

## A few Thoughts about Trends:

A skeptical 🤔 Start into Trend-Season + a critical 📊 Trend fuelled by all of us 🤖

**Trends are trending...** Here are a few examples of what has been said about trends, in a completely accidental order:

- [Mark Wainwright](#): Referencing Paul Ford's 1980 book "Prediction", where Ford stated that "progress is individual, personal, and in the eye of the beholder". Hence asking someone to predict "is invariably to ask them to prioritise, and then fantasise". Accordingly "we can only picture the future through our own specific frame of reference", or what Mark calls "me agenda-lens". As a consequence and according to Ford, we should rather be looking for the "intersections between very large things", specifically for the "points of contact or points of conflict" when we are searching for the most relevant trends. Mark also underscores Ford's warning that you "can't predict the future. You can only better understand the layers and let your mind wander over them until you find a connection worth making."
- [Frank Spencer](#): Declaring the "death of the megatrends", which he understands as a "byproduct of linear thinking" and brain-child of the "Industrial Age such as unlimited progress or steam-powered electricity". His critique of these megatrends goes on as he points out that they reflect an "outdated practice in the 21st-century landscape of convergence, complexity, and disruptive creativity". He hence recommends that we "must move beyond trends to recognize a new world of guiding narratives driven by values, implications, systems, design, and aspirations".
- [Doug Stephens](#): Calling out the inflationary tendency to use the term "trend", by which "we also discredit the practice of trend analysis, leading the business community to believe that futurism, as a field, is no better than a room full of chimpanzees throwing darts at pages of buzzwords". Where he adds differentiating value to the conversation is specifically by defining trends as "a sustained change or progression in a particular direction over time", for which we can also identify qualifying characteristics such as their scale, trajectory, speed, business relevance, potential up- & downsides as well as a certain level of urgency.
- [Jilian Ney](#): Asking us to move from trends to "cultural insights", which she defines as the process of "understanding cultural shifts" in a way that "can show how people think and behave" whereas trends are more "about fashion and emerging popularities. They are shorter-lived and sit on top of culture".
- [Terry Nguyen](#): Quite boldly states that "trends are dead" altogether, because "no one is sure exactly what a trend is anymore" in our today's TikTok-esk, garbage-filled digital "hellscape where everything and anything has the potential to be a trend". What we are seeing is hence not the identification of trends, but rather the manufacturing of meaningless accidental behavioural patterns which are pushed onto us as a combination of the aesthetic machine gun fire of the TikTok algorithm and an ever so eager retail industry, bombarding the modern consumer with a "never ending stream of ... marketing

vessels for products that fit into a paradigm devoid of meaning” in order to drive attention and profit.

- [Susie Hogarth](#): Argues against Terry Nguyen by saying trends are more powerful than ever, actually because they have garnered a stronger power and momentum over our today’s digital lives than ever before. And she smartly argues that Terry is actually confirming this fact because rejecting “the thing only serves to underline their power over the thing in the current landscape”. Rather than criticising TikTok and the internet, she hails “its promise of creative freedom and endless access for everyone”, where technically anyone can “have a reasonable stab at adding to mainstream culture from anywhere”. It is hence no surprise that Susie rather welcomes platforms like TikTok, “with its combination of freakishly powerful discovery algorithm that rapidly sends brilliant content viral, and a suite of editing tools that can turn almost anyone into a charismatic digital creator”, in her eyes apparently a digital “trend generation” engine.

After this short review of the existing conceptual trend-landscape, it might be time to add a couple of trend-related thoughts of our own. TRENDS, here we go...

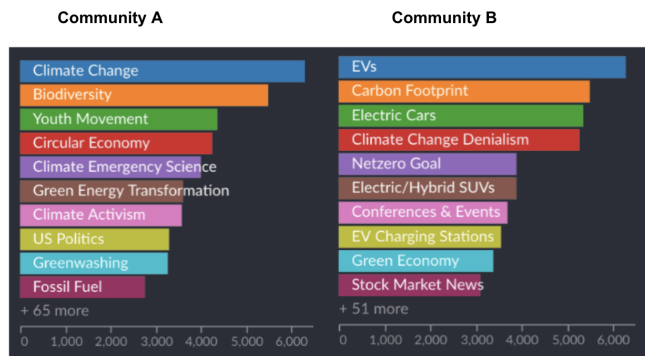
- Everyone in their right mind will obviously know that no one can *actually* predict the future, even with the most sophisticated data and (of course AI powered :) tools at their disposal. Hence, any attempt to simply predict, forecast or map out the future must necessarily fail. Nonetheless, especially during change-ridden, seemingly chaotic and highly “VUCA”-esk times like ours, people will naturally look for help or guidance on how to render their existence at least a tiny bit more stable and predictable - even if that will only mean that they can just conceptualise their chaotic context better by constructing a more orderly structured, or individually more meaningful frame of reference around it. For the purpose of keeping our following thoughts methodologically sound we will therefore only talk about trends in light of this “**structuring**” **function of patterns** we can identify in our environment. We might find such patterns then helpful to “classify” our otherwise still prevailing ignorance about what is happening in the world. A view on trend research that is in fact strongly leaning on Ambrose Bierce’s understanding of knowledge as “the small part of ignorance that we arrange and classify”.
- The **concept of “trend”** itself has been challenged on many levels, and various authors have suggested that it might be better to use other concepts to describe future-relevant influences, like values, cultural insights, ... In the end it is however not relevant what we call the concept we are interested in to better understand its impact on our future, as long as it has indeed an impact on us. The more interesting question is hence not about what terminology to use, but *HOW these influences are causally impacting us* and in which way and direction this should make us think to be optimally prepared and be able to adapt for a better future. Or in other words: It’s the causal relationships and mechanisms behind the trending patterns we should be interested in, not the fancy names or terminologies we can invent for them.

- **Humans are “cultural animals”**, this means it is not about nature vs. nurture, but actually culture IS our nature as social animals. This means we cannot completely decouple ourselves from our culture, nor from the trends we see happening in it. And because evolutionarily speaking, being on trend has helped us survive in our ancestral past by stabilising our status and belonging to our respective “in-group”, trends will likely continue to play an important role for our social trend brains, even - or maybe especially - in a more digitally connected world.
- Culture can affect us on many levels. It is hence important to identify the right level of cultural trends in order to tap into the most relevant aspect in which culture impacts us. It is hence exactly the **identification of hierarchies within trends** that will allow us to see what is most important, and which “trends” are just fleeting ripples on the surface of the digital ocean of the internet. Our earlier observation that our human nature is culture can here be reversed insofar as truly impactful culture is always connected to our biological nature as human beings. No culture has ever proved impactful which did not also help us guide the way we survive as human beings: relationships, food, health, sex,... Recently, the hierarchy in which our human lives hinge upon the wider biodiversity of our global ecosystems has also shown us that not all cultural layers are equally important. Especially those who exist only as capitalistic forms of escapism, disconnected from our own and the biological realities of the rest of the global ecosystem should probably not be overemphasised.
- Trends have long stopped being linear, simple and mono-causal. In our complex modern ecosystem environments of global interdependence and interconnectivity we need to look for **shifts in balance and new dynamics on how to resolve co-existing but [conflicting powers](#)** rather than for simple “up-trending” themes.
- In order to practically elucidate these principles it might actually be more insightful to develop a concrete example of one such “trend” rather than to produce a random list of more or less “trending themes”. We will do that within the area of sustainability, which a lot of other “trend researchers” have already in and by itself called a “megatrend”. Sustainability is the perfect area to showcase a trend that, as we will see, exists on several cultural layers, including social relationships and politics, where it has already been identified by independent researchers like [Robert Kurzban](#) and [Jonathan Haidt](#). Both researchers have independently recognised - on an individual as well as on a societal level respectively - how *self-deceiving* our mind can be when it comes to differentiating between “right and wrong” behaviour. What seems to have become a terribly hard thing to do in our increasingly complex world, is to withstand the impulse to immediately dismiss or devalue another position, especially when we perceive this position to be in conflict with our own individual opinion or social belonging.
- For the purpose of demonstrating this trend of “**Loss of Discourse Ability**”, Sustainability is the perfect context as it allows us to showcase exactly how this trend of irreconcilable positions has escalated within a highly controversial topic: Whereas one

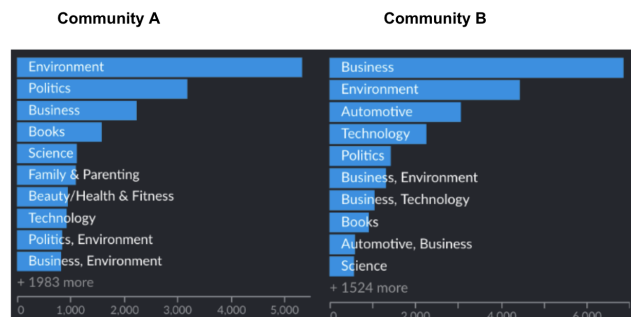
community of people would consider it by now high times to make fundamental changes to the way we are living and doing business today - let's call them community A, others would consider all the talk about climate change and sustainability nothing but alarmism and wasted energy, unless there are pragmatic and realistic options on how we can actually improve our lives - let's call these guys community B. And what appears to be especially interesting from a "rational" point of view is, that representatives of both communities seems to be able to logically point out how the other side is wrong as they are behaving like "hypocrites": Community A is calling out B to be **hypocrites**, as they don't seem to adopt the appropriate action to deal with the impending climate catastrophe predicted by climate science, whereas community B is calling out A to be hypocrites, as they are asking for disruptive changes without being able to explain how the exact mechanisms and complex processes required for this change are supposed to work or how this process would fairly account for the required monetary investments.

- Instead of losing ourselves in a most probably fruitless discussion about who might be the true or "most hypocritical hypocrite", we want to show here what might be the true, underlying "causal trend". Meaning how this conflict came about and how the implicit emotional entanglement of each and everyone in their respective social and emotional context effectively prevents them from "**seeing beyond our very own ego-barrier**". Which in effect leads to the above mentioned lost ability for social discourse, an ability that of course would be an urgently required prerequisite for actual societal progress on any complex topic such as sustainability.

- In order to do that we actually need to look closer at the details of the whole sustainability conversation, specifically into what topics and interests the respective communities (A and B) associate with it. Whereas Community A is mostly concerned with topics like "Climate Change", "Biodiversity", "Youth Movement" and "Circular Economy", Community B is mostly interested in "Electric Vehicles", "Carbon Footprints", "Electric Cars" and the "Climate Change Discourse" itself.



- Whilst this topical breakdown itself might already be interesting, the most revealing insight for why we have arrived at such a tricky impasse when it comes to sustainability can only be uncovered by analysing the underlying key interests of both communities. In



doing that we can see that for Community A, the two top interests are Environment and Politics, followed by Business. Whereas for Community B, Business is their top priority, followed by the Environment and the Automotive Industry.

- What this can tell us is that representatives of Community A do not share the same structure of interest priorities with Community B, something that points to a “different type of emotional entanglement” of both communities, or what we could call a “**conflict of priorities**” which cannot be resolved with rational arguments, as they will necessarily always be informed by the respective conflicting interests of both communities.
- In conclusion, we can wrap up this discussion about trends by pointing out that, using sustainability as a context, we were able to demonstrate a concrete manifestation of one socially widely relevant trend: That of necessary and urgent societal discourses about the future increasingly going bad because of the participants of this discourse being unable to overcome their underlying interest-based emotional limitations to lead such a discourse in an open-minded, ego-free manner. And yes, if you want to stick a label onto this trend, you could call it “**Lost Discourse (Ability)**”...

Are you interested in learning more about the specific trends which will be most relevant to your industry and most likely to impact your business:

Contact us at:

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