

# Anthropological trends in the digital space

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When putting these trends together, I focused on socio-cultural changes that will transform our interaction with digital technologies. I used the concepts of nature and culture to explain the role that we, and technology itself, play in closing the gap between these concepts.



The results are 12 trends that describe how our relationship with the environment, politics and one another will shape the future use of digital devices and technologies.

## 1. Increase in micro-communities

Due to the uncertainty caused by the economic climate, including political and natural changes, the number of micro-communities increases. People will start noticing that they need to tighten up their close networks in order to survive, or to live in harmony.

### 2. Micro social orders

Consequently, this will reflect on the online space, with multiple micro-social networks being created that will serve particular interests and may spread out at a small scale, but will impact directly on the communities' lifestyle (ie emergence of micro-social orders).

### 3. Paradigm shift

Enhanced by online social platforms, a trend that points out a fundamental change from traditional socialisation is the fact that unit will not be achieved through political consensus, but by what I call a "philosophical view of the world". This means that individuals will group more and more around their own interests, opinions, and cultural beliefs, as opposed to conforming to a unified model.

In the digital space the implications include customised advertising, brands that adapt to what people predict for themselves, and social networks that emerge accordingly.

### 4. Micro-segmenting

Closely linked to the previous one, brands will need to adapt to this new "view of the world". If one of the effects of the current paradigm shift is the emergence of micro-communities, brands will have to relook at their current marketing segmentation models, as messages will have to be addressed to groups of people with different needs, even if they belong to the same social-cultural structure.

It is likely that the criteria to group them will differ considerably from traditional models as values are changing quickly.

### 5. Meaningful content

In line with the individuals' need to fight for a common cause that reunites them, brands must create and activate content around things that mean something to people (ie how to adapt better to the current environment, political consciousness, increased consciousness of themselves and others), as opposed to content that serves the brand only (ie new products, information about brand, offers).

## **6. Adapting to complexities**

Degrees of complexity will continue increasing in the digital technology field, which means that individuals will adapt to the complexities in ways that impact upon the social, political and economic realms.

The use of digital media is already being combined with traditional media, and the use of mobile Internet will continue growing, but in South Africa a significant number of internet users will adapt their use of online platforms to their offline consumption of information. After all, reading the news online does not have the same implication as online shopping and other examples of digital behaviour conversion.

## **7. Behavioural conversion**

Because of the above, people may be more susceptible to achieving behavioural conversion in the digital space. In the context of the current environmental, economic and political situation, individuals will be encouraged to improve their use of digital platforms.

For instance, with petrol prices going up, it may be cheaper for someone in a semi-rural African area to buy online, as opposed to going to the shops in person. If this is going too far, people will at least get information about products from online sources, prior to paying a personal visit.

## **8. Intermediaries between nature and culture**

The modern selves are aware of the importance of being intermediaries between nature and culture. With the success of digital products that fit into lifestyles, individuals have been empowered to manipulate the sophisticated link that connects us with nature in a very different way.

While in the past humans relied on their observation skills and their astrological knowledge to predict natural disasters, or political revolutions, the modern selves use digital technology in order to create their own future and change, and interfere in the course of history (ie political revolutions enhanced by online protests).

## **9. User-generated design**

The fact that we as humans have the power to make use of technologies in order to know/manipulate our natural world has a positive aspect concerning our role in initiating dialogue with brands and products.

The voice of the people is powerful because it creates the trends; it is responsible for them, it drives them. This in the future will mean that products will be co-created by us, as users. This means we will be designing our future devices.

## **10. Expert systems still strong**

Oracles determined the future in ancient times. The oracles of the present are a hybrid of nature and culture represented by big technology companies that will permeate even more strongly our private lives with their devices.

The main takeout here is that, regardless of us creating and developing our own products, the presence of expert systems is still strong in closing the gap between nature-culture.

## **11. Shaping the process**

As a result of the supposed "civilising process" we have been going through, our own use of digital technology will start altering the way we shape the process.

This is not to say that the devices or the technology itself will make us less or more social. It rather points out that, by

progressively integrating the above-mentioned into our lives, our social interactions will adopt different dynamics - such as increasing our need to write about ourselves, or telling others about our lives, successes and achievements, among others.

## 12. Immediate content defines identity

Lastly, key to brands and media, it will be the need to align the content shared about themselves and others with a mind-set that is being reformulated as it is written.

In other words, more than ever, individuals are writing history the moment they post or upload content. The content defines their identity.

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## ABOUT MARCELA OSPINA

Anthropologist Marcela Ospina Salcedo ([www.marcelaospina.com](http://www.marcelaospina.com)) specialises in helping brands understand consumers from a cultural viewpoint. By using ethnography and drawing from neuropsychological principles, she advises on developing marketing plans, launching new products, and innovating communications strategies. She has a MA in sociology from Wits and eight years' experience doing ethnography and qualitative research in South Africa, South America and other African countries. She currently works at Aquaonline as a strategist. Email me@marcelaospina.com, and follow @marcela\_ospina.

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