



Top Topics 2026

GENERAL CONSUMER INSIGHTS



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During an era defined by algorithms and economic updates, people are pushing back to regain a sense of control where they can. Adults are using play to counter the seriousness of life, while younger generations are defying online immersion with tangible activities. Approaches to health and wealth are being redefined as larger systems seem broken, and people are delighting in spurts of surprise. This era is an opportunity for brands to partner in positive pushback and allow humans to feel in control, even if just for a meaningful moment away from a screen.





Top Topics 2026

1. Algorithmic Reliance & Defiance
2. Kids at All Ages
3. Shifts in Wealth & Redefined Luxury
4. Reworked Wellness
5. The Art of Surprise



Algorithmic Reliance & Defiance

Consumers are acknowledging that there's no stopping tech and AI's infiltration in their daily lives, so they are finding ways to disconnect as an act of rebellion, reclaiming control over their own attention. Brands that seamlessly blend unavoidable technology with refreshing physical experiences will win over conflicted consumers.



5 in 10

Despite **53%** of consumers using AI in their daily lives, **50%** are trying to minimize screen time.

- Dentsu report in Marketing Dive



Pinterest searches for snail mail gifts **(+110%)** and handwritten letters **(+45%)** are up YOY.

- Pinterest

84%

of kids say they want to escape their phones to live more in the real world.

- The Harris Poll

69%

of US gamers/social media users believe algorithmic recommendations on social media are less interesting than those from friends.

- Mintel

↑ 330%

Roughly 1,600 TikTok posts were tagged #AnalogLife during the first nine months of 2025 — up over **330%** from the same period the previous year.

- Axios

“Three-hour lines for pastries. Disposable cameras are selling out. Print catalogs are being framed as art. These aren't nostalgic throwbacks—they're life rafts in a sea of synthetic content.”

- The Next Big Think





Kids at All Ages

As life feels increasingly serious, culture is declaring an all-age need for play. The popularization of adult plushies and kid-like activities at grown-up establishments signals a collective desire for lighthearted escape and offers an invitation for brands to join in on the fun.



+225%

Pinterest shows a YOY increase in searches for nostalgia toys **(+225%)** and 2000s kids toys **(+140%)** as adults aim to relive their youth.

- Pinterest

81%

of adults admit they need "more time to be playful" in the real world.

- The Harris Poll

Over three-quarters of Americans (79%) want brands to help them have fun again.

- The Harris Poll

28%

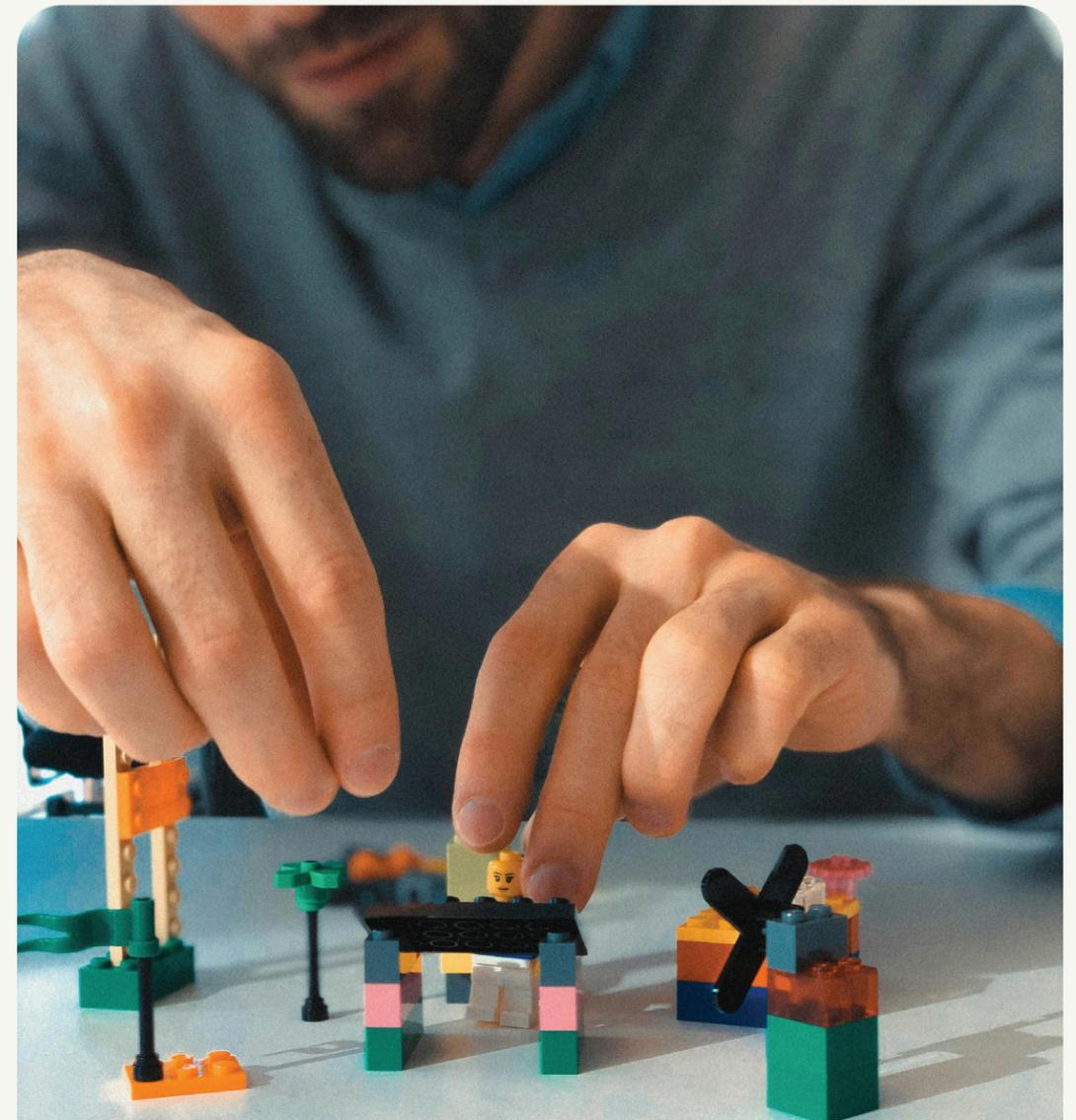
Kidults account for **28%** of global toy sales, an increase of 2.5% since 2022.

- Circana data in Morning Brew

80%

of adults engaged in playful activities agree that it is an important outlet for them to try new things and help them relax.

- LEGO



Restaurants like Funny Bar in New York City and Lagana in London offer fine dining with paper tablecloths and crayons, while Play Playground in Las Vegas offers larger-than-life physical and puzzle games paired with alcoholic "party pouches."

- Morning Brew



The meme stock craze of 2020 caused a “generational shift in how people think about building wealth.”

- Kevin Gordon, macro strategist at Charles Schwab in Axios



Shifts in Wealth & Redefined Luxury

The definition of “Wealthy” is being rewritten as this category has acquired new audiences through generational transfer, new mindsets for gaining wealth through gamification over traditional methods, and new definitions of luxury where freedom outweighs possessions. Brands that understand these shifts will be best prepared to support consumers’ aspirations.

70%

of American travelers agree, “For me, the real luxury in travel is time, freedom, or authentic experiences – not expensive amenities.”

- Future Partners

64%

Nearly two-thirds (**64%**) of Gen Z and Millennials say the only realistic way to build significant wealth today is through “alternative methods” (e.g., crypto, gambling, etc.).

- The Harris Poll

79%

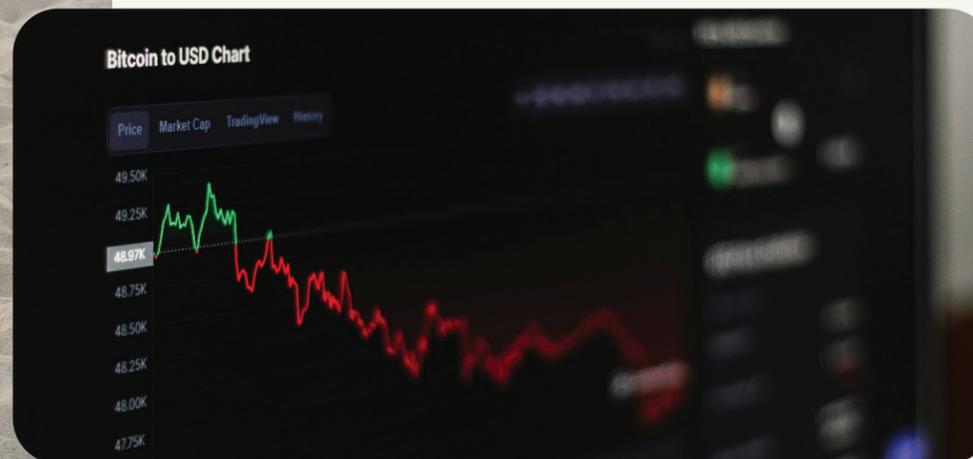
of respondents report luxury experiences feel “beige” lately and sacrificed soul for standardization.

- The Harris Poll

8 in 10

respondents say “these days, people always have to be thinking of ways to beat the system in order to make things work out the way they want them to.”

- Kantar U.S Monitor



The largest wealth transfer in U.S. history is underway with a \$124 trillion transition across generations set to occur over the span of 25 years.

- The Harris Poll



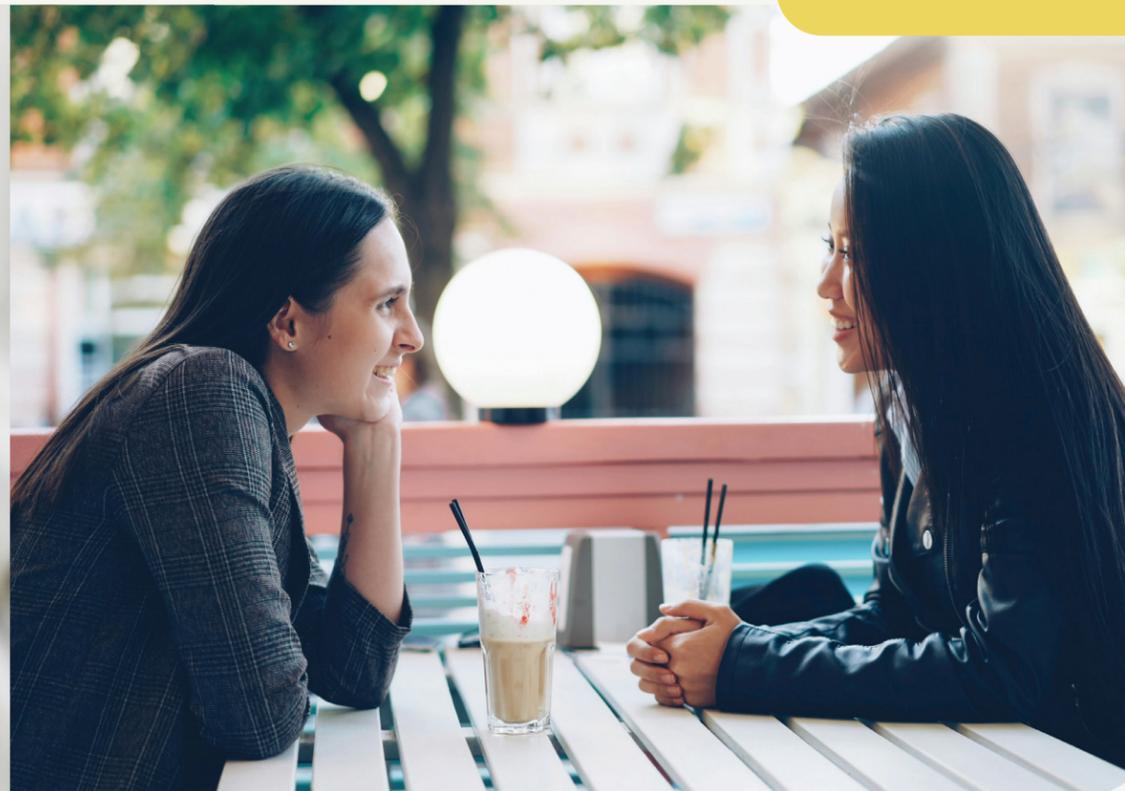
Reworked Wellness

In response to questions about the nation's health and food industries, Americans are returning to simpler rhythms of life. Traditional values, from-scratch foods, and alternative medicines are in while people detox from complex ingredients and alcohol-soaked social lives. Organizations will need to find ways to support at least one meaningful facet of their audience's well-being.

The Department of Health and Human Services announced plans to phase out eight artificial dyes and colorings by the end of 2026.
- ABC

64%

of consumers are feeling more drawn to traditional values and ways of living.
- Dentsu data in Marketing Dive



37%

of American adults now supplement or substitute mainstream medical care with treatments long considered alternative.
- New York Times

71%

of Gen Z who are of legal drinking age say they wish there were more social events and activities that weren't centered around alcohol.
- Kantar U.S. Monitor

89%

of respondents believe food can function as medicine.
- The Harris Poll

"Health and wellness is no longer just a category or sector. It is a benefit that consumers want from every product and service."

- J Walker Smith, Knowledge Lead at Kantar

↑ 478%

Coffee clubbing events are up **478%** compared to the previous year.
- Eventbrite data in Axios



More dopamine is released in our brains when rewards are unpredictable vs. expected, known as Variable Ratio Reinforcement, a principle identified by Ferster and Skinner in 1957.

This psychological pattern makes slot machines addictive and makes people spend over 2 hours watching TikTok despite feeling that a movie is too long a commitment.

- Weirdo

70%

of consumers say they love being surprised by brands through last-minute deals.

- The Harris Poll

44%

of teens lean more towards unapologetically weird brands.

- The Harris Poll

The Art of Surprise

As feeds start to blend and eyes glaze over, our brains have a psychological craving to be shaken out of the trance of digital monotony. Brands that break through with surprising and strange content provide the desired antidote to online fatigue.

“From Wendy’s tweets roasting people to Nutter Butter’s brain-rot posting, the more out there, the better. This ‘weird’ personality of brands isn’t just a novelty; they’re hacking cultural relevancy.”

- The Harris Poll

83%

of Gen Z / Millennials want brands to bring people together in spontaneous ways.

- The Harris Poll

64%

of teens are more likely to engage with brands that post completely unhinged content that makes them laugh.

- The Harris Poll





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