

2025 Pause, *Fast Forward,* Rebound?

Crowd DNA look at what trends will take their place in culture in 2025 (and beyond)

STRAT 7
CROWD.DNA

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Introduction

We know it's that time of year when every agency you've (n)ever heard of is telling you which trends they think are a big deal for the next twelve months.

So why should you bother reading any further? This isn't just another trends bingo card: each trend has been developed and refined by a global team of futurists and strategists across our five offices.

As with all our client projects, nothing at Crowd is off the shelf – we believe the future is best co-created. These are the starting blocks to inspire you and get you thinking.

We hope it leaves you – like us – with even more enthusiasm for 2025 (and beyond), to act on culture and help shape the future you want to see.

And if you want to work out how we can help you find genuinely future facing, strategic opportunities, drop us a line at hello@crowdDNA.com.

Drop One

Our report delivers two punchy drops of five trends each. Here's the first.

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Look out for five more for 2025 from Drop Two. Coming next month.

We are Crowd DNA. An insights and strategy consultancy with offices in Sydney, Singapore, London, Amsterdam, New York, Stockholm and Los Angeles. Formed in 2008, operating across 70+ markets, we bring together trend specialists, researchers, strategists, data analysts, designers, writers and film-makers to create culturally charged commercial advantage for the world's most exciting brands.

Contributors: Amy Nicholson, Olivia Anderson, Laila Cloudlry, Teresa Yong, Isabelle Reman, Dan Steward, Rachel Rapp, Jennifer Robinson, Chloë Swayne, Stephanie Winkler.



Ugly Delicious

Nothing shocks us anymore. **The last five years** of visual culture has taught us that our appetite for raw and unfiltered content that captures our attention will result in a never-ending sea of sameness – and it knows no limits.

But shock tactics can be put to better use: as visual design increasingly takes inspiration from ugly delicious aesthetic trends – and just in time.

The next five years will see a visual language develop that re-points shocking content – now that online has done all the hard work of making us comfortable with it – and makes it desirable: products that are so shocking you can't take your eyes off of them. This Ugly Delicious trend is a good fit to play out primarily in fashion, jewellery, design and food.

The Rebound Risk is high with any aesthetic trend, they exist on a pendulum that's likely to keep swinging (brat, to demure... and back again last Summer). And with Ugly Delicious coming after years of clean Millennial minimalism, we may rebound back to order and control in visual design.



@nolm_store

Freaky Fashion. Pearls are being sold with matted (synthetic) hair caught between the beads.



@clarkoriginals



@isamayabeauty

Lurid Lipstick. The high-end lipstick that comes in a phallus-shape.

Is it a trainer? Is it a kitten heel? Does it matter?

Brands. *Fast Forward.*

To be reactive without causing too much disruption (or dilution) of your core brand values: think about interesting paradoxes or insights that exist for your target audience or consumer and play to these tensions – whether that's through packaging, or a collab with an absurdist social media personality who still holds true to what you stand for.

“

Japan is a leading market here on shock tactics - never afraid of being different. We're now seeing brands in categories like food and beverage embrace how it can be both shocking and beautiful. I personally found Louis XIII's The Drop - cognac packaged up as perfume - extremely delicious (but kind of smart, if it's your thing) - essentially making premium alcohol into an accessory.”

TERESA, APAC, CULTURAL STRATEGIST

CROWD EXPLORES

At Crowd, we like to share our thinking as often as possible. So, we produce reports, films and case studies to keep you informed made by our Crowd DNA Studio team – our in-house creative team of designers, editors and videographers.

We will highlight some recent outputs in this report. First up, the Colour Me editorial series. Here our semioticians decode colour trends and how they reflect cultural shifts. Read about how brands can leverage Gen Z Yellow and Heritage Purple [here](#).

Post-Social

We've lost the social in social media. **The last five years** have seen social media platforms try to reinvent themselves to be relevant for a new generation of users.

But open any social feed and you're confronted with ads, algorithms and synthetic media – with little sign of the connection and community we all originally signed up for. We're seeing increasing numbers of 'creators' (influencer has become a dirty word) moving to OnlyFans, Substack or Patreon for the freedom and money, while celebrities are curating their own communities in completely new and ownable spaces of the internet (think Dua Lipa's Service95, for example).

Social media has lost sight of genuine connection. Users are dissatisfied and disillusioned. Social media as we know it is broken. We've reached peak enshittification.

'Enshittification'

noun Colloquial the gradual deterioration of a service or product brought about by a reduction in the quality of service provided, especially of an online platform, and as a consequence of profit-seeking.

Macquarie Dictionary's word of the year, 2024

As a reaction to consumer abandonment, established players like Snap are pivoting away, as with their latest slogan – Less Social Media. More Snapchat. While the much-prophesied shift to decentralised, user-centric and social-first sites has yet to materialise successfully.

Instead users are resisting the brandification of social media by creating shared meaning through the absurd idiosyncrasies of online communication.



The next five years will see an intensity of internet users who are doubling down on shared lingo, aesthetics and reference points.

'Internet speak' is happening from the ground up: internet in-jokes are unknowable and impenetrable to those who do not move in those online microverses (or in the case of 'skibidi toilet', anyone born before 2010).

Those who can talk the talk are forging a new, if-you-know-you-know community where the modes of communication are constantly being written and rewritten.

The Rebound Risk is that the more absurd the internet becomes, the greater the risk of reinforcing ingroup/outgroup dynamics that already permeate online spaces: there will be even more division than unity across the internet.

Brands. *Fast Forward.*

Brands beware. Co-opting internet speak without a true understanding of its origins, will get you found out. Instead, platform the realities of your audience and consumers through facilitating their expression and connection – rather than trying to monopolise attention.



Connective Social. *How luxury brands are becoming fluent in so-called 'brain-rot' language.*

“There’s a harsher divide between people who are very online, who have this shared vernacular and humour, and those who aren’t, who just don’t get it. It’s more than just a generational split - there’s a direct correlation between how online you are and your ability to engage deeply with the community of the internet.”

OLIVIA, EMEA, CULTURAL STRATEGIST
(and Chronically Online)



Shared Language. *How to talk Internet is what bonds Gen Z and Gen Alpha.*

ⁱ 'Skibidi toilet' is an internet meme popularised on TikTok by Gen Alpha. It's an animated series featuring heads appearing out of toilets. It's absurd, nonsensical and probably best left to the kids.



Girl, Erupted

The last five years has witnessed a reversal of hard-won rights for woman and their bodies around the world.

And this has led to a very. angry. mood.

While inclusive role models or storytelling – think: the Barbie movie or even the complex phenomenon of Tradwives – may have given new voices to woman, this **just. isn't. enough.** Instead, womanhood is erupting through sharing what's relatable, and unfiltered and that celebrates the many ways to being a female-identifying person in 2025 – and at any age.

The next five years will see female-only spaces move out of the WhatsApp group chat and into real world solidarity and action with women-only co-housing or cities (eg, Umeå in Sweden where inclusive initiatives include swings designed for average teen girls in mind and have led it to be dubbed the world's most feminist city).

We can expect to see representations of womanhood that spill outside the lines of 'submissive' or 'alluring' – think: honest, aspirational, shouty, smart, 'ugly' and confident.

The Rebound Risk is that rather than an acceptance of all the facets of biological identity, another form of 'othering' could take place: for instance, how movements like South Korea's 4B – a fringe feminist group advocating the rejection of marriage, childbirth, dating and sex – has sparked global interest in the wake of the fall-out from 2024 US election. Or the more worrying femcel movement, that abandons gender equality under a new guise of feminism.



Girls, Alone. An increase in spaces just for women such as the UK's first cohousing community exclusively for older women and *New Women Space* in Brooklyn (pictured) which is a place to "mingle and plot revolution"



Raw Motherhood. Titled 'Bundles Of Joy', this advert from Burger King UK and BBH London won praise for its veracity, while at the same time was criticised for capitalising on an intimate moment and presenting a less than perfect image of new motherhood.

Brands. *Fast Forward.*

Do your homework. This is a risky space for anyone who hasn't engaged with their female identifying audience with research on what drives them to your product or service. By understanding them better, you'll be better equipped to reflect their world and how to best communicate with them...

“We are seeing a pretty holistic celebration of women with brands playing a more supportive role, helping to promote sisterhood rather than just using it for another round of online sales.”

TERESA, APAC, SENIOR CULTURAL STRATEGIST

CROWD EXPLORES

Our Studio have spotlighted how brands are changing their narratives around women's experience – in sport, in city design, in fashion. In the editorial series **Crowd Shortcuts** – a regular trend spotting feature we share with our clients – we looked at products that are using periods as a valuable health resource: Read Waste Health [here](#).

Super Friction

The last five years has seen the desire for complete convenience, much of which has been focused around eliminating human interaction at consumer points (from cashless economies to the removal of check-out staff) and been accelerated by AI. But is everyone looking forward to a fully automated restaurant that logs all your preferences just so that we don't feel the friction of choice?

This steady erasure of friction has led to a deeply sanitized, and unsatisfactory experience of the shopper journey.

There will be a reaction against this, and already we are seeing signs that we want our daily life to still have points of friction along the road.

The next five years will see a lot of talk of the ethical values around automation and algorithms, but also how to reintegrate human friction as a positive experience. It will be about finding ways to counter instant gratification and curated social interactions in our daily lives.

“*Live experiences are the new luxury good.*”

KEVIN HARTZ, CO-FOUNDER EVENTBRITE

Super Friction will be a special offer – a chance to reconnect with unpredictability. This could be an increase in experiences that jolt the mind, amplify surprise and delight and make you linger just a while longer. Or ephemeral content that leaves us unsatisfied and enjoying the (slightly uncomfortable) feelings of wanting more.

“*In a world of machine-generated abundance, human-centred services and experiences will become increasingly rare, valuable, and therefore desirable.*”

ALISTAIR BARR, BUSINESS INSIDER

The Rebound Risk is that the human factor could become monetised and corralled into being a tiered or luxury option: which let's face it, is about as dehumanizing as it comes.



Brands. *Fast Forward.*

See friction as a good thing. Consider a return to celebrating product limitations and emphasise the greater reward that comes from enforcing consumer challenges and proactivity. Your consumer can be better connected to your product or service when they need to work together with you, or work a little bit harder, to totally get it.

CROWD EXPLORES

Our Studio have explored how brands are working to “make tech less out-source and more resource”. The editorial team put a semio lens on the smartphone brand Nothing to look at how it creates feelings of wonder and joy in our **Semiotics at Crowd** series. Read [here](#).



Tactile Friction. Music product designers *Teenage engineering* brings the joy of tactility back into the creative process



Participation Friction. *Championing participation by encouraging attendees to take a piece of the display home, Japanese apparel and home goods retailer Muji's trade-fair pavilion Emptiness won the Trade-Fair Stand of the Year category 2024.*



Rewarding Friction. Streetwear brand *Corteiz* uses friction to fuel its countercultural appeal, such as a new collection drop shrouded in secrecy, with instructions and locations shared on social media just before launch, rewarding fans who are willing to work hard to get their hands on the elusive brand across the city.



Future Stakeholders

The last five years has at times felt like everything has become a bit... generic and predictable: how is this the case when we are living through worldwide instability and uncertainty?

Every coffee shop looks the same and everyone's wearing the same (for our American friends) sneakers. Given what we've already explored, it's not entirely surprising when algorithms are our taste-curators. But have we really seen it all before. Twice? Or more?

The antidote to feeling caught between the monotonous present and an uncertain future, is to be a literal stakeholder on what's next...

The next five years will energetically combat cultural fatigue; putting consumers in the driving seat. We see it happening already with prediction markets like Polymarket, which allows people to place money on the outcome of everything from the mundane to the extraordinary (at the time of writing Jay-Z & Beyoncé's divorce in 2025 was at 20% likely).

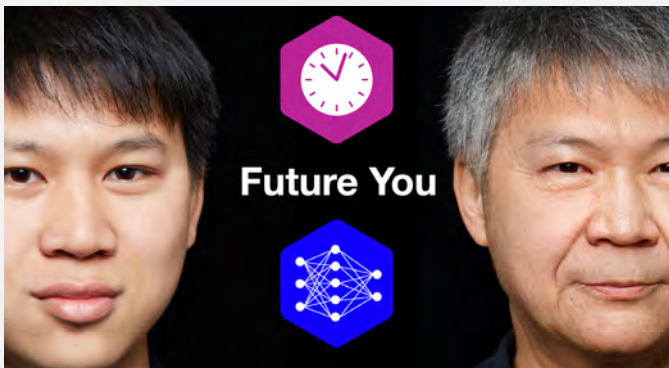
Being a stakeholder in these major and minor world events provides individuals a sense of control in an otherwise turbulent world. For example, Polymarket users correctly predicted the outcome of the US presidential election, when traditional polling said otherwise.

Being an architect or an author of the future is agency – and don't we all want products or services who can give us more of that right now?

The Rebound Risk is that rather than making change, we risk being passive observers, betting on outcomes rather than acting on them. Without regulation, these behaviours could run into murky waters. Or worse: be reduced to another Subscribe or Like button in lieu of real agency and change.



Decide The Future. Artists such as Ai Weiwei imagine relics of the future in [MAAM's Future Fossils](#) exhibit. Ai Weiwei. *Study of Perspective in Glass*, 2018. Glass. 3 pieces, each 4¾ x 3¾ x 4½ in. Courtesy Ai Weiwei Studio and Lisson Gallery.



Discover Tomorrow. [FutureYou](#) focuses on “the degree of continuity an individual feels with their future self” by offering consumers an intimate - and a literal - portrait of their future selves.

Brands. *Fast Forward.*

Adopt a long-term focus and invite consumers in: give them the chance to have a more active role in shaping future narratives through interactivity, an obvious opportunity would be the climate. For example, Deep Rising is an organization dedicated to preserving the deep ocean and has ‘The World’s Largest Ocean Dispute’ where consumers buy a share of the ocean.



If last year taught us anything, it's that fear trumps hope. Perhaps if we can all see a little bit more clearly into the future, with the help of authoring potential outcomes, we can reverse this cycle by envisaging the future we want to see. And become active stakeholders in that future.”

AMY, EMEA, FUTURES DIRECTOR



Gamified futures are helping us break free of the uncertainty of the present, while at the same time reminding us that we are constantly writing our own legacies in real time: what do you think the future will look like? And what will you leave behind once you arrive there?”

DAN, NYC, SENIOR CULTURAL STRATEGIST

CROWD EXPLORES

Speaking of games, our Studio have been exploring how sport is changing.

The Future Of Sport focuses on the impact of the Olympic Games on LA in ([read here](#)) representing the voices of 500 people across the US in a survey by our sister agency, STRAT7 Researchbods. And we used our proprietary AI-platform, Crowd Signals, to track the real-time conversations for the report, **Sports Fandom & Activewear** ([read here](#)).

Come to Crowd in 2025 for strategy rooted in cultural foresight.

We're experts in making sense of what's next. Whether it's two years or twenty, we help clients envisage tomorrow for better strategic planning today.

Since 2008 we've helped some of the world's biggest brands chart and shape their future direction, unpacking the potential impact of emergent culture on products, comms, services, consumers and much, much more. This has taken us across all sectors and audience types, from payments to pet food, scotch whisky to snacking, TV to travel.

Some highlights from 2024 include:

- + Working with a global jewellery brand to create a cultural foresight programme to maintain future relevancy
- + Delivering 2050 scenario planning for a major pet care brand to build their future business pipeline
- + Forecasting 10 year health and wellbeing horizons and potential product, channel, comms and innovation implications for a world-wide insurer with over 90 million customers
- + Touching down in India, Hong Kong, Singapore, Mainland China and beyond, delivering strategies for tech brands, tourism boards, gallery groups and beyond in multiple regions, languages and methodologies.

CROWD EXPLORES

Take a quick visit to the very recent past with **Last Year At Crowd film** (produced by Studio) to see some of our 2024 highlights from 135 projects completed.

If you want to paint a picture of what the near, or far, future might look like, and how YOUR brand could thrive in it, contact hello@crowdDNA.com

Thanks for
reading!

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