

# The search for meaning

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# What people expect from brands in the future.

What's the difference between names and brands? Names mark something or somebody, brands add meaning. And that is exactly what this trend report is about; how to add meaning to peoples lives? A big question. Especially now that the world is suffering from the corona crisis. Our partners from TrendsActive finished this trend report in

the BC era. Trendsactive researches long-term sociocultural trends and turns these into strategies. As such, we expected this report to enable brands to stay relevant on the long-term. But even on the short-term, now that the corona crisis unfolds, the insights and strategies from this report are more relevant than ever.

It seems that this report provides crucial food for thought and reflection for every CEO, brand manager, marketer or creative to seize the challenges brands face in AC era (of in the coming years)

Many brands need to balance how they respond in the right way to the crisis on the short-term and the long-term. Sure, you should “never waste a good crisis”. And please, feel free to follow-up on all the tackling-corona-in-10-easy-steps advice . But, if your brand is looking for a human-centric approach, please consult this trend report. It contains dozens of insights from the human sciences like psychology, anthropology and sociology. Indeed, it provides a human perspective on what adds meaning to peoples lives and what people expect from brands.

Being a brand consultant for more than two decades, my humble believe is that people we want to buy more than a product. Now, more than ever, they want to purchase from brands that change the world for a better one - they want to buy meaningful. That's why brands with no meaning to their audience and no relevance for the society will have a very hard time to build relationships with people who increasingly search for meaning in every aspect of consumption.

Understanding the sociocultural context provides a wealth of inspiration for the future of managing brands. This is one of my conclusion after collaborating with TrendsActive for the last two years. This was also one of the reasons why we at BrandTrust, the leading brand consulting firm in Europe, wanted to collaborate with TrendsActive far closer in the future. We want to merge our know-how, experiences and join forces to inspire and support our clients to improve their way of managing and navigating brands in a complex, chaotic world with a strong longing for more meaning. We are proud to have this report as the first output of the official collaboration between BrandTrust and TrendsActive

Use it to become a leader!

Yours Sincerely,

**Klaus-Dieter Koch**  
CEO Brand Trust GmbH



# The search for meaning



This trend report helps brands to respond to people's need for a meaningful life.

## The happiness paradox

There is a happiness paradox: people are looking for happiness en masse, but this search does not seem to lead to happiness. Anyone who feels that they are not happy is extremely aware of the lack of the happiness that they are seeking. And those who have found happiness are always looking for more. People now know more and more about how they can achieve happiness, and many Western countries have a high score on the World Happiness Report. Nevertheless, people continue to spend more time and more money on becoming happier. Loneliness is a social struggle, and the number of psychological complaints such as depression and burnout is increasing.

## The search for happiness

Everyone in the world is to a greater or lesser extent preoccupied with experiencing happiness – or the lack of it. They may express this in many ways, ranging from simple activities such as reading the book 'Ikigai - Japanese secrets for a long and happy life' to visiting a retreat in Bali. Or by getting involved in anything from trying out beauty products with CBD (a substance made from the cannabis plant) to exploring podcasts about mindfulness. People are spending their time and money on experiencing moments of happiness in all kinds of manner. This is also evident from figures from the Global Wellness Institute, which estimated the value of the global wellness economy at \$4.2 trillion in 2017<sup>1</sup>.

Yet it's not only private individuals who are so drawn to this theme; scientists are equally fascinated. This is evident from indicators such as the amount of research that is being carried out into happiness. This makes the need measurable, which then creates a sense of manufacturability. We are therefore learning more and more about how people can experience happiness. There is also plenty of attention being paid to happiness at a policy level. For instance, there's the Gross National Happiness Index (Bhutan), the Minister of State for Happiness and Wellbeing (UAE) and the International Day of Happiness (United Nations).

## From hedonia to eudaimonia

How is it then possible for people to not become happier, despite all their efforts? In order to find an answer to that question, we should look at an important shift that is currently underway: the shift from the need for a happy life to the need for a meaningful life. This new shift is actually part of a larger progression. Years ago at TrendsActive (in fact around the turn of the century), we already noted a shift from the need for a healthy life to the need for a happy life. And now, today, we are seeing a new shift that is receiving more and more attention: from the need for a happy life to the need for a meaningful life. But what are the differences between happiness and meaning? In essence, happiness is about the Greek 'hedonia',

which is about pleasant moments and feeling good, whereas meaning is related to 'eudaimonia', which is about doing well and getting the best out of yourself<sup>2</sup>. Within a meaningful life, people focus on living in a way that actually matters.

Within the field of psychology, the focus is also shifting from happiness to meaning. Thanks to the results of scientific research into both concepts, we can better understand the differences and similarities between happiness and meaning. An example of such a study is 'Pursuing happiness or virtue: The differential and overlapping well-being benefits of hedonic and eudaimonic motives'<sup>3</sup>. In this study, participants were asked to do an activity that provided eudaimonia (such as studying or cheering up a friend) or hedonia (such as having a lie-in or going shopping) for a period of ten days. And the result? Well, the participants who focused on hedonia during the study had positive feelings immediately afterwards. The participants who focused on eudaimonia did not feel so positive, but they did experience more meaning. But here comes the interesting part: after three months, the participants who focused on leading a meaningful life (eudaimonia) felt enriched, inspired and part of something bigger than themselves. The positive effect of their actions was strengthened after three months. In contrast, among the participants who focused on hedonia, the positive effect of their actions was many times lower than that of the other group after three months. Among other things, this shows the difference in the degree of long-term satisfaction, which is a crucial insight for brands to understand.



### A lasting impression

These research results help to explain why people search for meaning in life instead of just striving for moments of happiness. And that is precisely why this is interesting for marketers. As a brand, you naturally want to make a lasting impression and build a relationship with your customers. By focusing on happiness, you are of added value in people's lives for a brief period, but with a focus on meaning you are meaningful over the longer term. Just to be clear, this does not mean that focusing on happiness is irrelevant and offers no opportunities. It is still an interesting question to see how you as a marketer can ensure a moment of happiness for the consumer or B2B customer. However, we anticipate that the shift from happiness to meaning will continue (and will explain why in more detail in this report). If you do not want to lag behind as a brand, and want to make a lasting impression on people, you would do well to contribute to a meaningful life.

### Context

At TrendsActive, we have been translating socio-cultural trend insights into actionable strategies for more than 15 years, in order to ensure that our clients' brands remain relevant. We interpret human behaviour and needs, and make these insights actionable by placing them in the context of the particular brand and challenge. This report too focuses on a human need (meaning) that we have furnished with context. This context is based on numerous studies by psychologist Martin Seligman<sup>4</sup> (founder of positive psychology), entrepreneur Aaron Hurst<sup>5</sup> (author of "The Purpose Economy"), the prestigious Stanford University<sup>6</sup> and many others. We have examined research from European, American and global sources, which means that this report has a global scope with a focus on Western culture. To provide an overview of the mountain of opinions and research results, we have read, checked and scanned all information and reduced it all to three insights that show what people do to experience meaning in life. These are characteristics of a meaningful

life that emerge from all those studies and from which we can see a clear relevance for brands. Within this context, we can make the insights actionable for brands and marketers alike. Because despite the fact that much has already been written about the search for meaning, there is still no overview of practical insights. We are therefore revealing the actionable insights with regard to the search for meaning: those that have a positive effect on people's well-being. And how you as a brand and organisation can ensure that your brand is – and remains – valuable. Whether you are active as a marketer for an insurance company, a bank, a sports brand, an NGO or a B2B organisation, there are opportunities in all these places to contribute to the need for meaning and to work on a committed relationship with your customers.

This trend report is divided into three chapters. Each chapter consists of a trend insight that characterises the search for meaning. We have translated the insights into strategic guidelines and supplemented them with inspiring examples of brands that are already responding to the insight, so you can see how the trend is currently manifesting itself. In short, all the ingredients are present to help you understand the trend and to get started on the basis of well-founded strategies. In this way, we hope to help you get ready to be more meaningful in the lives of your customers.

**Pauline Taks and Kees Elands**  
TrendsActive

## *Three insights into a meaningful life:*



## *Mental well-being*

### THE IMPORTANCE OF MENTAL HEALTH

Mental well-being enables people to live meaningful, committed and productive lives<sup>7</sup>. Thanks to good mental health, you can learn to deal with setbacks and therefore become more resilient. This then enables you to do what you want to do, and to become better at it. The first chapter is therefore about the importance of mental well-being, the reasons why good mental health is under pressure, and the role that brands and marketers can play in improving people's mental health.



## *Social ties*

### THE FEELING OF BELONGING

Secondly, to lead a meaningful (and also a happy) life, it is crucial that you as an individual feel connected to others. This gives you the feeling that you belong and that you can be of meaning<sup>8</sup>. It has been proven that a feeling of loneliness has a negative effect on a meaningful life. In the second chapter, we study the fundamental need for social connection, the developments that currently influence that need, and what brands – and you as a marketer – can do to achieve social connection.



## *Transcendence*

### BEING PART OF A LARGER WHOLE

Finally, we examine the need for transcendence: the feeling that you as an individual are part of a greater whole. Transcendence is linked to a meaningful life, because when you feel connected to something bigger or to others, you experience meaning. In the third and final chapter, we look at what drives the need for transcendence in modern society, what people do to achieve transcendent experiences, and what contribution brands can make to this.





## The search for meaning

TREND INSIGHT 1

# Mental well-being

The importance of mental well-being is growing. In this chapter, we zoom in on the reasons behind this and what it all means for brands. After all, improving mental well-being is not only a task for individuals and society as a whole: brands also influence people's mental state. That is why we see a new challenge for marketers: how do I reduce mental pressure and/or improve my customers' mental well-being?

People cannot function optimally if they lack mental well-being. As a result, they cannot achieve their intended ambitions, and their self-development becomes neglected. In addition to the fact that mental health problems prevent people from achieving goals, experiencing poor mental health is simply also bad for general health. For instance, people who struggle with their mental well-being may also develop a weakened immune system or sleep problems. Scientific research shows that your brain can be affected by mental pressure. For example, research by Yale University<sup>1</sup> into chronic stress and its influence on the brain shows that long-term stress can lead to a loss of grey matter in the prefrontal cortex. As a result, people may experience more anxiety disorders. This kind of stress also has a negative impact on memory.

### From physical to mental

Mental well-being therefore influences overall health, quality of life, and personal growth. This is an insight that is not only demonstrated by research, but of which more and more people are becoming aware. Where previously the emphasis was on the physical aspect of health, more attention is therefore now being paid to the mental aspect of health. People are working hard to improve their mental well-being. This insight is not only embraced by individuals; numerous organisations and brands are also paying attention to how they can improve mental health. For example, mental well-being is an important theme for the World Health Organisation (WHO). What's more, parties from whom you wouldn't immediately expect it are also paying attention to mental health, such as Men's Health magazine. The cover of the magazine is usually adorned by famous men with a bare chest and large biceps. But in June 2019, what caught the eye was a photo of four British boys on the cover who were all struggling with mental health problems.

How is it that the importance of mental well-being is on the increase? And why are people doing more and more to improve their mental well-being? We zoom in on a number of societal and technological developments that answer those questions. These will teach you to understand why your customers are attaching more and more value to improving mental well-being, and why brands are increasingly expected to make a positive contribution to people's state of mental health.

### Openness and attention

First of all, the importance of mental well-being is increasing because more and more people are being confronted with the fact that good mental health cannot be taken for granted. In society as a whole, it is becoming increasingly common for people to experience conditions such as depression, an anxiety disorder or a burnout. The report 'Health at a Glance: Europe 2018' concludes that mental health problems affect more than one in six people across the European Union<sup>2</sup>. It is estimated that the annual cost of work-related depression is EUR 617 billion<sup>3</sup>. Globally, an estimated 264 million people are affected by depression<sup>4</sup>. The global expectations for the future are equally gloomy. The WHO predicts that by 2030, depression will be the number 1 disease globally<sup>5</sup>.

The increases in these figures indicate that there is a good chance that you will be confronted with a lack of well-being in your own environment. In addition, people are becoming more familiar with mental health problems because more attention is being paid to these worldwide. This attention sometimes comes from unexpected quarters, such as the British royal family. Through the Heads Together foundation, Prince Harry (who has also struggled with his mental health) and other members of his family are asking for greater attention to be paid to mental health problems. In addition, he has made a documentary series about mental health for Apple TV+ with Oprah Winfrey<sup>6</sup>. As the prince himself says, "I truly believe that good mental health – mental fitness – is the key to powerful leadership, productive communities and a purpose-driven self."

In addition, well-known personalities such as Billie Eilish, Kanye West and Lady Gaga are speaking out about their struggles with their mental health and what they have done about it. International organisations are also paying attention to mental health: this theme was on the agenda of the World Economic Forum meeting in Davos in 2019<sup>7</sup>. Top executives discussed how the world can cope with people's mental health challenges and the economic implications of these. People are therefore being confronted in their own environment with the consequences of mental health problems, and with the openness about and the emphasis on these by well-known personalities and organisations. As a result, there is a growing awareness that mental health is important, and people are becoming more alert to mental illnesses.

### Mental capital

A second reason that explains why people want to improve their mental well-being is the growing importance of mental health due to the demands that people make on their brains: their mental capital. Those brains have to work hard to keep up with the transition from an agricultural and industrial economy to a knowledge and services economy. People are doing less and less with their hands, and more and more with their head.



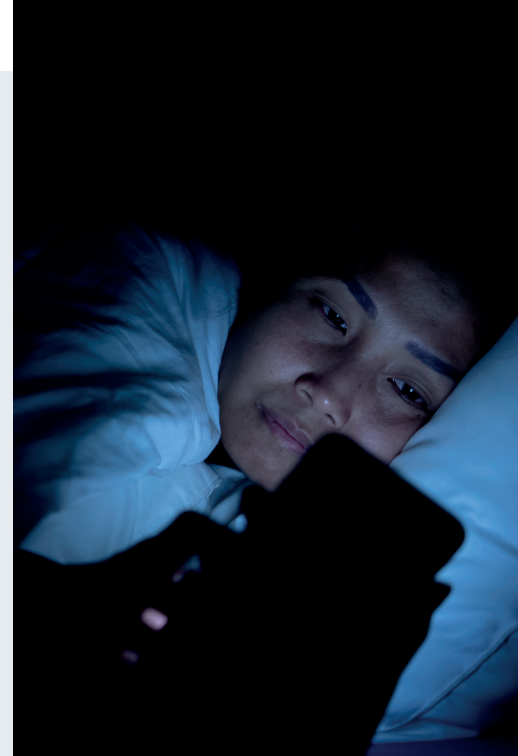
What's more, brains have to work hard to concentrate at a time when all kinds of stimuli are fired at people. Cal Newport, Associate Professor of Computer Sciences at the University of Georgetown, describes in his book 'Deep Work' why "focus is the new IQ" and that the ability to concentrate is becoming increasingly valuable<sup>8</sup>. A healthy head is becoming increasingly important for work and many daily activities. People have become dependent on a properly functioning brain to keep up with developments.

### The performance society

There is also a third reason why people want to improve their mental state: namely, the increasing mental pressure they are under. This is on the increase due to the performance society. People used to live in a command society where there was always someone who told them what to do. Now people live in a performance society: one in which individuals decide much more for themselves what they should do<sup>9</sup>. This then leads to mental pressure, because people expect quite a lot from their own abilities: from working on their own career and being in good shape financially to finding the right partner and exploring the world. And even if they don't feel any intrinsic pressure from these things, people may experience vicarious pressure through all the successful and adventurous stories of friends, colleagues and family or via the Instagram account of a stranger. And if something fails, many people blame themselves. Sociologists Keohane and Petersen argue that many contemporary problems of health and well-being have to be understood in the light of radical changes in society and their impact on the experience of individuals, rather than reducing these to an individual's own problems. So the problems result not only from individual causes, but from society and the norms that are imposed<sup>10</sup>.

### The effect of technology

In addition to the fact that mental well-being is under pressure as a result of the performance society, the influence of technology and social media on mental well-being is also a topic of conversation. For example, blue light from monitors is supposed to lead to sleep problems. Yet according to professor of chronobiology Roelof Hut, it appears that the influence of the light intensity of screens on sleep is not a cause for concern<sup>11</sup>. The problem lies more in what people do on their phones before bed, and not so



What people do on their smartphones does affect their mental state.

much in the light that shines from the screen. In other words, what people do on their smartphones does affect their mental state. This is why it is relevant to look at the effect of social media on mental well-being, since people spend an average of two-and-a-half hours on it per day worldwide<sup>12</sup>. The British study #StatusOfMind by the RSPH (Royal Society for Public Health) shows that the use of social media has both positive and negative effects on young people<sup>13</sup>. Negative effects are things such as an increase in anxiety, depression and lack of sleep. The researchers name Instagram the "worst social media platform": the platform that evokes the most negative associations, largely because of its visual character. When you ask psychologists how depression can increase among young people, they often state two reasons<sup>14</sup>. One is that sharing images that mainly consist of highlights creates the wrong expectations and can lead to a feeling of FOMO (fear of missing out). Another is cyberbullying: the miseries of the school playground can just continue online.

However, you cannot immediately assume that social media only has a bad effect on well-being. Research from Oxford University shows that the impact on well-being is minimal<sup>15</sup>. British scientists argue that "a bit of calm in the debate about the possible negative consequences of social media, usually characterised by an unfounded media hype, is appropriate." In addition, technology can also make a positive contribution to a healthier life, while in addition offering useful tools for marketers. For instance, the creators of Pokémon Go have announced the launch in 2020 of Pokémon Sleep, a game that keeps track of how you sleep and should reward good sleeping habits<sup>16</sup>. And another aspect that is being examined is how behaviour on smartphones can predict problems such as depression<sup>17</sup>.

In short, mental well-being is under pressure. People who are experiencing the negative effects of social and technological developments on their mental well-being will look for ways to improve it. And that is exactly where the added value of brands can – and perhaps should – come into the picture.

### Positive psychology

The latest development that is making people want to improve their mental well-being is the insight of scientists that individuals can influence their own mental health themselves. This makes it relevant for people to actively work on improving their condition. However, it's first worth realising that people cannot influence all kinds of mental problems themselves. For example, in anxiety disorders and depression, approximately thirty to forty per cent of cases have a genetic cause<sup>18,19</sup>. In addition, major setbacks and events can drastically change people's lives. But these figures do also show that people have a great deal of influence on their own mental well-being. The idea that it pays to actively work on one's own mental well-being is supported by a trend called positive psychology within the psychological field. This movement focuses primarily on stimulating healthy behaviour, rather than on curing people's complaints. The emphasis is on human strength rather than human weakness, and the focus is more on healthy people than on patients. So people not only feel the need to improve their mental health when they experience problems, but also realise that it is worthwhile to work on their well-being in order to become more resilient.

### Healthy lifestyle

It is clear that improving mental well-being is important both individually and socially. Knowing this, it is interesting to see what people are currently doing to improve their mental health and achieve personal growth. This provides an insight into people's lives and shows what they are spending their time and money on. First of all, people are fully engaged in preventing harm to their mental well-being.



By consciously adopting a healthy lifestyle, people are improving their well-being (including their mental well-being) and are able to pursue self-development. Consider, for example, the growing awareness that sleep is essential for people to function well. For example, influential people such as Jeff Bezos<sup>20</sup>, Sheryl Sandberg and Arianna Huffington are emphasising the importance of good sleep, and a genuine ‘sleep economy’<sup>21</sup> is being created: an industry with an unprecedented amount of products and services, from mattresses to luxury pyjamas and sleep gadgets. The McKinsey consultancy firm estimates that this industry accounts for \$30 to \$40 billion a year in America alone.

mindfulness training: for instance, a free course from Harvard University via Coursera or solo trips through Southeast Asia to make new discoveries. What these examples illustrate is that there is a whole range of ways in which people are working on their mental well-being, thereby stimulating personal growth. These offer new suggestions for brands to determine how they can contribute to the self-development of consumers and B2B relationships.

A healthy lifestyle goes beyond just good sleep alone: it encompasses everything from Bikram Yoga and health tests based on your DNA to a gluten-free diet and the use of the mindfulness app ‘Headspace’. The list of products and services that help people to live a conscious life is endless. What’s more, a healthy lifestyle does not solely relate to one’s private life; employers are also committed to creating a healthy environment by offering things such as standing desks or even an office dog that should help to reduce stress in the workplace. It is abundantly clear that the pursuit of a healthy lifestyle has led to an extremely large industry. This may also raise the question: What should I do, as a marketer, to promote a healthy lifestyle?

Tools for personal growth

For people who experience problems with their mental well-being, there are numerous ways in which they can repair the damage. Nature is a recent therapy that is also many centuries old. What has changed is that its healing effect is nowadays called ecotherapy: nature as a means of improving your mental state<sup>22</sup>. In addition, it appears that more and more people are looking for silence: places without an abundance of stimuli. Silence is being seen as a luxury<sup>23</sup>. From simple solutions such as the use of noise-cancelling headphones to a visit to a silent retreat, people are willing to go to great lengths to get a bit of peace and quiet amid the hustle and bustle.

Nature and silence not only have a therapeutic effect that can help with mental health problems, but can also lead to new insights that contribute to personal growth. After all, creating moments of calm for oneself also provides time to think about ambitions and to arrive at new and creative insights. In addition, there are of course many other instruments that can help people achieve personal growth. Take for example the ‘Instagram Therapists’<sup>24</sup>, real therapists who actively maintain an Instagram account – in addition to their normal work – in order to be able to give followers free advice on topics such as self-care, embracing imperfections and traumas. Their advice does not go unnoticed, as you can see from the fact that the account of Dr. Nicole LePera (@the.holistic.psychologist) has 1.3 million followers.

If people have not yet found the right tools to work on their personal growth, they can go to The School of Life to learn about relationships, work, love and grief. Or maybe they would prefer a

What now?