

2021

# SourceCode TrendSights Report

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Issue 2: Meaning



# Digital as a human catalyst

The world is always changing, but the advent of digital technology has emerged as a major pivot point for not only our economy and culture, but potentially our civilization itself. Just as writing and agriculture changed the way we thought about our place as human beings in the web of life and fabric of reality, digital technology has changed what it means to be human. Our roles as consumers, workers, voters, parents, and sense makers - among others - have been fundamentally altered by this new media environment. And these changes have only been amplified by crises from COVID-19 to racial injustice - which in turn feed back into our changing value systems and behaviors.



## Introducing

### SourceCode TrendSights

The SourceCode TrendSights report identifies seven motifs that incorporate the primary dynamics at play and help break down the landscape of change into specific, identifiable vectors with clearly actionable implications for businesses and organizations.

The motifs are at different stages of development, some are almost fully realized as new norms, while others are nascent and emerging trends. Most are more developed in a modality but spreading to others. Each will deliver seismic changes to the ways in which consumers engage and interact with brands, and how marketers and communicators must shift their thinking to deliver against these changing priorities. This motif is focused on Meaning and explores environment, society and governance and the implications for management in its response to the fast moving and turbulent operating environment. It sets out the responsibilities for organizations and the implications for leadership.

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# 03

## PATTERN RECOGNITION From Progress to Purpose

### Starting a community and conversations

This is less a snapshot of our society over the next 12 months and more a description of a story in motion, suggesting metrics to invent, phenomena to observe, and trends to support.

Our goal is to create a community and conversation to explore the future of Business & Economics and Work; Meaning; Culture and Society; and Narrative and Media.

In this second report we explore the second motif Meaning. Working with Douglas Rushkoff we identified trends in each area. These issues cover emerging issues related to environment, social and governance and corporate digital responsibility.

Indigenous cultures had no past or future. Everything was cyclical, seasonal, and in balance. With the invention of writing in the Axial Age<sup>1</sup>, we gained the ability to record our past and create contracts into the future. Linear time was born, and with it, the notion of progress. This year could be better than last year, and next year better than this. The concept of progress dovetailed a bit too easily with corporate capitalism and other triumphalist, totalizing campaigns. But as Silicon Valley billionaires build shelters and rockets for their escape from the “progress” they’ve wrought, many rediscovered the more ancient wisdom of circles<sup>2</sup>.

When there’s no longer anything new under the sun, making meaning - making sense of the world - becomes less about learning the facts and moving forward, than learning the patterns and surfing the waves. Marshall McLuhan told us that pattern recognition would be the primary skill required to navigate the future<sup>3</sup>. That future is here. Progress into the future matters less than our purpose right now.



<sup>1</sup>Bellah, Robert N. and Hans Joas, Axial Age and Its Consequences, Harvard University Press; Sew edition (12 October 2012)

<sup>2</sup>Taylor, Derrick Bryson and Kenneth Chang, Jeff Bezos Will Fly Aboard Blue Origin's First Human Trip to Space, New York Times (7 June 2021)

<sup>3</sup>McLuhan, Marshall, Understanding Media: The Extension of Man, Routledge, 2nd edition (18 May 2001)

## Purpose as Process

Thanks to the decline of simple cause-and-effect logic, purpose itself changes from a long-term goal, or “telos,” to a real-time approach or “comportment.” Purpose is becoming understood less as a reason for doing something than an approach to action or business. Purpose is characterized by an essential integrity, an awareness of a multiplicity of impacts, and an almost instinctive grasp of the appropriate.

Purpose-driven companies enjoy a congruence of product and process. It’s more than triple-bottom-line, or donating profits to charity. That’s the cost of admission. In this new understanding of purpose, the product and operations themselves are aligned with the underlying ethical promise of the company<sup>4</sup>.

Organizations are being called to account for key performance indicators beyond financial performance, and stakeholders beyond shareholders. This is the shift to environmental, societal and governance (ESG) concerns. It’s a direct response to macro issues in the US and globally including labor rights, diversity and environmental concerns. Progressive organizations are embedding this broader set of values within organizational leadership and planning.

The growing societal focus on ESG is supported by action from the investment community. Investment houses Amundi, BlackRock and Vanguard, have set out expectations for companies in their portfolio. They are among signatories to the UN-backed Principles for Responsible Investment (PRI) which commits to integrate ESG information into investment decisions<sup>5</sup>. In the US the Sustainability Accounting Standards Board (SASB) provides an ESG reporting standard for companies<sup>6</sup>.

ESG is a strategic journey for organizations. Financial markets and regulators such as PRI and SASB are helping to create new metrics. Systems of measurement are being created by individual industries. Leaders need to adopt a framework best aligned to the organization and use it as a guiding principle and benchmark.

<sup>4</sup> Eccles, Robert, Ioannis Ioannou and George Serafeim, Is sustainability now the key to corporate success? The Guardian (6 January 2012)  
<sup>5</sup>Principles for Responsible Investment, <https://www.unpri.org/> (accessed 12 July 2021)  
<sup>6</sup> SASB Standards & Other ESG Frameworks, <https://www.sasb.org/about/sasb-and-other-esg-frameworks/> (accessed 12 July 2021)

## Lines to Circles

The Myth of Eternal Return by Mircea Eliade<sup>7</sup> is enjoying new popularity as activists, permaculture farmers, and even currency designers look to more circular approaches to challenges. They are attempting to apply indigenous wisdom traditions that are informed by belief in reincarnation and imitation. We can’t behave unethically, because we will see that person again in another life. We can’t truly take credit for an innovation, since anything we do is merely an imitation of something done before - by an ancestor or a god.

This is more than New Age talk, but is increasingly informing the choices made by purpose-driven companies and entrepreneurs, from blockchain developers<sup>8</sup> to eco-farm designers<sup>9</sup>. The westward drive of civilization ended in Silicon Valley. The linear notion of progress has become more of a spiral staircase. Everything comes back around - from the waste we pour into the ocean, to the legacy of slavery.

In the shift to account for ESG concerns, organizations are expressing their commitment as a purpose. This must go beyond the platitudes of mission and value statements that were once the vogue of management. It must set out a higher order ambition that is rooted in the organization’s values. The challenge for leaders is bridging the gap between the capitalist values of free market and enterprise, and the societal values embodied in culture and community.

There is a groundswell of organizations that are seeking to prove that these two apparently opposing forces can be reconciled. Ben & Jerry’s is frequently held up as a poster child for progressive values<sup>10</sup>. Ice cream that changes the world may appear to be a laudable notion but for Ben & Jerry’s it is a business mantra. It seeks to make a fantastic product using natural ingredients and promoting business practices that respect and actively invest in the environment and employees. Harlem Capital’s purpose is to level up investment opportunities for women and diverse entrepreneurs<sup>11</sup>. It is disrupting an industry that is white and male with an ambition to invest in 1,000 diverse founders over the next 20 years.

Organizations such as Ben & Jerry’s and Harlem Capital show that it is possible for organizations to serve shareholders, at the same time as addressing broader societal issues.

## What is your organization’s purpose and what does this mean in terms of the dimensions of ESG?

<sup>7</sup>Eliade, Mircea, The Myth of the Eternal Return: Cosmos and History, Princeton University Press, Reprint edition (15 December 2018)  
<sup>8</sup>Bheemaiah, Kariappa, Block Chain 2.0: The Renaissance of Money, Wired (accessed 8 June 2021)  
<sup>9</sup>Tirado, Reyes, Defining Ecological Farming, Greenpeace Research Laboratories (June 2009)  
<sup>10</sup>Ben & Jerry’s Corporate Values, <https://www.benjerry.com/values> (accessed 12 July 2021)  
<sup>11</sup>Harlem Capital philosophy, <https://harlem.capital/philosophy/> (accessed 12 July 2021)



The invention of linear time also gave rise to messianism: someday in the future, the messiah will come (or return) and the great reckoning will take place. And while we still see some clinging to the idea of an apocalypse (fundamentalists)<sup>12</sup> or a Great Awakening (far right Q-Anon devotees)<sup>13</sup>, the greater trend is a transcendence of linear messianic traditions in favor of a more ethically driven presentism.

We no longer take part in “ends justifies the means” battles to some triumphant outcome, but interrogate the real-time processes in which we are involved for their ethical foundations. Ethics becomes more process-driven - a comportment or approach to decision-making itself, rather than a means to bring about a more just future.

If you stand for nothing you'll fall for anything. Marketing and public relations activity must be rooted in organizational values and authenticity. The backlash against social media accounts that posted black squares in response to the death of George Floyd and the emergence of the Black Lives Matter movement show the danger of so-called non activist activism<sup>14</sup>. It's an issue where organizational leaders are rightly cautious.

Nike made Colin Kaepernick, an American football player and civil rights activist, the face of its global ad campaign in 2018<sup>15</sup>. Nike's share price dropped two per cent in response to the Kaepernick ad as customers took to social media to post images of themselves destroying Nike products. However it also brought widespread support from other athletes. In 2016 Kaepernick fell to his knee during the national anthem at a NFL game in a bid to draw attention to police killings of African Americans and other injustices. Kaepernick's protest drew support from other players and inspired a movement across the NFL.

“Chobani and Nike are not afraid to stand for their values and publicly defend these despite criticism.”

Hamdi Ulukay, founder and CEO of yogurt company Chobani, has long courted controversy as an outspoken spoken advocate for refugees. He himself is a refugee from Turkey whose advocacy has made him a target for racist threats from the far right. Ulukay has called on the US to do more to support refugees via the media and platforms such as the World Economic Forum. He founded The Tent Foundation<sup>16</sup> as a vehicle to mobilize business to support refugees.

Chobani and Nike are not afraid to stand for their values and publicly defend these despite criticism. In doing so they recognize that they may disenfranchise some potential stakeholders but are prepared to accept that as a cost of authenticity.

How does your organization uphold and demonstrate its values?



<sup>12</sup>Strozier, Charles B., Apocalypse: On the Psychology of Fundamentalism in America, Wipf and Stock, (9 September 2002)

<sup>13</sup>Wong, Julia Carrie, QAnon's 'Great Awakening' failed to materialize. What's next could be worse, [The Guardian](#), (21 January 2021)

<sup>14</sup>Blackout Tuesday: the black square is a symbol of online activism for non-activists, [The Conversation](#), <https://theconversation.com/blackout-tuesday-the-black-square-is-a-symbol-of-online-activism-for-non-activists-139982> (4 June 2020)

<sup>15</sup>Nike releases full ad featuring Colin Kaepernick, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=grjUWkoBA>

<sup>16</sup>The Tent Foundation, <https://www.tent.org/> (accessed 12 July 2021)



In a circular world, all solutions are regenerative solutions. Infinite games. A person plays a finite game in order to win, and then the game is over. A person plays an infinite game for the express purpose of keeping the game going. Business plans and community designs alike do not end at the sale, but must show how they regenerate value instead of consuming it. This must be true for supposedly environmental electric car batteries (where do the rare earth elements come from and how are they replenished?) to grant proposals for community arts centers. Everything is biomimicry and based, in one way or another, on the regenerative properties of nature.

The evidence of the abuse of the planet by humankind is unavoidable. The evidence lies in plain sight in unprecedented temperatures and freak weather patterns. The climate crisis is not fake news or disinformation.

Fires in California have caused devastation to wildlife, housing and infrastructure as temperatures reach a record 54C. In Washington a wildfire in the Umatilla National Forest has damaged more than 60 square miles. It follows significant flood damage in 2020. Cities and towns along the Great Lakes region in Chicago need more than \$2 billion investment for repairs following floods and erosion.

Free market economies driven by financial metrics are damaging the natural environment by failing to place a value on natural assets. That has to change. Organizations must address environmental concerns as part of planning and risk within their own operations and supply chain. They also have a role to play in helping society address environmental concerns and the climate crisis.

Valuing biodiversity and the environment isn't just the right thing to do, it makes good business sense. A study in April 2021 by BBMG and Globescan reported that consumers under the age of 30 are almost 44% more likely to consider how responsible a brand is when choosing food and drinks<sup>17</sup>.

Sealed is an innovative solution that optimizes domestic energy usage. It audits home energy use and supplies modern HVAC solutions and insulation. It aims to improve energy efficiency for the average household by a factor of three. It generates revenue through energy savings and a monthly service cost.

The Upcycled Food Association prevents food waste via the products they buy. Members contribute to the circular economy by preventing food waste by creating new, high quality products out of surplus food. Pulp Chips, is Pulp Pantry's flagship line of veggie chips manufactured from upcycled ingredients.

It's not only associations and startups that are tackling environmental issues. Organizations are addressing environmental issues via corporate social responsibility programmes.

**Lombard Odier Group, an innovative retail and institutional bank, has launched a new impact investment solution, in partnership with Access To Water, to support water accessibility and quality in rural Senegal.**

**The cost of your organization to biodiversity does not appear on the balance sheet. How are you factoring environmental issues into risk and planning?**

<sup>17</sup>BBMG GlobeScan Radically Better Food 2021, [https://bbmg.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/BBMG\\_GlobeScan\\_Radically-Better-Food\\_2021-1.pdf](https://bbmg.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/BBMG_GlobeScan_Radically-Better-Food_2021-1.pdf) (Accessed 3 August 2021)



## Pattern Recognition

This is the skill required for surfing a chaotic culture - and actually best exemplified by the surfers and skateboarders who came to appreciate these contours. The older system understands the ocean as a series of latitude and longitude lines. A grid, superimposed on the water. The surfer understands that same water as a living system of waves - repeating patterns whose frequencies and amplitudes he can come to recognize and navigate.

Likewise, we can come to recognize the patterns in the Instagram feed, the onslaught of cable news, or any other turbulent system. Given that digital feeds and feedback loops invariably generate turbulence, being able to soften one's focus and recognize the patterns may be the most important skill of the 21st Century.

Data and machine learning is applied to help support decision making and identify patterns among data. It is also helping organizations improve productivity and work more effectively.

Key techniques in issues management include scanning and monitoring the organisation's environment and the concerns of stakeholder groups to identify and understand issues at the earliest possible moment. Environmental and social concerns play out and are amplified in a complex number of owned and social media channels.

Organizing data from legacy environments and disparate sources and silos across an organization is a critical challenge. NetApp is among a group of companies helping organizations move their data to the cloud to support effective decision making.

Heap provides a data application science layer on top of customer data. It helps organizations understand human behavior and supports decision making. Airkit is a digital self-service tool that provides tools to help organizations with the delivery and deployment of products and services. Communication teams are the eyes and ears for any organization.

## What data are you providing to your stakeholders to support decision making?

## The Order in Chaos

Where chaos used to be understood as disorder, non-linear math and fractal geometry have redefined it as order on another level. In the repeating shapes of the canopy of the forest, the clouds in the sky, or the waves in the ocean, we are learning to see "self similarity." This is comforting and orienting.

These repeating patterns are the result of feedback loops - iterative equations that circle repeatedly. And in musing on these patterns, human beings can sense an underlying order. This is the math underlying the stochastic analysis of the stock market (by human beings and algorithms, alike), the mutation of bacteria, and even the way we bring certain kinds of people into our lives. We are learning to read the turbulence.

Planning 12 month or even quarterly cycles makes no sense when life moves so quickly. In this content organizational plans are meaningless as soon as they are committed to pixels or paper.

COVID-19 has brought organizations closer to their customers. It has also been a shock to the leadership and management and taught us the need for agile and responsive management practices.

Organizations must cascade a vision, purpose, and values, and empower stakeholders to make decisions based on local operating context. Organizational planning must be both agile and distributed. Systems should be designed with embedded resilience and redundancy.

Zendesk supports organisations in managing customer relationships irrespective of physical location. Customer requests are up a fifth since the start of the pandemic according to its Customer Experience Trends Report 2021<sup>18</sup>. Zendesk reported that the ability of organizations to recognize patterns and adapt to the evolving needs of customers as their biggest pain point.

Progressive organizations are shifting from crude means of data collection such as surveys and feedback forms to real time customer journey orchestration. This describes the ability to interpret data in real time and modify the journey itself.

Realtime data is critical to decision making.

## How is your organization gathering and acting on data to optimize customer experience?

<sup>18</sup>Customer Experience Trends Report 2021, <https://www.zendesk.co.uk/cx-trends-report/> (accessed 3 August 2021)

## About

# SourceCode Communications

Since inception in 2017, SourceCode Communication's philosophy has centered on changing technology conversations by injecting humanity, empathy, and an emphasis on storytelling back into technology communications. We believe that if we can make the end user emotionally connect with a brand, we can more effectively change perceptions and behavior. Over the last four years, SourceCode has used this philosophy to fuel its growth into an award-winning communications marketing agency delivering measurable business impact to brands across D2C, Health & Wellness, Consumer Lifestyle, Consumer Technology, Financial Technology, Mobile, Cloud & Telecoms, Insights & Engagement, Analytics, and Enterprise Technology. What really differentiates SourceCode is the company's relentless pursuit to uncover and shine a light on meaningful stories that make people think and feel, and we're proud to have been named a best-in-class agency for our ability to do so. In 2021, we have been shortlisted as PProvoke's Digital Agency of the Year, named one of America's Best PR Agencies by Forbes, and honored at the SABRE Awards North America for PR Agency Citizenship. In 2020, we were PRWeek's Outstanding Boutique Agency and Best Places to Work, and Adweek named us a top 10 Fastest Growing Agency. The agency also proudly runs the Diversity Marketing Consortium™, a 501c3 using communications to amplify Black-, female-, and other minority-owned businesses, as well as WeRaise PR launched earlier this year to support, and champion, working parents within the communications industry. For more information, please visit [www.sourcecodecommunications.com](http://www.sourcecodecommunications.com).



## About

# Douglas Rushkoff

Named one of the "world's ten most influential intellectuals" by MIT, Douglas Rushkoff is an author and documentarian who studies human autonomy in a digital age. His twenty books include the just-published Team Human, based on his podcast, as well as the bestsellers Present Shock, Throwing Rocks and the Google Bus, Program or Be Programmed, Life Inc, and Media Virus. He also made the PBS Frontline documentaries Generation Like, The Persuaders, and Merchants of Cool. His book Coercion won the Marshall McLuhan Award, and the Media Ecology Association honored him with the first Neil Postman Award for Career Achievement in Public Intellectual Activity.

Rushkoff's work explores how different technological environments change our relationship to narrative, money, power, and one another. He coined such concepts as "viral media," "screenagers," and "social currency," and has been a leading voice for applying digital media toward social and economic justice. He is a research fellow of the Institute for the Future, and founder of the Laboratory for Digital Humanism at CUNY/Queens, where he is a Professor of Media Theory and Digital Economics. He is a columnist for Medium, and his novels and comics, Ecstasy Club, A.D.D, and Aleister & Adolf, are all being developed for the screen.

