

Trends 2026 | ☹️☹️☹️ JACK MORTON

# Culture Doesn't Stand Still





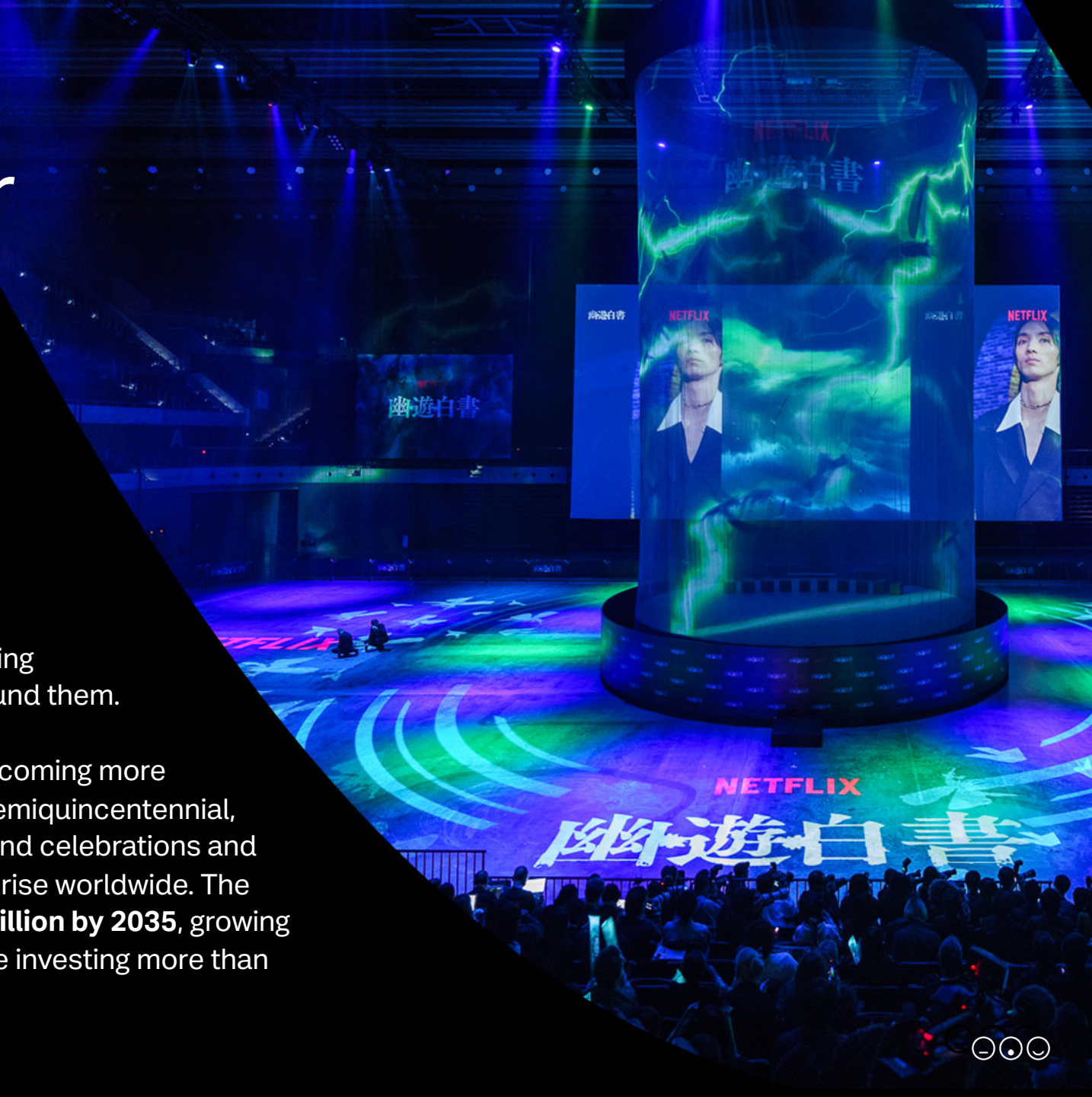
# In 2026, culture is undergoing another transformation

At Jack, we've always believed that the role of brands isn't just to follow culture, brands should help manifest it.

But culture never stops moving. Culture shifts, stretches, and surprises us. What felt revolutionary yesterday can feel routine tomorrow.

That's why, each year, we reexamine the undercurrents shaping how people connect, express, and experience the world around them.

In 2026, culture is undergoing another transformation. It's becoming more emotional, more participatory, and more global. From a US semiquincentennial, World Cup events, and the impending Olympics to global brand celebrations and generational movements, shared live experiences are on the rise worldwide. The global experiential market is on track to reach **nearly \$2.5 trillion by 2035**, growing at an **average annual rate of 6.8%**, indicating that brands are investing more than ever in bringing people together.





The following Cultural Truths for 2026 explore how **creativity, connection, and community** are evolving, and how brands can lead by creating moments that feel unmistakably human.

Because in 2026, the brands that win won't just appear in culture. They'll move it forward. One shared experience at a time.

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# The Human Reset





# People want to feel connected, not just catered to

After years of hyperconnectivity, people are choosing depth over breadth and human touch instead of algorithmic mimicry. They want to feel connected, not just catered to. The pendulum is swinging toward tactility, craft, and care. That means experiences need to feel purposeful, targeted, and more personal.

This shift to smaller more focused worlds will mean culture doesn't just live on the big C stages anymore. (Super Bowl, etc.) It's growing as smaller groups and identities in rooms, conventions, locker rooms, lunchrooms, rooftops and open spaces.

People are finding meaning and connection in everyday spaces, and brands are meeting them there with experiences that fit seamlessly into our unique lives rather than interrupting them. As behavior shifts, people are gravitating toward environments that feel familiar, accessible, and human. Intimacy and ease are the new currencies of connection.



When **Jim Beam** became the Official Spirit of U.S. Soccer, we helped the brand show up beyond the stadiums in the everyday spaces where fans actually connect. Think pre-match bars, fan lounges, and local viewing parties. The experiences focused on shared ritual over spectacle: bourbon tastings, fan-to-fan storytelling, and simple, tactile details that turned watch parties into moments of community. It was brand love, distilled down to human scale.





**Aesop's** pop-up library experiences (themed around women's history, LGBTQ+, etc.) in markets such as New York, London, and Shanghai blended scent and story within small, analog settings. Part bookstore, part sensory retreat, they created moments of pause that felt distinctly human.

# The next big thing will be small

## PROOF POINT:

Nearly 70% of consumers say they value experiences that help them “slow down and reconnect with real life” more than those that are convenient or digital-first (Mintel, 2025).

68% of global consumers say they're more likely to engage with brands “in familiar, everyday places” than in traditional venues or digital-only settings (NielsenIQ, 2025).

## KEY TAKEAWAY

**In 2026, emotional resonance across micro-cultures is the new scale of success meaning the way to reach more people meaningfully is to reach fewer people more deeply. The next big thing will be small.**



NETFLIX

# Creators

# Are

# Deciders

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At **Netflix Town** in Tokyo, fans became collaborators, co-creating art, experiences, and limited-edition merch for the platform's 10-year anniversary in Japan. Guests stepped into interactive worlds inspired by hit titles with every moment designed to elevate fan creativity and storytelling.

# The creator economy has evolved into true collaboration

The influencer is dead, long live the influencer. Creators aren't just amplifying brands anymore; they're shaping them, driving creative decisions that once lived behind closed doors. From co-designing products to turning fandom into feedback loops, creativity has become a two-way street where brands and audiences build culture together.

Pinterest and Emma Chamberlain's salted toffee coffee blend marked the platform's first-ever physical product, proof that creator ideas now drive brand innovation. Alix Earle turned her signature style into a denim collaboration with Frame, showing how social storytelling can translate directly to product creation. And Pip & Nut's "*Secret Squirrels*" community invited superfans into the kitchen to help develop new flavors, turning passion into tangible results.

Across industries, brands are turning to the voices who know how to reach, and represent, their audiences, giving them a real stake in everything from concept to creation.



# Shared creation builds brand trust

## PROOF POINT:

82% of Gen Z say they trust a brand more when fans and creators help make it, not just promote it (Morning Consult, 2025).

## KEY TAKEAWAY

In 2026, creators don't just inspire culture, they decide it.  
The smartest brands turn creative control into shared ownership.



At Gamescom, to promote the upcoming **Lords of the Fallen II**, CI Games opened a live tattoo studio, inviting superfans to permanently ink symbols from the game's lore, a raw, participatory expression of belonging.



# Culture

X



# Commerce

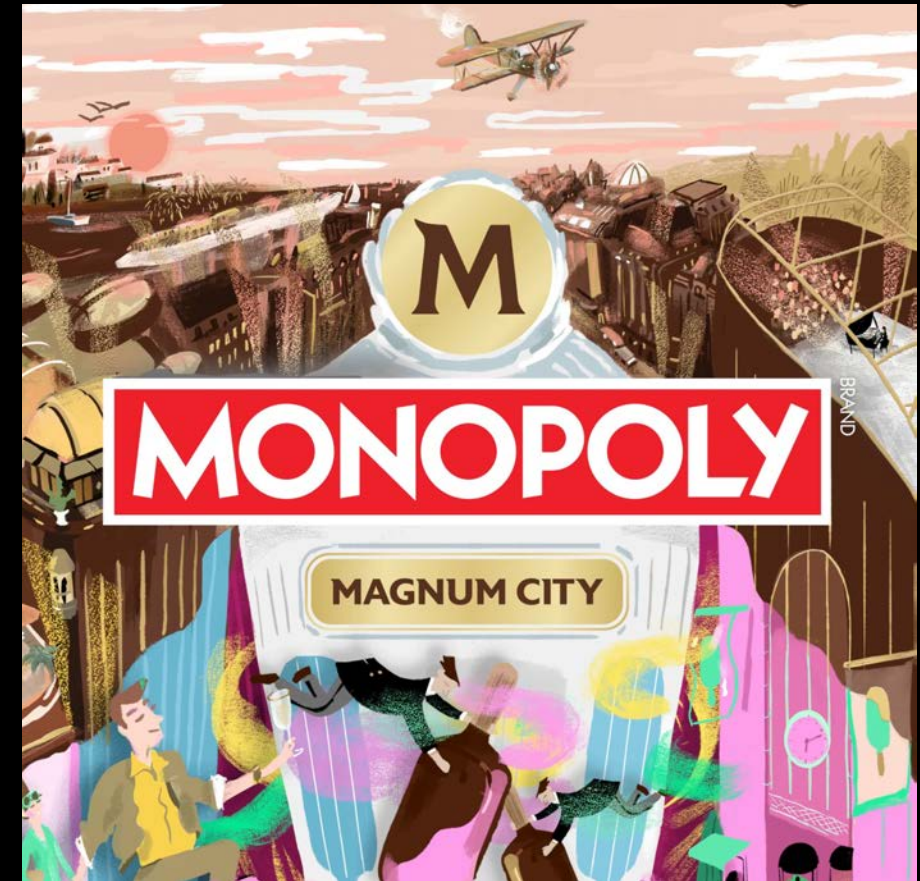


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# The line between creativity and commerce has officially disappeared

The most successful brands aren't just selling products; they're designing experiences that invite participation and turn cultural energy into measurable growth. Creative ideas are now business drivers, transforming transactions into moments of belonging and storytelling into sales. From interactive shopping and limited drops to real-world experiences that blend play and purchase, brands are proving that the future of commerce isn't about convenience; it's about creativity.



**Magnum Ice Cream** shows how creative commerce turns experience into impact. Through campaigns like *Pleasure Express: Beyond Worlds*, *Remix Arcade*, and its recent *Monopoly* collaboration, the brand bridged culture and commerce driving boosts in market share. The latest campaign saw double-digit sales growth, reinforcing its position as Singapore's number one ice cream.



# Make moments that sell themselves

## PROOF POINT:

67% of consumers have purchased products directly from a brand experience, and 85% say they're more likely to buy after attending one (Event Marketer, 2025).

## KEY TAKEAWAY

**In 2026, creativity sells. The brands that design culture-powered moments of commerce will turn engagement into their strongest form of conversion.**



**Oreo** turned crosswalks outside Kroger stores into giant cookie stripes with QR codes embedded in the pavement, blending play, purchase, and participation in one clever move.



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# Substance Over Spotlight







Innovation at **Jack Morton** isn't a headline, it's a habit. *NEXT Fest*, the second phase of our AI training program, set a goal of 40% weekly AI use among our people reached 63%. With image and video generation tools now supporting 70% of pitches and projects, we're proving that real progress happens quietly through sustained and sharing practice, not performance.



**Unilever** is applying AI to optimize supply chains and reduce energy use, proof that responsible technology and sustainability can deliver impact without spectacle.

# The most powerful progress won't be announced; it'll be demonstrated

In 2026, the smartest brands will let results speak louder than rhetoric, turning sustainability and innovation into systems, not slogans. Sustainability may lose its voice, but not its power, evolving from ideology into efficiency, from mission to measurable performance. Similarly, AI will shift from hype to infrastructure, proving that technology can serve people quietly and responsibly.

## PROOF POINT:

Only 35% of global consumers say they “fully trust” brands that use AI, yet 71% say they’re open to it when applied transparently and with human oversight (PwC Global Consumer Insights, 2025).

## KEY TAKEAWAY

**In 2026, doing the right thing will be the new innovation. The best brands won't shout about doing the right thing; they'll just do it better.**





# Global Stages, Regional Stories

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# From Tokyo's creative renaissance to Tribeca's reinvention, the world's cultural stages are shifting from spectacle to substance

The next wave of influence is being written in local languages and remixed for global audiences. *Demon Hunters* catapulted K-pop to new heights, *Ne Zha 2* became the highest-grossing animated film of all time with a story unfamiliar to much of the world, and *Black Myth: Wukong* turned Chinese mythology into one of the year's most anticipated games. Even the Super Bowl stage now belongs to global artists like Bad Bunny. The message is clear: culture no longer travels in one direction. It's shared, shaped, and reimagined by the world's most creative communities—and the brands willing to meet them there.



**Desperados** brought Latin energy to Europe's streets through *Avenida Desperados*, a collaboration with global party collective Elrow. The brand turned everyday city streets into spontaneous celebrations of Latin culture, transforming balconies and alleyways across Europe into living stages of music, art, and community. The series proved that global brands could show up locally, bringing people together through a culture that feels both rooted in a region and universal.



# Brands build deeper connection by showing up locally

## PROOF POINT:

78% of global consumers say they “feel more connected to a brand” when it participates authentically in major cultural events (Event Marketer, 2025).

## KEY TAKEAWAY

In 2026, big stages belong to those who show up with a local pulse.



**Tribeca Festival** has evolved from film-first to a cross-genre celebration of storytelling to include music, gaming, tech, and art, merging into one shared cultural language.





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# Joy As Rebellion







Nothing says fun like Pokémon GO. **Pokémon GO Fest** transformed the digital game into a real-world celebration of play, nostalgia, and community. Fans explored themed habitats, met larger-than-life Pokémon, and joined live contests and trivia challenges. The event turned a mobile pastime into a joyful shared spectacle, proof that in an often-serious world, a little wonder goes a long way.

# In the era of “permacrisis,” joy is resistance

Playfulness, color, and absurdity are reemerging as cultural lifelines. Consumers are gravitating toward brands that deliver levity and color in a gray world. This isn't escapism; it's reclaiming the narrative and creating space for our own sake. For marketers, leaning into joy means creating moments where absurdity and delight aren't just tolerated, they're celebrated.





# Unexpected joy will deliver unprecedented results

## PROOF POINT:

80% of global consumers say brands that “surprise and delight in unexpected ways” earn stronger loyalty (Trendwatching, 2025).


## KEY TAKEAWAY

In 2026, delight is disruption. The brands brave enough to make people smile in the face of overwhelming odds will win the cultural moment.



**Duolingo** continues to show up with chaotic humor. **The brand broke the internet** by “killing off” its famous owl mascot, a move so absurd it had fans, brands, and media outlets joining the drama. The satirical campaign racked up millions of reactions and pushed its social following past 25 million. It’s pure, rebellious joy that is funny, self-aware, and impossible to ignore.





# It starts with a choice to make 2026 extraordinary

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