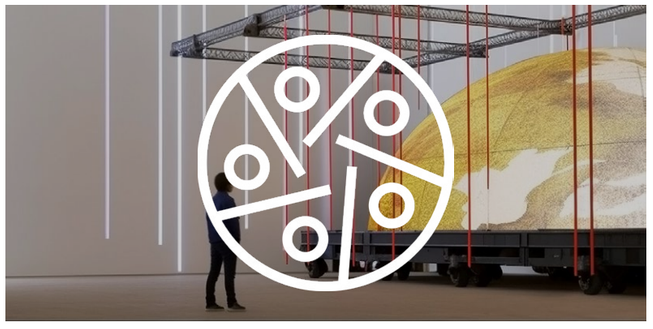
Climate Crisis and Resource Scarcity

We are at a climate tipping point, with increasing disruption and devastation across the globe. Urgency has turned into emergency, existentially threatening humanity and industry. But a growing sense of pragmatism over doomerism is clashing with industry roll-backs on sustainability commitments.



Evolving Demographics

Over the next decade the shape of our global population will change dramatically. Global economic instability due to falling fertility rates and ageing populations in some regions may be rebalanced by a growing youth workforce in others – with far-reaching repercussions for societies and industries.



Fragmenting Societies

Fractious inequalities and divisions are being exposed in a fast-changing, unstable world. The deterioration hinges on the increasing fragility and fragmentation of social, political and environmental ideologies, driving factions into isolated silos and societal polarisation, with apathy and misinformation clouding the way forward.



Micro-globalisation

The liberalised world we live in is inextricably interconnected but it has left us in a state of co-dependency rather than cooperation. Without equitable alignment, resilience may never come from an integrated and interdependent global economy, championing a renewal of localism and national pride.



Urbanising World

Despite the repercussions of a global pandemic, cities remain the epicentres of society. Priorities for living, working and playing in these urban environments are being redefined, with liveability, connectivity, sustainability and health and wellbeing becoming expectations rather than aspirations.



Escapism Retail

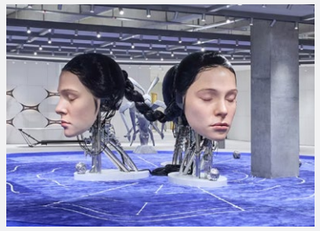
Louis Vuitton's LV The Place Bangkok is a multi-sensory destination that merges retail, gastronomy and exhibition spaces, Thailand

Drivers

Bored of uninspiring stores, algorithmic e-commerce and with growing over-consumption worries, consumers are seeking out physical brand communities and emotive, serendipitous experiences from retail spaces. Retailers must work harder than ever to build cultural connections as customers move on from a post-stuff era

What are the drivers of a macrotrend?

These drivers define the landscape from which the macrotrend is emerging, detailing the consumer attitudes, market and sector shifts, as well as the cultural, social, economic, political, technological and environmental forces shaping a macrotrend. Each driver emerges from one or more of our global drivers



Story-living Retail

We are entering a culture-coded retail landscape where stores will become ever-more immersive and personalised. These ‘story-living’ concepts invite consumers into spaces to both connect and participate



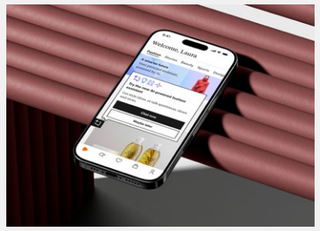
Stuffocation

The concept of enshittification is affecting retail, primarily through the increasing dissatisfaction with online shopping experiences and too much stuff. Brands that invest in more educational yet entertaining content will stand out



Authenticity By Design

Brands are turning to the creator economy to help them with new product development and reach new generations of customers who see co-curation as a marker of authenticity



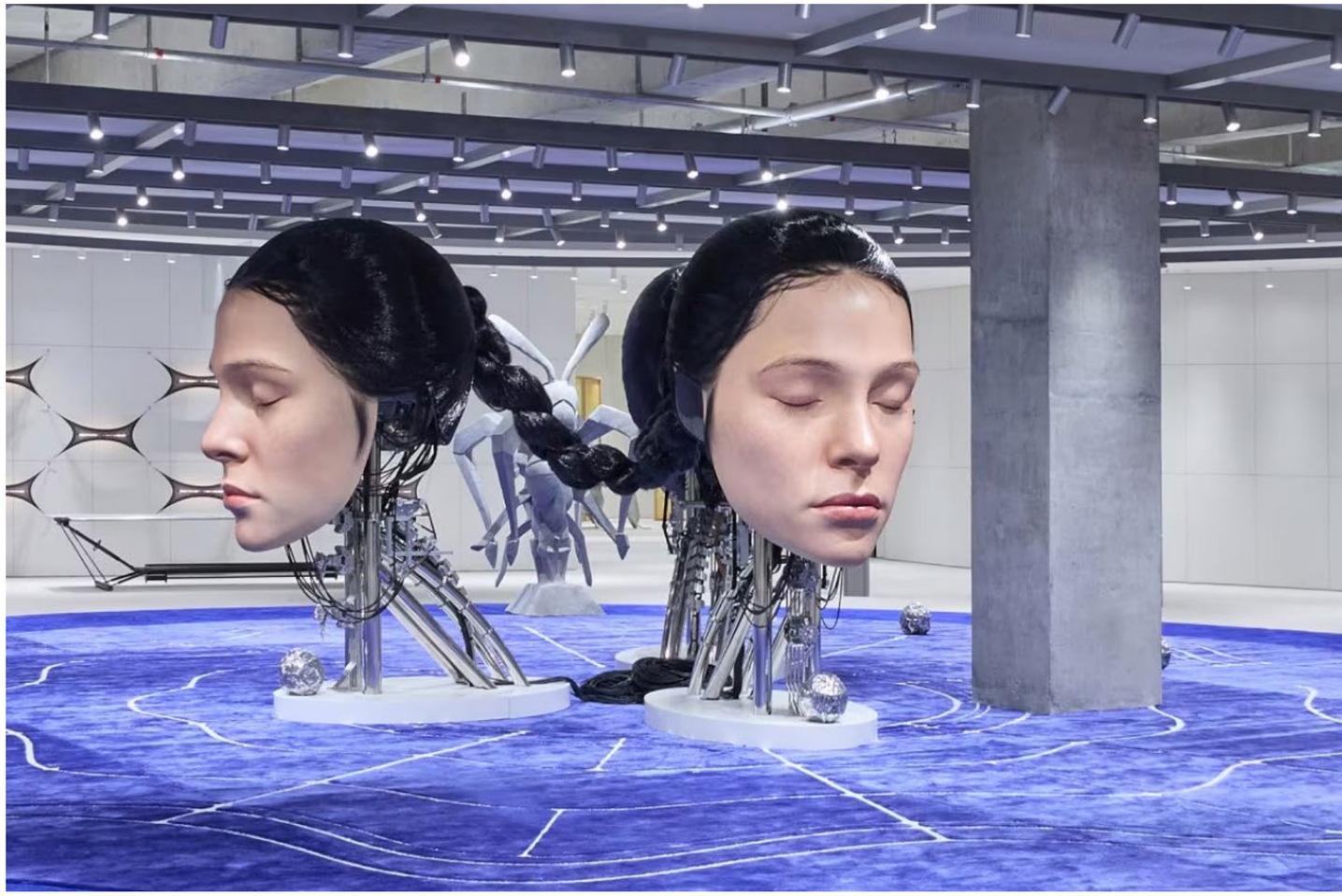
AI Concierges

Consumers are eager for AI-informed shopping; they are looking for products that move quickly from social media to personalised purchase. A new type of AI concierge will facilitate a customer journey based on intuitive prompts and product discovery in-store

76% of consumers describe online shopping as dull, with **78%** feeling overwhelmed by the plethora of choices

Source: Criteo





Left and above: Korean eyewear brand Gentle Monster opened its third Haus Nowhere store in Shenzhen whose giant installations tell an ancient story about giants, insects and animals, China

Story-living Retail

The concept of 'enshittification' is affecting retail, primarily through increasing dissatisfaction with online shopping experiences and – in general – the churn of having too much stuff. The phrase, coined by internet evangelist Cory Doctorow, refers to the degeneration of quality and enjoyment within a platform or service as it grows more commercialised and intrusive, prioritising profit over user experience.

In retail, this issue surfaces as consumers express how online shopping lacks excitement and discovery. Despite being convenient, 76% of consumers in a survey by Criteo described online shopping as dull, with 78% feeling overwhelmed by the plethora of choices.

In the US, consumers describe the physical shopping experience as miserable and like a form of 'retail gymnastics', according to The Wall Street Journal, when they try to find the right size, or even the right merchandise, in stores.

Retail is facing an epidemic of sameness. Many stores look and feel the same, thanks to standardised aesthetics and predictable formulas, which is only being heightened by AI. We are seeing a need for differentiation in an algorithmic age.

This is where narrative intelligence becomes important for brands to consider. Your brain is literally hard-wired to ignore data and focus on narratives, writes researcher Francesco D'Orazio on LinkedIn. 'The ability to understand, create and leverage stories for strategy has become the hidden advantage in today's data-saturated world,' he adds.

Related Global Driver
Fragmenting Societies

Consumers are apathetic towards retail; as a result, they are looking for inspiration in socialised retail settings

Stuffocation

Mindful consumption was trending on social media in January via the #NoBuy2025 movement on TikTok with over 5,000 posts from consumers offering advice about how to change their habits, stick to the essentials to save money and buy less stuff.

Sustainability is still front-of-mind for consumers, who are increasingly prioritising it in their consumption practices, with 85% saying they are experiencing the disruptive impacts of climate change in their lives; 46% say they are buying more sustainable products as a way to reduce their impact on the environment (source: PwC).

As we tracked in our Residential Retail macrotrend, brands should prepare to target consumers with a paradoxical narrative. They have limited budgets, but they have expensive tastes driven by Instagram and TikTok and what they see online. They demand convenience, but they also have a social conscience. They care about sustainability, but they're addicted to fast fashion.

This is a confusing era for consumers, highlighted by the TikTok and Amazon partnership launched in August 2024, which prompted an over-consumption-focused backlash and a spike for creators sharing #deinfluencing content on social media.

Although consumers are more aware of climate change and the need to consume less, brands that invest in more educational, yet entertaining content will stand out. Those that raise awareness of the impact that industries such as fashion, food, beauty, household goods and their production processes have on the planet through storytelling experiences in-store will drive more sales than eco-doom-inducing data on global warming.

Against this backdrop, we are seeing a marked shift towards advocacy over purchases, which is changing the retail landscape to be more activations-driven.

Related Global Driver
Climate Crisis & Resource Scarcity

People are placing more value on memorable, meaningful experiences rather than accumulating material goods

46% of consumers say they are buying more sustainable products as a way to reduce their impact on the environment

Source: PwC



Too Many campaign by Vinted. Produced by **Wolfstreet**, UK

28% of grocery shoppers reported buying products resulting from brand-influencer collaborations, with the figure rising to **56%** among 18–34-year-olds

Source: Mintel, 2024





Left and above: Beauty brand **Refy** builds loyalty through co-creation and community engagement, inviting fans with 1,000+ followers to become brand influencers who collaborate on content and access exclusive perks, UK

Authenticity By Design

Brands are turning to the creator economy to help them with new product development and reach new generations of customers, who see co-curation as a marker of authenticity. Trust is becoming a key factor for the next generation of consumers.

Transparency and authenticity are more important than ever before, not only to drive footfall into retail spaces, but those brands that undertake co-creation initiatives also showcase a deeper understanding of customer needs. Some 28% of grocery shoppers reported buying products resulting from brand-influencer collaborations, with the figure rising to 56% among 18–34-year-olds (source: Mintel, 2024).

Consumers are more open to retailers which offer transparent supply chain information and support start-ups at grassroots level. Retailers are increasingly open to including customers as part of the product design process and to adopt fast moving trends at scale.

TikTok has launched an SME Council in the UK to support small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) with a mission to use the platform for business growth. The initiative brings together a mix of creators, founders and change-makers to collaborate and share ideas. A survey by Retail Economics found that 76% of UK consumers are considering purchasing via platforms like TikTok Shop or Instagram Shopping in 2025, demonstrating the increasing role of social commerce in consumer behaviour.

Creators are likely to play an increasingly integral role in Walmart's merchandise offer. The big box retailer is looking to partner with creators to fuel innovation and NPD in the near future: 'Creators are the life blood of social commerce and we wanted to get closer to that, Walmart chief marketing officer William White told the inaugural Forbes Creator Upfronts conference in October 2024.

Global Driver
Micro-globalisation

Consumers want to collaborate with brands to help shape a more equitable, co-dependent future

76% of consumers say AI is making life easier and they want generative AI agents ‘to take actions and complete tasks on their behalf

Source: Adobe Analytics



Zalando partnered with OpenAI to develop its AI-powered tool providing consumers with personalised recommendations to boost discovery, Germany

AI Concierges

In our EQ-Commerce macrotrend we examined how four pillars of retail – intelligent, interconnected, intimate and intuitive – would point to a highly personalised and engaging shopping experience. The hyper-speed of AI technology adoption by consumers is adding to this.

In our macrotrend The Synthocene Era, which explores the opportunities arising as human and AI intelligence become merged, consumers want meaningful connections with those brands that get both emotional experience and personalisation right.

Consumers are eager for AI-informed shopping. Some 76% of consumers say AI is making life easier and they want generative AI agents ‘to take actions and complete tasks on their behalf – both at home and at work’, according to Adobe Analytics, and this includes ordering products on their behalf. These AI-adopters are looking for products that move quickly from social media to personalised purchase. The emergence of AI concierges that facilitate a customer journey based on intuitive prompts and product discovery in-store will lead the way in this new era.

Retail is becoming increasingly agentified, says Emily Freeland, director of value consulting at Zendesk. ‘You’ve got a concierge service, which is truly sourcing the best information to give the customer – using multiple bots essentially to search large bodies of data to offer the fastest response. Next it will be how do we do that for a live experience in-store?’

‘We want to use technology in a way that it enhances our physical world; where it allows us to facilitate a connection among people and the space they are in,’ says Daan Lucas, founder of Random Studio. ‘We are exploring spatial AI, where a camera understands the world more like a human does. Better tools allow us to create more interesting experiences, enhancing the richness of the physical space, which can enhance humanity.’

Related Global Driver
Accelerating Technologies

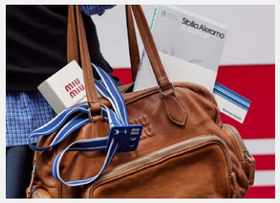
People are increasingly using AI for personal shopping recommendations

Insight

As brands learn to lean on culture for emotional connection with consumers in physical spaces, innovative retailers will embark on story-living pop-ups, creators for co-collaboration and clubland community events

What is Insight?

Insights explore the nascent consumer behaviours, attitudes and trend responses emerging today that will evolve or gain traction in the near future through to 2030. Insights help brands and businesses to understand and identify the opportunities presented by this trend



Storified Retail

Story-living environments blend retail and hospitality to create immersive brand experiences that align with cultural moments. Gen Z crave engaging physical experiences, so brands must rethink retail as agile, transient and participatory



Malls 2.0

Malls are making a comeback, driven by younger consumers seeking cultural and social experiences. Destination retail is thriving again, thanks to a shift to entertainment, dining and in-store events that go beyond traditional shopping



Third Space Wellness

Health and wellness culture is reshaping third spaces – those settings beyond home and work – into places where brands build community, promote wellbeing and foster deeper connection



Creator Economy Value

Retailers are embracing the creator economy, rethinking supply chains to prioritise grassroots discovery. Creator communities are becoming innovation partners, exchanging authenticity and influence for mentorship and collaboration



Built-in RAR Mindset

Store designers and brands are planning ahead for the RAR consumer mindset, which involves a Recycle, Archive, Resale shopping journey. RAR should be a brand mindset, so that in-store areas can champion brand culture



Club Culture

Consumers are seeking brand events to be with their local community and to feel a sense of belonging as cultural moments are served to them as a reward for their loyalty

Storified Retail

Story-living environments blend retail and hospitality to create immersive brand experiences that align with cultural moments. Consumers, especially Gen Z, crave engaging physical experiences; in the US, 57% of Gen Z think of visiting a physical store as an experience if it's worth the effort, according to Adyen (2025).

To meet this demand, brands must rethink retail as agile, transient and participatory. Consumers should be part of the narrative, not just observers.

Pop-ups have become key to this shift. Fast, flexible and culture-driven, they help brands build emotional connections and communities. Strategist Kristoff D'oria di Cirie explains: 'Story-living designs sensory spaces, while story-doing invites customer participation – going beyond traditional storytelling to create deep engagement.'

Lancôme's Domaine de la Rose in Grasse, France, is one example. Set in nearly 10 acres, it offers a fragrance-making class and sensory immersion into the brand's heritage. In 2024, Lancôme brought this experience to Chinese consumers with a flagship outpost in Hainan, mirroring the original journey.

Miu Miu aligned its 2025 Lunar New Year Encounters campaign with ephemeral activations in China: a flower boat in Guangzhou's Liwan Lake Park and a pop-up at Beijing's Shichahai Ice Rink. Bookable via Trip.com, both allowed guests to sip tea, pick bouquets and receive a fortune book for the Year of the Snake, successfully connecting seasonal culture with brand storytelling.

Pop-up cinemas are the latest evolution in branded experience. AMI Paris launched a vintage-style cinema in Seoul's Seongdong-gu to celebrate its collaboration with ambassador Choi Woo Shik. The two-storey cinema invites visitors into AMI's whimsical world of fashion and film, blending narrative with emotion.

These story-living strategies show how temporary spaces, when thoughtfully designed, can foster lasting emotional bonds between brands and audiences.

Miu Miu's Summer Reads pop-ups celebrate influential female authors by gifting customers curated books from branded newsstands in selected cities

Storified Retail

AMI Paris launched a vintage-style cinema in Seoul with ambassador Choi Woo Shik, blending fashion and film in a whimsical two-storey space, South Korea

Consumers, especially Gen Z, crave engaging physical experiences; in the US, **57%** of Gen Z think of visiting a physical store as an experience if it's worth the effort

Source: Adyen, 2025



Above and right: Din Tai Fung at Santa Monica Place, US

Malls 2.0

Malls are making a comeback, driven by younger consumers seeking cultural, social and sensory experiences. Destination retail is thriving again, thanks to a shift to entertainment, dining and in-store events that go beyond traditional shopping.

Despite stereotypes, Gen Z aren't abandoning malls, they're showing up more than older generations. According to Ipsos, 58% of US shoppers aged 18–34 visit malls regularly, compared to 48% of 35–54-year-olds and just 38% of those aged 55+.

This shift is transforming mall layouts. In the UK, Westfield now dedicates nearly 15% of its space to experiential and leisure tenants, up 40% post-Covid. 'It's not just brands activating space,' says Jacinta Rowsell, director of operations at Unibail-Rodamco-Westfield (URW). 'We're changing our leasing strategy to reflect this demand.'

Simon Property Group embraced Gen Z's creator culture with its 2024 Meet Me @themall campaign, enlisting hundreds of local influencers to post from its shopping centres. With 1980s and 1990s nostalgia – think The Breakfast Club soundtrack – the campaign tapped into Gen Z's anemoia: nostalgia for a time they never lived, as explored in our 2025 Future Forecast.

As highlighted in our Gen Z's Mall Revival report, fast-casual dining is now central to the mall experience. 'It used to be that the shopping occasion drove people to the mall and then maybe you grabbed a bite to eat. Now, the dining options drive people there, and you're hoping they do a little shopping while they're there,' David Henkes, senior principal at Technomic, a market research firm, told CNBC.

This trend is evident at Santa Monica Place, where Din Tai Fung's newest location features its largest ocean-view patio and a TikTok-famous secret menu. 'It's fun and delicious,' Arden Yum, a college student drawn in by its secret menu on TikTok, told Business Insider.

True Food Kitchen, Yelp's fifth most popular mall brand, according to its 2024 report, also resonates with Gen Z. Its blend of sustainable dining and social activism – like a recent salad collaboration with Grammy-winner SZA – makes it both a culinary and a cultural destination.



58% of US shoppers aged 18–34 visit malls regularly, compared to **48%** of 35–54-year-olds and **38%** of those aged 55+

Source: Ipsos



Arc in London's Canary Wharf is a communal contrast therapy club offering burnt-out Londoners a new way to prioritise health and social connection. Photography by Des Iles, UK

Third Space Wellness

Health and wellness culture is reshaping third spaces – those settings beyond home and work – into places where brands build community, promote wellbeing and foster deeper connection.

Today's third spaces go beyond retail, evolving into social hubs that align with consumers' longevity and lifestyle goals. More than half of consumers (55%) want brands to foster online community, while 36% seek in-person spaces to connect (source: Sprout Social).

This shift extends to travel. According to GHARAGE, 15% of air travellers want airport spa or wellness areas and 13% would arrive early for gym or pool access.

'Wellbeing now underpins how brands approach third spaces,' says UK-based brand strategist Kathryn Bishop. 'Becoming a wellness brand is increasingly central to future brand strategies.'

Fitness-forward third spaces reflect this evolution, from GymShark's 24/7 facilities to Lululemon's spin studios, Hoka's running clubs and Remedy Place's recovery spas. These branded environments fuse health, social connection and community.

As seen in our Game-Changers: The Future of Sports Fandom macrotrend, niche and mainstream sports offer brands the chance to tap into growing micro-communities. North Six has collaborated with Estée Lauder and Dr Jart+ on activations that let audiences test, share and connect through in-person brand moments.

'Brands are getting creative with mobile tours and pop-ups,' says North Six's Andrew Barlow. 'They're bringing experiences to high-traffic areas like college campuses, creating buzz through content-worthy, real-life moments.'

Starbucks is also re-imagining its third-space model, encouraging dwell time with perks like free refills and a 'time well spent' ethos.

Fashion brands are joining in: Zara by Castro's café (Lisbon), Coach's restaurant (Jakarta), and a Kate Spade pub (London) offer hospitality-style spaces that encourage community.

The outdoor space, designed by nature, is increasingly being used as third-space inspiration: outdoor or winter sports brands such as Canada Goose (London) or The North Face (Shanghai) are creating community-driven third spaces to bring the outside in or take brands into an outdoor environment where they can channel the energy and discovery associated with activities such as skiing, snowboarding or hiking.

> 'Wellbeing now underpins how brands approach third spaces. Becoming a wellness brand is increasingly central to future brand strategies'
>
> *Kathryn Bishop, UK-based brand strategist*

Creator Economy Value

Big box retailers, grocers and beauty chains are embracing the creator economy, rethinking supply chains to prioritise grassroots discovery. Creator communities are becoming innovation partners, exchanging authenticity and influence for mentorship and collaboration.

‘Brands have to work harder than ever to maintain attention, loyalty and spending. At adidas’ 8428 Melrose Avenue store, that meant opening the doors to Los Angeles’s creator community – blending the brand’s design DNA with local cultural influence to turn the space into a live platform for storytelling, collaboration and experimentation,’ says Mike Tristram, head of strategy and marketing at Checkland Kindleysides.

Walmart has introduced its affiliate programme Walmart Creator, targeting younger shoppers and helping to localise its vast store network. In the UK, online grocery retailer Ocado’s Roots platform is designed to support a community of 100 challenger, start-up brands with mentorship and peer learning.

‘It’s a democratic approach that promotes a network of creativity; it allows us both to learn – we can be small, fast and creative. And it means we are a wide-range supermarket retailer. We believe in progress over perfection,’ says Amit Chitnis, chief commercial officer at Ocado.

UK high street retailer Marks & Spencer is finding success with its M&S Insiders initiative, using in-house creators who produce user-generated content that outperforms external influencer campaigns by 30% in engagement, helping the brand connect with younger audiences.

Accessories retailer Claire’s is co-developing products with Gen Z and Gen Alpha through its The Collab campaign. Over 12 months, young customers helped shape product development, with the results showcased in a major ad launch. ‘We’re working with our young customers to develop what Claire’s should look like in partnership with them,’ says Meghan Hurley, vice-president of global marketing.

North Six’s Andrew Barlow highlights how influencer collaboration strengthens cultural relevance, starting with identifying brand values and finding ways to bring those to life with the people who share them. ‘The best spaces tap into culture through collaboration, partnering with local creatives, hosting events that matter to the community and designing experiences that reflect what’s happening now in unique, ownable ways.’





Left: Claire’s Mini Mart collection; Above: The Collab by Claire’s, US

‘It’s not about chasing trends - it’s about connecting with people in ways that feel authentic, relevant and true to what a brand stands for’

Andrew Barlow, vice-president of experiential production, North Six

‘At adidas’ 8428 Melrose Avenue store, bringing consumers into the brand’s design DNA means this space blends brand storytelling and cultural relevance’

Mike Tristram, head of strategy and marketing, Checkland Kindleysides

Creator Economy Value

adidas’ 8428 Melrose store in West Hollywood blends sleek design with community-focused experiences, offering curated collections and immersive storytelling, US



‘The global second-hand apparel market is set to reach **£278.3bn** ($367bn, €330.6bn) by 2029, expanding at a pace 2.7 times faster than the broader global apparel industry’

Source: ThredUp Resale 2025

Peek & Cloppenburg, Düsseldorf, Germany

Built-in RAR (Recycle, Archive, Resale) Mindset

Store designers and brands are planning ahead for the RAR consumer mindset, which involves a Recycle, Archive, Resale shopping journey. RAR also has to be a brand mindset, so that in-store areas can champion brand culture.

Brands will place recycling UX next to repair services, and more space will become dedicated to archive and resale collections sitting adjacent to current merchandise. Retailers including Peek & Cloppenburg and Ikea are already hosting repair workshop spaces designed for interaction with customers. Resale advocates and archivists are looking for storytelling, collection history and repair narratives that tap into product journeys.

As we explored in our Rebranding Resale report, curating the right kind of archive merchandise is a big opportunity for the fashion retail sector as governments will increasingly legislate for companies to produce less.

‘Scandinavian resale retail brands such as Arkivet are ahead of the pack in this area – it’s not about a vintage shop or luxury thrifting, it’s where adjacent brands and sellers make money with resale merchandise next to new collections,’ says Jack Stratten, director of Insider Trends.

The global second-hand apparel market is set to reach £278.3bn ($367bn, €330.6bn) by 2029 and is expanding at a pace 2.7 times faster than the broader global apparel industry, according to ThredUp’s Resale 2025 report.

Celebrating brand heritage in-store is a tool for connecting customers into archival culture. ‘With the rise of user-generated fashion commentary on TikTok and increased awareness of designer archives, consumers are more interested in the history and cultural impact of fashion brands than ever before,’ says Gemma Ruse of London-based retail design agency Studio XAG. ‘Placing a brand in the cultural conversation ensures customers experience the brand as something bigger; engaging with in-depth knowledge satisfies the curious and increases the time that people spend with your brand.’



Above and right: Nike SNKRS Air Max Dn Car Boot. Design by Seen Studios, UK

Club Culture

Club culture is the new retail experience. Consumers seek brand events to be with their local community, to be the first to experience collaborations and to feel a sense of belonging as cultural moments are served to them as a reward for their loyalty.

A brand's cultural involvement makes up a full 25% of a consumer's purchasing decisions, according to Magna, while working with relevant cultural partners has become increasingly important to a brand's influence, rising by 217% since 2020 (source: Dazed).

Fast fashion retailer H&M wanted to change its 'essentials' perception to something more edgy among Gen Z in New York, so it took to the artist communities of Williamsburg, Brooklyn, for a rolling pop-up location called The Residency.

'Every six weeks, a new community-led story unfolded. From Get Ready With Me sessions led by local content creators in a restaurant-style Content Kitchen to Chromatic Yoga sessions hosted by local personal trainers to launch H&M Move – the H&M Williamsburg pop-up was less a store, more a cultural conversation, designed to be reconfigured and re-activated on repeat – a shape-shifting space where brand, culture and community collided, over and over again.' says Mike Tristram, head of strategy and marketing at Checkland Kindleysides.

Brands are planning cultural events and getting the right talent for the right audiences, according to Steph Mount, design director at UK agency Seen Studios. Mount says the agency's recent Nike Dn Car Boot event was an opportunity to get culturally relevant people together. 'It's all about how and why they are embedded with the brand and where the event is happening. Who? What's the age group? What music do we get in? And then connecting consumers to the brand in the room,' she adds.

'It's all about how and why they are embedded with the brand and where the event is happening'

Steph Mount, design director, Seen Studios



A brand's cultural involvement makes up a full **25%** of a consumer's purchasing decisions

Source: Magna

Club Culture

To celebrate its Oxford Street store opening, Ikea partnered with Lab 54 to host a series of pop-up parties in London's coffee and kebab shops, UK

Foresight

Culture will envelop retail in a new reality – one of connection, community, authenticity and co-curation. Consumers will seek brands that offer story-living experiences and regional events that can be personalised by mood or emotion

What are the foresights of a macrotrend?

Foresights examine speculative future scenarios five to 10 years in the future. Building on the Insight section, they showcase new directions, divergence or developments



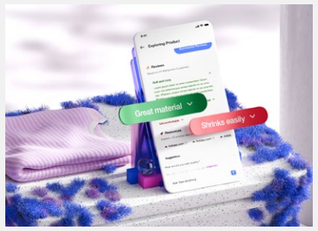
Travel Retail: The Fourth Space

Brands are exploring wellness-inspired, culturally relevant third spaces and extending them into curated overseas 'fourth spaces' – retail experiences accessible only through travel



Levelling up Loyalty

Retail brands will need to upgrade their loyalty programmes, – giving their customers the opportunity to level up purchases and generate extra value from experiential in-store transactions.



Agentic Retail

Agentic commerce is emerging as the next era of conversational retail, with emphasis on optimising product information for AI agents



Mood Curation

Consumer codes of culture will drive a new era of mood retail where future-thinking brands will understand how to build desire for products based on consumer mind state







Clockwise from left to right: Mytheresa and Moncler Grenoble, Norway

Travel Retail: The Fourth Space

Brands are exploring wellness-inspired, culturally relevant third spaces and extending them into curated overseas ‘fourth spaces’ – retail experiences accessible only through travel.

As global travel returns, consumers are seeking educational, culturally rich brand encounters in key destinations. Luxury brands are leading with ephemeral pop-ups and themed events that serve regional customers willing to travel for immersive experiences.

This foresight connects with our Guochao Wellness analysis, as tourism-driven retail offers consumers an additional space for brand connection. With international tourist arrivals expected to hit 1.8bn by 2030 (source: UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)), brands that integrate wanderlust and event-driven experiences will lead in this emerging format.

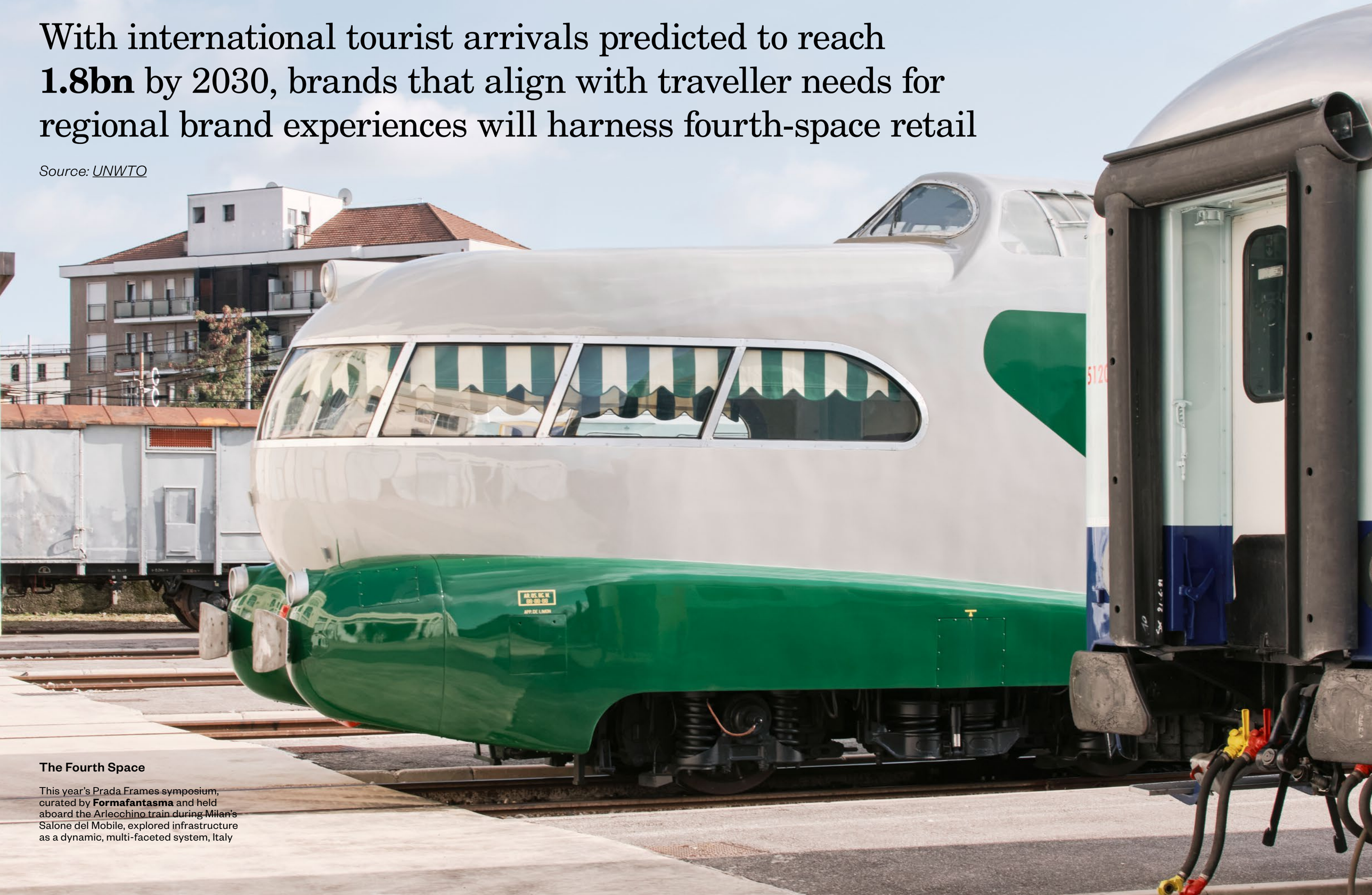
The return of Chinese travellers in 2025 highlights the need for immersive storytelling that merges tourism, entertainment and culture. Brands succeeding in this area will use regional activations and local ambassadors to deepen consumer engagement and brand knowledge.

‘Instead of asking ‘What’s trending?’, retailers can ask ‘What’s meaningful here?’,’ says Shop Drop Daily curator Tim Nash. ‘Rather than chasing algorithms, what if brands collaborated with local artists, celebrated regional quirks, told stories that only that city could tell?’

Luxury retailer Mytheresa exemplifies this with exclusive VIP events in resort destinations. It partnered with Moncler Grenoble, for example, for a two-day event in Oslo, Norway, hosting a dinner at the Oslo Opera House with a soprano performance and a skiing excursion at Skimore, Oslo’s largest skiing area.

With international tourist arrivals predicted to reach **1.8bn** by 2030, brands that align with traveller needs for regional brand experiences will harness fourth-space retail

Source: UNWTO



The Fourth Space

This year's Prada Frames symposium, curated by **Formafantasma** and held aboard the Arlecchino train during Milan's Salone del Mobile, explored infrastructure as a dynamic, multi-faceted system, Italy



Selfridges Unlocked, UK

Levelling up Loyalty

Retail brands are upgrading their loyalty programmes, giving their customers the opportunity to level up purchases and generate extra value from experiential in-store transactions.

The focus will be on co-curation and collaborating on personalised experiences such as wallets – a practice borrowed from the luxury industry – as consumers look for rewards driven by activations and cultural environments.

Glossier's beauty passport is a new initiative promoting visiting the beauty brand's UK or US stores to collect exclusive city stickers and have customers personalise their visit with photos taken by a Glossier Editor who stamps their book.

Selfridges has launched an updated version of Selfridges Unlocked, a membership programme that rewards customers for spending money and time in-store. With more than 1.3m active members, Keyholders (members) can collect Keys for checking in at events, dining at in-store restaurants and engaging with exclusive experiences. Those who reach 200 Keys become a VSP – Very Selfridges Person – gaining access to personalised perks, priority services and bookable Unlocked events, all of which encourage in-person visits.

The future of loyalty apps will be linked to geolocation and in-store visits. 'Customers who use store apps such as Radar will use the app as part of a campaign; it's designed to be used in-store, not at home, and is more focused on loyalty and rewards for customers,' said Nick Patrick, CEO of in-store navigation app Radar, at January's NRF 2025: Retail's Big Show conference in New York.

'Customers who use store apps will use them as part of a campaign; [they are] designed to be more focused on loyalty and rewards for customers'

Nick Patrick, CEO, Radar

Agentic Retail

Consumers are eager for AI-informed shopping and will embrace AI-driven decisions, valuing AI concierges for increasingly personalised experiences. They'll seek humanised assistants to predict and support seamless purchase journeys – from e-commerce to in-store visits inspired by social media.

Culture will shape how consumers explore brand discovery through AI, whether for convenience or for experience.

'Do we turn ourselves into flesh robots… or do we play with the fact that people are ambiguous, that they are explorative?' asks Daan Lucas, founder of Random Studio.

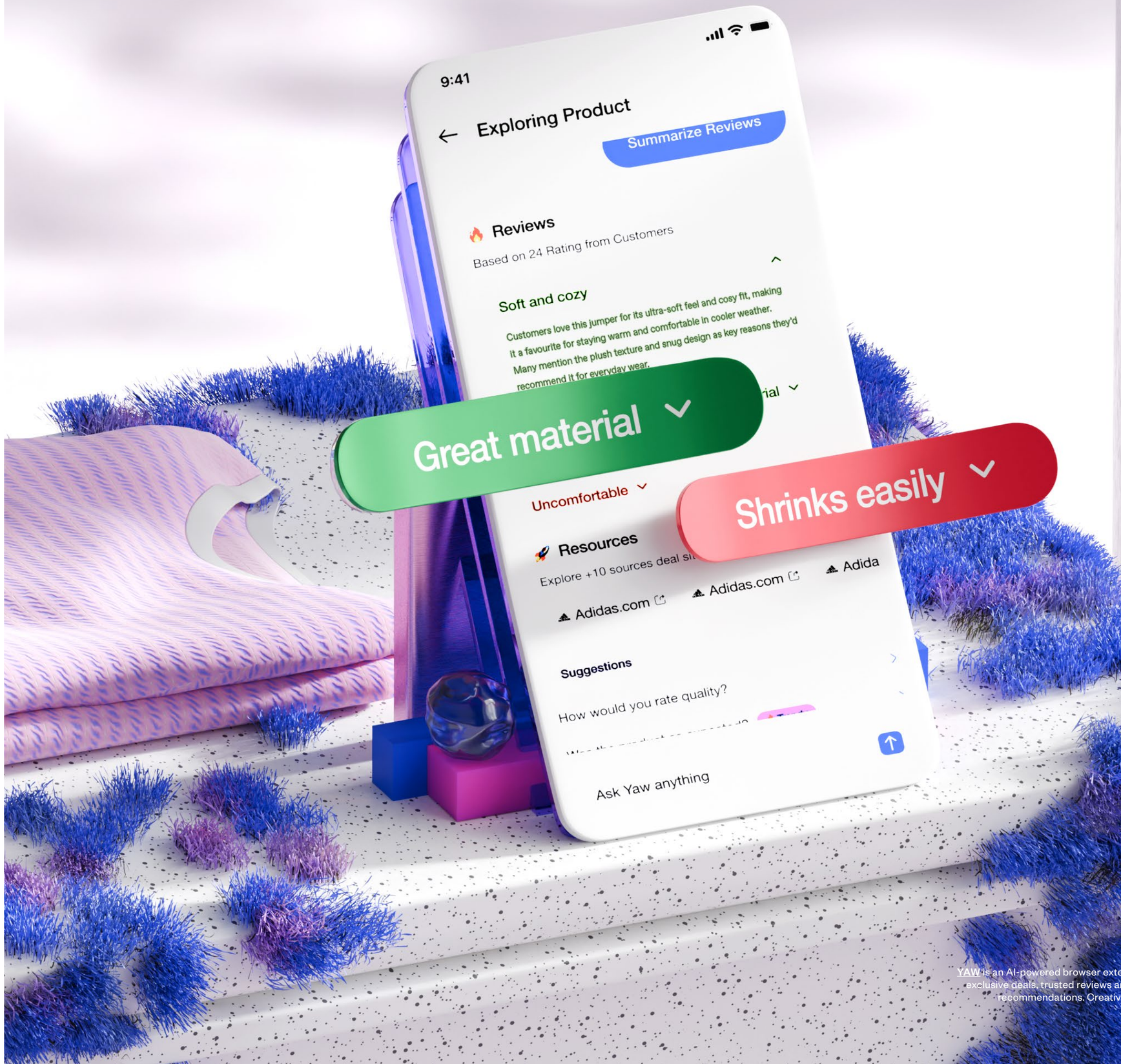
According to management consulting firm Oliver Wyman, brands that build trust through generative AI and elevated service will gain an edge. A May 2024 study found that 61% of consumers believe organisations should be open about using AI.

Agentic commerce is emerging as the next era of conversational retail, with emphasis on optimising product information for AI agents. In April 2025, OpenAI announced an integration with Shopify that will allow purchases directly within ChatGPT, transforming it into a full-funnel shopping tool.

As The Future Laboratory's Content Commerce analysis notes, such partnerships will foster intuitive, algorithm-driven retail relationships. Time spent 'in market' before buying will shrink as AI assistants consider both logical and emotional factors.

'Brands will need to train AI systems to name-check their brands, utilising culture for category-specific prompts,' says consultant, author and founder of Platform13 Leila Fataar.

Balancing in-store tech with a human touch will be vital as we enter the era of Agentic Retail. Sephora sees its future very much in bricks-and-mortar retail, and plans to roll out a modular store blueprint across all of its 700 US locations with updates being driven by agile reactions to viral trends. Each of Sephora's 25,000 beauty advisers carries a skin-scanning device so they can provide personalised advice.



YAW is an AI-powered browser extension that finds exclusive deals, trusted reviews and personalised recommendations. Creative by Pepper, US



From left to right: Glossier partnered with **Random Studio** to launch its Fleur fragrance with an AI-driven pavilion that analyses visitors' expressions and posture to generate personalised poetry, France

Mood Curation

Consumer codes of culture will drive a new era of mood retail and understanding the way people feel when they enter a physical space.

Future-thinking brands will understand how to foster communities and how to build desire for products based on consumer mind state.

In the mood for some R&R? Feeling energised by ASMR-inspired food prep? Emotions generated via taste or touch, joy and playfulness will start to define physical retail spaces where brands are tapping into consumers' mood triggers.

Transformational moments in retail that are dedicated to wellbeing and mindfulness can be seen as a mutually beneficial relationship, bringing brands and consumers together. For its latest UK influencer campaign in April 2025, beauty brand Rimmel London partnered with recipes platform Mob for a series of supper clubs with recipes inspired by the 'rich textures and indulgent shine' of Rimmel's lip products.

In China, brands are courting Gen Z with amplified activations designed for relatable moments. At its Solar Powered Sanctuary in Shanghai, outdoor brand UGG utilised the Labour Day week-long holiday in early May 2025 to create an open-air space designed to let people lie back, recharge and simply be.

'More than a product showcase, it became a space where young people felt seen, inspired and reconnected,' says customer experience specialist Ludovic Bacque.

Transformational retail will become aligned with curating communities through culture. 'Events are the next phase of what retail can mean,' says Leila Fataar, consultant, author and founder of Platform13. 'Where it is must make sense. Breaking the formula for your brand to be discovered in cool and interesting ways, and being shared socially – these are the ways people will react to brands in a way that doesn't feel sponsored.'

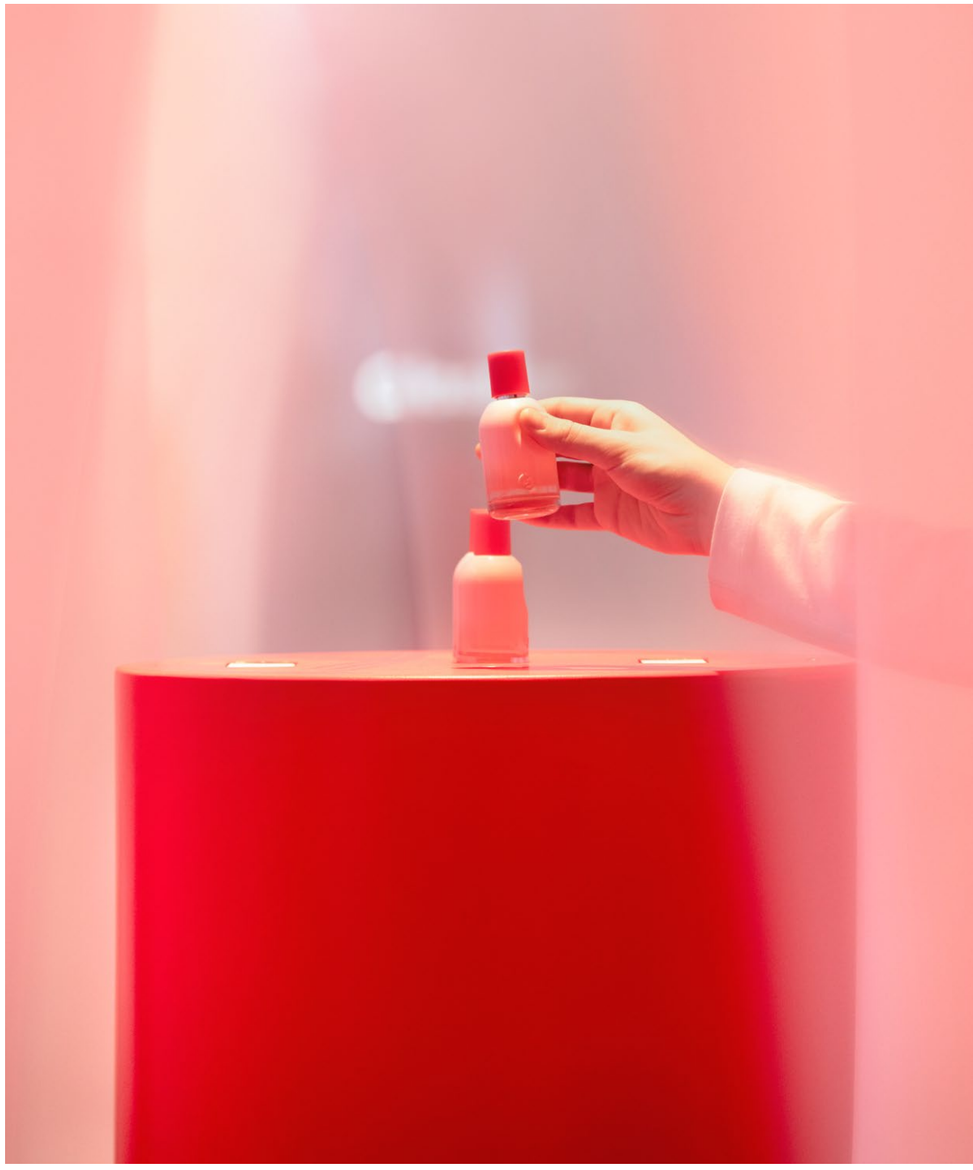
'Humans are hard-wired for novelty,' says Mike Tristram of Checkland Kindleysides.

'A well-designed pop-up isn't just a store – it's an invitation to explore. Whether it's tapping into the 'joy economy', a cultural moment or a brand world IRL, pop-ups thrive on the element of surprise.'

Brands will view their customers as participatory audiences who want to discover, to be the first to share, the first to show their social circle, and ultimately, to create more connection.

'A well-designed pop-up isn't just a store – it's an invitation to explore'

Mike Tristram, head of strategy and marketing, Checkland Kindleysides



Strategic Implications

As consumers tire of homogenised retail experiences and complicated – often mundane – e-commerce journeys, they are seeking brands that tap into transformational connections. Physical retail becomes relatable, emotional and rooted in culture where communities drive change and brand spaces provide the entertainment



adidas 8428 Melrose Avenue, US

Strategic Actions

Crack the culture code

Brands that position themselves via community-defining physical spaces that are culturally rich and educational will generate more meaningful relationships among consumers.



Ikea coffee shop pop-up by Lab 54, UK

Use curator-economy partnerships

Tapping into your audience as a source of innovation is leading to new opportunities for relationship-building; it's a two-way road with benefits on both sides across design credibility, relevance and commerciality.



AMI Cinema by AMI Paris, South Korea

Set the narrative with story-living retail concepts

Consumers are looking for inspiration and entertainment from store spaces. Giving them an active role offers meaningful connection that elevates brand experience into something transformative.



Refy, UK

Thought-starters

Use AI to read customers' moods

By starting a conversation with your audience when they enter the retail space, brands can generate emotion-reactive customer interactions.



Glossier Fleur experience by Random Studio, France

Rethink loyalty beyond transactions

Reward time spent in-store by offering exclusive perks and experiential activations, turning retail into a destination where customers engage, connect and socialise, driving brand affinity and long-term loyalty.



Selfridges Unlocked, UK

Create fourth spaces for travellers

Ephemeral brand spaces connected to tourism will open up the world for new audiences; where culture meets wanderlust, brands will drive a localised experience agenda.



Prada Frames 2025 by Formafantasma, Italy

Related Macrotrends

2022

Hyperphysical Stores

In a post-Covid landscape, changing consumer needs are driving retailers to rethink bricks-and-mortar stores to be more engaging, sensorial and memorable.



Gucci Vault. Creative by Max Siedentopf, Italy

2023

EQ-Commerce

Innovative retailers are using technology to create intelligent, empathetic commerce journeys – where every touchpoint is a learning opportunity, and artificial intelligence caters for customers' idiosyncratic needs at scale.



AI imagery by The Future Laboratory, UK

2023

Home States Futures: Residential Retail

With hybrid working becoming the new normal, global retail footfall in decline and the loss of third spaces, the home is shifting from a fundamental comfort and security shelter to a dynamic commercial hub bubbling with retail innovations.



Samsung Shift by Form Us With Love, Sweden

2025

New Codes of Value

In this new era of scarcity, richness is expressed through rituals, and abundance is found in regenerative pursuits and deeper connections. New codes of value are emerging around connection, care and human flourishing.



Wise branding by Ragged Edge, UK

Strategic Worksheets

This strategic worksheet is to help you apply this macrotrend to your business



Gentle Monster Haus Nowhere Shenzhen, China

Prioritisation

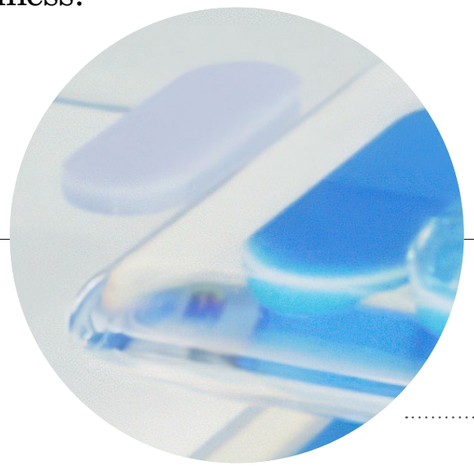
Consider the following:

Which human need is most relevant to your brand/business?

Attainment | Belonging | Curiosity | Identity | Purpose | Security | Fulfilment

Which driver will have the most impact on your brand/business?

Micro-globalisation | Fragmenting Societies | Accelerating Technologies | Evolving Demographics | Climate Change & Resource Scarcity | Urbanising World



Influence

Consider the following:

How will this trend affect how you fulfil that need?

What impact could these drivers have on the business?

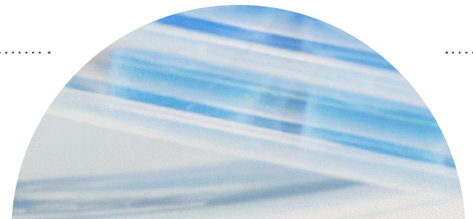
Select two insights that feel most relevant to your brand/business:

How do these insights align with your brand's trajectory?

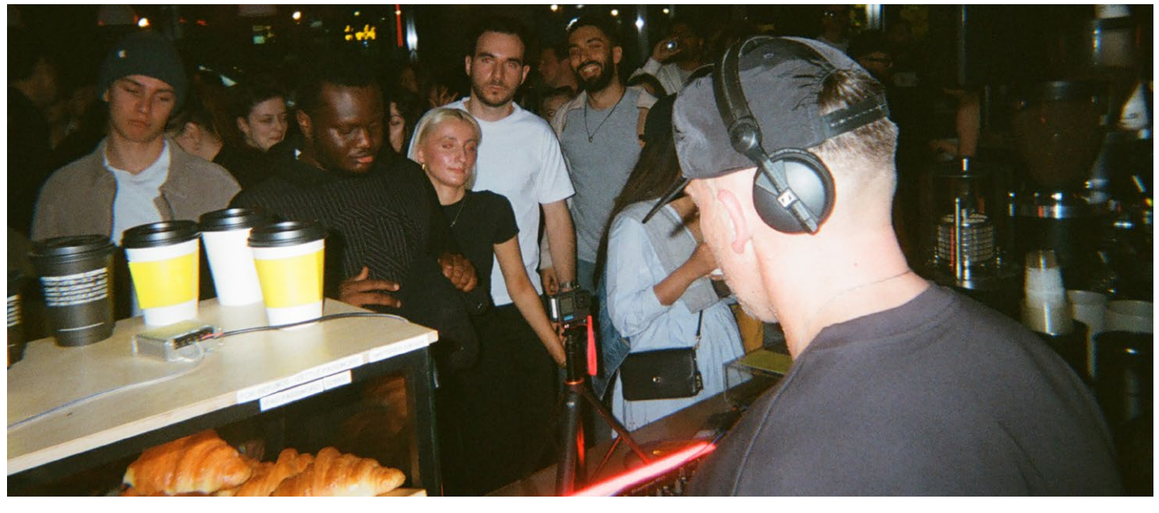
How could you apply these insights to your business?

Which foresight scenario is your company least prepared for?

What is most surprising about this foresight scenario?



Consider how this macrotrend could affect the following pillars of your brand:





01 Culture

What cultural conversations are emerging and who are the tastemakers?

How do we add value to culture?

What will our consumers pay more for in the future?

02 Category

What's our greatest opportunity?

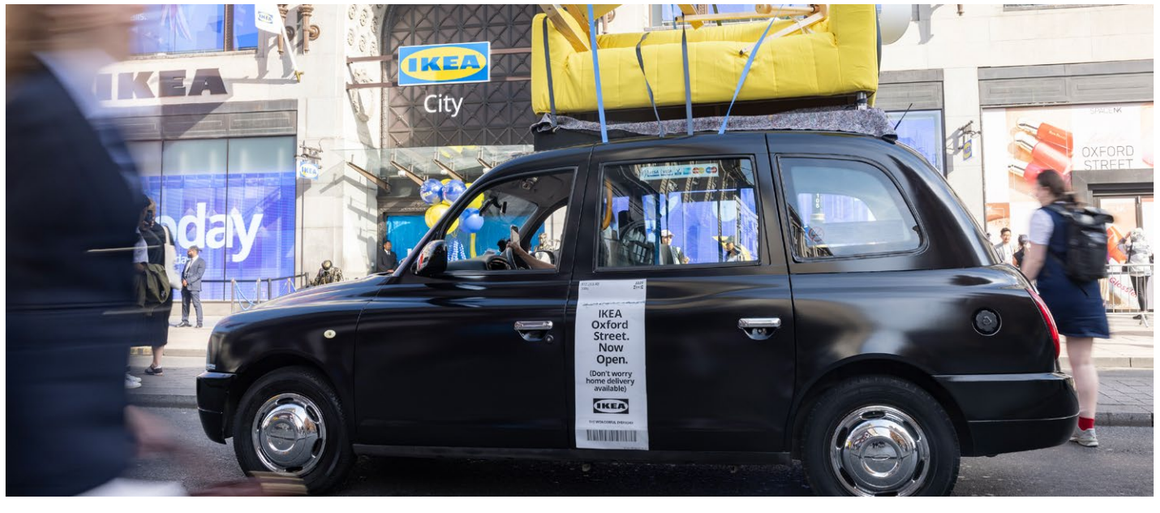
How is the competition evolving?

How can we differentiate?

From left to right: Ikea coffee shop pop-up by Lab 54, UK; adidas 8428 Melrose Avenue, US

Consider how this macrotrend could affect the following pillars of your brand:





03 Consumer

What's our greatest opportunity?

How is the competition evolving?

How can we differentiate?

04 Business

What are our biggest challenges?

What part of the value chain will add the most and least value?

What are the strengths of the brand in this future?

From left to right: Glossier Fleur experience by Random Studio, France; Ikea Oxford Street, UK

Planning

YEAR 1

Over the next 12 months, how will this macrotrend affect your team?

YEAR 3

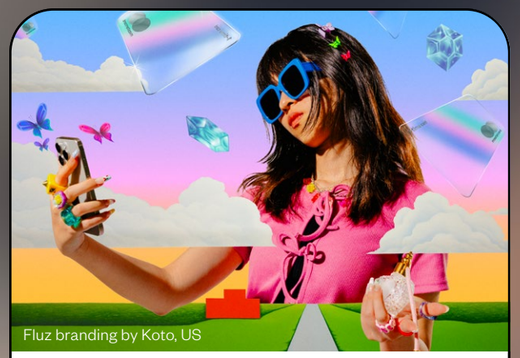
In three years, how will this macrotrend change the brand?

YEAR 5

In five years, how will this macrotrend change the business?

This report is based on the sector research from The Future Laboratory's trends intelligence platform, **LS:N Global**

Read our latest macrotrend reports:



Fluz branding by Koto, US

New Codes of Value

In this new era of scarcity, new codes of value are emerging in which richness is expressed through rituals, and abundance is found in regenerative pursuits and deeper connections.



Samsung Shirt by Form Us With Love, Sweden

Home States Futures: Residential Retail

With hybrid working the new normal, global retail footfall in decline and the loss of third spaces, the home is shifting from a comfort and security shelter to a dynamic hub bubbling with retail innovations.



AI imagery by The Future Laboratory, UK

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We can also deliver our macrotrends to your business in a number of ways, from on-demand video presentations to strategic workshops and bespoke reports.

If you want to find out more, say

hello@thefuturelaboratory.com

Co-founder and chief creative officer : Chris Sanderson
Co-founder and editor-in-chief : Martin Raymond

Director of foresight : Fiona Harkin
Deputy foresight editor : Dan Hastings-Narayanin
Insights and engagement director: Olivia Houghton
Senior foresight analyst : Alice Crossley
Senior foresight analyst : Rose Coffey
Foresight analyst : Seyi Oduwole
Creative lead : Emily Rhodes

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Senior production planner : Maddie Watts

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The Future Laboratory
6 Orsman Road, London N1 5RA, UK

Follow us
LinkedIn
TFL Instagram
LS:N Instagram

Get in touch
+44 20 7791 2020
office@thefuturelaboratory.com
hello@lsnglobal.com

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