

(15 OCT 2020)

IN FAKE LIFE

A STUDY ON REALITY AND LIVING
IN A MARKET WITHOUT IRL

HIGHSNObIETY Q3

FROM IN-STORE TO OUT-OF-BODY, THE IDEA THAT REAL-LIFE EXPERIENCES EXIST IN A MARKETPLACE HAS BECOME CENTRAL TO THE NEW LUXURY LANDSCAPE. YET, AS SOON AS CREATIVES AND MARKETERS BEGAN TO FULLY WRAP THEIR HEAD AROUND THE EXPERIENCE ECONOMY, THE GLOBAL LOCKDOWN DISRUPTED NEARLY EVERY POSSIBLE FORM OF IRL EXCHANGE.

WITH A RARE CHANCE TO OBSERVE AN ENTIRE MARKETPLACE IN A VACUUM, WE TOOK A LOOK AT THE STATUS OF “EXPERIENCE” IN ITS CURRENTLY BROKEN STATE, WITH AN EYE TOWARD HOW THE IRL WILL RECONSTITUTE ITSELF. MADE AT A TIME WHEN THE WORLD HAS NEVER BEEN MORE ONLINE, THIS PAPER WAS FUELED BY RESEARCH GATHERED FROM A SURVEY OF 652 HIGHSNOBIETY AUDIENCE MEMBERS AND INTERVIEWS WITH 11 EXPERTS FROM ACROSS THE RETAIL, WELLNESS, FASHION, HOSPITALITY, AND CULTURE INDUSTRIES.

**IN ALL OF THESE DISCUSSIONS, OUR AIM WAS TO DISCOVER:
WHAT LIVED EXPERIENCES HAVE TAKEN ON A NEW VALUE?
WHAT ACTUALLY WORKS BETTER REMOTELY? IS THIS CURRENT
VERSION OF LIFE FAKE, OR IS IT THE NEW REALITY?**



THE DESERT OF THE REAL

In our study, the readers we polled reported back on a post-pandemic daily routine that has been almost completely rewired.

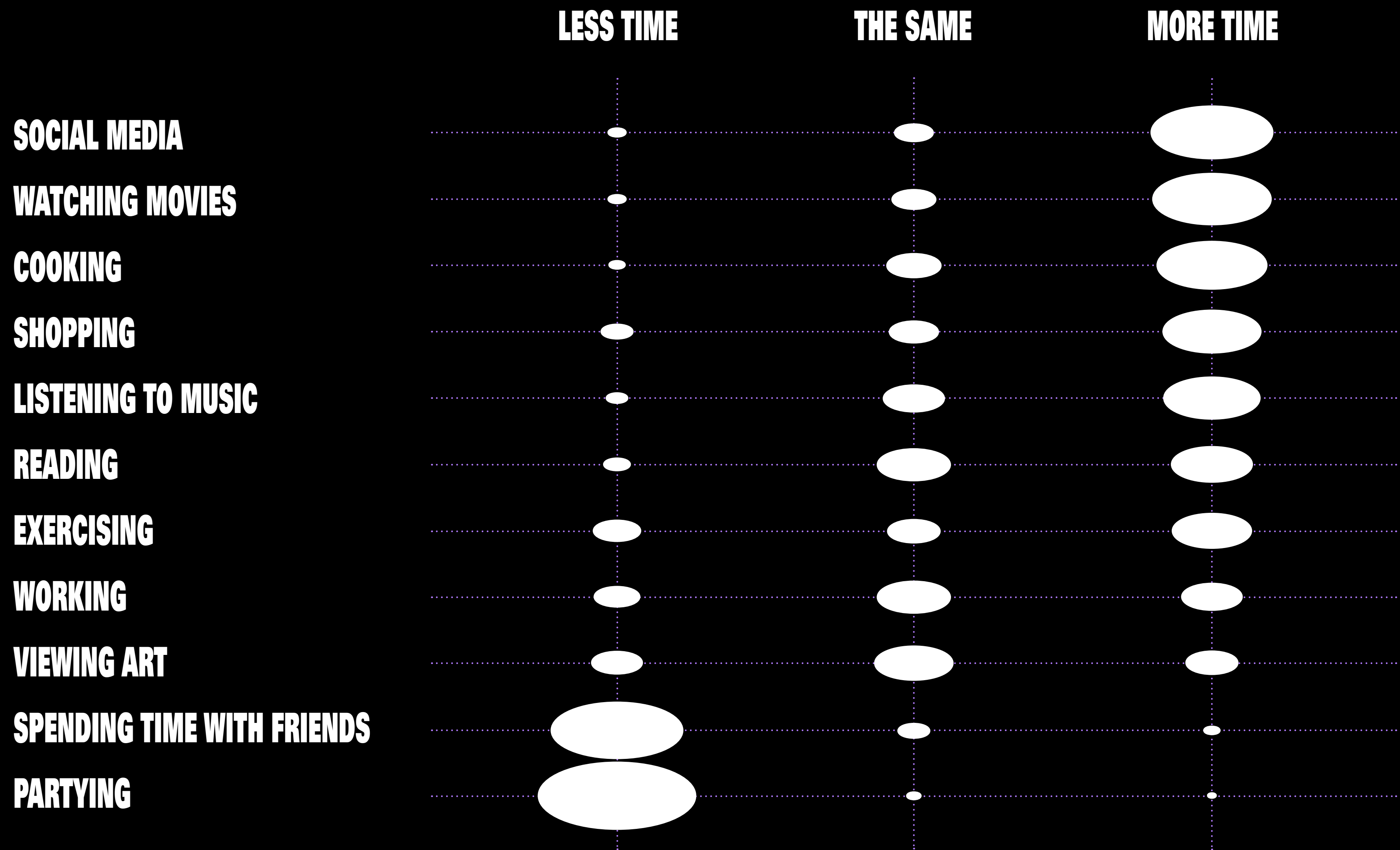
Unsurprisingly, their time scrolling and streaming shot up, while their time partying and socializing went down. In the qualitative responses we received, readers described a routine that was still busy and efficient, but one where experiences themselves were **"less memorable."**

In this desert of the real, where happenings blend into one another on the surface of screens, differentiation often came in the form of **surrealism**: the shock of doing something that shouldn't be done online.

"I CANNOT STAND TO SEE A TINY VERMEER."

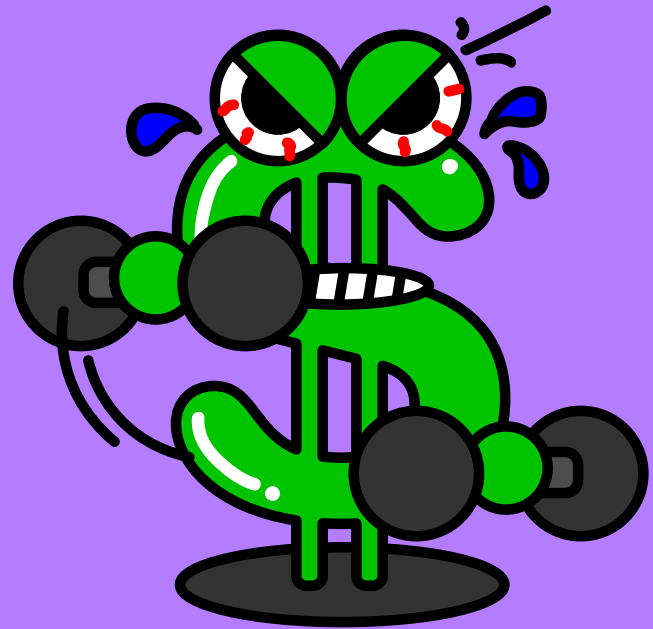
(CHRIS DERCON, PRESIDENT OF THE GRAND PALAIS MUSEUM)

IN THE LAST 6 MONTHS I SPENT MORE/LESS TIME ON...



WHILE ARTICLES AND REPORTS TOUT THE DEVELOPMENT OF EXOTIC ONLINE SUBCULTURES AND ARCAINE GAMER COMMUNITIES GROWING TODAY, WHAT WE HEARD FROM ACTUAL YOUNG PEOPLE IS A RETICENCE TO ADAPT RATHER THAN A MASS ONLINE AWAKENING. ONCE SCREEN ADDICTION IS NO LONGER A CHOICE, PERHAPS IT BECOMES EASIER TO FIND SHORTCOMINGS IN THE VIRTUAL.

HAVE YOU ATTENDED ANY MEMORABLE VIRTUAL EVENTS IN THE PAST 6 MONTHS?



**"A FUNERAL, WHICH WAS A REALLY ODD EXPERIENCE,
AND SOME BIRTHDAY PARTIES."**

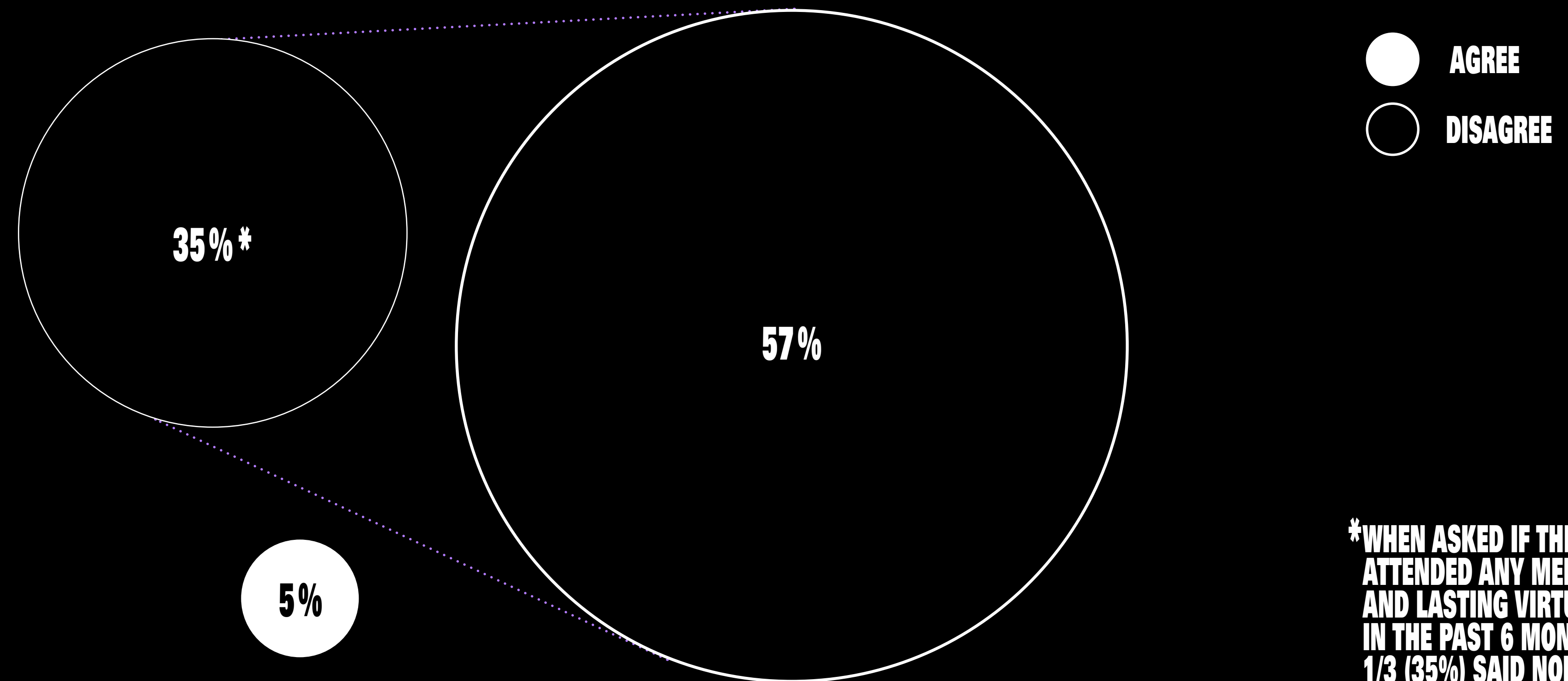
**"I ATTENDED MY VERY FIRST ZOOM WEDDING.
IT WAS WEIRD, BUT FUN."**

**"I HAD A TAROT READING CLASS, IT WAS REALLY EYE OPENING FOR ME,
NEVER THOUGHT I WOULD ENJOY SOMETHING LIKE THAT."**



WHILE 70 PERCENT OF RESPONDENTS SAY THEY SPENT MORE TIME ON SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE LAST 6 MONTHS THAN EVER BEFORE, IN THE QUALITATIVE RESPONSES, THERE WAS LITTLE INTEREST IN THINKING OF THESE EXPERIENCES AS A 1-TO-1 REPLACEMENT FOR REAL, LIVED EVENTS. AS ONE RESPONDENT PUT CONCISELY: "I HATE HAPPY HOURS AND ZOOM BIRTHDAY PARTIES. MISS ME WITH THAT SHIT."

"VIRTUAL EXPERIENCES CAN BE AS MEMORABLE AND LASTING TO ME AS PHYSICAL EXPERIENCES."



***WHEN ASKED IF THEY'VE ATTENDED ANY MEMORABLE AND LASTING VIRTUAL EVENTS IN THE PAST 6 MONTHS, OVER 1/3 (35%) SAID NONE AT ALL.**

**"I DOUBT THAT SOMEONE IS GOING TO SAY
IN 10 YEARS, 'OH MY GOD, I HAD THE BEST
EXPERIENCE OF MY LIFE DANCING IN MY LIVING
ROOM TO A STREAM.' OR, 'I MET THE LOVE OF
MY LIFE IN A CHAT ROOM NEXT TO A STREAM.'"**

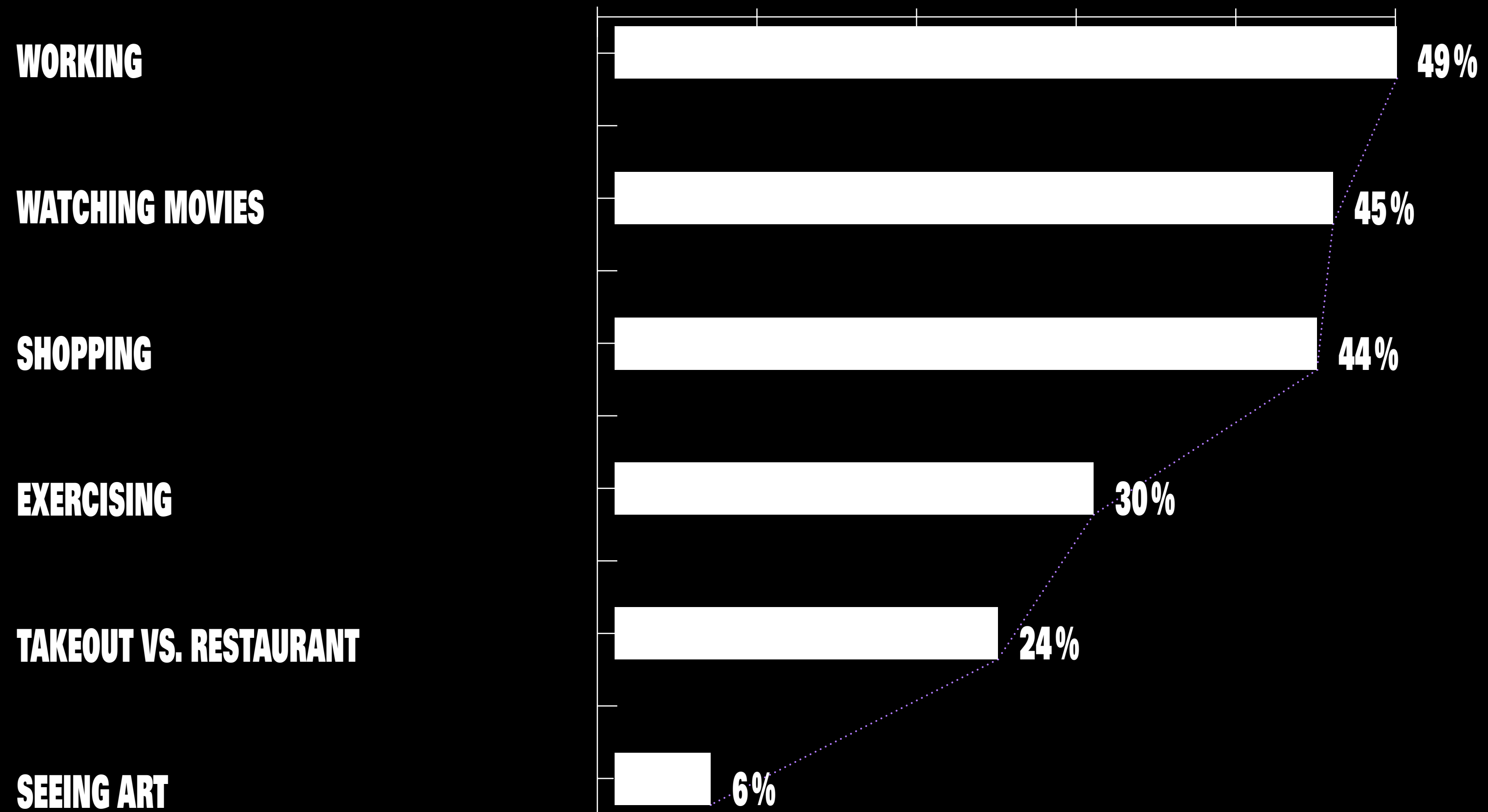
(HONEY DIJON, DJ AND CLUB LEGEND)

A man with a grey beard, wearing a brown tweed jacket, a white shirt, and a brown tie, is smiling while wearing a blue HTC Vive VR headset. He is positioned in the center of the frame against a dark blue background. To his left, there are two poles with orange and white stripes, and one with green and white stripes. To his right, a black desk lamp with a white shade is visible. The text "WHAT GETS UPLOADED" is overlaid in large, bold, purple capital letters across the middle of the image.

WHAT GETS UPLOADED

WHILE THE MOST PASSIONATE RESPONSES IN OUR STUDY WERE OFFERED ON THE SUBJECT OF WHAT'S MISSING IN A FULLY ONLINE WORLD, ONE OF OUR PRIMARY OBJECTIVES WAS TO UNDERSTAND WHAT MIGHT GET "UPLOADED" AFTER THE PANDEMIC WAS OVER — E.G. EXPERIENCES THAT WERE ONCE CONDUCTED LIVE, BUT WERE IN FACT PREFERABLE ONLINE. IN THIS CATEGORY, ONLY THREE FORMERLY IRL PASTTIMES CAME CLOSE TO CRACKING 50 PERCENT ON THE UPLOAD LIST: WORK, CINEMA, AND SHOPPING.

WHAT DO YOU PREFER TO DO ONLINE RATHER THAN IN REAL LIFE?



Chief among the most uploadable experiences cited by readers was “work,” which is perhaps unsurprising in an age where project management tools have digitized collaboration and the open-plan office has become the universally recognized bane of productivity.

Much like its fellow IRL activities on the upload list, the kind of white-collar work that many of our millennial readers participate in was already part of a long-term cultural shift toward digitization. However, respondents were quick to point out that unlike ecommerce and streaming services, remote work is not a consumer choice but rather a scenario that had to be forced upon employers by unprecedented world changes.

“The problem is the old guard thinking that it would reduce productivity,” said one of the many respondents who cautiously reported about an uptick in their own efficiency in a WFH setting. “But studies are showing that people are actually overworking.”

**“WE DON’T WANT TO GO BACK TO WHAT IT WAS.
WHAT IT WAS WASN’T NORMAL.”**

(BRICE PARTOUCHE, FOUNDER OF SATISFY RUNNING)

THE SHOPAISSANCE

A woman with long dark hair, wearing a vibrant green, vertically striped, long-sleeved dress, stands in the aisle of a large, empty theater. She is looking towards the camera with a slight smile. The theater has rows of plush, purple upholstered seats with gold-colored frames. The walls are a light, textured grey with large, arched alcoves. Some alcoves contain blue-tinted artwork or screens. The ceiling is high and features decorative, carved elements. The overall atmosphere is one of grandeur and elegance.

As the third most uploadable human past-time according to our study, shopping during the era of digitized life has undergone a quick renaissance.

In April 2020's Highsnobiety White Paper "The Immunized Shopper," readers reported a crisis-era relationship to shopping in which perception was at odds with reality. For while an overwhelming majority of readers reported a sustained personal interest in style, two-thirds said that they felt queasy consuming conspicuously during a time when others were tightening their belts.

In this current poll, taken six months after the pandemic began, 83 percent of readers told us that they were shopping as much or more than they were pre-pandemic, with 56 percent ticking the box for "more".

"CERTAINLY [BRICK-AND-MORTAR] BUSINESSES HAVE BEEN AFFECTED BUT I HAVE A FEELING THAT IT'S GOING TO COME BACK. THERE'S GOING TO BE SUCH A PENT-UP DEMAND FOR IT. THE WORK THAT WE'VE DONE FOR BRANDS LIKE KITH HAS BEEN ABOUT CREATING A SPACE THAT WASN'T REALLY ABOUT SHOPPING, A SPACE WHERE PEOPLE COULD GO WITHOUT LOOKING FOR SOMETHING IN PARTICULAR. AND I THINK THAT HOLDS TRUE. THE KITH LOCATION THAT WE JUST INAUGURATED IN TOKYO, WHICH WAS DELAYED BECAUSE OF THE PANDEMIC, HAS BEEN SLAMMED WITH PEOPLE."

(DANIEL ARSHAM, ARTIST AND CO-FOUNDER OF SNARKITECTURE)



Interestingly, these bouyant shopping numbers seem to be about more than just being bored: more than two-thirds of readers polled have been impressed by how certain retail platforms have evolved their digital experiences to match the moment.

Qualitative responses to our poll questions exhibited an immense level of **attention to detail** in how the customer experience was examined by our readers, who cited examples — including video reviews of items, to integrations on IG Reels and TikTok, to an improved UIs and product photography, and expedited checkouts through Klarna and Apple Pay — as reasons for improving their digital experience and loyalty to a retailer.

The digitizing of banal quotidian experiences like the weekly grocery run is seductive to audiences, who here seem to not just tout physical conveniences, but psychological ones as well, as being tantamount to their new digital shopping experience.

Across the board, the experts we spoke to agreed that the shock of quarantine had introduced a **Cambrian explosion in the growth of online shopping**. This fact is especially true in a new luxury context, where according to our collaborative study with Boston Consulting Group “Culture Culture Culture,” the phase of inspiration has become the crucial segment of the purchasing path.

"WE'RE THINKING ABOUT RETAIL IN THE KIND OF EXCLUSIVE SPACES THAT PREVIOUSLY HAVE HAD HIGHER BARRIERS FOR ENTRY, BUT ARE NOW HUNGRY TO HAVE ANYONE COME THROUGH THEIR DOORS. WE'VE BEEN TALKING ABOUT POP-UP STORES IN MUSEUMS, PLACES THAT WOULD HAVE BEEN JUST PROHIBITIVELY EXPENSIVE, THAT ARE GOING TO HAVE TO START REALLY LOOKING AT HOW THEY USE THEIR SPACE AND WHO THEY WANT THERE."

(OLIVIA-JENÉ FAGON, EXPERIENTIAL CREATIVE DIRECTOR)



"PEOPLE ARE GETTING A BIT BORED AND EXCITED TO EXPRESS THEMSELVES STYLISTICALLY AGAIN. HOWEVER, WE'VE BECOME MUCH MORE CONSCIOUS AND AWARE ABOUT HOW MONEY IS SPENT. WHERE IS THAT MONEY GOING? IS IT GOING TOWARDS SOMETHING PURPOSEFUL? ARE WE FOR THE CAUSE? ARE WE FOR THE PLANET? ARE WE FOR THE BETTERMENT OF ALL?"

(ESTELLE BAILEY-BABENZIEN, CO-FOUNDER OF NOAH)



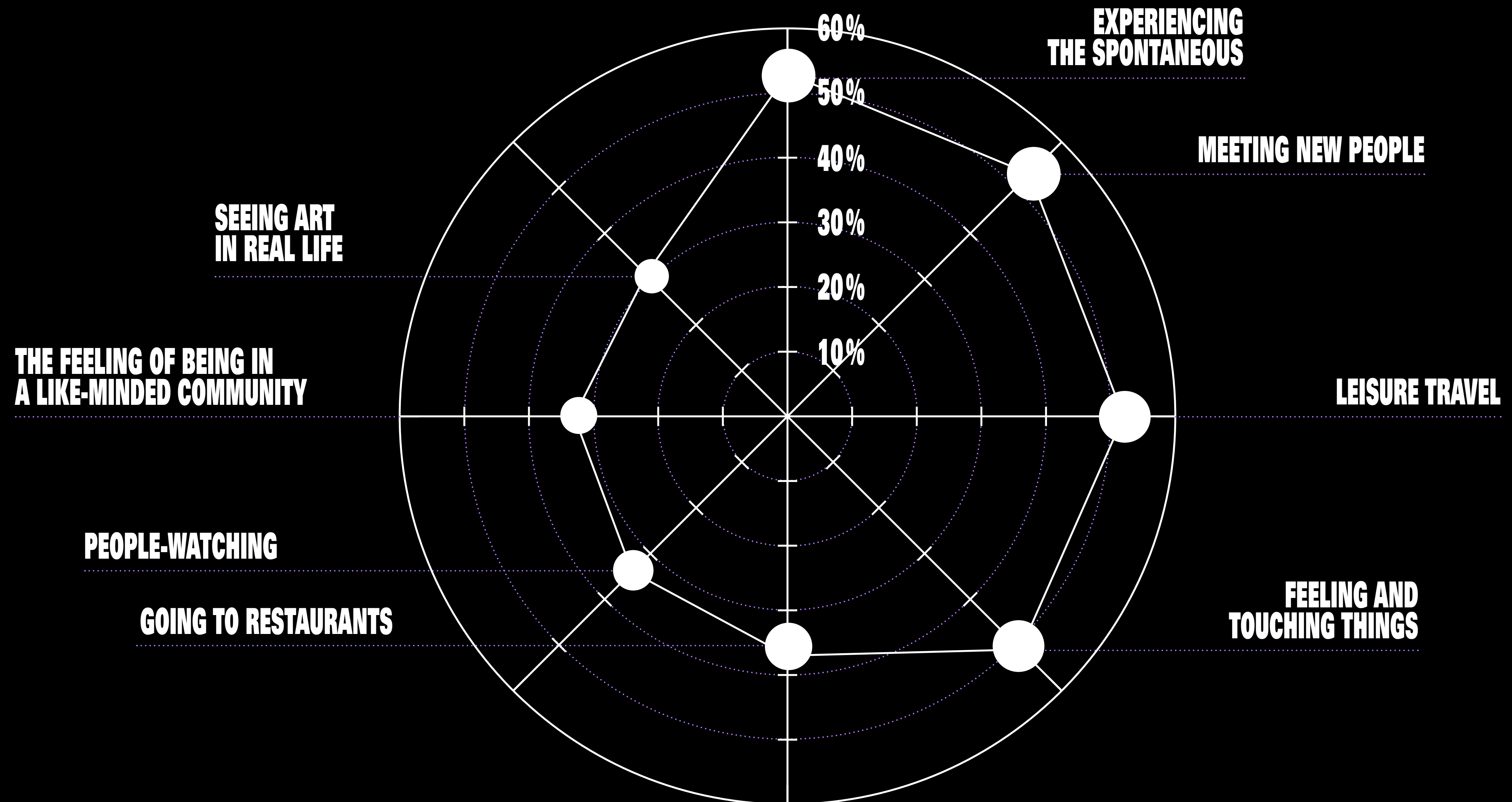


From the second we started living our lives on screens, touch has been a challenge.

In the mid-2010s, Apple began rolling out a new haptic feedback function for the iPhone called 3D Touch that gave specific sentience to specific stimuli. But technologies like these don't address **the lack of physical touch** that comes with the digital lives they facilitate.

When respondents we spoke to mourned an absence of “vibe” or “body language” in their new social reality, this is the kind of touch they’re referring to. Things like deciding who gets to open a door first, or the once-mocked “water cooler moment,” are details that hit different when everyone is flattened on a screen.

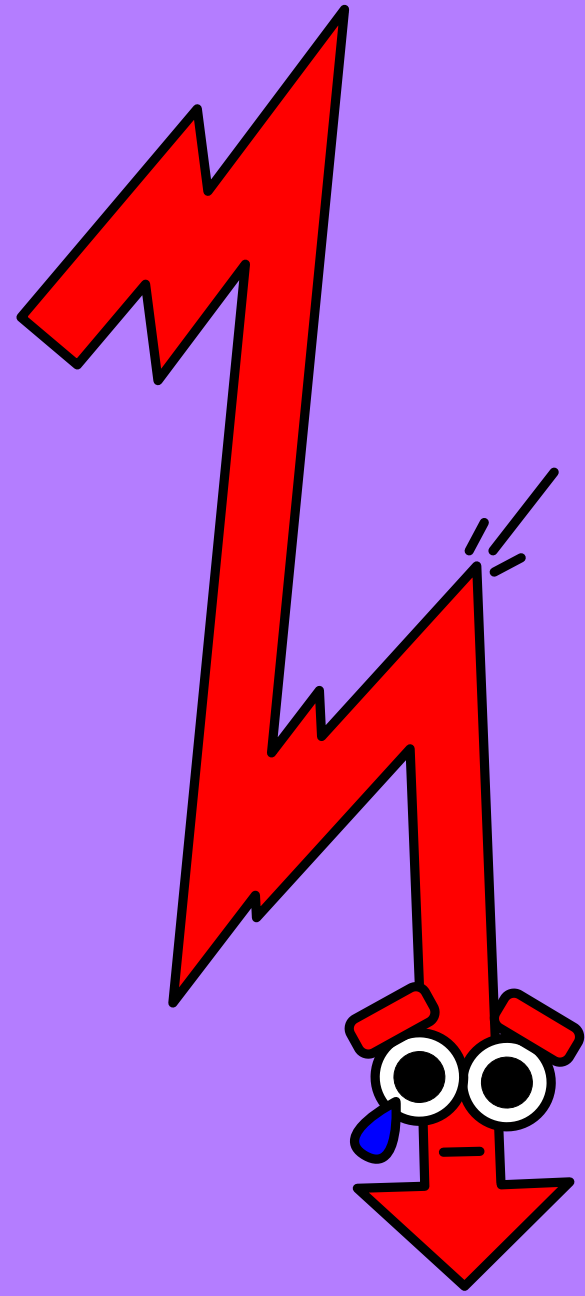
WHAT DO YOU MISS ABOUT REAL-LIFE EXPERIENCES?



WHILE MANY READERS ARE RELISHING THE ONLINE VERSIONS OF WORKING, EXERCISING, AND SHOPPING, MASS CULTURAL GATHERINGS LIKE CONCERTS AND NIGHTLIFE REMAIN IRREPLACEABLE. WHEN ASKED WHAT THEY LONGED FOR IN THEIR NEW ONLINE LIVES, THESE RESPONDENTS VERY OFTEN POINTED TO THE SPONTANEITY OF LIVE ENCOUNTERS. WHAT THEY CHERISHED ABOUT OFFLINE WAS ITS RANDOMNESS. NOT SURPRISINGLY, ONLY 2 PERCENT OF RESPONDENTS SAID THEY PREFERRED SOCIALIZING ONLINE.

"I DON'T REALLY WATCH TV, BUT WHEN I DO WATCH SOMETHING AND PEOPLE ARE HUGGING OR SHAKING HANDS, IT KIND OF SHOCKS ME. IT ONLY TAKES A MONTH FOR HABITS TO CHANGE. SO NOW WHEN YOU SEE PEOPLE HUGGING YOU MIGHT INTERPRET THEM AS BEST FRIENDS."

(BRICE PARTOUCHE, FOUNDER OF SATISFY RUNNING)



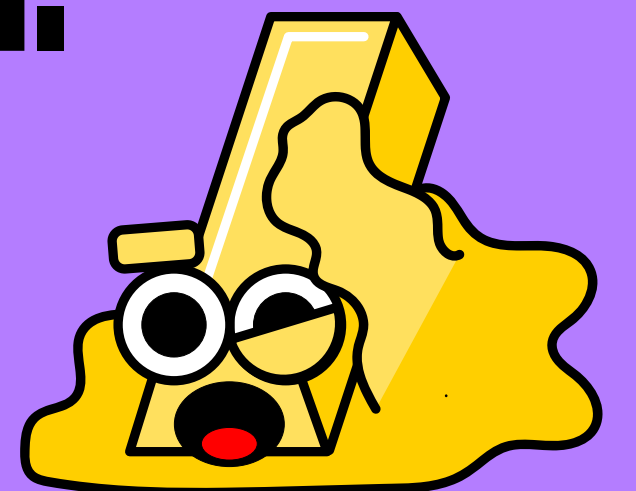
WHAT WILL NEVER BE ADEQUATELY REPLACED VIRTUALLY?

"REAL LAUGHTER, RATHER THAN ;D"

"FEELING LIKE THE NIGHT COULD TAKE YOU ANYWHERE."

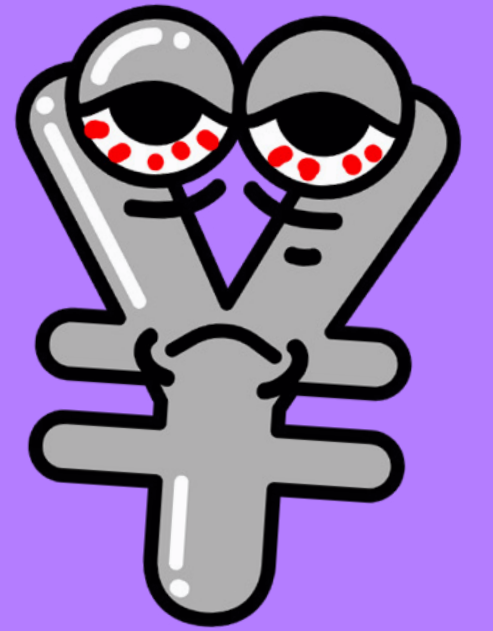
**"TRYING NEW RESTAURANTS. YOU CAN STILL ORDER TAKEOUT,
BUT IT'S NOT THE SAME FEELING."**

"YOU CAN'T RAGE WITH 20,000 PEOPLE FROM YOUR COUCH."



EXPERIENCES LIKE SHOPPING OR GOING TO CONCERTS USED TO FULFILL MULTIPLE NEEDS AT ONCE. YOU BOUGHT A SHIRT, AND FLIRTED, AND GRABBED LUNCH ALL, IN ONE SWOOP. NOW, YOU CHECK YOUR VARIOUS CARTS, CHAT WITH A CRUSH IN YOUR DMS, AND ORDER LUNCH ON POSTMATES.

50 PERCENT OF RESPONDENTS SAY THEY HAVE BECOME MORE EFFICIENT WITH THEIR TIME DURING LOCKDOWN, WITH MANY DESCRIBING RETAIL EXPERIENCES IN PARTICULAR AS BEING MORE “TRANSACTIONAL.” WITH REALITY HOGTIED TO THE DIGITAL CONVENIENCES THAT ONCE SERVED IT, A SUPPORTING ROLE HAS NOW TAKEN CENTER STAGE.



"IN AN ONLINE YOGA CLASS, THERE'S NO ENERGY COMING BACK AT YOU. SO NORMALLY MY BUSINESS PARTNER CHLOE AND I TEACH TOGETHER ON CAMERA BECAUSE AT LEAST THERE'S ONE OTHER PERSON THAT YOU CAN MAKE JOKES WITH. IT CAN FEEL KIND OF DEAD IF YOU'RE NOT SUPER ANIMATED AND EXCITING, SO IT BECOMES LIKE A BROADWAY SHOW."

(KRISSY JONES, FOUNDER OF SKY TING YOGA)



A photograph of three people hanging upside down in a room with a brick wall. The person on the left is wearing a red jacket and blue sneakers. The person in the middle is wearing a red jacket and tan pants. The person on the right is wearing a green jacket and yellow sneakers. A large blue barrel is on a wooden stand in the center. The floor is made of wooden planks. The text "DO YOU BELIEVE IN MAGIC?" is overlaid in the center.

DO YOU BELIEVE IN MAGIC?

**"EFFICIENCY HAS BEEN GAINED
AND FUN HAS BEEN LOST."**
(AMAR LALVANI, CEO OF STANDARD HOTELS)

TWO-THIRDS OF THE READERS WE SURVEYED SAY THEY'VE BECOME MORE DELIBERATE ABOUT HOW THEY SPEND THEIR TIME. THEY'VE REFLECTED ON THE FLOTSAM AND JETSAM OF THEIR DAILY LIVES AND ARE BECOMING MORE MINDFUL OF WHAT THEY DO AND WHO THEY DO IT WITH.

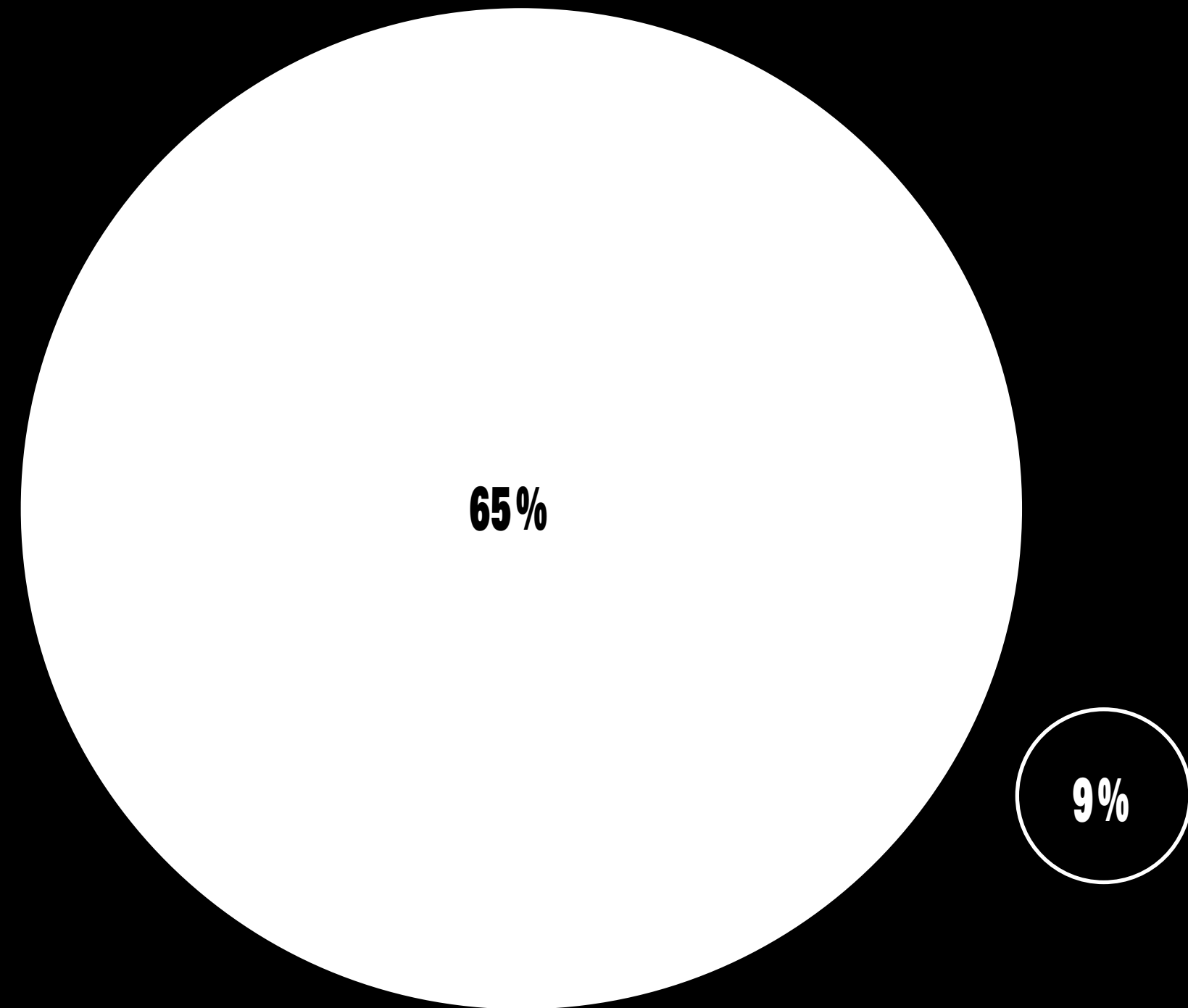
74 PERCENT CLAIM THEY'LL SPEND MORE ON TRAVEL AND NEW EXPERIENCES AND LESS ON ALCOHOL AND PARTYING. THE LATTER FACT IS PERPLEXING GIVEN HOW MUCH EVERYONE MISSES TOUCHING.

"WHEN IT COMES TO BUSINESS TRAVEL, THERE WILL BE A MAJOR CHANGE. QUESTIONS WILL BE ASKED, LIKE, 'DO WE REALLY NEED TO TRAVEL TO NEW YORK FOR A TWO-HOUR MEETING? IS THIS NECESSARY?' I THINK THE OVERALL HASSLE OF FLYING WILL REMAIN POST-PANDEMIC BUT I HAVE NO DOUBT THAT PEOPLE WILL WANT TO TRAVEL. WE WANT TO SEE OUR FAMILY. WE WANT TO SEE OUR FRIENDS."

(HEIDI KÖPPLE, HEAD OF COMMERCIAL CENTERS AT ZURICH AIRPORT)

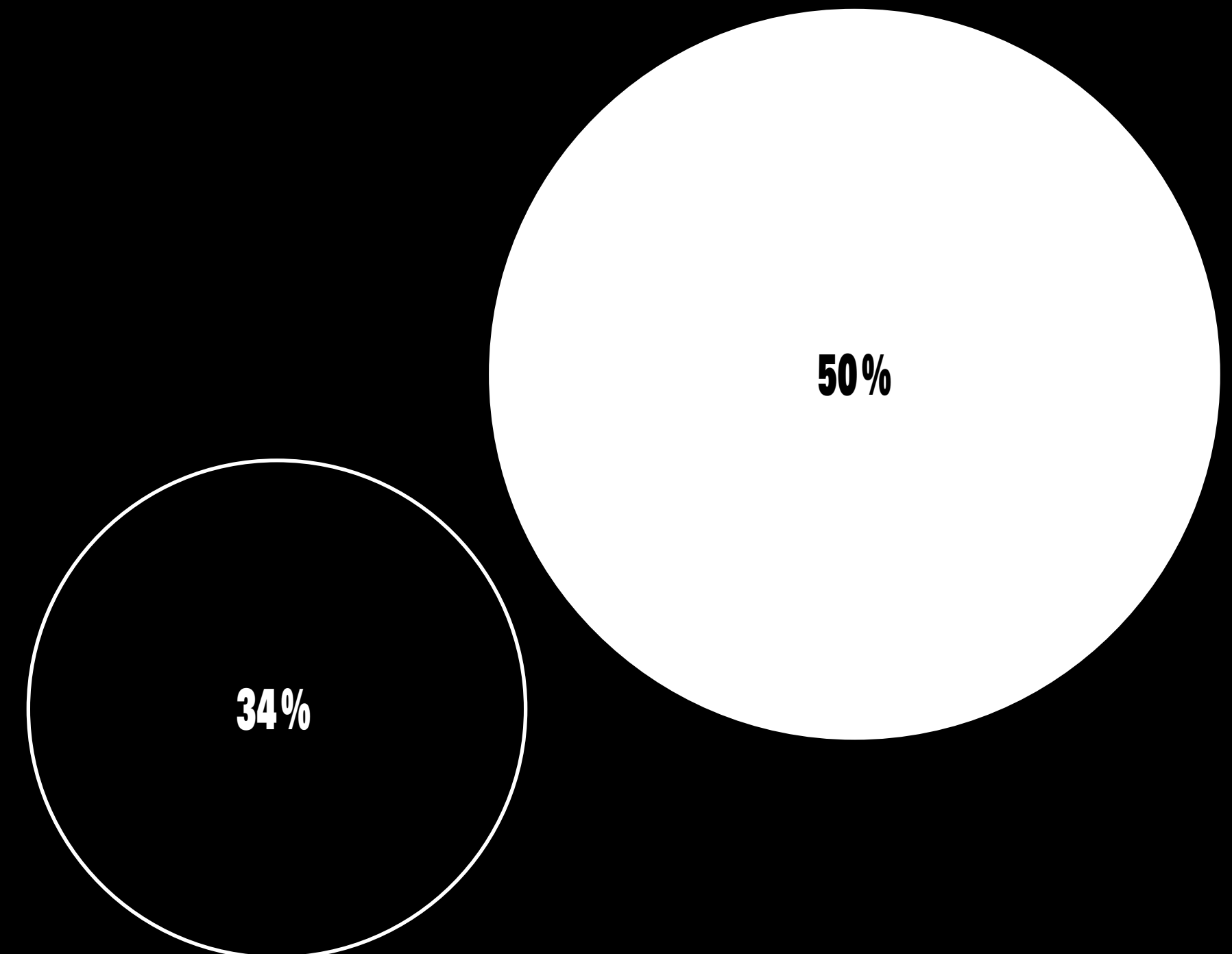


**SINCE COVID-19, I HAVE BECOME MORE
DELIBERATE ABOUT WHAT ACTIVITIES AND
EXPERIENCES I SPEND MY TIME ON.**



DO YOU BELIEVE IN MAGIC?

**I HAVE GOTTEN MORE EFFICIENT
WITH MY TIME DURING LOCKDOWN.**



 **AGREE**
 **DISAGREE**

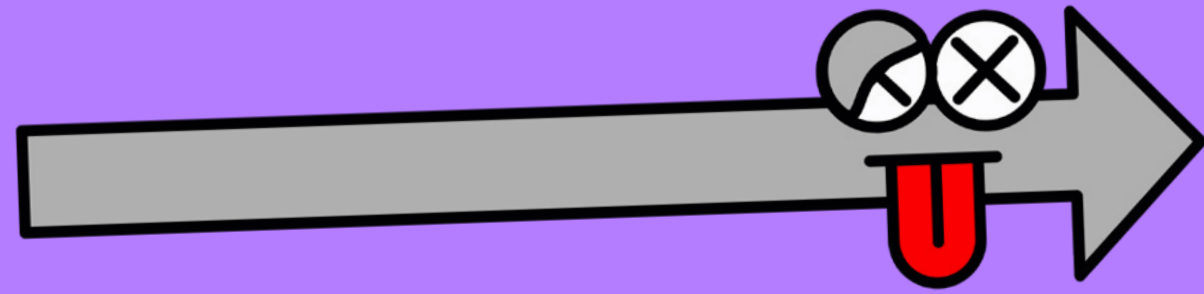
“I MISS BEING AROUND FRIENDS WITHOUT FEARING VERY POSSIBLE DEATH,” WAS ONE OF THE DARKEST AND MOST STRAIGHTFORWARD RESPONSES WE RECEIVED ABOUT THE NEW STATE OF EXPERIENCE. IN A SOCIETY WHERE BEING CAREFREE AND BEING YOUTHFUL ARE NORMALLY SYNONYMOUS, 53 PERCENT OF OUR PREDOMINANTLY MILLENNIAL AND GEN Z AUDIENCE REPORTED BEING MORE STRESSED OR WORRIED THAN USUAL.

"THE REALITY THAT'S BEEN BROUGHT TO LIGHT BY COVID IS THAT PEOPLE ARE NOT PAYING ENOUGH FOR A MEAL OUT, AND THAT'S SOMETHING THAT'S SUPER HARD TO SAY, BECAUSE I BELIEVE IN HAVING RESTAURANTS BE ACCESSIBLE. MAYBE IT'S THE SAME APPROACH WE HAVE TO MEAT: EAT LESS OF IT, BUT BETTER QUALITY. IT'S LIKE: EAT OUT LESS, BUT PAY MORE."

(ANNIE SHI, RESTAURATEUR)



INTERESTINGLY, THIS TIME OF CERTAINTY HAS LED TO AN UPTICK IN ACTIVITIES RELATED TO DISCOVERY AND SELF-EDUCATION, WITH 50 PERCENT OF RESPONDENTS CITING THAT THEY'VE FOUND NEW INTERESTS VIRTUALLY DURING THIS PERIOD.



"WHEN THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM AND MOMA REOPENED, HALF OF MY FEED WAS CURATORS AND ARTISTS AND DIFFERENT PEOPLE GOING TO VISIT THE MUSEUMS. I THINK THERE WAS A DESIRE FOR A FEELING OF NORMALCY THROUGH ART. CERTAIN MUSEUMS LIKE THE MET HAVE THESE PIVOTAL WORKS WHERE SEEING THEM IS LIKE VISITING A FRIEND OR A FAMILIAR FACE. WHEN YOU VISIT A MUSEUM, THOSE THINGS ARE STILL THERE."

(DANIEL ARSHAM, ARTIST)



ACCORDING TO OUR DATA, WHAT'S AT THE GREATEST DEFICIT IN OUR CURRENT CRISIS OF EXPERIENCE IS A HOLISTIC SENSE OF ACTIVATION.

READERS LAMENT THAT RESTAURANT-QUALITY FOOD DOESN'T WORK WITHOUT THE RESTAURANT, AND THAT "VIRTUAL" VERSIONS OF THINGS LIKE CONCERTS FEEL MORE UNFULFILLED THAN SIMPLY LISTENING TO MUSIC. "YOU CAN'T RAGE WITH 20,000 PEOPLE FROM YOUR COUCH," IS A COMMENT WE GOT HERE THAT RINGS VERY TRUE.

"WE HAVE BECOME MUCH MORE AWARE OF WHAT HAPPENS IN AN EXHIBITION SPACE. THERE ARE PEOPLE MOVING AROUND VIEWING, BUT ALSO LOOKING AT EACH OTHER. WE MISS THAT EMPATHIC FEELING OF ENCOUNTERS WHICH ARE NOT REALLY ENCOUNTERS. IN MUSEUM SPACES, YOU CAN SWITCH BETWEEN THE COLLECTIVE AND THE INDIVIDUAL. I MISS THE FEELING OF BEING IN A SPACE WITH OTHER PEOPLE WITHOUT NECESSARILY HAVING TO BE SOCIAL. YOU CAN BE SOCIAL, BUT YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE SOCIAL."

(CHRIS DERCON, PRESIDENT OF THE GRAND PALAIS MUSEUMS)



**WHAT'S GONE IN THIS MOMENT IS HAPPENSTANCE,
SERENDIPITY, CHANCE, AND ALL OF THOSE OTHER WORKS
THAT CAN ONLY BE DESCRIBED WITH MAGICAL LANGUAGE.**

**IT'S THEREFORE SURPRISING BUT NOT SHOCKING THAT
READERS LISTED "LEAVING ROOM FOR THE SPONTANEOUS
AND UNPLANNED" AS THE NUMBER ONE THING THEY
MISS ABOUT REAL-LIFE EXPERIENCES.**

CREDENTIALS

**A White Paper By Highsnobiety,
Writing and Interviews
by Kevin Pires,
Research By Emily Dreesen
and Mike Nallan**

**Source:
Highsnobiety proprietary survey,
September 2020; n=652,
Age: 80 % 18–34
Location: 42 % North America,
37 % Europe, 14 % APAC,
7 % Other**

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ABOUT HIGHSNOBIETY

Highsnobiety is a media authority on youth fashion and the culture that surrounds it. Started as a lifestyle publication which grew out of a streetwear blog launched in 2005, Highsnobiety now also operates an in-house creative agency, shopping platform and insights- and strategy consultancy for its brand partners. In a world where being culture-obsessed has become not the exception but the rule, Highsnobiety's mission is to turn curious outsiders into cultivated insiders.

For more first-hand insights on the business behind youth culture and what makes our market tick, sign up to the Highsnobiety Insights Newsletter:
<https://mailchi.mp/highsnobiety.com/8bxo03cgv2>

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STAY SAFE