



Horton International
EXECUTIVE SEARCH • MANAGEMENT CONSULTANTS

THE TOP CONSUMER TRENDS: REDEFINING THE FUTURE



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01 / EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Top Consumer Trends: Redefining the Future outlines the key shifts shaping consumer behaviour, highlighting the driving forces, demographic influences, and emerging business opportunities. As technology, environmental concerns, and societal values evolve, consumers make purchasing decisions emphasising sustainability, personalisation, and ethical practices.

Key trends include:



Personalisation Driven by AI

Advanced AI tools enable hyper-personalised experiences, while data privacy remains a critical concern.



Plant-Based and Lab-Grown Foods

Ethical and sustainable food options are gaining momentum, particularly among younger generations.



Augmented Reality in Shopping

AR is revolutionising customer experiences, blending virtual and physical retail environments.



Circular Economy and Sustainable Consumption

Consumers are prioritising eco-friendly products and services, encouraging businesses to adopt circular models.



Health Tech Integration

Wearable devices and telehealth services are transforming how consumers approach wellness and preventive care.



Digital Detox and Mindful Living

Consumers are seeking balance through reduced screen time and mindfulness practices.



Local and Community-Focused Commerce

Support for local businesses aligns with ethical consumption and sustainability values.



Work Flexibility and Remote Innovation

Flexible and hybrid work models are reshaping workplace dynamics improving productivity and sustainability.



Gamification in Everyday Life

Game-like elements in apps and platforms are enhancing engagement across fitness, education, and productivity.



Ethical and Transparent Supply Chains

Demand for accountability and sustainable practices drives innovation and trust in supply chains.

These trends are shaped by generational differences, with Millennials and Gen Z leading many shifts. They emphasise values like sustainability, ethical practices, and technology-driven solutions, while Gen X and Boomers increasingly adopt these changes in areas such as health tech, flexibility, and durability.

These trends present opportunities for businesses to innovate, adapt, and build deeper connections with consumers. Success will depend on aligning offerings with evolving priorities, leveraging technology responsibly, and embracing transparency and sustainability to thrive in an increasingly competitive landscape.



"Last year, a client of mine—a CEO of a reputable and esteemed Finnish design company—made a striking statement during a briefing for their C-level search: 'Do we really need more stuff on this planet?'

The company, founded in the early 1900s, is a beacon of timeless Finnish design and sustainability, with a robust aftermarket that keeps its products in circulation for decades. I own a cherished piece from this brand from the 1950s passed down to me, and it's a testament to the durability and enduring appeal of ageless design.



It's heartening to see sustainability and circularity remain as one of the major consumer trends, reinforcing the need for conscious consumption and responsible production. These principles are not just values but necessities in addressing the environmental challenges of our time."

Ani Närhi

Managing Partner - Board
Observer

Horton International Finland

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THE TOP CONSUMER TRENDS: REDEFINING THE FUTURE

Consumer behaviour constantly evolves and is influenced by technological changes, society, and global challenges. This ongoing evolution is continuing rapidly, reshaping what people value and how they make purchasing decisions. Consumers today are more aware of how their choices affect their health, communities, and the environment. These changes create opportunities for businesses to adapt and challenges to remain relevant.

Key forces are driving this shift. Environmental concerns, fueled by climate change and resource shortages, are increasing demand for sustainable products and services. At the same time, advances in digital technology are transforming how people interact with brands. A growing focus on health and well-being is also shaping consumer priorities. However, these trends are not uniform. Generational, cultural, and economic factors shape them.

This article examines nine key consumer trends. Each trend highlights consumer priorities and behaviour shifts, the demographics driving them, and their implications for businesses. From sustainability to technology, these trends show how innovation and responsibility are shaping the future of consumption.



CHANGING CONSUMER DEMOGRAPHICS: A NEW PERSPECTIVE

Before diving into the trends, it's helpful to understand how consumer demographics have shifted in recent years. Different generations have unique experiences and values that shape their consumption patterns.



Baby Boomers (Born 1946-1964)

continue to have significant purchasing power and often prioritise quality and reliability. While they are slower to adopt new technology, many are beginning to embrace tools that improve their health and help them stay connected.

(Born 1965-1980) Generation X

values practicality and flexibility. Often referred to as the "sandwich generation" because they support ageing parents and children, they gravitate toward products and services that save time and reduce stress.



Millennials (Born 1981-1996)

are highly tech-savvy and focus on experiences. They are leaders in digital consumption and prioritise sustainability and ethical practices. This group drives trends such as plant-based diets and eco-friendly fashion, seeking brands that align with their values.

(Born 1997-2012) Generation Z

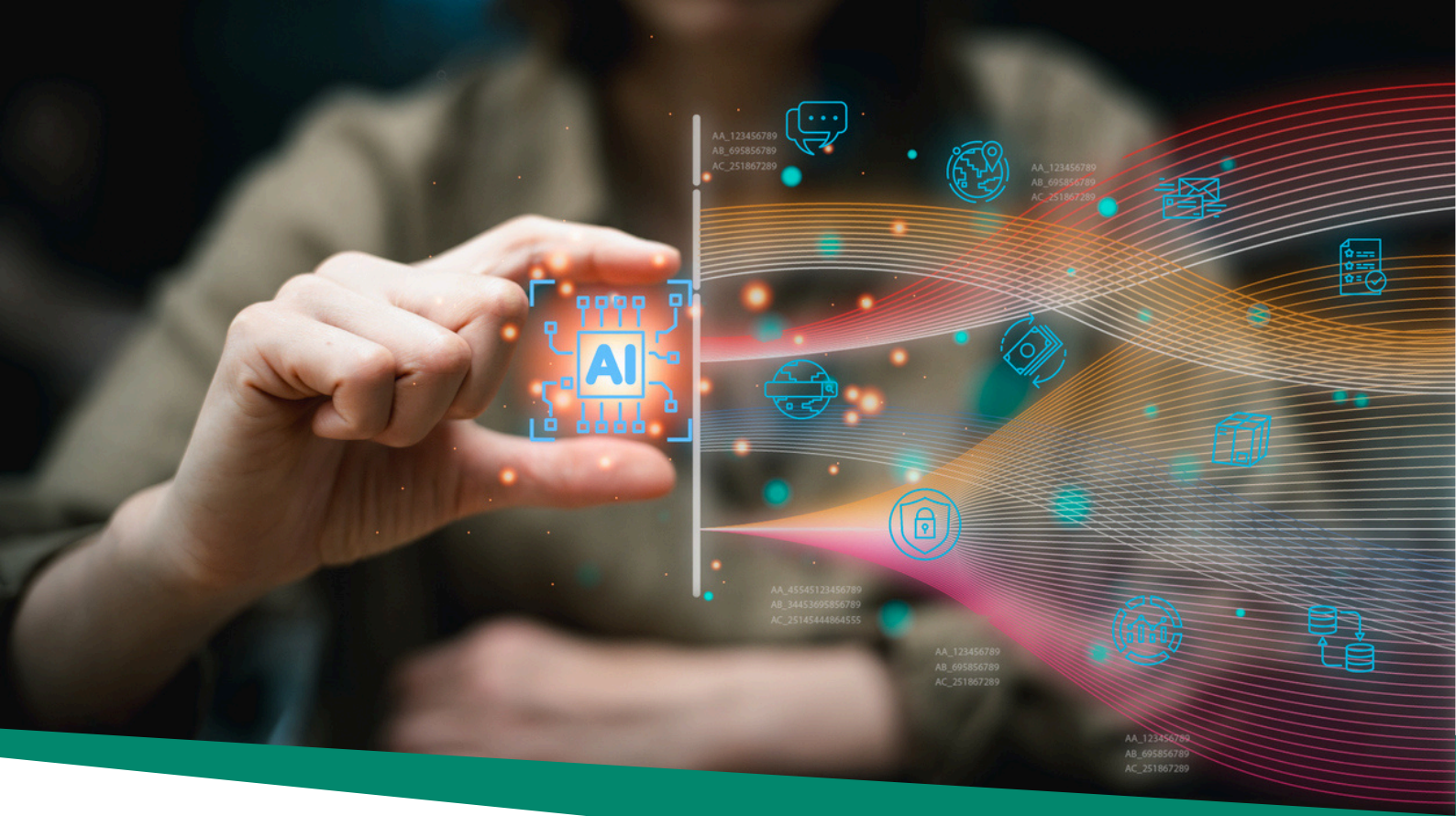
the first generation to grow up with digital technology, values authenticity and inclusivity. They prefer platforms and brands that offer transparency, instant engagement, and community-driven experiences.



Generation Alpha (Born post-2013)

is still growing up but is already influenced by an AI-driven, eco-conscious world. Their preferences are expected to focus on seamless technology integration and commitment to sustainability.

In summary, Boomers and Gen X often prioritise quality and functionality, while values and experiences drive Millennials and Gen Z. Although sustainability is important across all generations, the focus varies: older consumers may emphasise durability, while younger consumers demand ethical sourcing and carbon-neutral production.



01 PERSONALISATION DRIVEN BY AI

Many consumers seek brands that offer personalised shopping experiences, setting the stage for AI to revolutionise how personalisation is implemented. AI can now generate hyper-personalised shopping experiences and tailored shopping advice based on previous behaviour.

However, a fine line exists between leveraging customer data and protecting customer and data privacy. For instance, for many consumers, privacy is more important than convenience. Brands that fail to do so risk being penalised by customers and regulators. The brands must be transparent about how they collect and use data and how they protect it.

Job Opportunities

As brands embrace AI-driven personalisation, the demand for specialists in AI, data science, and customer experience is growing. Companies must strike a balance between delivering tailored experiences and maintaining consumer trust, creating new career opportunities in this evolving space.

- **AI Developers & Data Scientists** – Creating smart algorithms that enhance shopping experiences while safeguarding privacy.
- **Customer Experience Designers** – Crafting seamless, AI-driven interactions that feel personal yet unobtrusive.
- **AI-Enhanced Content Creators** – Producing dynamic, data-driven marketing materials that adapt to consumer preferences.

02 AUGMENTED REALITY OFFERS IMMERSIVE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

Augmented and virtual reality is a significant trend aimed at enhancing customer experience and enabling customers to make good buying decisions quickly. Platforms that allow customers to try before they buy will become commonplace and improve the online shopping experience. While augmented reality will never entirely replace the experience of touching, feeling and trying a product, it can get very close to simulating the in-store experience.

Numerous tools and apps allow consumers to try cosmetics and clothes to explore the latest fashions as part of their purchase journeys. While their customers may be reluctant to spend money on headsets and other touchy-feely peripherals that exploit virtual reality, businesses can create small storefronts that have these facilities, bringing the full impact of augmented reality to the High Street.

Job Opportunities

As AR adoption accelerates, businesses are looking for new ways to enhance the customer journey, creating exciting opportunities for tech-savvy creatives to shape the future of immersive shopping experiences.

- **AR UX Designers & Developers** – Crafting seamless and engaging AR-powered shopping experiences.
- **Retail & E-Commerce Integration Specialists** – Implementing virtual try-ons, 3D product displays, and in-store AR solutions.
- **AR App Developers** – Building mobile apps that allow consumers to visualise products before purchase.
- **AR Storefront Experience Creators** – Designing interactive in-store AR setups to bring online and offline shopping closer together.
- **AR Data Analysts** – Using customer interaction data from AR platforms to optimise user engagement and sales strategies.





03 PLANT-BASED AND LAB-GROWN FOODS

The trend towards plant-based food has gained momentum recently, driven by ethical concerns, health consciousness, and environmental sustainability. The latest innovations in the field have increased customer options considerably, giving them a much better choice over what they eat. Although this trend resonates most with vegans, vegetarians, and flexitarians who are actively seeking ways to reduce their environmental footprint, it appears to be the younger generations, particularly Millennials and Gen Z, who are leading this trend and who are more likely to value ethical sourcing and sustainability in their dietary choices.

As technology advances, plant-based and lab-grown food options will likely become more diverse, affordable, and accessible. Governments may incentivise their adoption through subsidies and policy changes, further accelerating market growth. Collaboration between food scientists and culinary experts will refine taste and texture, making these products more mainstream.

Job opportunities

As plant-based and lab-grown food options continue to evolve, governments may incentivise their adoption through subsidies and policy changes, further accelerating market growth. This opens new career opportunities for professionals looking to shape the future of sustainable food.

- **Food Scientists & Biotechnologists** – Innovating plant-based and lab-grown alternatives, enhancing taste, texture, and nutritional value.
- **Sustainable Agriculture Specialists** – Developing eco-friendly farming techniques for plant-based ingredient production.
- **Manufacturing & Production Engineers** – Optimising large-scale plant-based food production to increase efficiency and affordability.
- **Supply Chain & Sustainability Managers** – Ensuring ethical sourcing, reduced waste, and efficient distribution of plant-based products.
- **Culinary R&D Experts** – Refining plant-based recipes and textures to meet consumer expectations and broaden appeal.



04 CIRCULAR ECONOMY AND SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION

Sustainability has become a central focus for businesses and consumers alike. The circular economy emphasises reducing waste, reusing materials, and recycling products, transforming traditional linear consumption models. The trend is driven by increasing awareness of climate change and resource depletion, prompting consumers to seek eco-friendly alternatives. Governments and organisations also introduce regulations and incentives to promote sustainability, further driving this shift.

Millennials and Gen Z are at the forefront of this movement, prioritising brands that align with their environmental values. Gen X and Baby Boomers are also participating, particularly in home energy efficiency and recycling.

Job opportunities

The circular economy is transforming industries by focusing on waste reduction, material reuse, and sustainable production. As climate awareness and government regulations increase, businesses are shifting toward eco-friendly solutions, creating new job opportunities.

- **Sustainable Product Designers** – Developing eco-friendly, reusable, and recyclable products that minimise waste.
- **Waste Management & Recycling Specialists** – Innovating ways to recover and repurpose materials in a circular system.
- **Supply Chain & Sustainability Managers** – Optimizing green logistics, ethical sourcing, and carbon footprint reduction.
- **Repair & Refurbishment Experts** – Supporting the shift toward fix-and-repair retail models, extending product lifecycles.
- **Circular Retail & Leasing Model Designers** – Creating rental and resale business models that prioritise sustainability over disposability.



05 HEALTH TECH INTEGRATION

Technology is revolutionising how consumers manage their health, from wearable devices that track fitness metrics to telehealth services offering remote consultations. The pandemic underscored the importance of accessible and proactive healthcare. Coupled with advances in AI and IoT, health tech provides personalised solutions and convenience, catering to a growing demand for preventive care.

Health-conscious individuals across all age groups are adopting these innovations. Millennials and Gen Z embrace wearable devices and mobile apps, while Boomers and Gen X show interest in telehealth services.

Job opportunities

Technology is revolutionising healthcare, from wearable fitness devices to AI-powered telehealth services. As demand for accessible, preventive care grows, health tech innovations are creating new job opportunities.

- **Health Tech Developers** – Designing apps, wearable devices, and AI-driven healthcare solutions.
- **Telehealth Specialists** – Expanding access to virtual consultations and remote patient monitoring.
- **Cybersecurity & Data Protection Experts** – Safeguarding sensitive health data and digital health records.
- **Regulatory & Compliance Officers** – Ensuring health tech solutions meet legal and ethical standards.

06 SUPPORTING LOCAL AND COMMUNITY-FOCUSED COMMERCE

Consumers increasingly support local businesses and prioritise community-focused commerce, emphasising authenticity and sustainability. This trend is driven by a growing awareness of the environmental impact of long supply chains and a desire to strengthen local economies. Supporting small businesses and artisans also aligns with the values of ethical consumption and transparency.

Digital platforms play a crucial role in this shift by connecting consumers with local makers, farmers, and independent retailers. These tools make it easier for people to discover and support nearby businesses, blending technology with community engagement.

Millennials and Gen Z lead this movement, motivated by the ethical and environmental aspects of buying locally. They value the stories behind their products and often seek items that reflect craftsmanship and cultural heritage. Gen X and Baby Boomers are also participating, particularly in rural and suburban areas where local markets and community businesses thrive.



Job opportunities

Consumers are increasingly prioritising local businesses, authenticity, and sustainability, driven by ethical consumption and a desire to support local economies. Digital platforms are making it easier to connect with independent retailers, artisans, and farmers, blending technology with community engagement.

- **Digital Platform Developers & Managers** – Creating online marketplaces that connect consumers with local businesses.
- **Local Marketing Specialists** – Helping small businesses reach their communities through targeted campaigns.
- **Sustainable Business Consultants** – Guiding companies on eco-friendly practices and ethical sourcing.
- **Small Business Support Roles** – Assisting local entrepreneurs with strategy, operations, and digital transformation.



07 GAMIFICATION IN EVERYDAY LIFE

Gamification is evolving beyond entertainment and gaming to permeate various aspects of daily life, including education, fitness, workplace productivity, and financial management. Incorporating game-like elements such as rewards, points, leaderboards, and challenges enhances user engagement and motivates behaviour change.

This trend is driven by the increasing accessibility of mobile apps and digital platforms, making integrating gamification into routine tasks easier. For example, fitness apps use streaks and badges to encourage consistent exercise, while educational platforms employ interactive quizzes and progress tracking to make learning more engaging. Similarly, financial apps use gamification to promote savings and budgeting habits.

Generation Z and Millennials are the primary adopters of gamification. They are drawn to its interactive, competitive features and the sense of accomplishment it provides. Apps and platforms that use gamification resonate strongly with these groups due to their familiarity with digital environments and preference for dynamic, engaging experiences.

Generation Alpha is emerging as a key demographic, particularly in educational settings. Gamified learning tools cater to their digital-native upbringing, making education effective and enjoyable. Gen X and Baby Boomers are also beginning to adopt gamification, especially in health and wellness contexts, where tools like step counters and habit trackers align with their goals for self-improvement.

Job opportunities

The gamification trend opens doors to a variety of job opportunities.

- **Game Designers & UX Specialists** – Creating interactive, reward-based systems that enhance engagement.
- **Data Analysts & Behavioral Scientists** – Studying user behavior patterns to refine gamified experiences.
- **Educational Technologists** – Designing gamified learning platforms that make education more dynamic and effective.
- **Health & Wellness Coaches** – Leveraging gamification to motivate fitness, mental health, and habit-building.

08 DIGITAL DETOX AND MINDFUL LIVING

As technology becomes ever-present in daily life, consumers are increasingly seeking ways to counteract digital saturation. Digital detoxes and mindful living have gained traction as people strive to reclaim their time, reduce stress, and prioritise mental health. This trend reflects a growing awareness of the toll that constant connectivity and screen time can take on well-being.

Digital detox involves consciously disconnecting from devices, such as smartphones and computers, for a set period. Consumers are turning to offline hobbies, spending more time in nature, and exploring mindfulness practices like meditation, yoga, and journaling. Meanwhile, mindful living emphasises intentionality, encouraging consumers to be present in the moment and align their actions with their values.

This movement is fueled by increasing reports of "tech fatigue," including sleep disturbances, decreased attention spans, and social anxiety linked to the overuse of digital platforms. Millennials and Gen Z are the primary drivers of this trend, seeking tools and experiences that help them unplug and practice mindfulness. Apps like Calm and Headspace and retreats focused on wellness and mindfulness resonate strongly with these groups.

Generation X and Baby Boomers contribute primarily through activities like gardening, hiking, and community-based wellness programs. For these generations, relaxation is often emphasised and reconnecting with simpler, offline pursuits.

Job opportunities

As the demand for mindful living and digital well-being grows, new career opportunities are emerging at the intersection of technology, wellness, and behavioral health.

- **Wellness App Developers** – Creating digital solutions that promote mindful technology use and digital well-being.
- **Corporate Wellness Program Coordinators** – Designing employee well-being initiatives that help businesses support healthy work-life balance.
- **Content Creators for Wellness Apps** – Producing meditation guides, mindful habit trackers, and relaxation tools.





09 WORK FLEXIBILITY AND REMOTE INNOVATION

The shift toward flexible work models, including remote and hybrid setups, has become a defining trend in the modern workplace. The pandemic served as a global experiment in remote work, proving its feasibility for many industries. As a result, businesses have embraced flexible models that improve work-life balance, enhance productivity, and lower operational costs. Employees, freed from lengthy commutes, benefit from increased personal time and reduced stress, while companies gain access to a broader talent pool unhindered by geographical constraints.

Beyond personal and organisational advantages, flexible work models contribute to sustainability. Reduced commuting lowers carbon emissions, aligning with global efforts to combat climate change. Additionally, decentralising workspaces helps revitalise smaller cities and towns, spreading economic opportunities.



While Millennials and Gen Z often drive the demand for flexibility, these models benefit all age groups. Gen X and Baby Boomers, particularly those approaching retirement, appreciate the ability to work part-time or remotely. This inclusivity ensures businesses retain valuable institutional knowledge and foster diverse, multigenerational teams.

The rise of remote work has also sparked innovation in collaboration tools, virtual meeting platforms, and project management systems. However, businesses must address challenges like maintaining team cohesion, managing performance, and preserving company culture in virtual environments. Flexible work is no longer a temporary adjustment; it is the future of work. Companies that adapt and innovate within this framework attract top talent, drive employee satisfaction, and remain competitive in a rapidly evolving marketplace.

Job opportunities

The shift toward remote and hybrid work models has transformed the modern workplace, offering better work-life balance, increased productivity, and access to a global talent pool. As businesses adapt to this new era, job opportunities in remote and flexible work continue to expand.

- **UX Designers & Software Developers** – Enhancing collaboration tools, virtual platforms, and digital workspaces.
- **Digital Marketing Specialists** – Managing brand engagement and online strategies in a decentralised workforce.
- **HR & Remote Work Strategists** – Designing policies that support hybrid models, employee well-being, and company culture.
- **Freelancers & Independent Consultants** – Thriving in flexible roles across multiple industries, from content creation to business strategy.

10 ETHICAL AND TRANSPARENT SUPPLY CHAINS

Ethical and transparent supply chains will become a critical focus for businesses, driven by increasing consumer demand for accountability, fair labour practices, and sustainable production methods.

Today's consumers expect more than just quality products; they want to know where their items come from, how they are made, and under what conditions. Companies are adopting technologies like blockchain to provide verifiable, end-to-end visibility into their supply chains. By publicly sharing this information, businesses meet consumer expectations and differentiate themselves in competitive markets.

Social media and digital platforms have encouraged consumers to research and share information about brands, highlighting unethical practices. Scandals related to exploitative labour or environmental harm can quickly go viral, damaging reputations and bottom lines. Companies prioritising transparency are rewarded with trust, loyalty, and an enhanced brand image.

Millennials and Gen Z are at the forefront of this movement, wielding their purchasing power to support brands aligned with their values. They prioritise companies that promote fair wages, gender equality, and sustainability.

Gen X also values transparency, appreciating detailed insights into product origins and manufacturing standards. Though less vocal, Boomers are increasingly influenced by these shifts, especially when ethical considerations align with quality and durability.

Job opportunities

Consumers are demanding greater accountability, fair labour practices, and sustainable production, making ethical and transparent supply chains a key business priority. Companies adopting blockchain and digital tracking to ensure end-to-end supply chain visibility are gaining trust, loyalty, and a competitive edge.

- **Sustainability Specialists** – Implementing eco-friendly sourcing and waste reduction initiatives.
- **Supply Chain Transparency Technologists** – Leveraging blockchain and AI to provide real-time supply chain insights.
- **Ethical Sourcing Specialists** – Ensuring fair labor practices, responsible material sourcing, and ethical partnerships.
- **Compliance Professionals** – Monitoring regulations and corporate responsibility standards to prevent unethical practices.

CONCLUSION

As consumer trends continue to evolve, there is a profound shift toward innovation, responsibility, and conscious decision-making. Across generations, individuals are prioritising sustainability, health, personalisation, and ethical practices, reshaping industries and creating new opportunities. Businesses that embrace these shifts by aligning with consumer values, leveraging technology, and fostering transparency will position themselves as leaders in the evolving market landscape.

The future of consumption lies in balancing innovation with responsibility, crafting products, services, and experiences that resonate with a more aware and connected global audience. These trends are not merely challenges but opportunities to redefine success in a world where values drive value.



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