



The rise of micro communities

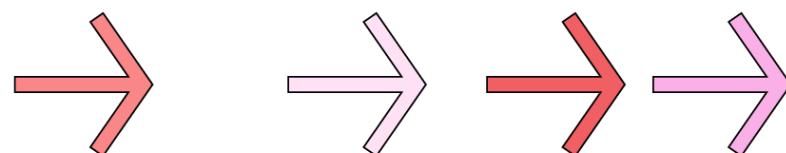
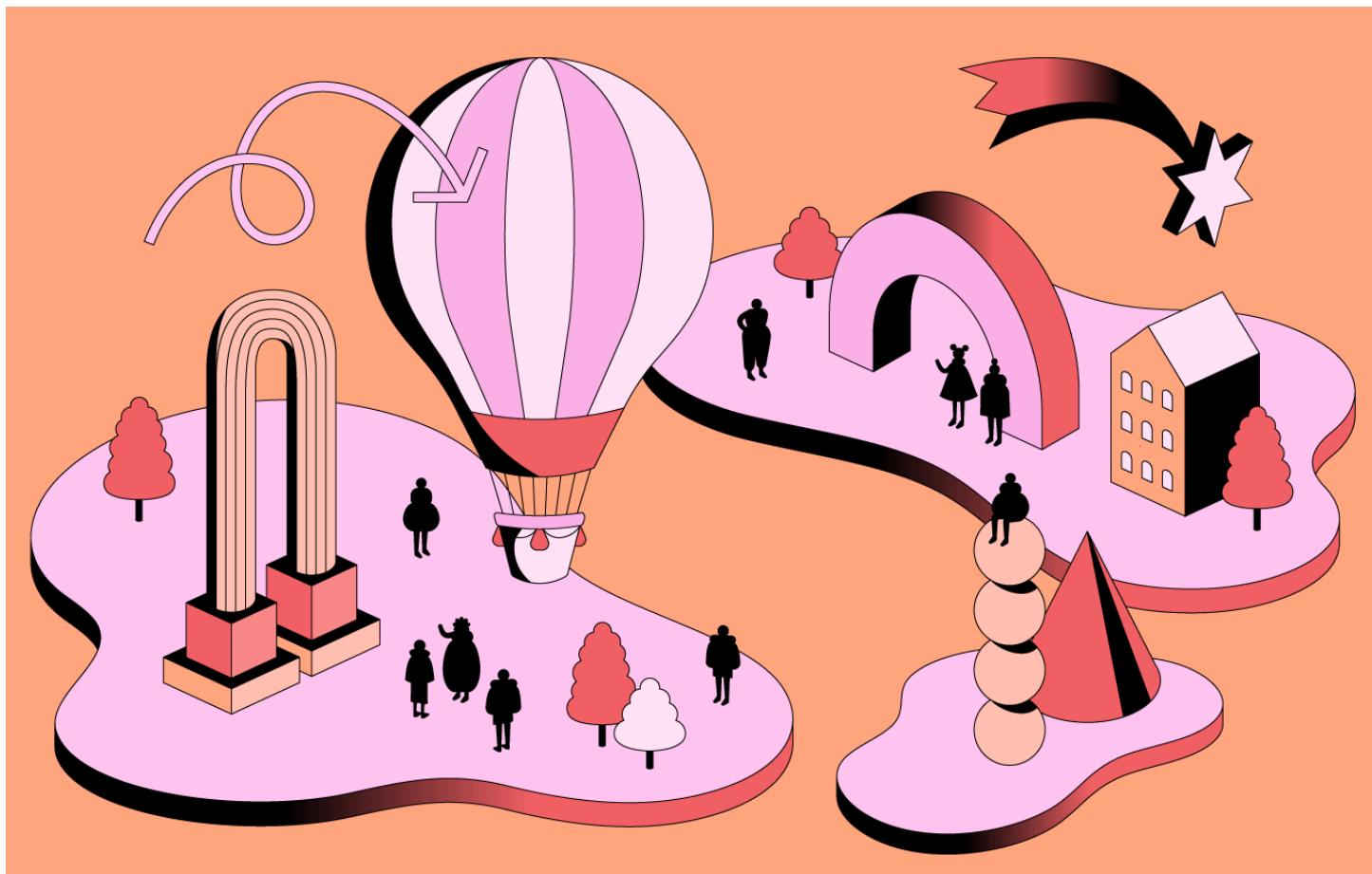
Make→Shift is part of TrendWatching's Free Trend Updates. Each monthly issue examines one cross-industry movement no brand can afford to ignore, answering 'why now' and spotlighting the opportunities brands can act on today.

All in a six-minute read.

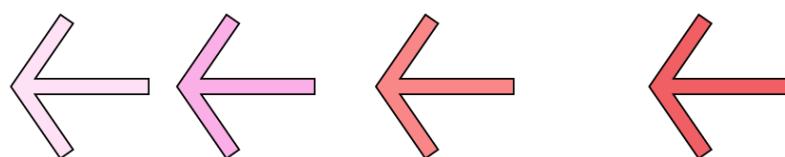
What happens when niche culture goes mainstream?

As new technologies and emerging trust models drive a wedge between social and media, micro-communities and subcultures are experiencing a renaissance both online and IRL. The opportunity? Shift your attention away from the

mainstream and the individual, and towards the fringe and the collective. Empower and cater to the millions of NICHE NETS popping up now to regain trust and build lasting connections.



WHY NOW?



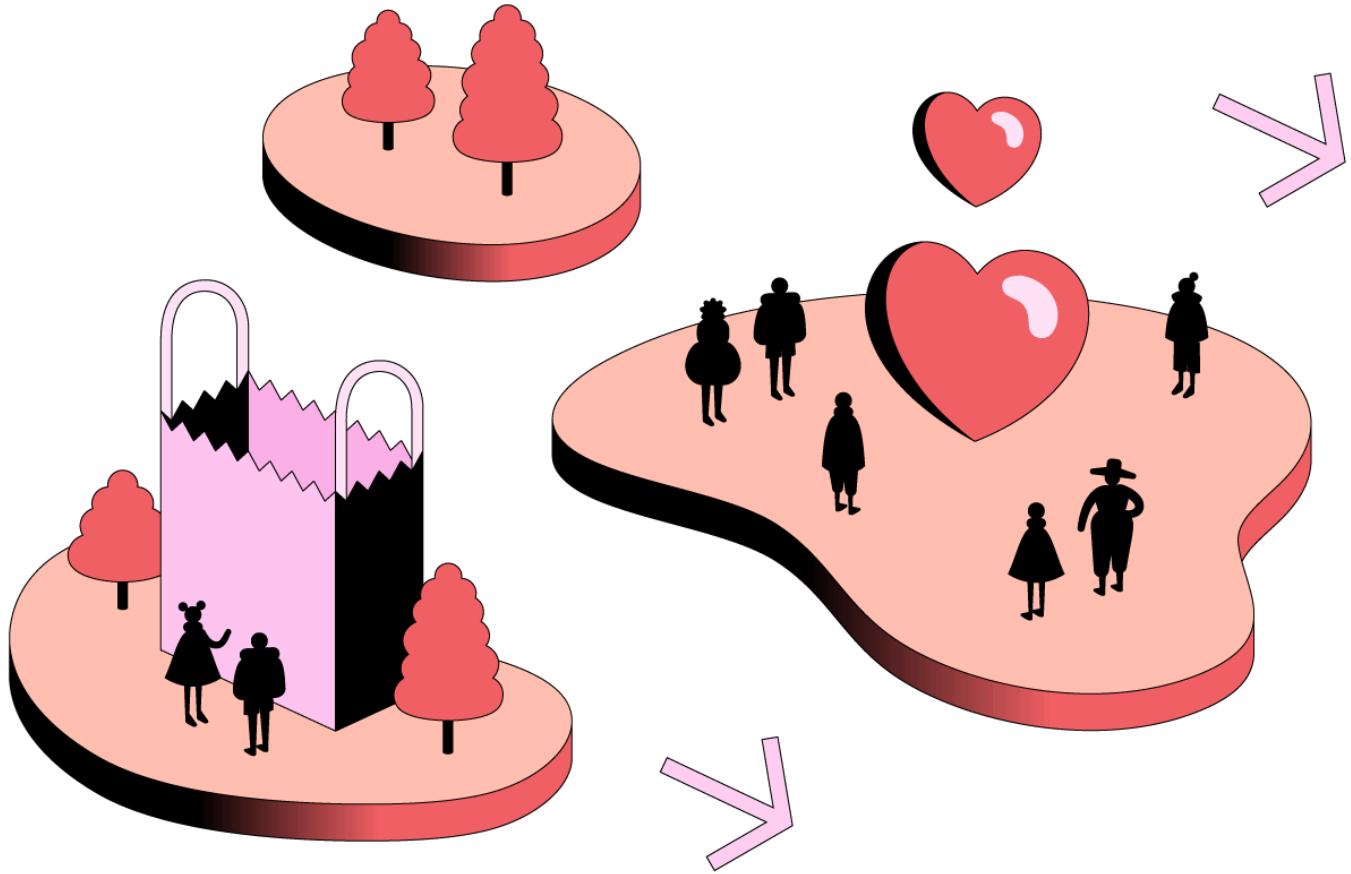
SOCIAL VS. MEDIA

The TikTokification of online content is shifting content discovery away from a user's friendship network towards something that's more algorithm-driven. Even as heavyweights like Kim Kardashian urge Instagram to be 'great' again (read: less like TikTok), your younger cousin is getting millions of views on their first TikTok video. That has important consequences: the dissolution of social from media, and the rise of smaller, less ad-dominated networks that put the emphasis back on people. Networks like Locket and Yubo that are based on interests and relationships are gaining traction, and Gen Z is flocking to micro-communities on Discord, Geneva and Reddit. In short? Social networks are evolving to become smaller and more fragmented.

DECENTRALIZED TRUST

People feel let down by authorities who aren't making progress on society's most urgent issues, like climate change and inequality. Meanwhile, brands are practicing purpose-washing and celebrities are taking three-minute flights in private jets. So it's unsurprising that trust is becoming increasingly fragile, decentralized and community-driven. People are looking for – and finding – trust and bonds within self-governing and altruistic groups on platforms like Reddit, or through authentic recommendations from relatable micro-creators on TikTok. NICHE NETS can be more intimate, developing trust through direct access to real, likeminded people and taste connoisseurs ('just DM me') instead of automated customer chatbots operated by brands.





LOYALTY PLUNGE

In a world where new DTC startups appear almost as quickly as TikTok microtrends, consumers can constantly satisfy their urge to try new products, experiences and brands. And that's sending customer loyalty into a tailspin. For the increasing number of consumers practicing belief-driven shopping, standout brands already function more like communities than corporations, bringing people together to form a movement with shared values and interests. Yes, it's hard to cultivate brand communities – an engaged, authentic community can't be built overnight – but community is fast becoming the strongest competitive advantage a brand can attain.



NICHE

Web3-based social platform focuses on user-owned communities

Niche is a new social network that lets people form communities around shared interests or topics, like pickleball or Taylor Swift. As of September 2022, the platform was still in beta but according to the founders, Niche is built on top of web3 tech such as DAOs and NFTs, so members of a Niche community will act as owners while being able to seamlessly create micro-economies, and the platform won't have to rely on ads to generate revenue. Niche was founded by Christopher Gulczynski, one of Tinder's co-founders and Zaven Nahapetyan, a former engineering manager and organizational lead for Facebook.



WEIBO

Weibo set to launch an interest-based community app

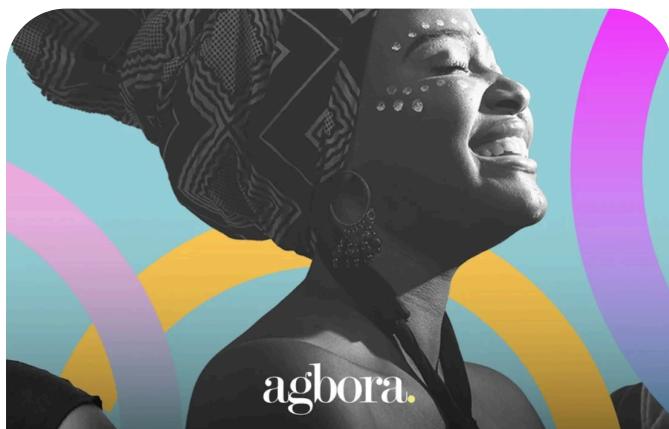
Weibo is developing an interest-based social app named Planet. An upgraded version of Planet Video, which already has millions of communities covering local areas, lifestyle, 2D, beauty, campus, food and more, Planet will allow Weibo users to follow celebrities and influencers while embedding themselves in communities with similar interests. This could allow global brands to create China-tailored content that speaks to specific consumer communities. Weibo announced the plans in July 2022.



DELLI

New app aims to be 'Depop of the food community'

Cofounded by Depop's founder, London-based **DELLI** is a community-led platform for food sellers and food lovers. The app uses a drop model to help reduce food waste and help smaller producers bring their meals to market. Since launching at the start of 2022, drops have included from local brands including Dr Sting's, Maya's Bakehouse and Sonora Tortillas (the latter sold out in 8 minutes).



AGBORA

Agbora links professionals in Africa and African diaspora

Built by a diverse team of engineers from Nigeria, Egypt, India and the US, **Agbora** is catering primarily to Africans and the diaspora at home and abroad, and connecting users for social interactions as well as business opportunities. On the platform, professionals, influencers, talent, and leaders can express themselves and their brand, grow their circle, facilitate meaningful relationships, and promote opportunities by helping users share experiences and learn from each other.

PALLET

Pallet helps businesses tap into community talent

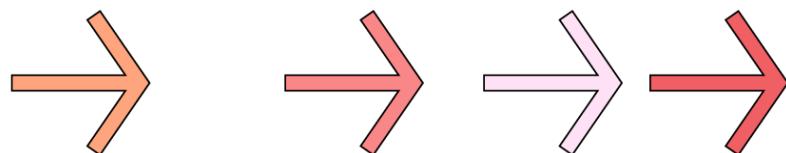
Whether it's a copywriters group or a web3 collective, micro-communities can offer an amazing, curated talent pool. **Pallet** allows these communities to help their audience land jobs or projects at companies around the world. Businesses can access a deep and wide talent pool of job-hunting community members by diving into talent collectives: collections of members open to new opportunities that are curated by community leaders. The concept recognizes that individuals are more than just their resumes and helps them gain a stamp of approval from industry leaders.



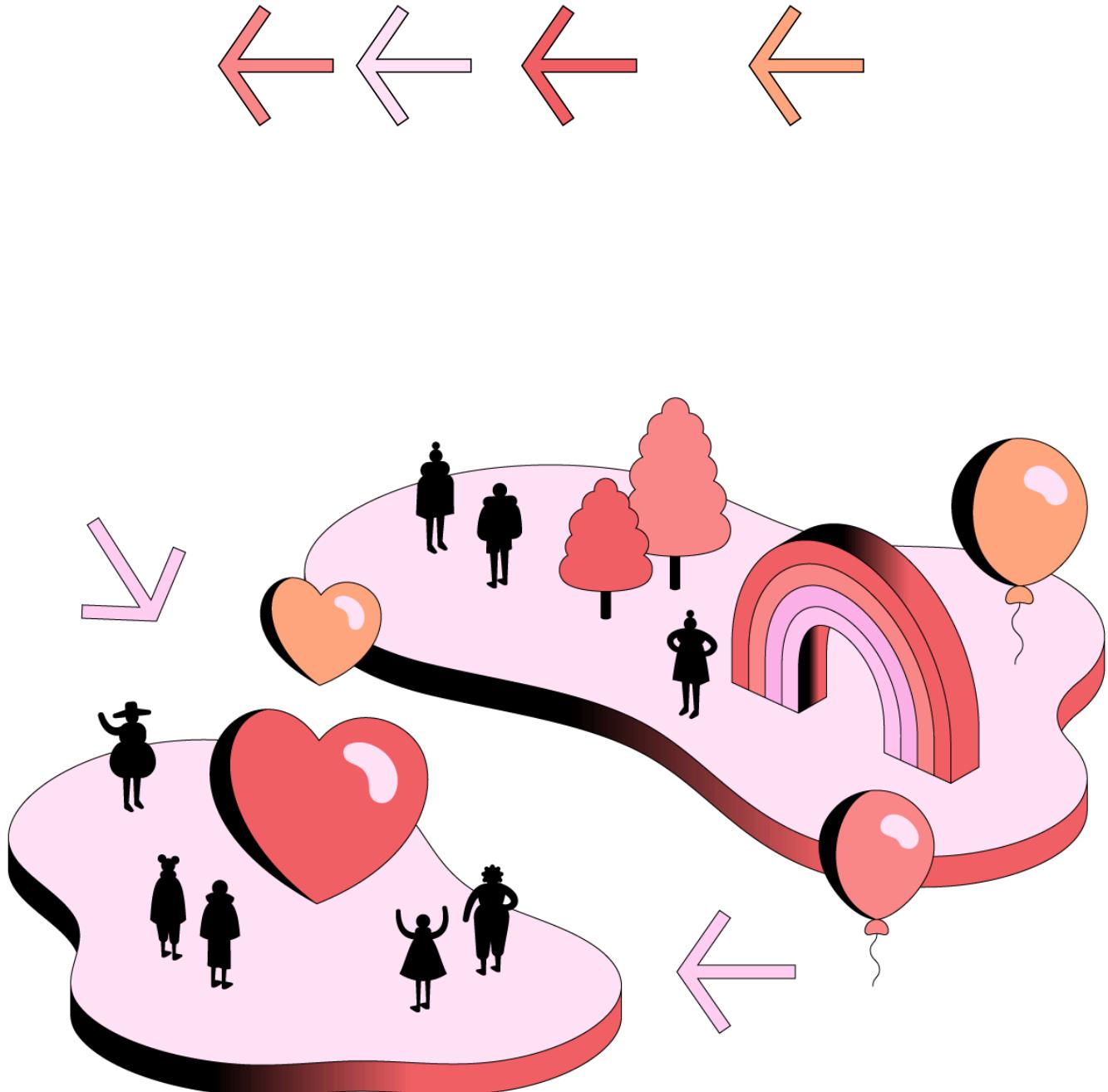
POOLSUITE

Lifestyle community expands into sunscreen and crowdfunding a luxury guesthouse

Poolsuite, the team behind summer-themed radio station Poolsuite FM, is expanding its 1980s, pool-themed lifestyle brand and community. In 2021, that included branching out into **sunscreen**; in 2022 the brand forayed into web3 with a **Manor DAO**. The aim of the DAO is to crowdfund a luxury guesthouse through NFT-based memberships. Members of Poolsuite's and Manor DAO's community will access **exclusive perks** and can vote on everything from the location of the guesthouse to the interior design.



OPPORTUNITIES



A MOVEMENT, NOT A MOMENT

Brand communities go beyond membership cards, loyalty points, and crowdsourced feedback. They're about deeper connections built on shared values (see [Remote Year](#)), goals (see [Handsome](#)) and identities. Brands are building ecosystems that celebrate the different communities that sit under their umbrella. When building or engaging with a community, don't think about what it offers your brand. Instead, focus on what your brand can do for the community (see [Patagonia Action Works](#)). As what was niche becomes the norm, also consider how

your brand can support, empower and celebrate micro-communities that have typically been suppressed by mainstream culture.

MVC: MINIMUM VIABLE COMMUNITY

We're fast approaching a world in which companies will compete with headless brands – decentralized, web3-driven communities where products and services are built for and by members. Community-first business is booming, and headless leisure brands, food companies, CPG, consulting groups and yes dating shows already exist. Switch up your product development. Rather than starting with a minimum viable product and then testing it, first create a minimum viable community and empower and incentivize members to develop a product or service. To help members feel fully invested, find new ways to align every participant's engagement with a project's upside.

COMMUNITY BUYING, SHARING, AND OWNING

The shift towards consumerism driven by micro-communities rather than individuals holds myriad opportunities for more equitable business models. In Latin America, Muni offers community buying, where local leaders centralize neighbors' e-commerce orders, giving each neighborhood better access to online commerce. Fractional wants to make real estate ownership more accessible by allowing friends and strangers to invest in and own properties together. Finally, Bandi connects users to their 'fashion twins' – the people they most resemble in style and body shape – to encourage clothes swapping instead of buying. Could a NICHE NET help you build a better business model?





WAYS TO GET STARTED WITH THE TREND

1. "There's a subreddit for that!" Explore subreddits that link to your core customer profile, industry, products or services. What can you learn from discussions that are happening within these communities?
2. Check out Exploding Communities to explore a list of the fastest-growing online communities.
3. Ready to build or boost your own brand community? Then apply to this Minimum Viable Community online course for startups, or check out this free

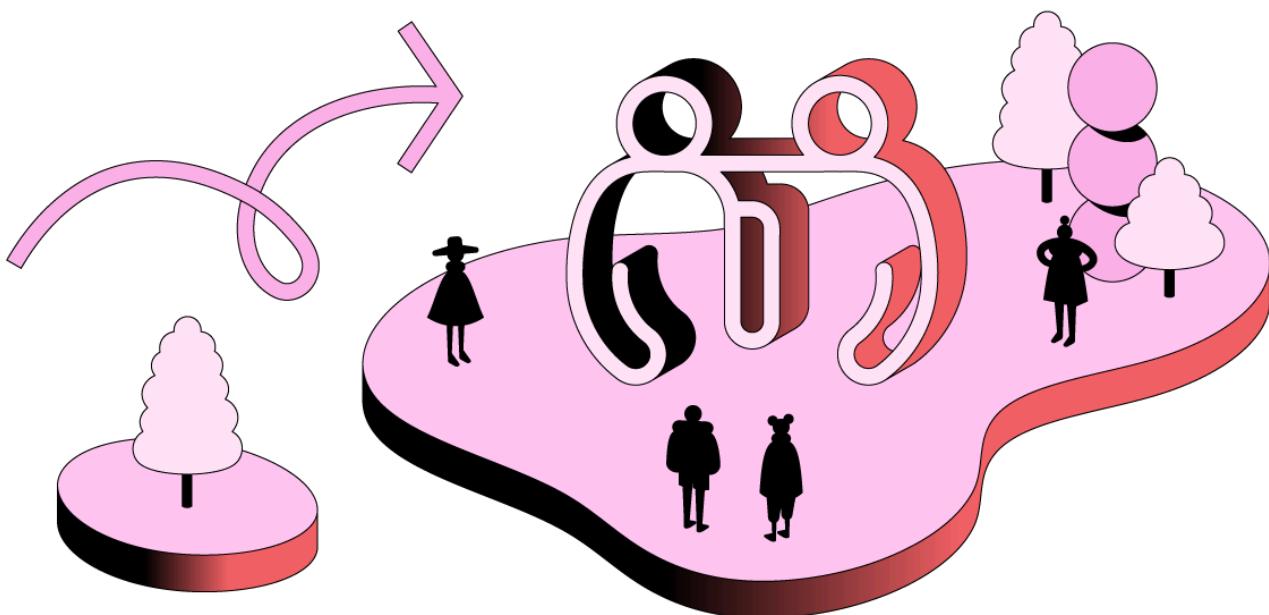
Community Canvas.

4. Join the Community Club and connect with thousands of community builders from around the world.
5. Interested in how NFTs might help you construct or improve a community? This NFT Playbook For Brands can help you get started.

TREND BEHIND THE TREND

At TrendWatching, we track trends on various levels, from micro to macro, mega to meta. NICHE NETS sits under our JOYNING mega-trend, which spotlights how brands can help foster connections that are genuine and meaningful in a world where many feel isolated and lonely.

Curious to learn more about our trend framework? Take a look at our trend platform, Amplify.



The Make→Shifts you may have missed:

From "NORM-NUDGING" to "COUNSEL CULTURE", our previous Make→Shift issues provide a cornucopia of purpose-driven insights, plus actions you can take on the trends that matter.

Previous briefings

And what's more...

- **Did someone say 4-day workweek?**

Companies across the globe are trialing or permanently implementing 4-day workweeks and employees are embracing the change. Head over to our sister publication Business of Purpose for tips on reducing hours and boosting your staff's wellbeing.

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Contributors

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