TOP 10 GLOBAL CONSUMER TRENDS FOR 2015

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Consumption in 2015 is increasingly being driven by the heart: consumers are making choices defined by their positive impact on the world and community through cause-linked buying, the thriving “sharing economy” or the “can-do” attitude that Millennials have in common. Malls are reinventing themselves as community hubs rather than the commercial antithesis of it. Health, tracked digitally, is often benchmarked against the progress of significant others, and rising, chatty vlogger stars are appealing to millions through their relatable stories. Individualism prevails in the heightened consumer desire to safeguard privacy, and still this conversation is shared and debated. Consumers are also favouring greater convenience, for which they are increasingly prepared to pay. Brands cater to the trend through sharper online and offline shopping combinations and neighbourhood buying options. More broadly, the blending of online and “real world” lifestyles is moving into a new, more unified phase.
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In November 2014, a Swedish taxi company confidently launched a project placing therapists in the back of cabs to help passengers solve problems as they head across town for US$165 per hour. This venture is attractive to post-recessionary consumers, as more are willing to pay for products that simplify their hectic on-the-go lives. This simplification mantra is also driving a trend, seeing consumers gravitate towards the ease of local “top-up” shopping.

Technology plays a big part in attaining convenience. As more time-pressed shoppers make purchases on their smartphones, an increase in “omnichannel” shopping options creates a seamless link between virtual and “real world” shops with wide consumer appeal. The consumer interest in convenience is also amplified on holiday, from the outward journey onwards. In everyday life, the idea of buying brief moments of leisure, such as 15-minute massages at shopping malls, is becoming more popular too.

In pursuit of quality time
More consumers are willing to buy products and services that optimise the use of their time. New app AisleFinder, offering information and navigation, was praised as the “Google Maps of Supermarkets” by pcmag.com. The combination of the desire to be fit and lack of spare time is popularising mini workouts on fitness apps. Bytesize’s 7 Minute Workout is a hit, with millions of downloads helping it crack the top-ten charts in 127 countries, according to iTunes. The app’s logo, a large number 7 over a red background, hints at the idea of time as the most valuable resource.
Buying time is a worldwide desire. In Nigeria, severe traffic congestion in urban areas is boosting strong growth in internet retailing. According to website Gulfnews.com, "In Lagos, a city of 21 million people, a journey to the store can kill your entire day if you lose the traffic lottery." Euromonitor International data forecasts that real mobile internet retailing in Nigeria will grow by over 210.2% in 2015. Even sleep feels like a luxury amenity as time-pressed, digitally active consumers eat into their nightly slumber, and brands are starting to offer rest-related options. By November 2014, the Sleep Cycle alarm clock saw 6.1 million downloads on iPhones, according to xyo.net.

**Top-up shopping a rising star**

Despite the well-publicised spread of online shopping, “real world” food shopping seems to be going back in time, with more shoppers appearing to prefer the simplicity and convenience of nearby shopping over choice. These shoppers are selecting to buy less, more often in so-called “top-up” shopping. This is a consumer preference reflected in plans for smaller, neighbourhood stores. Figures released at the beginning of August 2014 from global property consultants CBRE suggest megastores are in decline, with planned floor space shrinking. A CBRE summer 2014 survey of 21,000 consumers in 20 Eastern and Western European countries and South Africa found that around half of consumers prefer smaller shopping centres with convenient access. Mid-2014 research from the UK’s Future High Street Forum conducted by Southampton University also stresses the revived consumer interest in top-up trips to local stores. Euromonitor International forecasts for 2015 show that while sales in grocery retailers in the UK are set to grow by 0.2% in real terms, this figure will rise to 2.5% for convenience stores.

In many countries, the convenience store is thriving. Small shops in petrol stations, pharmacy chains and discount shops, barely developed until recently, are more in demand in the capital cities of countries such as Panama and Guatemala. Mini Stop and 7-Eleven were the only two convenience store chains in the Philippines until recently. Now there are seven, and most have aggressive expansion plans that will soon double the total in the country, reports the Wall Street Journal, citing local industry sources.
More omnichannel solutions for time-poor consumers

The widespread adoption of smartphones also means that consumers are able to shop anytime, anywhere and are becoming increasingly demanding in terms of convenience. The appeal of online shopping can be undermined if consumers have to waste time waiting for orders to be delivered. Brands are more creative in meeting consumer convenience needs. October 2014 saw the launch of a click-and-collect service in a Caffè Nero in Cambridge, UK by House of Fraser, an area where it lacks a storefront but has many online customers.

24/7 culture and convenience

Another type of on-the-go convenience is meeting consumer out-of-hours needs. Many people in the thriving call-centre sector in India, the Philippines and elsewhere in the Asia-Pacific region work shifts answering international calls and represent the ideal customer for 24-hour convenience stores. According to UK department store chain John Lewis in a report released in autumn 2014, Britain’s 24-hour culture has created a new breed of “inshopniacs,” with the store reporting a 31% surge in the number of online shoppers at night. More parents kept awake by a crying baby, late-night gamers and shift workers are shopping online after dark.

Top 15 Convenience Store Markets in 2014

Source: Euromonitor International trade sources / national statistics
Note: Convenience stores include chained grocery retail outlets selling a wide range of groceries and fitting several of the following characteristics: extended opening hours; selling area of less than 400 sq. metres; located in residential neighbourhoods; handling two or more of the following product categories: audio-visual goods (for sale or rent), take-away food (ready-made sandwiches, rolls or hot food), newspapers or magazines, cut flowers or pot plants, greetings cards. Data based on constant prices and fixed 2014 exchange rates. Market size based on retail value RSP.
Catering to the “trapped” consumer
Brands are intensifying their bid to entice the millions of consumers “stuck” in transit. Digital interactive mapping, for instance, animates an airport’s retail, entertainment and dining options, with brands offering real-time deals for nearby concessions. At London Heathrow, all 70 restaurants now offer takeaway “on-board picnic” hampers. Passengers are enjoying more on-the-go pampering and shopping, reducing the stress of travelling and filling “deadtime” with some purposeful self-treating. While spa chains in airports aren’t new, consumer interest in new on-the-go grooming options, such as gate-side manicure stations, is intensifying.

In summer 2014, Philadelphia International Airport became the first in the USA to offer passengers free use of 30 low impact exercise bikes in the terminal. One user, Ms. Donofree, enthused to the New York Times: “I did skip the gym this morning because I had to come here to the airport, so I don’t feel so guilty about skipping it now that I’m here on the bike.” With a compressed time frame for meetings, more executives are finding themselves in airport-based conference centres. Even though airplanes are one of the most difficult places to sleep in, airlines are competing to make air travel more relaxing. Quality sleep is also increasingly seen as a hotel unique selling point.
CONSUMPTION AS A ROUTE TO PROGRESS

An interesting 2015 trend sees consumption viewed as a route to progress. This idea has emerged several times in recent years, notably in the green consumption arena, but seems to be resurfacing strongly both in terms of expression through product consumption and corporate responsibility choices. Brands seem keener to align themselves with changing the world for the better, picking up on consumer interest in a more caring consumption style and an understanding that counterculture is better organised and has new needs. They express this via so-called “brand activism.”

Craft site Etsy’s strapline reads, “Join the movement rebuilding human-scale economies around the world.” A chorus of Silicon Valley tech giants including Microsoft and eBay has just decided to back change.org, the petitions website. In a July 2014 piece on social enterprise, “Forget Zombies, Get Ready for the Goodpocalypse,” Joe Waters of cause marketing blog selfishgiving.com stresses that the money needed to address social problems comes from consumers rather than brands. Two well-advertised campaigns in late 2014 were Rolex’s “Young Laureates” with a strapline of “Anyone can change everything,” and “CHIME FOR CHANGE,” a Gucci-founded female empowerment initiative inviting consumers to lend their voice for “Education, health, justice. For every girl. Every woman. Everywhere.”
Green it!
“Vegan fashion” brands that pride themselves on animal-free designs are being spotlighted by journalists for their style. A piece by Amy de Klerk of the Telegraph titled, “The best vegan fashion brands” in November 2014 praises new brands such as Wilby for their eco-sensitivity and feel-good factor about buying green. Joanne Hayek and Tatiana Fayad, designers of popular costume jewellery with a social message using upcycled items, launched Beirut-based brand Vanina using restyled depreciated coins. Ms. Hayek told the New York Times, “We realized that fashion can deal with different areas of society and could be more than just dressing you up. It was a tool in our hand.” Vanina’s Unlocked collection, for example, made from gems and recycled keys, is “an invitation to keep doors open” in both politics and personal situations.

According to the Krakow Post website, “conscious consumption” is on the rise in Poland, with a growing number of community-supported agriculture (CSA) schemes. This good feeling is exported to other parts of the world. “Brazilians are getting more interested in social projects and inspiring movements—especially crowdfunded ones—that allow them to show their social network they’re engaged with social issues,” explains Carolina Câmara, 24, from Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. There is always room for an artistic statement. “Hunger King,” a restaurant / art installation, highlighted income equality in Hungary in summer 2014.

Top 5 Organic Packaged Food Markets in 2014

Source: Euromonitor International trade sources/national statistics
Note: Historic values are the aggregation of local currency country data at current prices converted into the common currency using y-o-y exchange rates. Market size based on retail value RSP.
Female empowerment as consumer driver

Moving fashion-followers to engage with pressing world issues is a revived trend. The recent “This is what a feminist looks like” T-shirt is an example, despite the subsequent cheap labour controversy. Another is Benetton’s “Submit the news you would like to see” drive, in support of UN Women. During a mock protest at Chanel’s recent Spring / Summer 2015 fashion show in Paris, a “mob” of supermodels carrying placards showcasing Chanel’s latest designs featured unapologetically feminist messages.

“Women Fashion Power” is a newly-opened London exhibition showing how prominent women have used clothing to build reputation, underlining that glamour can go hand in hand with purpose. The contemporary women featured include Natalie Massenet MBE, Founder of NET-A-PORTER and Chair of the British Fashion Council, Anne Hidalgo, Mayor of Paris, Wei Sun Christianson, a co-chief executive of Morgan Stanley Asia Pacific, Livia Firth, Creative Director of Eco Age and architect Dame Zaha Hadid. Fashion commentator Vanessa Friedman believes this exhibition indicates “an enormous and meaningful change in the conversation about achievement and gender.”

A different route to expression was the latest Islamic Fashion Festival in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, where catwalks were noted for their rich colours. Presenting Islamic women’s fashion as a part of everyday contemporary consumer culture may be viewed as a way to reshape received stereotypes. This is the opinion of Reina Lewis, Professor of Cultural Studies at the London College of Fashion, whose book “Muslim Fashion: Contemporary Style Cultures” will be published in 2015.

Consumer interest in consumption for change as well as thrift lies behind the success of an enterprise collecting and selling “ugly fruit.” Lisbon renewable energy consultant Isabel Soares seeks out produce failing the “dictatorship of aesthetics” in shops that leads to food waste.

Empowerment can also stem from relaying actual consumption experiences and “telling it like it is.” New Tumblr microblog “It’s Like They Know Us” from Sara Given, a pressed mother of a toddler, mocks advertisements depicting absurdly perfect family moments.
**What design signals**

Julian Assange, the controversial WikiLeaks founder, is licensing a line of T-shirts to fund his campaign for freedom of expression. While a good-sized chunk of consumer culture is built on celebrity product lines, mixing in values on morality and politics adds complexity.

One exciting design hub that can revolutionise lives via consumption is D.school at Stanford University, where projects with practical applications start with the aim of improving people’s lives. One of D.school’s most popular courses is “Design for Extreme Affordability.” Its alumni have saved lives through inventions, such as a low-cost miniature warming pouch that prevents newborns from developing hypothermia and is cheaper than traditional incubators.

While smartphone use is ubiquitous, commentators have noted that very little of the mobile experience reflects its fastest growing audiences in emerging markets.

An interesting shift away from this is the launch of African emoticons for Android users, from Mauritius-based app company Oju Africa, meant to celebrate African culture on apps such as WhatsApp and Twitter.

“What Design Can Do,” a two-day mid-2014 conference in Amsterdam gathered some of the world’s leading product designers, challenging them to use their skills to help improve the world. Designs making real social impact were highlighted, including “Chineasy,” a simplified method of teaching Chinese via graphic-design flashcards. Participant Paola Antonelli, Senior Curator of the Department of Architecture and Design at the Museum of Modern Art in New York says: “Design is connected to its present and when people are changing and cultures are changing, design helps the change happen.”

The evolving use of cars is one example. With fewer young people wanting to own cars, and instead opting to use them at their convenience through ride-sharing and apps like Uber, car brands are faced with designing cars for people who want to use them in this way.
INFLUENCERS: MORE LIKE US

Consumers are keener and more able to express their individuality through consumption via the buying reach of the global internet. Vloggers and fellow consumers, not just conventional celebrities, are increasingly steering preferences and buying choices.

“A-listers” as lifestyle mentors

High street collaborations have helped everyday consumers feel more like celebrities. H&M has just marked a decade of collaboration with couture designers in a glossy book, “From Karl Lagerfeld to Alexander Wang, “The First 10 Years.”” However, celebrities are keen to show that they are more than clotheshorses, with some branching out into lifestyle brands preaching consumption habits to their followers. In “How Gwyneth Paltrow’s Goop Has Become a Role Model for Other Celebrities,” Vanessa Friedman of the New York Times looks at Goop and copycat celebrity lifestyle brands featuring ecommerce elements, charitable giving and social media interaction with millions of followers. Goop is nicknamed “the aspirational–and controversial–lifestyle wellness-blog-cum-travel and cooking-tip-sheet-cum-shopping-website Ms. Paltrow founded.” Ms. Paltrow herself calls it “contextual commerce.”

Other celebrity offerings include Jessica Alba’s The Honest Company for natural baby products and the newer E.D. home wares brand from Ellen DeGeneres. “Celebrities are increasingly moving from endorsing products to being the product,” said John Demsey, group president of Estée Lauder. “This is only going to get more common.”
Vloggers

The video blog or vlog category is hugely popular on YouTube, with millions of subscribers heeding the words of lifestyle “mega vloggers.” Two of them hail from the UK. Alfie Deyes, aged 21, has a recent book out already topping Amazon bestseller lists. His girlfriend, Zoe Sugg, known as Zoella, has 12 million vlog hits a month and six million YouTube followers who swear by her shopping advice and beauty products. Her new ghostwritten book, “Girl Online,” outsold both JK Rowling’s and Dan Brown’s debut books in its first week.

Lily “Superwoman” Singh, who in late 2014 scored six million followers on her YouTube channel, is an Indo-Canadian vlogger popular in the expat Asian community for her satirical take on everyday life. “We have this intense emotional connection with our fans,” Singh explained to Newsweek. “In Singapore they waited outside my hotel and cried when they saw me.”

“Social Talent is definitely the new celebrity,” said Dominic Smales, Managing Director of Gleam Futures, a company managing emerging digital celebrities such as Sugg. “Far from being a “flash in the pan,” this is the result of a total shift in the way a whole generation consumes their entertainment and selects their influences.”

An interesting, related development sees social media marketers identifying “influencers” with a dynamic social media presence. These young personalities, who have become beauty and fashion ambassadors, can be harnessed to promote brands, chat in front of a camera with ease, and are free of the reluctance of A-listers to link their names to a commercial activity.

US social media marketing firm theAudience represents people and brands on social media and is drawn to young influencers like Acacia Brinley and Tyler Perry who have staggering numbers of followers. Its work may be seen as a mix of talent scouting and (digital) “native ad” agency. Just getting these young influencers together at parties multiplies publicity. As Rami Perlman of theAudience told the New York Times in September 2014, “Put in a room together, [these influencers] are constitutionally incapable of not snapping pictures of one another and posting them to Instagram. They tag each other in their updates, and their followers cross-pollinate, yielding them even more followers and so more eyes and ears and more influence, which is exactly where theAudience wants them [as we] can use those higher numbers to broaden the reach of the brands they do negotiations with.”

Napster founder, Sean Parker, who views this activity as event sponsorship, stresses that in this medium, “These kids—the Influencers—are natives,” and, he believes, are offering pop art. “Viners like King Bach and Nash Grier perfected the six-second comedy sketch. Acacia perfected the selfie. You have 10 million people watching. You are now the entertainment,” he adds.
You, the consumer, are an influencer

Millions of influencers in 2015 are one of us. They are “relatable,” dispensing with the cultivated distance of conventional celebrities. You could be one. Ordinary consumers are already airing their purchasing grievances and joys via the “online megaphone.” Consumers notice online reviews and trust them and this is influencing buying decisions. In response to approaches on social media on anything from new flavours to strategy feedback to piloting disability aids, many shoppers are getting involved in the brand development process.

While social networks such as Facebook, Flickr, Instagram and YouTube position themselves to show the personal worlds of people, others such as Pinterest pave the way for curators, a new breed of influencers who act as “selectors” of products and services. They are identifying consumer tastes and buying preferences, attracting interest communities and enriching ecommerce, and are en route to being virtual shop windows. Sites such as FoodGawker.com have surged thanks to fans who upload pictures and recipes, in which leading brands such as Nestlé frequently take part.

An interesting trend sees vloggers creating “unboxing” videos, which while not new, appears to be a growing appetite for opening newly-bought items on camera. This feels like a statement on the allure of consumption, even when the pleasure is vicarious. Meanwhile, you can now see how popular you really are on Twitter, as the company decided in autumn 2014 to let anyone see the number of people viewing their tweets. Twitter’s analytics tool, previously only available to advertisers, also breaks down followers in categories such as gender and location.

Number of Mobile Internet Subscriptions by Region in 2014

Source: Euromonitor International from trade sources/national statistics
Note: Data for 2014 is forecast
The “Share a Coke” campaign, Coca-Cola’s bid to add people’s first names and positive words like “family” or “friend” to its bottles and cans, has proved a global hit. Through it, the carbonated drinks giant astutely acknowledged the widespread consumer interest in sharing. In 2015, the “sharing economy” is growing and disrupting the way in which individuals think of space and ownership. Consumers are increasingly preoccupied with access rather than ownership. Pooling resources in various ways is becoming integral to urban life and is likely to impact the future of cities.

It is not merely a response to the need for thrift. For consumers, collaborative consumption means convenience, innovation, local, virtual currencies, community and green values too. Digital life is a brilliant facilitator of much to do with lightweight living. Indeed, the strapline of collaborativeconsumption.com is “sharing reinvented through technology.”

Share today
Consumers crave more connections both through collaborative opportunities and commerce, and at the same time expect on-demand service. The sharing economy is thriving as a result. While increasingly mainstream, the very different mind-set behind collaborative consumption is worth emphasising. Speaking to the New York Times in August 2014 about its impact on US society, Juliet Schor, sociology professor at Boston College, commented: “It’s very counterintuitive from the old individualistic American culture, where people aspire to increasing amounts of privacy, gated communities, owning your own.” This community outlook has given rise to a plethora of collaborative endeavours, from community gardening to shared workspaces and bartering and even to the phenomenon of “two-way reviews,” happening on services like Uber and Airbnb, where customers themselves are rated in addition to businesses.
In collaborative consumption, perhaps ridesharing and homesharing are the most visible activities, as more people share their vehicles and homes. City living and new holiday preferences have affected the property market. Airbnb has just launched its new quarterly magazine, promising “to explore our fundamental values: sharing, community and belonging.” City living also significantly impacts driving habits and the car industry, as it lends itself to car-free and car-light arrangements.

More people are “shedding stuff” – downsizing on possessions to embrace lightweight living and earning themselves the nickname of the “pay-as-you-live generation.” Such consumers access documents, music, film and other media digitally and are happy to rent. Mainstream brands squeezing into this culture include Home Depot, now renting to people reluctant to buy rarely-used tools, and clothing brand Patagonia, partnering with eBay to redistribute pre-owned items and extend its customer base. Anna Bance, the founder of clothing rental website “Girl Meets Dress,” explains that unlike when the service launched during the recession, choice and convenience now rule.

Sharing information is key in collaborative consumption and is behind the principle of crowdsourcing, used very effectively in traffic app Waze. Monitoring biological diversity via “citizen science,” when scientists ask for the input of members to help them track the state of various indigenous flora and fauna, is another. Many consumers also enjoy sharing energy-saving milestones.

Other examples include sharing funding via crowdfunding. “Cooking to Share,” a book from Greek chef Alexandra Stratou, was realised thanks to crowdfunding on Kickstarter. “They are in it with me – I feel that I am publishing this book with all these people,” she told website Kathimerini.

**Sharing buying tips**

Online, consumers are forever sharing or reposting personal news or content they find interesting from a blog, brand or retailer online. Before consumers buy a fridge, holiday, spa treatment, plastic surgery procedure, pension plan or new cosmetics product, move abroad or choose a training course, they are checking fellow consumer responses. The post-recessionary consumer is generally a more cautious spender. What better safeguard than learning about the consumption experience from purchase to use to aftersales service or lack of it from someone who has already bought the product?
Consumer freedom and uncertainty in the sharing economy

Peer marketplaces, where consumers buy from other consumers, democratise luxury services and let consumers buy in occasional work by those with cookery or office skills, for instance. However, people working in the sharing economy find uncertainty as well as freedom. The New York Times recently profiled Boston microentrepreneur Jennifer Guidry; with a background in electronics, accountancy and cookery, her varied work takes in reviewing a food outlet as a secret shopper, buying from farmers markets for client meals she is preparing, assembling furniture and tending gardens. Offering transport via a variety of apps including Uber, Lyft and Sidecar, she also finds tasks via TaskRabbit, an online marketplace for chores. Ms. Guidry explains that her work fits in with her needs as a mother and is irregular, although just sustainable enough to support her.

Sharing endeavours aren’t always welcome – one Dutch initiative, part of a broader scheme called “the participation society,” offers an example. Newspaper Daily Volskrant reported that support for a government plan to shift some of the burden of caring for elderly and disabled people from the taxpayer to families, friends and neighbours, is low. Other consumers see collaborative consumption as a pragmatic response to a tough reality: “The rental economy is part of a growing, post-recession movement to value experiences over possessions. Really? How about the fact that incomes have remained stagnant for decades so people simply can’t afford to own all those luxury items they crave? What Hype!” notes blogger Benjamin Greco.

Real Market Sizes of Leisure Accommodation Online Sales in the USA, Japan and China: 2012-2015

Source: Euromonitor International trade sources/national statistics
Note: Accommodation types include AirBnB, an online marketplace that facilitates booking of accommodations between hosts, who list the accommodation, and guests, who book the accommodation. Data based on constant prices and fixed 2014 exchange rates. Market size based on retail value RSP.
Data for 2014-2015 is forecast.
A futuristic food hall shopping, work and living complex has just opened in Rotterdam, the Netherlands, embodying what many consumers in 2015 expect from a shopping centre. Nicknamed the “Horseshoe” after its unusual shape, it remains open for 11 hours daily, accommodating 100 fresh produce market stalls, a co-working space for entrepreneurs, restaurants, cookery school and 228 apartments, and is also part of an ambitious urban renewal project. Despite a media focus on sagging consumer demand for malls, global property advisor CBRE reveals that 39 million square metres of shopping mall space was under construction across the world’s major cities in 2014, a three million square-metre increase on 2013.

Online shopping has reshaped consumer buying habits, but it is not a substitute for the experience of shopping in stores. This is reflected in surveys, such as a mid-2014 “Omnichannel Shopping Preferences Study” from management consultants A.T. Kearney. “Ninety percent of shoppers surveyed would prefer to buy in a brick-and-mortar store across demographic and age groups,” Mike Moriarty, its co-author, told Forbes.

**A community and experiential focus**

Malls are stepping up their reinvention as stylish community hubs reminiscent of town squares of the past. The Horseshoe reflects the fact that shopping hubs are changing to offer a more experiential and community purpose in inner city locations. In mature economy countries in particular, the function of public and community spaces is altering, with malls no longer the corporate antithesis to community but shopping emporiums that fuse with community. They remain prized social hubs for many emerging market consumers. A new app pilot called Inside offers indoor navigation, and mall shoppers are one of its target audiences.
Sociologist Rodrigo Salcedo, author of a book entitled “Malls in Chile,” attributes a broader community role to malls. “In a mall, you can see people from diverse social strata and urban tribes coexisting,” he writes. Online magazine Hispaniclyspeakingnews.com reports on Colombians’ growing love for shopping malls. “The mall has replaced both the church and the plaza as a place to self-actualize and consume.”

UK retail giant Tesco is testing this community-themed concept in one of its UK stores, Tesco Watford Extra – where hair salons, baby gyms and yoga are featured alongside a large community room for local people. This is similar to initiatives Tesco already runs in some of its stores in Asia, such as its Tesco Lotus business in Thailand. The UK’s Daily Mail newspaper sees the UK pilot as an attempt to replicate the vibrant atmosphere of town centres and surpass soulless warehouse-style hypermarkets.

In the MENA region, shopping has moved out of the souk and under cover, and the mall has become the centre of social life. The Middle East is home to huge malls including “Mall of the Emirates,” with over 100 million visitors annually. When Shake Shack, a US burger restaurant chain, was invited to open outlets in the Middle East, its CEO’s response as reported to CNN was, “You don’t understand. We’re a cool New York urban brand. We don’t do malls.” He soon changed his mind: “The mall there is the piazza. It is the Union Square.” “For most of us, shopping malls have become the default destination on weekends,” writes Batul K Sadliwala in the Kuwait Times newspaper. Alongside a more hospitable microclimate, “they satisfy the appetite for material goods and society.”

Smaller, more central shopping centres appeal to consumers

In tandem with this community-centred focus, many shopping centres popular with consumers are smaller and more centrally located. Out-of-town megamalls, with the exception of some outlet centres such as Space near Florence, are paling beside enclosed smaller inner city shopping centres, which offer choice retail therapy, entertainment and dining options. 39 of the 45 new shopping centres planned in Germany will be located in city centres. At the end of August 2014, in Bad Münstereifel near Germany’s former capital, Bonn, the Retail Outlet Shopping company launched Germany’s first shopping centre that took over a complete small medieval town centre.
The above-mentioned summer 2014 research from property firm CBRE reveals that 49% of consumers prefer smaller centres or high streets to large, purpose-built shopping centres. It identifies “Shopping Centre Socialites,” a consumer type prevalent in Turkey, Spain, Romania, Italy and Ireland, as people who see shopping hubs as places to meet friends and enjoy quality restaurants, cinemas and free Wi-Fi. The majority of respondents also believe that smaller shopping centres will compete with online retailing in the future.

Emerging market shoppers are enjoying malls for their international allure

Haitang Bay multi-story, duty-free mall in south-eastern China, described in the UK’s Daily Mail as “like a duty free shop on steroids,” opened its doors in September 2014 with thousands of eager consumers rushing to get their hands on over 300 international brands. The entry and expansion of global brands such as H&M and IKEA is also driving large malls in India. Jakarta is sometimes known as “Mal Kota” (Mall City) with almost 200 shopping malls. For the emerging middle class in the country, malls are not just for shopping, but also for social and business activities as well as opportunity to taste foreign cultures through international brands.

Market Sizes of Internet Retailing vs. Store-based Retailing in 2014

Source: Euromonitor International trade sources/national statistics

Note: Regional values are the aggregation of local currency country data at current prices converted into the common currency using y-o-y exchange rates. Market size based on retail value RSP.
Millennials, young people born roughly between 1980 and the mid-2000s are the first “digital natives” and are seldom out of the news. These consumers, 2.6 billion people aged 12-32 globally in 2013 according to Euromonitor International, appear indecisive and self-promoting to many. They are over-immersed in their smartphones, and they also appear too ready to postpone life’s milestones. “People have been calling me a narcissist since I was three,” says Hannah, Lena Dunham’s character in “Girls,” her Millennial manners comedy.

Other discussed Millennial traits include a lack of trust in authority and a level of optimism some find ungrounded. But members of this wired generation, the first to see how wealth can be fleeting in the “Great Recession” as well as living through several traumatic wars, are showing a more caring side in life and in survey responses. For many, the solution is not to acquire more, but less. They show openness to others and socially-aware brands, with a desire to work in a more meaningful way.

**My life, my privacy**

Millennials are no longer notoriously careless about privacy. Just looking at the warm welcome they have given disappearing-message apps like Snapchat and Cyber Dust or anonymous app Whisper, shows that they are more aware of their digital footprint. Jules Polonetsky of the Future of Privacy Forum, a Washington, D.C.-based think tank promoting responsible data practices, believes that Millennials have a generationally-specific outlook on privacy matters. “They are more concerned about things being private from their parents, from their employer, from their college admissions officer or from the creepy adult who doesn’t belong in their business.” Indeed, Hike, a popular Indian app with over 20 million subscribers, lets users filter the information they transmit, concealing aspects of their social lives from their parents. Polonetsky stresses that unlike older people, Millennials are less provoked by commercialism or data collection and have the capacity to “tune out” this commercial side of online life.
Socially-conscious and less brand-loyal consumers

Risk-averse and socially-conscious, Millennials are savvy shoppers. They need to be, as they have less cash and are reluctant to spend what they do have. Having grown up on free services, games and social networking, brands are finding it harder to sell to them. Millennials are buying fewer cars and homes, despite being immersed in consumer culture, particularly electronics. They are using their comfort with technology to locate best prices and learn about trends. Many are indifferent to prestige brands and lavish ads, preferring to buy online or shop in high street chains for items like organically-farmed cotton clothing with the odd high-end buy.

Joe Waters, author of selfishgiving.com, believes, “Millennials...may be the most socially conscious generation in American history. They expect companies and non-profits to meet their high standards with responsible and impactful programs.” Much has been written on how Millennials are less impressed by car culture, with a growing number perceiving them as mere appliances rather than freedom icons.

Average Global Gross Income of Consumers Aged 15-29: 2011-2030

Source: Euromonitor International from national statistics
Note: Data based on constant prices and fixed 2013 exchange rates. Data for 2014-2030 is forecast.
Generation pause

Almost one third of Americans aged 18 to 34 are still living at home with their parents, according to mid-2014 official figures. Higher youth unemployment rates and student debt mean that millions globally are delaying life’s milestones, such as having children. A study from investment company SCM Direct, conducted in August 2014 by Research Plus in the UK, found that among those aged 25 to 34 years old, one in five postponed their marriage plans for more than two years. Many in their 20’s recognise they will be unable to afford the house or lifestyle that their parents enjoyed.

Returning “boomerang kids” and those who never left home are straining family resources. A growing booklist with titles such as “Accordion Family: Boomerang Kids, Anxious Parents and the Private Toll of Global Competition” is offered to parents coping with these Millennials. While some see this trend as a global and personal failure, others are more optimistic. Some Millennials are using the financial breathing space offered by living at home to experiment with different career paths.

Brands have to be creative to reach this demographic. “Meet the Millennials: Getting to Know Your Next Big Customer,” an article in trade publication BedTimes Magazine, offers tips for reaching young adults stalling on traditions like setting up home, that prompts mattress shopping. “Tricky to sell to,” the article advises, “they must be approached on their own terms,” through online outreach and entertainment sponsorship, it suggests.

Marketers have found that young adults, who exercise more than their parents did, have energy drinks for breakfast. PepsiCo responded to this change with Kickstart, a caffeinated fruit juice drink with Millennials in mind and marketed as a breakfast beverage. In austerity-hit Portugal, McDonald’s recently promoted its fast-food meals with an advertising campaign called “Living la vida low-cost.”

Millennials at work

According to an autumn 2014 report from The White House by President Obama’s Council of Economic Advisers as reported by AP, [US] Millennials are the most diverse and educated generation to date, despite facing a scarcity of economic opportunities.
In 2015, Millennials are presenting challenges for some employers. Praised for their “can-do” attitude and affinity with teamwork, they feel entitled to expect variety, constant online access and a life away from work. This desire has led to articles from About.com and other information hubs, such as “11 Tips for Managing Millennials,” which states: “Millennials are the most connected generation in history and will network right out of their current workplace if these needs are not met.”

This fluid work / personal lifestyle is not always derided, however. Rob Orr of Samsung Electronics Europe praises Millennials for their work-life blending skills. For this reason, many have embraced less secure forms of entrepreneurship as “creatives,” pursuing their own ventures. Adam Neumann of shared workspace firm WeWork elaborates, “The true story is that Millennials are willing to share things to have better experiences... That’s a major shift in how people do business and how they interact with each other.”

**Listening to vloggers**

The digitally-savvy “selfie generation” believes that fame must now also include a huge social media presence. It’s not surprising, therefore, that the popularity of young vloggers and their fans is transforming youth culture. YouTube vloggers are now more popular role models for young people, than reality TV stars, Hollywood actors or footballers, according to autumn 2014 research commissioned by Tesco Mobile. The majority (78%) stated that they are more likely to look up to celebrities that have become famous by their own means.
“It is not a scandal. It is a sex crime...Anybody who looked at those pictures, you’re perpetuating a sexual offence.” This was Jennifer Lawrence’s indignant response to Vanity Fair, regarding the posting of nude celebrity photos to online message boards in late 2014 by hackers. Fans of the Hollywood actress tweeted their support. This might be because privacy issues affect everyone online, and as millions are sharing their most personal sentiments through their smartphones.

Due to consumer demand, in 2015 brands will increasingly offer privacy as a selling point. As anxiousness surrounding the data capture implications of marketing initiatives such as store loyalty cards grows, consumers are more uneasy about headline-grabbing media bulletins on state and brand privacy breaches, “leaky” apps and vulnerable “Internet of Things” (IoT) devices. Privacy concerns are even expressed in art. The “Jammer Coat” from Vienna-based Coop Himmelb(l)au, stops firms accessing your phone’s data and was exhibited at the Triennale in Milan.

Is privacy a luxury?
For many, the invasion of privacy that accompanies online activity grates and makes them feel helpless. Journalist Roger Cohen recently wrote, “To live today is to self-promote or perish. Social media tugs the private into the public sphere with an almost irresistible force.”

Consumers may be unsure about developments like location-specific advertising or targeted advertising linked to their previous online searches. New book “The Circle” is a social media dystopia about a world that shuns privacy. Reviewing it on tech website Digital Trends, Andrew Couts reminds us that we are all the villains of the story due to our obsession with sharing every meal and opinion: “Enriching corporations that...trample on the one thing that allows each of us to be our true selves: privacy.”
Debates on the secondary use of data are ongoing and have forced researchers and brands to reconsider ethics and appear more accountable. Jules Polonetsky of the Future of Privacy Forum argues that “Consumers don’t want to talk privacy; they want to talk about how the data is used...They want ‘Here is what we’re doing, and here are the choices you have,’” to feel more in control.

Convenience versus privacy

Many people, however, view an online presence as a trade-off. A “personal brand” in cyberspace is understood to come with some forfeiting of privacy. Christian Rudder, overseeing OKCupid’s in-house research and author of new book “Dataclysm: Who We Are When We Think No One’s Looking” takes surrendering privacy online as a given. “Guess what, everybody,” he writes, “if you use the Internet, you’re the subject of hundreds of experiments at any given time, on every site.”

Some believe that because apps and search engines know so much about consumers, gathering more information on contextual apps benefits consumers, especially when signals on commuting habits or the type of news read can make them predictive. Jules Polonetsky concurs that customers don’t always object to being tracked. “You go to Amazon and they track everything you do, and you kind of like it. You don’t have to read the privacy policy. They sort of say, ‘We think you might like this because everyone else like you likes this...’ They set the tone that this is a tailored and personalized experience, and it’s done for you and for them.”

Real Market Sizes of Personal Credit Card Transactions by Region: 2009-2014

Source: Euromonitor International from trade sources/national statistics
Note: Credit card use can be viewed as an indicator of consumer trust in the protection of their personal data. Data based on constant prices and fixed 2014 exchange rates. Market size based on retail value RSP. Data for 2015 is forecast.
The Achilles’ heel of smart devices

Even smart devices are vulnerable. Releasing a study of the 10 top IoT in devices, all app-controlled mid-2014, HP identified 250 security vulnerabilities and found that 90% collected personal information. In an October 2014 TechCrunch article, “The Internet of Someone Else’s Things,” writer Jon Evans zooms in on the problematic issue of ownership of “Smart Things,” which he feels will split between the physical owner, the legal owner and the owner with the ultimate power to command them. He indicates that this is already happening with smartphones, leading some to cynically call them “tracking devices which make phone calls.”

More brands promoting themselves as privacy-friendly

Facebook has made some nods to user privacy concerns via a privacy check-up initiated by a cartoon avatar, and new app Rooms that lets users interact on Facebook under pseudonyms. After buying privacy-friendly WhatsApp in 2014, Facebook’s Mark Zuckerberg declared that “Private communication has always been an important part of the picture, and I think it’s increasingly important,” a U-turn on his reported 2010 comment that privacy was no longer a “social norm.”

Edward Snowden’s “big reveal” on data capture seems set to continue driving privacy-focused start-ups. Privacy-centric enterprise Places, part of a growing online decentralisation movement, is building a secure Dropbox-style platform for file sharing and messaging. “Intimacy is the concept that is missing today on the web, and it’s in the heart of everyone. It’s all about that…If you want to share publicly Facebook is good for you but if you want to share [things like] all the Saturday night party pictures, it’s nothing you have to be ashamed of…But how to share that? You don’t today…And we thought, ok what do we do?” says co-founder Vigile Hoareau, as reported on TechCrunch.

Cyborg Unplug’s website promises a system that “detects and kicks selected devices [such as cameras] known to pose a risk to personal privacy from your wireless network…it’s your territory and your rules, so make it harder for those that seek to abuse it.” The use of emotive terms like personal, territory and abuse is designed to appeal to consumers worried about technology’s new challenges to privacy. Another recently launched product is the “Blackphone.” This smartphone was built around encryption whose creator, Mike Kershaw, explains as “anti-personal data from the ground up.” Privacy concerns are also driving consumer take up of alternative social networks like Ello that promise not to sell on customer data, or search engines such as DuckDuckGo with the tagline, “The search engine that doesn’t track you,” as part of its logo. Other interesting options are emerging, such as new “anti-social network” app Cloak, which helps users sidestep exes and enemies using location data. Dating app SinglesAroundMe’s new feature, Position-Shift, lets users change their perceived location.
For the many millions of consumers who enjoy shopping and bargain hunting, cross-border online shopping and foreign shopping excursions are central to their lifestyles. Buying online via more interactive, visually-appealing websites is fun, feels safer and lets shoppers obtain products from abroad that are unique or significantly cheaper. In 2015, many consumers will be making a holiday of shopping, or at least making shopping tourism a major part of their holiday by choosing a base near key shopping areas. More of them are expected to downsize to cheaper holiday accommodation to free up cash for product shopping.

**Top 5 In-country Tourism Expenditure Markets in 2014**

Source: Euromonitor International trade sources/national statistics

Note: Tourism expenditure in-country includes domestic tourist expenditure by domestic visitors and incoming tourist receipts by international visitors in the country of reference. Data based on constant prices and fixed 2013 exchange rates. Market size based on retail value RSP. Data for 2013-2014 is forecast.
Bringing the world to you
A more confident online shopper is fuelling the success of cross-border online shopping. This confidence is acknowledged in a new shopping collaboration, seeing two of the biggest auction names, the traditional Sotheby’s and internet shopping giant eBay with its reported 145 million active buyers, joining forces to help more consumers buy antiques and art online.

Farfetch.com is an online boutique that is also enjoying its moment. With over US$160 million in sales in 2013, buyers globally appreciate the desire of founder, José Neves, to share his talent-spotting mode of shopping with them and the best of 300 boutiques. “When I go to New York, I don’t go to a department store,” he explains. “I go to the meatpacking district or in SoHo. I go into that tiny little boutique, that hole in the wall, where I discovered a selection that I can’t find anywhere else.”

Local consumers are turning to overseas retailers in search of better value and choice
For value-conscious shoppers, cross-border shopping over the internet bypasses higher local prices. Research from French ecommerce association Fevad, released in winter 2014, reveals that 28% of the nation’s online shoppers purchased Christmas items from websites outside France.

The 2014 Online Shopping Behaviour Study by MasterCard showed that almost 40% of online shoppers in the UAE buy from foreign websites. One Seoul-based office worker, who bought a television from Amazon.com, told Bloomberg News, “The TV would have cost at least US$600 more [in South Korea] than the US$1,243 I paid. Why should I pay more for the same, or a very similar, product?” Some consumer groups, including Australian consumer advocate group Choice, however, have been critical of aspects of the international online shopping spree – for instance, of “geo-blocking,” a method used by some online retailers to show a “different face” depending on the user’s global location.
Real-world shopping is part of this international value quest. In Vietnam, the trend seeing affluent consumers buying cheaper portable luxury goods while travelling abroad to avoid tariffs has its own moniker: “hang xach tay” (hand-luggage goods). For the USA, Sao Paulo is its busiest consulate worldwide, as Brazilians increasingly head north to shop. One visitor to the consulate, a 30-year-old banker, told the NPR news organisation that he would be heading off to New York, Orlando and Miami with his doctor girlfriend on a shopping trip. “It’s so much cheaper than here, even taking into account the cost of airline flights costing around US$800-US$1,000.” Shops in the Miami area even sell counter-seasonal clothing due to the numbers of Brazilian shoppers. When it’s even easier to head across a border to benefit from lower prices, consumers are jumping at the chance. One committed cross-border bargain-hunter interviewed by the Toronto Star said, “It’s an adventure, you never know what’s going to happen.”

### Shopping tourism

Indicating the importance of shopping to consumers, travel website Booking.com is currently inviting users to rank destinations in terms of shopping amenities in a “Where the world shops” feature, sharing these tips with site users in a bid to prompt bookings.

The love of shopping for Chinese consumers is well known, with Chinese-speaking staff in most designer shops. As the allure of bling alone fades, Chinese shopping tourists are keen to benefit from better professional sales services and product knowledge. According to the China Outbound Tourism Research Institute, 27% of Chinese tourists abroad spend more on shopping than on anything else. A spring 2014 study from tourist VAT refund company Global Blue revealed that 82% of Chinese tourists said shopping was a priority while traveling. One 28-year-old Shanghai resident, on a 10-day shopping trip to Europe with her friend, told the New York Times that they had mapped out a strategy; in Paris they planned to visit the Louvre and the Eiffel Tower, but at the top of their list were Chanel and Prada.
More travelling consumers are buying before they even step on a plane. In its global 2014 Traveller Experience Survey report, consumer transaction technologies company NCR Corporation stresses that airports now derive up to half of their revenue from non-aero retail and concessions. In line with the trend for authentic-style holidays, consumers are keen on shopping tours offered to help transform them into savvier shoppers once at their holiday destination. Self-guided tours firm Shop NYC Tours, for instance, ranks its “Fashionista Fave” tour and “Recessionista tour” as favourites.

Building and retaining a client base via social media

Travellers, especially the young and tech-savvy, are researching their purchasing plans online and comparing prices well before they leave home. Popular mobile messaging service Weixin, known outside China as WeChat, has over 600 million users in China and lets them share their foreign shopping experiences in real time, check prices, send photos of purchases or even take orders on behalf of friends back home. According to Jing Daily, which reports on luxury consumer trends in China, virtually every overseas Chinese tourist has a WeChat account.
Consumers in 2015 live in a world where the “real world” and online culture are blending in an evolving coexistence. Omnichannel shopping is the most obvious consumption-related instance, and consumers are showing their appreciation for the improved online and offline retail buying experience this offers them. This convergence goes behind shopping however, to impact consumer lifestyles more broadly. It is interesting that a clear understanding of how we live with a foot in both worlds often comes from those urging some disengagement from round-the-clock connectivity.

**Shopping in harmony**

Perhaps like never before, the online world will be the defining factor for the way people buy and live the year’s shopping milestones, particularly the 2015 year-end Holiday Season. Brands that have interacted and bonded with their customers online via contests and offers are expected to see larger sales. This year, success will also depend on whether new omnichannel retailing strategies deliver a truly convenient buying experience. A survey published in 2014 by consultancy firm Deloitte shows that about a third of UK shoppers used multiple channels when making a recent purchase. The report argues that the flexibility of omnichannel retailing can enable purchases of products that would not have been available in local stores. It also suggests frequent shoppers and those planning high-value purchases are more likely to be omnichannel devotees.
A novel, recent campaign saw 80% of retailers along central London’s prestigious Regent Street use “Beacon Technology” – small transmitters that interact with mobile devices and update passing shoppers via gadgets carrying their app on promotions and products. Discussing this debut, the New York Times stressed that “The public’s almost insatiable appetite for technology is continuing to blur the lines between physical stores and online shopping.” This project has a goal of building “stronger relationships with customers regularly bombarded by ads in the digital and real worlds.” It understands that brands must engage with customers online to help consumers find them and, like Apple, promote a lifestyle around a brand.

**Top 10 Mobile Internet Retailing Markets in 2014**

![Chart showing the top 10 mobile internet retailing markets in 2014 with the US at the top, followed by the UK, China, Japan, and South Korea. The chart also shows the market size in US dollars for 2009 and 2014.]

*Source: Euromonitor International from national statistics
Note: Historic values are the aggregation of local currency country data at current prices converted into the common currency using y-o-y exchange rates.*

**Online immediacy and the real world**

Fans of the hit mobile dating app Tinder illustrate how the internet has unlocked new ways of serving the human desire for connection. Increasingly, consumers expect that the instant connection and social gratification available online will be a part of their offline social lives, too.
Acknowledging this, high street stores are working to make shopping more compelling. Couponing websites are going global too. Kedar Tenny of McDonald’s India said online couponing had driven “a significant number of customers from the online world into our restaurants.” More is being written about how style interests and trends expressed online impact designers who now see social media as a creative resource and communications tool.

“Fashion needs to start listening and start sharing,” says Julie Anne Quay, founder of the fashion social network VFiles. “If you look at our news feed there are images by Meisel and Testino, but there are also images by a 16-year-old style blogger in Ukraine and a new designer from Korea...That’s what fashion looks like now.”

A closer online / offline world
The blending continues. People’s attachment to their smartphones, phablets and tablets is having a ripple effect on broader consumption needs. For instance, as consumers favour ever larger screens on portable devices to use in their mobile cocoons, fashion brands are responding. Tom Mora, head of women’s design at J. Crew explains, “Throughout the design process, we try to consider every aspect of the way our customers live their lives, and changing mobile technology is no exception. We think about all of these details, whether it’s introducing new tech accessories for the new iPhone 6 or special interior pockets to carry the various generations of iPads or tablets.”

Consumers are taking their love of technology and mobile cocooning on holiday with them, with free Wi-Fi being one of the most desired hotel perks. Holidays and hotels are therefore ending up on Pinterest and Instagram, places where consumer curate their actual consumption as well as consumption aspirations.

Real world sensibilities are also grounding online dating. Profiles on new smartphone app “imgegenteil” (“on the contrary” in German), called “the slow dating movement” by its founders, features pictures shot by the app’s co-creators taken in the candidate’s home. Each page also features a profile summarising the interviewer’s impression of the candidate.

Tech site Mashable’s tips for Valentine’s Day surprises all involved social media-themed DIY projects melding on- and offline life, such as turning convo threads (grouped messages) into memoirs.

Crowdfunding stepped in as rescuer after Thomas Steinemann, having bought the oldest Swiss watch brand, DuBois et Fils, failed to gain backing from banks and investors.
Innovative digitally-themed products in the real world

More products incorporate digitally-themed elements to appeal to the sensibilities of onliners. Digitally-inspired products include hashtag-shaped earrings on Amazon and digitally-shaped pasta from Barilla, which plans to print on 3D food printers in restaurants. Jewellers are entering the wearable technology market with smart jewels. Users can buy elegant leather straps and silver necklace upgrades to house Misfit Wearables’ Shine fitness and sleep monitor, for instance.

In a mid-2014 New York Times article, “I Had a Nice Time With You Tonight. On the App,” Jenna Wortham salutes new apps for people in relationships. She feels that “Adding the Internet to the mix can strengthen a relationship over all, because online interactions have their own kind of entertaining rapport that can coexist with their offline counterparts.”

Beware over-convergence

A political blogger for Grist.org, David Roberts, decided to cut his online dependence to enter a self-imposed offline exile. Speaking to Andrew C. Revkin of the New York Times, he described his thinking pre-unplugging: “I was never completely where I was, never entirely doing what I was doing. I always had one eye on the virtual world. Every bit of conversation was a potential tweet, every sunset a potential Instagram.”
In 2015, more consumers are acting on their belief that monitoring their wellbeing digitally will help them stay well. Fusing consumer interest in preventative healthcare that takes in lifestyle eating, fitness and healthy living habits, plus the passion to benchmark against other consumers with near 24/7 digital engagement, connected health is a prevalent trend. App downloads show just how much consumers have taken to digital health and the world of fitness, healthy lifestyle, daily workouts, dieting, medical information and tracking it embraces.

This includes concerns about new diseases triggered by heavy use of gadgets and related sedentary living. By November 2014, according to xyo.net, the MapMyRun app, tracking various physical activities and calories burned, had notched up 5.4 million downloads on Android. WebMD, used for checking symptoms, medicines and conditions, reached 6.9 million downloads on Android. A staggering 32 million consumers had downloaded the Calorie Counter app.
Mobile fitness monitoring
Controversies over sleep monitoring, imperfect wearables, gadget-related syndromes such as “text-neck” and the desirability of wearables for children aside, the trend seeing consumers interested in digitally monitoring their physical activity through wearable devices and apps to help them meet their fitness goals is flourishing. This is because consumers are aware of the benefits of exercise, yet are lacking in drive. Keen to follow medical advice to stay active and worried about the impact of obesity on health, the multitude of digital tracking devices seem like the panacea, and brands that make them have been urging the “worried well” to get wired and start recording their activity. This blend of exercise and technology also mirrors broader lifestyle trends. Consumers everywhere are connected most of the time, thanks to smartphones, so it feels natural to them to blend fitness elements into their mobile cocoons.

For consumers wishing to make and maintain far-reaching lifestyle changes, monitoring that hooks into their mobile lifestyle makes obvious sense. Dieting is an interesting model, because eating meals and snacking happen throughout the day. This is fertile ground for greater consumer interest in tracking food consumption via the “internet of things.” This sees devices in the smart home and outside it, such as calorie counting apps, smart watches and smart mirrors to give you a peak at the future you and shopping trolleys that flag unhealthy items, all offering motivational messages. One popular dieting app, New Zealand’s FoodSwitch, lets shoppers scan barcodes of packaged food items to see immediate nutritional advice in the form of traffic lights.
The consumer need to share, benchmark, compete and stay motivated means this tracking and health-promoting activity is spilling over into discussions on social networking, dedicated social networking platforms / apps – some created by brands such as Nike and Adidas – and blogs. This phenomenon is also related to the broader perception of wellbeing. In the eyes of consumers, fitness is more than the physical element and linked to factors such as purpose, social life and community.

Making headspace
Consumers are becoming more devoted to their mental wellbeing and seeing their smartphones as devices to enhance their lifestyles and happiness. Their need to take time out and empower themselves through greater self-awareness, and focus is spurred by work / life balance tensions and often involves stress detection, meditation and other relaxation techniques.

Cyberchondria
Consumers are increasingly using “Dr Google” not just to read up on certain conditions but also to self-diagnose. This is understandable for a computer-literate population going online more and more for everything from shopping to looking for love. NHS Choices, the UK Government’s health website, saw visitors jump by 40% in the last year.

However, this knowledge adds a new dimension to the patient-doctor relationship, with some patients becoming “cyberchondriacs” and developing unfounded fears about illness based on their internet searches. Dr. Laurence Buckman, a former chairman of the British Medical Association’s GPs committee, highlights the “extraordinary” rise in the worried well. “My heart does sink when someone comes in with a sheaf of papers with the Google logo at the top, absolutely convinced they know what is wrong with them.”

Connected health campaigning
Connected health is working for consumers in other ways, with social media and blogs seen as megaphones to pressure the food industry and others into greater transparency and into altering product formulations. In an online environment, consumer complaints can become magnified. The New York Times highlighted one case in which an American mother, Renee Shutters, went online with a petition to highlight the adverse effects that petroleum-based food dyes in confectionery were having on her son. This prompted commitments from brands such as Mars to explore natural alternatives.
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Daphne is inspired by making sense of contradictory global consumer and cultural trends, such as the desire for luxury and instant gratification alongside the celebration of frugality, sharing and imperfection. Her interest in sustainability and consumer awareness issues sees her actively participating in a number of relevant forums, most recently urban sustainable lifestyles at UNEP’s Division of Technology, Industry and Economics office in Paris.
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