A definitive guide to the visual and cultural trends in influencer marketing. Produced by Whalar.
HOW WILL YOU DEFINE A DECADE?

by Mike Hondorp, CMO, Whalar

In 2020, Instagram will celebrate a decade since its founding. Having worked there during the consumer shift to mobile, and the platform’s subsequent rise to prominence in the marketing and creative landscape, I witnessed firsthand the democratization of creativity, and its profound effect on culture. A global network of social talent are now blending creativity, art, technology and culture like never before, and it’s no surprise that advertisers and marketers are taking note.

However, knowing where to invest marketing resources within the ever-evolving world of social media is tough. So to give marketers actionable insights, we embarked on a project to identify the key trends that are redefining the influencer space for the 2020s - on Instagram and beyond.

We call this project Trends: 2020.

This report presents six key trends in the influencer and creator ecosystem, along with a deep dive into the data and the culture surrounding each. In 2019, digital ad spend overtook traditional for the first time.² Now, more than ever, the need to be culturally relevant within the social space is crucial for brands, publishers and creators alike.

Mobile is the go-to place for social, political and environmental issues and beyond. Our study illustrates that audiences are seeking a greater purpose in the content they consume. For brands to thrive in this ecosystem, aligning with passionate creators who aren’t afraid to take creative risks can increase brand equity exponentially.

We hope you enjoy Trends: 2020. We invite you to read on for the trends, creators and cultural moments that will define the decade to come.

Methodology

It was important for us to find the trends that real people were tapping into, and what better way than to analyse the trend setters they follow?

Our data science team analysed a database of over 15,000 influencers, with a combination of 37 million data points, to uncover which creators had credible audiences, along with audience and engagement rate growth.

After months of observation and analysis, we identified the six key trends that will influence advertising and culture over the next decade.

Posting with a Purpose

In an age of hyper-publishing, it can be hard to cut through the noise in order to make a real difference. But one question remains: how should we approach creativity and influencer marketing in an era of ever-shifting consumer needs and behavior?

The following report introduces six trends that audiences around the world are tapping into, unified by one overarching theme: posting with a purpose.

Whether it’s protesting, doing a kickflip, or creating the next form of digital art, the creators that are gaining the most popularity from consumers are the ones who use their platform for their true, unfiltered, passions.

THE SIX TRENDS TO WATCH:

1. Advocacy
2. Level Playing Field
3. Fantasy Face
4. Digital Romanticism
5. Craftwork
6. Y2K 2.0

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² eMarketer Editors, 2019, US Digital Ad Spending Will Surpass Traditional in 2019, eMarketer
Currently, 58% of all US consumers consider environmental impacts when purchasing a product. Regarding social issues, the percentage of ‘Belief Driven Buyers’ rose from 51 to 64% from 2017-2018 worldwide. In other words, for the significant majority of consumers, their key influence when purchasing is whether they are taking a stand and support social issues.

Reasons behind this colossal shift in spending habits are easily visible within wider culture. The global climate strike in September 2019 broke all previous climate strike records as protestors surpassed 4 million around the world. These events take direct aim at politicians and corporations who fail to recognise the repercussions of their actions. Fueled by key influential figures, protest groups and amplified through mass social media use, the strike was then supported by brands and corporations making a stand. Patagonia shut down all trading, whilst more than 7,000 companies, including Tumblr and Wordpress, also donated ad space or banners on their sites in support of the cause.

Supporting a cause whether or not it directly affects you, because ultimately we should all give a sh*t.

Environmental Leader (Natural Marketing Institute data), 2017, “6 Benefits of Becoming a Sustainable Business,” Environmental Leader.

Hal Conick, 2018, “Consumers Want Brands to Take a Stand on Social Issues,” Medium

Sabrina Barr, 2019, “Climate Strike 2019: When are the Global Protests and how can you Take Part?”, Independent

Terry Nguyen, 2019, “Some brands are closing stores for the big global climate strike. That’s a big deal,” Vox

Live Instagram data, October 2019, #activism, #activist

At time of publishing, #activism has been shared by over 1.3 million users and a further 1.2 million for #activist - signalling an appetite to speak up for issues that you care about.

@hellomynameiswednesday

UK

Our featured creator, Wednesday, (@hellomynameiswednesday), blends their lifelong activism alongside their artistic talent to create a cocktail of powerful information that is educating and inspiring audiences around the world. In the past 3 months alone, they have gained 46.22% more followers through an unwavering dedication to their cause. Alternatively, the US-based inspiration account, @zerowasteinspo, is indicative of people turning to social media communities for practical advice in tackling climate change, and has gained 812,093 followers in the past 6 months, a 107.82% increase. Finally, Meg Boiga (@meg.boiga), known for her raw, honest truths, uses her platform to lift the lid on the postpartum experience by founding the hashtag #this_is_postpartum and promotes self-care and wellbeing through her motivational messages. Through this, we have seen her account grow by over 80% in the last 6 months alone.

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2020 brings with it a watershed moment for channeling historical events where global citizens stood up for what they believed in. April 22nd marks the 50th Anniversary of Earth Day, and September 2nd will be 75 years since the ending of WWII.

Looking forward, the US Presidential election takes place in 2020, as well as ongoing Brexit negotiations in the UK. The key political and social events of this decade will define our future, and people are passionate about having their voices heard.

Looking to the Cannes Lions winners from 2019, advocacy emerged as the key ingredient when delivering powerful campaigns. Nike’s “Dream Crazy” and The New York Times’ “The Truth Is Worth It” both took controversial issues and put their message at the centre of them. The New York Times’ was the first campaign in history to win both Film Craft and Film Grand Prix at the prestigious event. Whilst Nike highlighted and empowered the struggle often faced in sport, particularly through their collaboration with Colin Kaepernick.
#TakeYourSeat. Launched as part of The UN and Grey London’s The People’s Seat, we generated a conversation and empowered all voices to be heard at the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Katowice, Poland. By choosing Instagram stories as the vehicle, the message dominated the global news agenda and reached over 1.3 billion people, contributing to the eventual implementation of the Paris agreement.

For Burt’s Bees, we produced a campaign that was centred around World Earth Month and was entirely product-shot free. Instead, we collaborated with influencers to share their own stories of how we can all be a #ForceForNature. By forgoing product marketing, the campaign’s success was proven by its social performance - an engagement rate of 6.08%, garnering 13 million impressions and valuable consumer commentary - reflecting the desire for purpose driven narratives.

River Island worked alongside Whalar to promote a worldwide campaign for the #LabelsAreForClothes initiative to raise money for anti bullying charity, Ditch The Label. Aiming to break apart conventional beauty standards, handpicked creators published their independant narratives on how they broke the mould and explained why certain brands are empowering their differences, rather than suppressing them.
Celebrating female athleticism.

Surveys around women’s sport indicate positive association in comparison to men’s sport (i.e. progressive, inspiring and family-oriented). For instance, only 7% of fans believe female athletes are ‘money driven’, in comparison to 35% of men. Whilst three quarters of those interested in women’s sports are aware of which specific brands support women athletes, and 63% of consumers believe brands should invest in women’s and men’s sport equally.7

On a global scale, it has become clear that participation is growing in demand. The IOC “Women in Sport” policy has overseen women closing the gap on men over the past 30 years. From 26.1% at Seoul 1988 to a record 45.2% at Rio 2016. In October 2018, the Youth Olympic Games (YOG) Buenos Aires 2018 was the first fully gender balanced Olympic event ever.8

A revolution is taking place and it’s being felt across major markets. The US women’s soccer team has already set the precedent by taking their own governing body to federal court over the gender pay imbalance - even though the team has outperformed the US men’s team on the global stage. Publishing platform, The Lily, remarked, “The women won the 2015 World Cup and shared a bonus of $1.73 million; the men lost in the Round of 16 in the 2014 World Cup and split $5.38 million in performance bonuses.”9

Our featured creator, Stefani Nurding (@stefani1nurdingxx), has subverted gender norms within the traditional skateboarding space, which has seen her engagement rate rise up to 18% in recent months. British Boxer and WBO flyweight champion Nicola Adams (@nicolaadamsboxi) has seen 274.54% growth in the past 6 months following her unprecedented success in the ring and gaining 138,882 followers in the process. Sam Kerr (@samkerr20), Australian soccer team captain, Chicago Red Stars player and Nike Athlete, has seen her popularity explode following her success on the pitch, and her account has grown 134.74% in the past three months.

@stefani1nurdingxx

1. Neilson, 2018, “Global interest in women’s sport is on the rise”, Neilson
2. Olympic, 2019, “Promotion of women in sport through time”, Olympic.org
3. Alice Jessop, 2019, “The U.S. women’s soccer team outperforms the men’s. That’s it. It helps its equal pay claim”, The Lily

Celebrating female athleticism.
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2019 provided a watershed moment for female athleticism and marketers alike. Nike used the Women's Soccer World Cup as the launch of their campaign “Dream Further.” Alongside the stars, they featured external narratives beyond the event itself, such as Alex Scott managing Barcelona FC.

Successful brands, such as Nike, are playing on a love of sport - which ultimately cannot be gendered. The UK Women’s Super Soccer League saw ticket sales for their opening 2019 games sell out, and generate more ticket sales than the entirety of the previous season. Whilst for the 2020 Olympic hopefuls, Team GB Women are predicted to outperform the GB Men on the medal table for the first time.1

In 2018, Vogue published:

“The gender bias in skateboarding has been steadily closing, thanks to a generation’s worth of hard-won victories, harder work, and spectacular talent by its female stars. Up next? The 2020 Olympics.”

Matt Slater, 2019, “Tokyo 2020: Women Set to outnumber Men in Team GB’s biggest overseas team ever”, Independent

Mackenzie Wagoner, 2018, “New Guard [Gender Bias in Skateboarding], Vogue

For the first time ever, the sport will be featured in next year’s Olympic games in Japan, and Sky Brown (@skybrown) - multi-championship winning skater and the youngest girl to ever participate in the Vans US Open - is set to be the athlete that everyone will be watching.
Our collaboration with Nike reimagined how female fighters were presented, by partnering the athletes with artists. Working with four Nike athletes - Zeina Nassar, Ramla Ali, Yasemin Adar and Irem Yaman. Each were paired with creators who ranged from painters to graphic designers, who could offer their artistic ability to elevate any story.

Strava collaborated with Whalar to craft a campaign to encourage athletes of all backgrounds and abilities to reach their goals. Unified by the tag #StravaSummit, they shared how every target is on a different level, but nonetheless is as important. Whether it’s a 5k or Mount Everest, a Level Playing Field should be available to all athletes.

Adidas Swim: a campaign built around empowering physical strength and wellbeing. At its core, the collaboration focussed on fitness over conventional or prescribed beauty standards. The campaign featured strong, athletic creators, in order to show the collection was made for women who want to take their fitness routine to the next level.
Making an artistic statement by using the face as a canvas.

Influencer marketing and beauty have always gone hand in hand, and it’s impacted our spending habits. Spending is up in the beauty sector, across all genders. In the US, revenue in the Beauty & Personal Care market amounts to $82.8 billion in 2019, with the market expected to grow annually by 2.6%. For the UK market, 30% of women aged 16-24 say they spend more than they did 12 months ago. Earlier this year, thousands of teenagers mobbed an appearance by influencer James Charles at the Birmingham store of the cosmetics brand Morphe. It’s no wonder creators are thinking outside the box when it comes to make-up and beauty.

The hair, skin care and cosmetics industry, which took home an annual revenue of $3.35 billion at the end of last year, is set to be worth $3.6 billion by 2023. Out of all three, the cosmetics sector saw the most growth since 2010, increasing from $2.06 billion to $2.7 billion to 2018.

Interestingly, men are outspending women on beauty treatments in the UK, spending $4,333.42 compared to their female counterparts at $3,938.95. Proving this upsurge in creative beauty is truly a universal trend.

Our featured creator, Frances O’Sullivan (@beautyspock), has acquired 109,059 followers in the past 6 months and is continuing to grow at a rapid pace since being featured in various publications, including on Instagram’s own feed. Whirlwind Star, Natasha Seth (@escapingyouth) is known for her ultra-creative artworks, and has been a pioneer in the Fantasy Face trend thanks to her out-of-this-world portraits, which has seen her engagement rate increase by 44% in the last 3 months alone. Finally, creator, Gary Thompson (@theplasticboy) has gained huge traction for his fearless looks and creative approach to content creation. The world has taken notice, alongside prolific collaborations, he has attracted 108,045 new followers in the past 6 months, whilst maintaining a 9.34% engagement rate in the same period.

12 Statista, 2019, "Beauty and Personal Care (USA)", Statista
13 SkinKitchen-Mintel Data, 2019, "Extreme makeup: how the girls and boys of Generation Z created a huge new subculture", The Guardian
14 Beauty Serve, 2019, "UK beauty spending habits revealed", Beauty Serve
In *Euphoria*, which debuted on HBO during the summer of 2019, makeup plays a crucial role in the provocative series that has captured the mood of a digital generation like never before. The makeup reflects the character’s personal journeys - main character Jules begins dreamy and vibrant before evolving into hard and graphic - rather than reflective of binary or expected beauty standards. Indicative of a generation who love to express their individuality through fashion and makeup, *Euphoria*’s Instagram account shares the show’s progressive and in-touch aesthetic, acting like a very real extension of the narrative with which fans can interact. As a result, *Euphoria* surpassed over 1 million followers within the first eight weeks of broadcast.

Recently, AR is merging with progressive beauty concepts to evolve ideas of human beauty and representation. As of August 2019, Facebook opened their doors to their AR Studio, meaning anyone can design, build and publish their own AR filters. This move has intensified global fascination and increased consumers’ ability to be far more creative with how they present themselves online.

Art director and 3D makeup artist Ines Alpha (@ines.alpha) alludes to the cultural significance of blending AR with art.

“Makeup is about blurring the frontier between reality and fiction. Three-dimensional software is just another tool we can use to play with anyone’s face and with the concept of beauty in general.”

Ines’s content was shared across Instagram’s own channel and surpassed 1 million views within the first 3 hours.

@euphoria, 2019, Instagram account.

James Loke Hale, 2019, “Facebook Opens Instagram’s AR Filter - Building tool ‘Spark,’ to Everyone”, Tubefilter

@ines.alpha, 2019, Instagram account, original content shared on Instagram’s channel.
Halloween offers everyone an opportunity to be creative without judgement. Boots tapped into this creative freedom to shift perception of their brand as a traditionally baby boomer or older millennial destination. Their methodology was centered around collaborating with exciting Gen Z artists who could translate the brand’s new identity to a younger audience, and using AR filters to amplify this.

For GlamGlow, we partnered with a mix of male, female and non-binary creators who would all add something exciting and creative to the brand. The #Volcasmic moisturiser protects and nourishes the face in preparation for creators to express their art. Influencers such as Heather Lines (@heatherlinesmua) and Rowan Young (@rowanyoungx) shone bright as ambassadors for highly expressive makeup finding its way into day to day life.

Fragrance brand Impulse partnered with us on #TrustYourImpulse for the launch of their new Body Mist pack designs. The campaign featured creators who pushed the boundaries with their makeup on Instagram and TikTok with the aim to encourage young girls to have the confidence to be themselves and express whatever they wanted through trusting their Impulse.
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A dreamy blend of still life and portraits, capturing imperfect perfectionism and nostalgia.

Our featured creator, Benji Colson (@benjicolson_), boasts up to a 16.28% engagement rate by mixing his dreamy aesthetic with a distinct minimal style. Fashion editor Hegia de Boer (@heyhegia) shares romantic snapshots of her life on her feed, and has seen a 583.42% increase in her community over the last six months. Macarena Achaga (@macabeso) is a powerhouse example of this trend. Although commonly known as an actress, Macarena uses Instagram to express her ‘romantic’ aesthetic. Her following has grown by 793,387 in the past 6 months, a 136.77% increase.

As the highest performing trend in our study, we’re confident in claiming this visual trend as the new Instagram aesthetic: Gone are the days of millennial pink and The Museum of Ice Cream. Instagram has grown up.

Alongside this the resurgence of film cameras is an example of millennial and Gen-Z nostalgia for non-digital, vintage photography. Polaroids, for instance, represent something tangible and physical, an antidote to the high frequency of content in today’s digital world.

Fujifilm’s sales dropped 90% from 2002-2004 as digital options flooded the market. However, during the 2015 holiday season it became the top selling camera on Amazon, notably for its ‘vintage’ quality. The increase was from 100,000 units in 2004 to 5 million in 2015. While the overall film camera industry, following 5 years of steady decline, has seen sales pick up post 2017.

In physical film you have something finite — there’s something romantic in that alone. After a steady decline in film due to digital, the reversal of the camera market is symptomatic of the seduction of capturing this trend’s imperfect perfectionism.

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Take *La La Land* as a benchmark for recreation of an old-style Hollywood. A nod to this era looking to reconnect with an aesthetic, beyond this one. Our fascination with looking to the past with a stylised lens continues to flourish through art. We can look to the upcoming remakes of *West Side Story* (2021), *Pinocchio* (2020), and the rise of sleek, indulgent period dramas such as *The Crown* (2016-present), to see cross-pollination of this trend across media.

Additionally, BBC America’s *Killing Eve* character Villanelle debuted a bubblegum pink, frothy tulle, gown given by award winning British designer Molly Goddard during a now famous scene. Her interchange of a contemporary and romantic wardrobe encapsulates this trend of unearthing classic aesthetics and remaking them through modern imagery.

And finally, in the digital world, there is the rise of poet Rupi Kaur. Kaur’s style of poetry uses an unfinished beauty to reflect the fragility of the digital age. Having started her career posting extracts on Tumblr in 2012, the 25-year-old Canadian’s first collection, *milk & honey*, has been translated into 40 languages and has sold 3.5 million copies. For perspective, she has outsold *The Odyssey*, making her work the best selling poetry book of all time.19

Gucci is redefining luxury by combining retro and romantic movements through their campaign, Horsebit Loafer. The collaboration with Whalar talent played on a contemporary nostalgia that is indicative of the fashion house’s millennial marketing strategy. Creator Eric Schloesser (@ericschlo) encapsulated their aesthetic, blending a stripped back mid-century wardrobe with contemporary dance to give the Horsebit Loafer an edge in a busy digital space.

With Whalar, The Night Sky spotlighted their unique star maps in time for the holiday season, encouraging Cyber Monday shopping. A one-of-a-kind campaign, each map represents the stars during a special moment from each creator’s lives. Whether it was a first kiss or a first breath, the storytelling content works beautifully within a digital romantic theme.

Dior Maison partnered with Whalar creators who could capture their products befitting of a polished aesthetic that would look at home on the pages of a luxury magazine. Moody, seductive and slightly mysterious content dominated the campaign in order to promote the home fragrance amongst a new digital audience.
The experts, artists and makers of today, openly sharing their creative processes.

Our featured illustrator and textile artist Sofia Salazar (@__hiedra__) has seen her engagement rise significantly up to 9.29%, 150% higher than industry averages in the past three months alone, showing a real appetite from audiences to see the creative process. Digital illustrator, Alex Kunchevsky (@kunchevsky) has gained 146,877 followers in the past six months, a staggering 1233.44% growth, since he started to share his ‘speed paints’ on his feed. Similarly Israel-based artist Shira Barzilay (@koketit) has seen a 161% increase in her audience size over six months.

Being self-taught through online platforms has defined a generation of entrepreneurs and creators. Independent creators lifting the lid on their specialised craft is the gateway to this democratic form of learning. More than 7/10 viewers use YouTube to solve a problem in their job, studies or hobbies. Whilst 86% of viewers regularly use YouTube to learn how to do new things.20

The rise of TikTok signals a new era of sharing your craft via fast-paced, quick-fire content. Currently, it’s reshaping how a new generation are consuming music-based content, fuelled by its growing base of 500 million active users worldwide.21 One clear example of its heightened influence is how Rapper ‘Lil Nas X’ built up momentum for a debut single via TikTok memes. The Verge commented on TikTok’s role in his music career:

‘TikTok was crucial to the success of Hill’s “Old Town Road” hit, which now sits at number 15 on Billboard’s Top 100 chart. A hashtag for “riskyrave” has manifested thousands of videos with more than 6.9 million plays. Hill’s Lil Nas X Spotify page has more than 65 million streams of his song.”22

21 Maryam Mohsin, 2019, “10 TikTok Statistics That You Need To Know in 2019”, Oberlo
22 Julia Alexander, 2019, “ ‘Old Town Road’ proves TikTok can launch a hit song”, The Verge
The steady rise of e-commerce platforms such as Etsy, operate as an online marketplace between consumers and independent craft-makers. Since launching in 2005, Etsy has seen their number of active buyers rise to 39.4 million. In the US, it has overtaken Ebay, Amazon and Craigslist as the ‘most popular online marketplace according to online sellers in the United States from January 2019’. According to The Motley Fool, its power is encapsulated in a focus on craft over quantity.

“Etsy simplifies the customer experience. Etsy’s entire site is keyed around acting as a marketplace for what Silverman (CEO) calls “microsellers,” or artisanal vendors who specialise in crafts, handmade goods, and curated vintage finds. Subsequently, Etsy’s got a vote of confidence from industry analysts. Morgan Stanley recently concluded that Etsy’s business is “relatively immune from Amazon disruption.”

Back in 2012, Forbes wrote:

“Skillshare’s vision is to democratize education by empowering anyone to be a teacher.”

Since then, the subscription model surpassed 5 million global users in 2018 and continues to be a true democratic learning tool for multi-disciplinary creators.

Recently, documentaries have gained popularity on platforms such as Netflix that showcase high level experts and their creative process. Abstract: The Art of Design, and Chef’s Table are both award-winning documentaries from the Netflix original series project.

In 2020, the World Expo Dubai is an opportunity to see the world’s leading designers, engineers and innovators showcase the best in cutting-edge craft. The non-stop 173-day event represents a decade-defining moment for audiences to discover the craftsmanship of the future.

The launch of the Net-A-Porter x J. W. Anderson capsule collection illustrated the importance of the creative process just as much as the finished project. Whalar executed this collaboration, and partnered five diverse artists with Net-A-Porter commissioning each artist to also share the creative process behind each piece of art, giving our influencers the chance to fully immerse their audiences in their process.

**Wine Australia**

Our collaboration with Wine Australia illustrated how to shift brand perception through the use of traditional methods in a contemporary environment. Combating an out-dated perception of Australian wine, we paired professional winemakers with influential trendsetters ranging from foodies, to wine experts, entertainers and artists to show Australian wine in a new light.

**NET-A-PORTER**

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For HP, our solution has centred around enlisting digital creators to showcase their step-by-step creative process. This included working with professional digital artists to showcase the Z by HP range in real-time. By lifting the lid on the artists’ creative process, followers were able to seamlessly visualise how Z by HP products would fit into their own creative process.

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The ‘Millennium Bug’ is back, baby. Vintage tech apparel by way of the Cartoon Network and PlayStation 1.

Our Y2K 2.0 featured creator, Marques’ (@marques), bold and uncompromising investment in his unique style boosted his overall style by 36.86% in the past three months alone. Whalar Star, Alex Gwron (@alexgwron) has grown by 136.2% (27,077) in 6 months, and is Creative Director of Aged Vintage, a zine that takes inspiration from the early 2000 era. Stylist, Faith Harper (@faithharper) uses her platform to share her Y2K 2.0 looks. Balancing shades of punk with millennium bug inspired imagery, Faith’s account has increased by 91.89% during the past 6 months, including 27,004 new followers in the past 3.

The trend is fuelled by Gen Z, who are the first generation of the digital age (think about it, babies born in the year 2000 are turning 20 this year)! Savvy and overloaded with information since infancy, 82% ignore traditional ads, and they will command 40% of all US consumer activity by the end of 2020.

The growth and accessibility of online vintage fashion has seen its global value surpass $24 billion, and is expected to reach $55 billion by 2025. In other words, vintage has grown 2.5 times faster than classic retail over the past 3 years. As a result, platforms such as Depop have been a catalyst in providing cheap accessibility to ‘vintage’ products, in particular those of the early 2000s. Roughly 90% of active users are under 26. Year on year revenue growth is currently at 100% and surpassed 13m users in 2019. Combining platforms Depop and Instagram, the hashtag #Y2K has over 730,000 search results and is rising by the day.

@marques

UK


Ilaria Gasparo, 2019, “Millennials and Gen Z are leading the rise of resale fashion marketplace”, Medium

Ingrid Lunden, 2019, “Depop, a social app targeting millennial and Gen Z shoppers, bags $62m, passes 13m users”, Techcrunch

Live Depop and Instagram data, October 2019, “#yk2” search
We are going into the year that marks the 20th anniversary of the new millennium. Now, the generation that weren’t able to experience tech’s influence on fashion firsthand are seeking its distinctive styling. Whether it’s the release of Matrix 4, or the resurgence of old-school streetwear brands like Fila and Kappa influencing everything from youth culture to fashion runways - it’s hard to ignore this new-wave nostalgia.

Earlier this year, Dazed described Y2K as "Driven by Gen Z’s nostalgia-tinged quest to find authenticity in a digitally filtered world".

The Guardian’s definition:
"Synthetic or metallic-looking materials; inflatable furniture, moon-boot footwear and alien-inspired hairstyles were just a few signposts of the spirit of the age."

For publishers, the highly individualised and thrift store inspired aesthetic symbolises a cultural shift.

However, sometimes, the best definition comes from the pioneer of influencers yearning for the OG era. Paris Hilton famously tweeted in 2018, “The early 2000s was such a fun and iconic era for fashion, people didn’t have stylists and actually had personal style. Now everyone kinda looks the same!”

Sophie Benson, 2018, “The year we went wild for Y2K”, Dazed
Gap's “Denim Through the Decades” campaign focussed on tapping into stylish Gen Z and millennials who appreciate the history of classic American fashion. Whalar partnered with creators blending nostalgic aesthetics with forward thinking fashion concepts to bring relevance back to a legacy brand. The influencers delivered a 9.4 million impressions and 283k engagements through content that connected with a young audience.

Internationally, we've executed a number of campaigns for Reebok Classics that all carry with them the nostalgic Y2K aesthetic. Particularly for the “Reebok x Foot Locker Road Trip” collaboration, we worked with brand ambassadors who could highlight how sneaker culture has had an impact on different countries, in different ways and at different times.

Superdry's “My Way” campaign focussed on casting unique characters and talent to reinvigorate the brands position within contemporary streetwear. To deepen their digital strategy, we identified fashion leaders and cultural innovators who would re-introduce the brand to a new audience. Taking inspiration from Superdry's Japanese graphics, the aesthetic of the campaign was reminiscent of the early 00s and the Y2K aesthetic.

極度乾燥（しなさい）
The Trends: 2020 report has revealed several insights around the modern day consumption of social media:

- In 2019, digital ad spend overtook traditional for the first time. The value of being culturally relevant within the digital social space is now crucial for brands, publishers and creators alike.

- Based on the analysis of 15,000 unique data sets, six growing trends were identified: Advocacy, Craftwork, Fantasy Face, Digital Romanticism, Y2K 2.0, and Level Playing Field.

- While each trend was unique to a particular theme and aesthetic, they all had a purpose at heart, and showed creators taking action in their own unique way. Whether through traditional activist methods in Advocacy or Level Playing Field, or through avant garde make up in Fantasy Face, these visual trends were more than skin deep.

This trend report shows that above all, posting with purpose is key. Brands, creators and publishers alike will see the most success if they stick to what they believe in and create content accordingly. Brands in particular can use the information in the above report to tap into the most prolific trends that are predicted to dominate next year through working with the creators and influencers that are shaping our tastes, and ultimately defining a decade.

Understand the role of advocacy for your brand. The goal is not to have a platform for every issue or insert a brand into conversations or causes that are inauthentic, but rather to understand your consumers’ passions and how your brand supports these.

Find your communities - locally and globally. By activating local voices on a global (or national) level, you can authentically achieve personalization at scale.

Work with highly-vetted creators with authentic audiences to drive real results. Rely on first party data, straight from the source, via trusted and approved marketing partners across your key platforms.

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We’re Whalar, and we’re on a mission to liberate the creative voice.