

After the Virus: 10 Consumer Trends for a Post-Coronavirus World

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Skift Take

Which trends looked years away from the mainstream — and so were easy to ignore — but now feel primed to become totally normal in a matter of months, if not weeks? Our friends at TrendWatching analyze.

— Rafat Ali

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Our friends at [TrendWatching](#) have been tracking for some years emerging consumer trends that offer powerful early signals of what people will value and what their priorities will be in a post-coronavirus world. [Download the full report](#) (for free) to explore these trends complete with related innovation examples and suggestions on how to apply them.

What are 10 emerging cross-industry trends that have been radically accelerated by the crisis?

The prospect of a pandemic has been a well-known systemic risk for many years, but no one could have predicted the exact timing or nature of the current coronavirus crisis.

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That's often the way with trends: The big shifts are well-known; there are many weak signals; but it's hard if not impossible to know exactly the timing and shape of the bell curve that most trends follow. Will they stay niche for one year? Three years? Or suddenly see accelerated mass adoption because of some external trigger?

That's why at times like this, when everything seems to be in flux, it's useful to be able to look at trends that were already "out there." Which new behaviors have early adopters and pioneer brands already been embracing? **Which trends looked years away from the mainstream (and so were easy to ignore), but now feel primed to become totally normal in a matter of months, if not weeks?**

On an organizational level, times of crises can be both threatening and liberating. Most of the executives we speak with are painfully aware of the gap between their oil tanker-size organizations and their new, agile startup competitors. But cultural change is hard — without a big shock that means all the old "rules" can be broken. This is that moment.

Here are 10 emerging consumer trends TrendWatching has been tracking for some years that offer powerful early signals of what people will value and what their priorities in a post-coronavirus world will be. [Download the full report](#) (for free) to explore five further trends complete with related innovation examples and suggestions on how to implement them.

As you scan these trends ask yourself: Are we prepared for these new behaviors? Are we ready to meet these new expectations?

1. VIRTUAL EXPERIENCE ECONOMY

You know all about the Experience Economy. When superstars like Billie Eilish are canceling tours, sports leagues are called off, the Louvre is shut, and the Olympics are looking more precarious by the day, there will be a massive void in people's lives. But immersive new technologies mean that people can increasingly get their experience-based status fixes from *virtual* experiences, too. Social media and esports are the obvious manifestations of how consumers accrue status in the virtual realm. But now watch out for other, less competitive virtual experiences — 'travel', retail, gatherings, and more — to

take on new levels of meaning.

Featured Innovation: Assassin's Creed offers guided tours of ancient Egypt



French games brand [Ubisoft](#) released a free in-game update for popular game Assassin's Creed, allowing owners of the Origins game version to access Discovery Tour mode. In this mode, players can travel around the game's world (which is set in ancient Egypt), and visit locations such as Alexandria, Memphis, and Giza. The mode also features guided tours, allowing players to learn about the Great Pyramids, daily life in ancient Egypt, and the reign of Cleopatra.

How to apply this trend?

Don't get hung up on the tech as you face an endless barrage of VR- and AR-powered experience pitches. While the tech is important, in the end it's not about the tech at all but about deep human motivations.

The bigger challenge: Stop thinking about digital experiences just as tools or entertainment, and start thinking about them as platforms for status-accruing experiences.

Once you've made that mindset shift, the possibilities are infinite. How will you create virtual experiences that consumers value — and want to share — as much as their real world experiences?

2. SHOPSTREAMING

Back at the [end of 2017](#), when we first wrote about this trend emerging in Asia, we said, "two of Asia's biggest digital waves — e-commerce and live-streaming — are merging. This is spelling out the next direction for both online shopping and social connections: interactive, experiential, and in real time." But the recent crisis has seen the Chinese live-streaming market grow even **bigger and faster** than it has over the past few years, and this heady mix of entertainment, community, and commerce will raise ecommerce expectations going forward, on a global scale.

Featured Innovation: Taobao uses live streams to help boost income of Chinese farmers



Starting in April 2019, China-based online shopping site [Taobao](#) will allow farmers from across the country to host their own live streams in an effort to help boost their income. The initiative hopes to increase their earnings by around RMB 10,000 (USD \$1,487) a month by promoting their hard-to-sell products. A similar scheme was watched by over 400 million people in 2018. Taobao also plans to launch a series of television shows around the topic.

How to apply this trend?

Amazon's functional design and relentless focus on choice and convenience have come to define customer expectations as to what online commerce is about in the West. But the next generation of digital commerce will be radically different. More engaging, more immersive, and more social. Yes, it's almost like the offline malls of yesteryear.

Your challenge: Could you create an online shopping environment where people come just to hang out and chat?

3. VIRTUAL COMPANIONS

This has been one of our most eye-opening and controversial trends since we first spotted it a couple of [years ago](#). Quite simply, as people become accustomed to digital assistants and chatbots their expectations will evolve, and *some* people (no, not all!) will start to seek out digital companions that can provide them with a sense of connection, companionship, and even love. The

out virtual personalities that have the power to entertain, educate, befriend, and heal. The crisis will see people turning to these virtual companions, and once the genie is out of the bottle, these behaviors will persist once the crisis subsides.

Featured Innovation: Samsung launches virtual beings at CES 2020



January 2020 saw Samsung introduce Neon, virtual beings that look and behave like humans, and can demonstrate emotion and intelligence. The avatars, which were unveiled at CES, are intended to work alongside people, sharing experiences and teaching skills rather than simply supplying data and information. Powered by proprietary technology CORE R3 ("reality, real time, and responsiveness"), the project remains under development with a beta version expected later in 2020.

How to apply this trend?

It would be easy to look at Samsung's Neon and dismiss this trend as a Black Mirror episode come to life. But it would also be a big mistake. Need more evidence? Witness the delight in reviews for the "AI friend" Replika. Those are real – not virtual – feelings.

Not every brand needs to offer people virtual companionship. That would be weird. And creepy. But if you're a brand who people would welcome some companionship from, then this trend represents an exciting challenge for you: What personality should your virtual companion have?

4. AMBIENT WELLNESS

Right now, people are obsessively reaching for their hand sanitizer as they move through their daily lives. But as this moment starts to pass, they'll revert to less hygienic habits, although their desire to remain safe and well will be stronger than ever. Which will create a huge opportunity: for providers of physical spaces to embed health-boosting measures into the very spaces that their customers pass through, making staying healthy effortless.

Featured Innovation: Stella McCartney launches "clean air" flagship



June 2018 saw Stella McCartney open a flagship London store, featuring an air filtration system. The luxury fashion designer's Bond Street store includes an air filtration system which removes 95 percent of all airborne pollutants and traffic fumes. The clean air flagship store is designed to raise awareness of the problem of air pollution.

How to apply this trend?

Hand hygiene is front of mind for people today. But think expansively about how your customers interact with your physical spaces, and the impact those spaces have on all aspects of their physical and mental well-being.

Where are there opportunities to alleviate any negative impacts, or better yet, offer health *boosting* measures within the environments that your customers pass through?

5. M2P (MENTOR TO PROTÉGÉ)

Liquid online social connection, meet the very human desire for self-improvement. Yes, people will spend mindless hours online. But many of them will also yearn to use some of that time productively, and so will embrace platforms that connect them with teachers, experts and mentors in their quest to learn new skills.

Featured Innovation: Duolingo partners with Twitch to offer language learning gaming streams





Language learning platform [Duolingo](#) partnered with video game live-streaming platform [Twitch](#) to launch the Duolingo Verified Streamer program in July 2019. The 12 multilingual streamers are part of Duolingo's Global Ambassador program, and while not language experts or teachers, each is multilingual or learning a second language. They offer streams in Twitch chat on various topics, allowing viewers to practice their chosen language.

How to apply this trend?

Obviously skill-focused organizations and services will be a natural fit for this trend. But any business with an online platform or community could experiment with weaving a self-improvement strand through their offering. Just see how video game platform Twitch offered its viewers a chance to brush up on their language skills! Ask yourself, what skills would *our* community be interested in developing?

6. A-COMMERCE

Another trend from a couple of years ago that has just received a powerful shot in the arm. Back in 2017/18, the increasing power and adoption of AI was the main driver of this trend. Now it's the sudden sharp increase in demand for contact-free interactions converging with advancements in robotics that is enabling a new breed of automated commerce, IRL.

Featured Innovation: Domino's pilots robot car-powered pizza delivery



In June 2019, Domino's Pizza and robotics company [Nuro](#) announced the launch of a pilot initiative where a fleet of driverless robot cars will deliver pizza to customers in Houston, Texas. The deliveries are carried out by Nuro's R1 vehicle, which is roughly half the width of a compact sedan and does not allow for a human driver. The vehicles are being monitored by remote technology and human drivers in chase vehicles.

How to apply this trend?

As the saying goes, necessity is the mother of invention. During the crisis both businesses and customers will welcome automated alternatives. They'll accept kinks that wouldn't be acceptable in less challenging times. But don't assume this situation will continue indefinitely. Smart brands will use this period to experiment, but when making longer term plans, think carefully about which parts of your customer journey to automate.

Your ultimate aim: Let the robots and algorithms do what they do best, and free humans to do what they do best too.

7. THE BURNOUT

The coronavirus is hardly the only thing causing people mental anguish. Even before it triggered a global public health crisis and raised fears of a deep economic slump, people were facing rampant inequality, always-on social competition, the looming existential threat of the climate crisis, and much more. It's hardly surprising therefore that any organization that can help improve people's mental well-being will be welcomed with open arms.

Featured Innovation: Moxy Hotels offers in-room ASMR videos





The [Moxxy NYC Chelsea](#), owned by Marriott, announced in April 2019 that guests will have access to exclusive ASMR (Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response) videos in their rooms. The videos, which are part of the hotel's Bedtime Stories program, were co-created with ASMR experience providers [Whisperlodge](#) and feature performers using and interacting with a variety of different props to provide guests with a so-called "mental massage" after a long day.

How to apply this trend?

Get ready to flex your organization's empathy muscle! This is one of those trends that doesn't need to require a huge budget or highly technical solution. It simply requires you to think about, and really understand, what's causing your customers' mental anguish. Now find a clever way to alleviate it!

8. OPEN SOURCE SOLUTIONS

We termed this a "bold new frontier for sustainability" when we first wrote about **open source solutions**, the act of sharing and even giving away your innovative solutions to our toughest shared problems. The coronavirus is one of the most urgent transnational, cross-demographic problems in recent history, and as such it has reminded people that the best organizations are those that collaborate generously with others.

Featured Innovation: Ford, Uber and Lyft Join Shared Streets data platform



In September 2018, it was announced that Ford, Uber and Lyft were joining [SharedStreets](#), a public-private data platform designed to help reduce urban transportation issues. The platform, funded by Bloomberg Philanthropies, will operate in over 30 global cities, including Paris, Melbourne, and Washington, D.C. SharedStreets aims to create shared, machine-readable standards for data such as curb usage and traffic speeds, enabling cities to make better investment and management decisions.

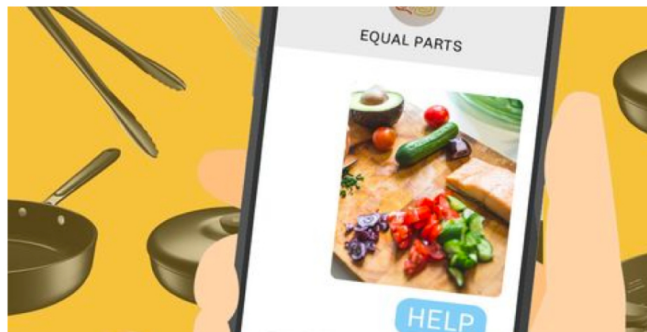
How to apply this trend?

This remains one of the biggest and most impactful trends we've ever published! It should challenge and excite you in equal measure. But it's actually a trend with a long pedigree: in 1959, Volvo invented the three-point seat belt but famously made the patent available to everyone in the interests of public safety. It's estimated that since then the invention has saved over 1 million lives. The brand still (rightly!) celebrates this decision. **Ask yourself: What could we do in 2020 that we'll still be talking about in 60 years time?**

9. ASSISTED DEVELOPMENT

One beneficial outcome of more time spent at home? Many will be prompted, forced even, to learn some often long-neglected traditional life skills, such as — *gasp!* — cooking for themselves. Trend watchers love branding things as "millennial," but the recent growth of the on-demand economy has seen rising numbers of affluent urbanites outsource basic domestic tasks to gig workers. They'll gladly hand back some of these when the crisis is over, but others they'll find they actually *enjoy* doing themselves.

Featured Innovation: Cookware brand offers cookery advice by text



Cookware equipment brand [Equal Parts](#) offers customers access to pro tips through Text a Chef. People can text in to receive cooking tips, inspiration, and meal ideas. The on-demand text service is available seven days a week, 9 a.m.–9 p.m., Monday through Thursday, and 2 p.m.–6 p.m. on Sunday, Eastern Standard Time. The brand sells individual

cookware (USD \$49-\$149) and four different cookware kits ranging from a 13-piece accessories set at USD \$199 to a USD \$449 15-piece complete kitchen set.

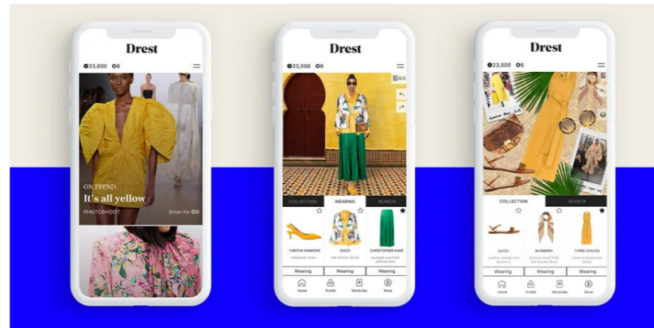
How to apply this trend?

Think about the #adulting “jobs to be done” your brand enables. **Are you only selling a product, or can you help your customers to become more independent, better versions of themselves?** As people emerge from a crisis, they’ll appreciate those brands that supported them through it. Don’t just think about support in purely survivalist terms. Aim higher up Maslow’s hierarchy of needs too.

10. VIRTUAL STATUS SYMBOLS

We’re obsessed with status. If you understand how people identify themselves, how they gain respect from society and their peers, then you’ll have a powerful tool through which to understand their behavior. Physical goods have long had a monopoly on status: They are scarce and expensive. Younger consumers and video gamers have long embraced virtual goods, but now expect new technologies (e.g., AR and blockchain), the growing desire for sustainable consumption, and the corona crisis to converge and push the recognition that virtual goods can be genuine status symbols into other industries and demographics.

Featured Innovation: Drest turns virtual fashion challenges into a sales opportunity



Luxury fashion gaming app [Drest](#) opened its waitlist in September 2019, ahead of a full launch expected in 2020. Available on iOS and Android, the game app provides users with styling challenges to execute on realistic-looking photos. They can then purchase the products either in-game or from online luxury retail platform [Farfetch](#). Luxury brands featured include Burberry, Gucci, and Prada.

How to apply this trend?

The best place to start is to understand how your customers derive status from their interactions with your brand today, in the real world. Is it through price? Scarcity? Do you make them look accomplished or smart? What tribes identify with you?

Now dive into the online worlds — gaming, social media — where people are spending even more time than ever. What are the social dynamics at play in these communities?

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