

Collective Culture





Communities are at the core of everything we do and continue to emerge all around us. Now, in the midst of a global pandemic, our very notions of community are being challenged. With most of the world in isolation, we are forced to redefine community and connect with one another in new, innovative ways.

Social distancing efforts have pushed people to connect online and it is transforming the concept of social media as we know it. Once fueled by misinformation, excess consumerism, and mental health concerns, social media seems to finally be doing what we originally intended for it to do: bring us together. With consumers around the world spending significantly more time on their smartphones, projects like The Social Distancing Project and Quarantine Chat are fostering real, authentic human connections.

Even prior to the pandemic, people were ready for a shift from many connections to more meaningful ones. In a March 2019 post, Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg declared privacy to be the next major social media trend. In an article for Harvard Business Review titled “The Era of Antisocial Social Media,” Sara Wilson explores the trend toward smaller, more specialized online communities, breaking them down into three distinct categories: private messaging, micro-communities, and shared experiences. These three types of communities are set to change the way we interact with one other and the world around us for years to come.

In times of crisis, people search for the stability and safety that comes with having something to believe in. It's human nature to want to feel like you're a part of something bigger than yourself, and for many, this

feeling comes from religion. COVID-19 has sparked a resurgence in religious practices. According to the Pew Research Center, in a survey of 11,537 adults conducted March 19-24, more than half of American adults say they have prayed for an end to the spread of the coronavirus. Google searches for prayer have surged in the past few months, now at their highest volume since 2015. But, not everyone finds solace in organized religion. As the younger generation embraces nonconformist views on identity and gender, the lack of inclusivity demonstrated by traditional religious systems can be a turn-off. Instead, they find their faith in less rigid forms of spirituality. Magnifying the economic, environmental, and political anxieties of our time, COVID-19 has pushed more people to seek answers in the stars.

Large organizations and shared belief systems satisfy our desire for belonging, but so do smaller, less formal community structures. Our chosen tribes are just as, if not more important than the ones we're born into. They are the people we face some of the world's most pressing challenges with. Throughout history, subcultures have emerged from a group's inability to fit in. By challenging the status quo, these communities push culture forward. Once an outlier, skate culture has permeated mainstream culture in a way that many other subcultures are unable to. The fascination with this effortlessly cool community became apparent in 2018 when three films on the topic hit screens, and continues today with the release of a new HBO series called *Betty*. Streetwear giant Supreme is proof

of the subculture's mainstream success. What started as a clubhouse for New York City skaters has become a trailblazer of streetwear and the culture surrounding it. By embracing the communities built around niche interests, we can support the evolution of our culture and create a society that better represents everyone within it.

**With most of the world
in isolation, we are
forced to redefine
community and connect
with one another in new,
innovative ways.**



Watch List

Influential brands, initiatives, and voices that are leading the conversation.

Chani Nicholas



Chani Nicholas is a Los Angeles-based astrologer that weaves progressive politics, activism, mental health, and queer identity into her work. She is helping lead a rising number of modern astrologists who are adopting radical approaches to self-acceptance, self-love that are outside of existing social norms. This year, she published a New York Times best-selling book titled *You Were Born For This: Astrology of Radical Self-Acceptance*.

The Skate Kitchen is a NYC-based skate collective made up of young women finding their place in the male-dominated world of skateboarding. After being discovered by documentarian Crystal Moselle on the subway, they were cast in a 2018 documentary called *The Skate Kitchen*. Now, several of the group's members start in HBO's *Betty*, a fictional spin-off of the documentary. The group aims to give people who don't fit the skating mold the confidence to try it out.



The Skate Kitchen

The Nearness Project



Launched in April 2020, The Nearness Project creates a community where people can share and seek inspiration from each other's experiences during COVID-19. Started by two former Rookie Mag contributors, Anna White and Alia Wilhelm, the project exists as a web platform and Instagram account, and will eventually come out as a print publication. It includes work from people all over the world and can be equated to an online version of art therapy.

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Social Solace



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Found Faith



— 03

Chosen Tribe



— 04

Community By Design





People are craving closeness at a time when being close is the one thing we cannot do. Social distancing has pushed people to connect online and it's changing the way we interact with social media and digital communities as a whole. Once fueled by misinformation, excess consumerism, and mental health concerns, social media seems to finally be doing what it was originally intended to do as it slowly transforms into a tool for creating real, authentic human connections. According to March 2020 findings from [Global Web Index](#), 70% of consumers around the world are spending more time on their smartphones, with nearly half (44%) spending more time on social media specifically since the outbreak of COVID-19. As of March 24, 2020, time spent in group calls on Facebook increased by over 1,000% and messaging increased by 50%. Instagram and Facebook Live views doubled in just one week and TikTok downloads rose 27% in the first 23 days of March 2020, bringing the total number of downloads to 1.9 billion.

As many crises do, COVID-19 has pushed people to find new, innovative ways to connect with people

The Social Distance Project

The Social Distance Project is an Instagram project that acts as a digital diary, publishing anonymous submissions that document the everyday drama of life in quarantine.

QuarantineChat

Designed by artists Danielle Baskin and Max Hawkins, QuarantineChat connects isolated people by encouraging serendipitous conversation. Using the app Dialup, the user is matched with a random person to chat on the phone with, bringing back the simple joy of talking to a stranger.

Quarantine Together

Quarantine Together is a new dating platform that connects people in times of social distancing. After each match they send users a link to donate to the Frontline Responders Fund.

70%

Since the outbreak of COVID-19, 70% of consumers are spending more time on their smartphones, with nearly half (44%) spending more time on social media specifically.

43%

of young people (16-30 years of age) feel that large social networks like Facebook and Instagram have 'too many people on them.'

70%

of fashion executives believe that increased exploration of and spend on new media platforms versus more "traditional" platforms will be crucial to their companies.

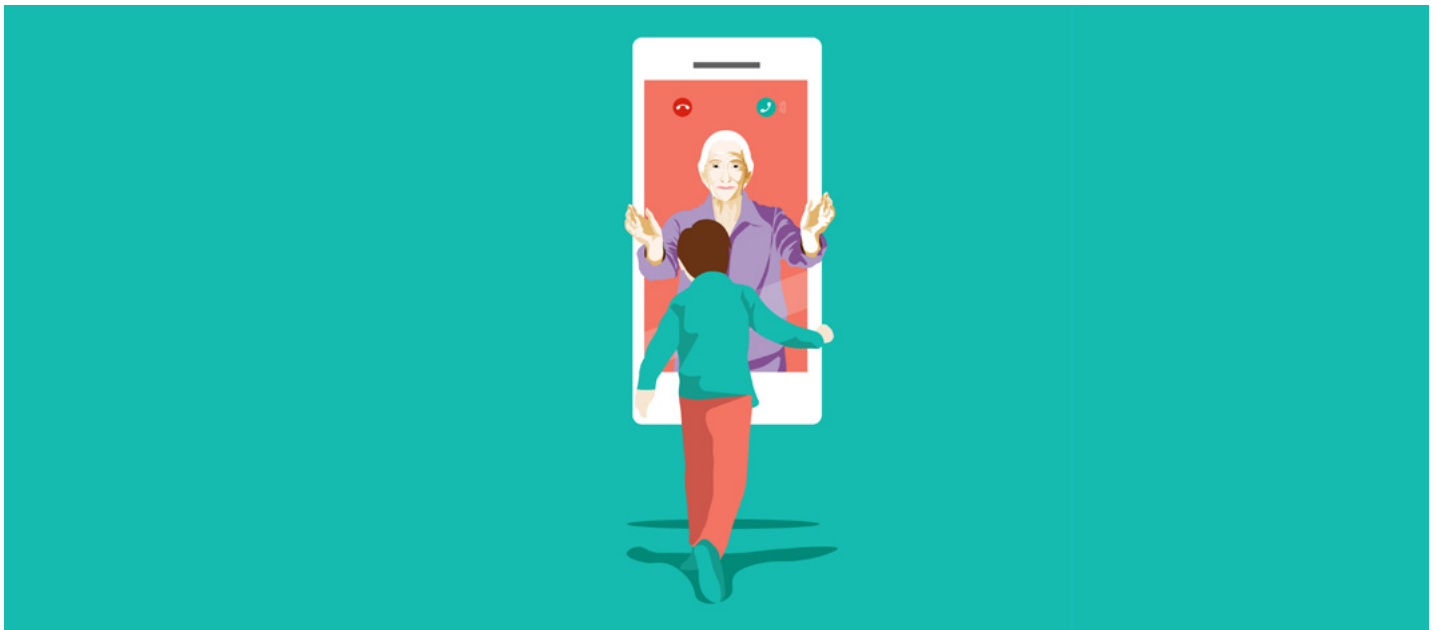
Source: [Global Web Index](#), [ZAK Agency](#), [Business of Fashion](#)

given the tools at their disposal. [The Nearness Project](#), launched in April 2020 by former Rookie Mag contributors, creates a community where people can share and seek inspiration from each other's experiences during the pandemic. [The Social Distancing Project](#) similarly shares peoples' experiences under lockdown by publishing anonymous submissions to Instagram, documenting the drama of everyday life in quarantine. Artists Danielle Baskin and Max Hawkins designed [QuarantineChat](#), a service that aims to build a sense of community in locations where lots of people are self-isolating. [Quarantine Together](#) is a new dating platform that connects self-isolators so they can fight both loneliness and the virus simultaneously.

Even before COVID-19, people were searching for more authentic online connections. In a March 2019 post, Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg declared that privacy will be the next major social media trend. "Today we already see that private messaging, ephemeral stories, and small groups are by far the fastest growing areas of online communication," said Zuckerberg. He explained that privacy "gives people the freedom to be themselves and connect

more naturally" and noted that people are increasingly seeking "the digital equivalent of the living room" as opposed to a "town hall." With Instagram likes expected to disappear in more markets, it is only a matter of time before brands recognize that people prefer meaningful connections over many connections. Instagram is currently working on a messaging app called Threads that will make it easier to share status updates, location, photos, and texts with users' close friends list. This will help the social media giant create the more personal and private experience that users are looking for.

In an article for Harvard Business Review titled "The Era of Antisocial Social Media," Sara Wilson further explores the trend toward smaller, more specialized online communities. Wilson calls these private online communities digital campfires and breaks them down into three distinct categories: private messaging, micro-communities, and shared experiences. According to a [survey](#) by the ZAK agency, 38% of people under 30 only use Facebook for the private messenger function. Several companies have responded to this preference by employing texting features to mimic the intimacy of personal interactions.



Micro-community campfires are defined as “private or semi-private forums where people gather around interests, beliefs, or passions,” and best exemplified by Facebook Groups, Instagram’s “close friends” feature, and YouTube’s hyper-specific communities. Many times, they originate in unexpected places. For example, gaming platform Discord has become a lesser known destination for beauty fanatics, with multiple servers devoted to topics like makeup advice or cruelty-free products. Brands can tap into these micro-communities through influencers or build their own communities from scratch - the benefits of which are well-proven. Glossier created a private Slack group for its best customers to organize meet-ups and discuss products. The brand credits the group with helping to co-create the Milk Jelly Cleanser, one of its top selling products.

Shared experience campfires are closely associated with gaming platforms. Fortnite has been described as a de facto social

network as players spend hours connecting with their friends while playing. Twitch serves a similar purpose and recently pushed into non-gaming categories like music and sports. Like Fortnite, Twitch is both a form of entertainment and a catalyst for bringing people together for a shared experience. If strategic, brands can successfully capitalize on users’ shared interests. Brands like the NFL, Marvel, and Nike have leveraged Fortnite to reach their audiences by selling skins, creating branded game modes, and doing limited-edition product drops inside the game.

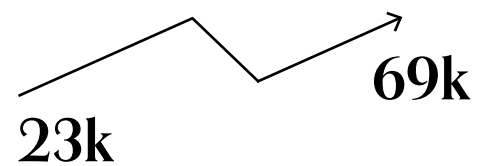
Social media is changing as we know it. Quarantine has only strengthened people’s already apparent desire for more authentic, unfiltered human connections. Although these closed communities inherently mean less access for brands, those with the know-how and patience needed to reach them will see long-term benefits that cannot be achieved through traditional marketing strategies.

In times of uncertainty, people search for the stability and safety that comes with having something to believe in. Now, as we find ourselves in the middle of a global pandemic, this search is being satisfied with a resurgence of spirituality. Google searches for [prayer](#) have surged in the past few months, now at their highest volume since 2015. According to the [Pew Research Center](#), in a survey of 11,537 adults conducted March 19-24, more than half of American adults say they have prayed for an end to the spread of the coronavirus. Nine out of ten Americans who pray daily say they are praying in the pandemic, as are 15% of those who say they seldom or never pray and 24% of those who say they do not belong to any religion. Prior to the pandemic, a fascination with religious iconography took hold of the music industry. Kanye West's *Jesus Is King*, Chance the Rapper's *The Big Day*, and FKA Twigs's *MAGDALENE* brought religion to the forefront of pop culture.

Despite the recent surge in interest, young people are hesitant to adhere to many religious practices. As the younger generation embraces nonconformist views on identity and gender, the lack of inclusivity demonstrated by traditional religious systems can be a turn off. The [Pew Research Center](#) found that there is a particularly large gap in religious affiliation between adults under 40 and over 40 in Canada and the United States. In Canada, 51% of adults under 40 are not religiously affiliated, while in the United States, 34% of that demographic are unaffiliated. For many young people, faith manifests itself outside the walls of organized religion. Of 2,000 people polled by [Vox First Person](#) and Morning Consult, only 56% considered themselves very or somewhat religious, but 70% said they were very or somewhat spiritual.

34%

of adults under 40 are not religiously affiliated in the United States.



Searches for [Susan Miller](#) are +200% from last year. On April 26, 2020, weekly average searches hit 69,345.

\$2.1B

Size of the "mystical services market"

56%

of Americans consider themselves very or somewhat religious.

70%

of Americans consider themselves very or somewhat spiritual.

+31%

Searches for [prayer](#) are +31% to last year and are growing at an accelerated rate.

Astrology has emerged as a place of faith, free of judgement, and has enjoyed broad cultural acceptance for several years now. COVID-19 has only magnified the economic, environmental, and political anxieties of our time, pushing more people to seek answers in the stars. By doubling down on horoscopes, people are hoping to assuage their feelings of powerlessness, even just for a moment. According to data provided by Lucie Greene, a cultural trend analyst, Dazed and Refinery29 reported a bump in traffic to their horoscope-related stories. Dazed Beauty saw a 22% increase in horoscope-related traffic this quarter versus last quarter. The corporate world is taking note of the public's appetite for

zodiac-themed product offerings. Apps like Co-Star and Sanctuary have already staked their claim on a share of the \$2.1 billion "mystical services market." This spring, Amazon sent out "shopping horoscopes" to its Prime Insider subscribers. On the runway, Marine Serre made a case for the zodiac's place in high fashion with her Fall 2019 constellation-themed show. Banu Guler, the chief executive and co-founder of Co-Star, reinforces the universality of astrology, viewing it as a form of collective wellness that helps people relate to each other. At a time when people are deprived of connection on a personal and spiritual level, it seems the opportunities for astrology are endless.



Throughout history, subcultures have emerged from a group's inability to fit in. Forgotten by the mainstream, individuals create communities based on niche interests and shared experiences. Built on a foundation of inclusivity, these communities are able to give their members what they are unable to find elsewhere: a sense of belonging. But as they grow, they take on an even more important role, as they often shape the very culture they sought to distance themselves from.

Over the past few years, skate culture has permeated mainstream culture in a way

that many other subcultures are unable to. The fascination with this effortlessly cool community became apparent in 2018 when three films on the topic hit screens and garnered overwhelming praise from community members and outsiders alike. Crystal Moselle released "Skate Kitchen," a heartfelt film about a group of teen girls who find themselves through skating, Bing Liu released "Minding the Gap," a documentary that illustrates his childhood hobby alongside a larger narrative about domestic violence, and Jonah Hill released "Mid90s," an intimate homage to the Los Angeles skate communities of his youth. Two years later, Moselle is producing a "Skate Kitchen" spin-off series for HBO titled "Betty." The six-episode series premiered on May 1, 2020 and introduces us to the same group of girl skaters profiled in her documentary, but further explores the intricacies of their everyday lives as they navigate the male-dominated world of skateboarding. Though a work of fiction, the main cast is composed of members of the real NYC-based skate collective, The Skate Kitchen.

These films and series all have one thing in common: they portray skating as far more than just a sport. For many people, skating is a symbol of their adolescence and a powerful form of self-expression. It's a means of escaping from harsh realities and feeling that they belong to something bigger



Masha Ossovskaya

than themselves. After the release of “Mid90s,” nineties pro Chad Muska praised the film on Instagram: “Our community can be very protective of our culture and quick to judge anything that presents us outside our normal environment... It is hard to explain in words the importance of the friendship and family that us street skaters had back in the 90’s... Whether rich or poor, no matter what ethnicity you were, it didn’t matter, as long as you loved skateboarding you were part of this family...”

Authenticity is key to successfully portraying or marketing to a subculture. It’s one of the reasons skating brand Supreme has seen the astronomical level of success that it has. What started as a clubhouse for New York City skaters has become a trailblazer of streetwear and the culture surrounding it because it has stayed true to its origins - retaining a rigorous business model and selling its heavily curated items in small batches to maintain a consistent air of exclusivity.

Roller skating culture has seen a similar trajectory to skateboarding, albeit at a much smaller scale, and the sense of community that it fosters is no less important. In March of this year, Carhartt WIP released a documentary titled “Soul Skate” that follows the bi-annual event of the same name and documents the importance of one of Detroit’s lasting subcultures. Throughout the film, event-goers explain what skating means to them. “With skating, it’s not ageist, it’s not sexist, it’s just loads of different people from all different walks of life all in one

If you want to know what’s next, look to the outliers.

environment... No matter who you are or where you’re from the main love you have is for skating,” says one skater. But roller skating is more than just the skate parties. “Skating plays a huge role in Detroit’s cultural and political history,” notes Bwalya Newton for Dazed. “In 1950s and 60s Detroit, during what would have been the beginning moments of the cultural shift brought on by desegregation, roller-rink owners maintained racial divides by violently pushing ‘Rhythm Nights’ and ‘Soul Nights’ to African-Americans. Attendance was enforced by means of harassing and attacking the black populous if they showed up to other events. Through brute force, these nights came to be symptomatic of the style and culture of black popular music...” Now, roller skating finds its way into pop culture. Just six months ago, Alicia Keys released a music video for her single “Time Machine,” featuring a nostalgia-inducing celebration of the roller-rink community.

Culture evolves with the outliers. Skate culture is just one of the many communities that helped shape the world we all experience today. By embracing the communities built around niche interests and shared experiences, we are able to create a society that better represents everyone within it. If you want to know what’s next, look to the outliers.

Community By Design 04



Several years ago, religious groups and other civic organizations were the foundation of society's strongest and most closely-knit communities. Now, those same powerful communities are instead built around businesses. In an op-ed for The Business of Fashion, Doug Stephens equates a powerful brand to a religion. "Brands like Nike have moved beyond simple communities of customers and become global ideologies based on our shared interests, aspirations and the deep human need for connection and belonging," says Stephens.

Humans are fundamentally social animals that crave a sense of belonging, mission, and meaning. If a company can shift from selling a product to building a community, it can unlock a number of competitive advantages. In a 2019 [survey](#) by First Round, nearly 80% of founders reported building a community of users as important to their business, with 28% describing it as their moat and critical to their success. With technology and communication platforms more accessible than ever before, brands have a rapidly growing population of potential community members. In 2019, the global smartphone

penetration rate surpassed 40% for the first time ([Statista, 2020](#)), meaning nearly half of all humans on the planet are able to engage with others online.

Now, with most of the world in isolation and purchases being delayed, brands have the opportunity to cultivate these online communities at a time when consumers are especially engaged. During the pandemic, brands are expanding their efforts to keep people feeling connected and engaged. Facebook is working with the NHS in the UK to hand out their Portal devices to care homes, while Airbnb partnered with [SAGE](#) in the US to provide experiences on its Online Experiences portal for free to the charities' elderly members.

In an article for Harvard Business Review, Jeffrey Bussgang and Jono Bacon outline the seven key elements of successful communities: a shared purpose, easily accessible value consumption, easily navigable value creation, clearly defined incentives, carefully crafted accountability, healthy participation, and objective governance.





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