

Accenture Life Trends Report 2023 forecasts relationship dynamic shift between business and people

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Following several years of constant global instability, people are gaining greater access to emerging technologies - including AI, Web3, and tokenisation - advancing the next generation of creativity, community and data privacy.



Accenture Song

Accenture Life Trends 2023

In turn, businesses and leaders should prepare for shifts in business models due to changing customer behaviours as they find increasing value in new emerging technologies, forecasts the Accenture Life Trends 2023 report from Accenture (NYSE: ACN).

Building on the 15-year legacy of Fjord Trends, this report - now titled Accenture Life Trends 2023 - identifies five global macro movements across human behaviour that will shape business, culture, and society in the coming year.

From learning to live in [permacrisis](#), to increasingly seeking to belong in online communities, to missing work's intangible benefits and using emerging technology such as AI to accelerate creativity, the landscape of day-to-day life has been greatly altered. This shift will push businesses and leaders to operate in radically new landscapes, further cites the report.

"Disruptive moments have people questioning what sense of control they have over their own lives. As they inevitably adapt and get a handle on things, the decisions made to exercise more control will affect the brands and organisations they interact with," said Mark Curtis, global lead, thought leadership, metaverse and sustainability, Accenture Song. "These new power dynamics will create opportunities for businesses to develop fresh and modern ways to engage and build customer relationships."

Crowdsourced insight and intelligence from Accenture Song's global network of designers, creatives, technologists, sociologists, and anthropologists, the annual bellwether forecast – which leveraged AI for the report's imagery – includes the following trends and actions for businesses to heed in 2023.

1. We are in a permacrisis but will adapt

The world is moving from one global catastrophe to the next. But, as humanity has for millennia, people are adapting to instability by switching between four responses: fight, flight, focus, and freeze, which will affect what they buy, and

how they view brands and their employers — and companies need to be ready.

In Africa, change and instability are constant. People are used to adapting and finding creative ways to move forward. Accenture's [research](#) has found that people in emerging markets have more experience in dealing with uncertainty. Their ability and willingness to adapt outstrips that of people used to living in mature markets. Africans also use their resilience to force change: in 2022, the [Kenyan political uprisings](#) helped lead parliament to review policies, and [climate protests](#) in South Africa challenged oil companies to stop surveying the coast for resources.

"Every problem is an opportunity in disguise. In this state of 'permacrisis', we recommend that brands, businesses, and organisations in the continent act by partnering with unconventional channels and media for increased reach and relevance while managing the accompanying risks," said Emma Carpenter, studio director and design capability lead for Accenture Song in Africa.

2. What's next for loyalty

In an unstable world, people seek places where they feel they belong. As a result, modern brands will be built as communities first, reshaping loyalty and brand participation. For example, the majority of Accenture's research focus group participants have tried new hobbies or joined new communities in the past six to nine months. Emerging technology is largely driving the three threads to enable this model.

- a. Communities of belonging: on platforms like Reddit, Discord, and Twitch.
- b. Token-gating: exclusive access reserved for "token holders only."
- c. Collectables: digital arts, autographs, trading cards, and more.

In uncertain times, Africans find security and comfort through participation in like-minded groups and communities. Culturally, local community is at the heart of society. It's a construct that is embedded in all aspects of life and so forming closely connected groups is a natural behaviour on the continent. People are finding or otherwise creating places where they feel like they belong online. In some cases, these communities are born out of people taking matters into their own hands when an organisation falls short of their expectations. [EskomSePush](#) was built by two frustrated customers of the South African power utility and is now used by a community of six million people daily to plan around electricity outages.

"Brands need to engage with unofficial communities — not the ones they have formally created as communication channels, but those that also exist on the fringes by supporting new platforms that communities are building themselves, giving people alternative ways to nurture and build meaningful connections with other like-minded individuals," said Carpenter.

3. The importance of work intangibles

As the debate continues around the return to the office, one thing is clear: it's not yet a success for many people. Everyone has felt the loss of intangible office benefits, like chance encounters and consistent, close guidance of junior talent. Now the consequences of the loss are becoming clear. Without in-person engagement, companies can stand to lose mentorship, innovation, culture and inclusion. It's time leaders went back to the drawing board to make a logical, mutually beneficial plan.

In Africa, work is largely unregulated. From solo traders including kiosks, hawkers, taxis and domestic workers, about [80 %](#) of workers are employed in the informal sector — in comparison to over [25%](#) in Europe. The remaining, more formal sector is made up of small businesses and/or monitored by the Government. Many Africans rely on a cash-based economy to access essential goods and services such as food, clothing and transport. As the sector largely relies on close contact, [most jobs](#) in Africa cannot be performed from home. Office work on the continent is minuscule.

"While remote or hybrid working is uncommon for most Africans, we expect African organisations to refocus their connections with the informal sector to leverage insights to drive business innovation – among others."

4. AI is becoming people's co-pilot for creativity

Artificial Intelligence is now in the hands of the everyday user and is a new tool for the creative process. Suddenly, neural networks have been made widely available to create language, images and music with little effort or skill. Developments within AI are also hitting the market at an astonishing speed. At scale, this is an incredible breakthrough for creativity. Companies need to consider how they will stand out in the sea of AI-generated content and how they use AI to enhance the speed and originality of innovation.

Many Africans are excited about the potential of creative AI and others see it as a threat that will take away jobs and Africa's authenticity. While both sides have their arguments, it's not simply black and white — the impacts of AI technologies will be multifaceted. The business case for AI in Africa has been bright with experts from the [State of AI in Africa Report 2022](#) noting exponential growth and attracting significant funding. AI for Good highlights the Tunisian AI startup InstaDeep receiving \$100m funding earlier in 2022.

"Until recently, AI has mostly been used to [help solve Africa's most pressing problems](#) in health, finance, education and agriculture. Now, with the sudden emergence of AI that makes art, music and writes stories — once thought to be uniquely human talents; we will begin to see a disruption to the creative industries. Getting started with creative AI technologies has a low barrier to entry. An internet connection and a smartphone are all that is needed to start — making it viable for mass adoption in Africa," said Carpenter.

5. Digital wallets could end the digital identity crisis

The use, and misuse, of personal data is long overdue for a transformation. Transparency and trust in online brand experiences are quickly diminishing in tandem. But control of their data could soon swing back to the user. Digital wallets containing tokens (representing payment methods, ID, loyalty cards and more) will allow people to decide how much data they share with — and even sell to — organisations. That's great news for brands: the data that people do hand over will be even more valuable than the third-party information that is no longer collected in a cookieless world.

The African continent still has a long way to go. Nations like South Africa, Kenya, Zimbabwe and Uganda have [data protection or privacy laws](#), but in other cases, regulators have not been successful in enforcing them. Coupled with poor education and literacy, public awareness about the importance of data protection in Africa is low. In this context, some companies have introduced limited versions of their platforms for free in exchange for users providing some personal details e.g., [Facebook Free Basics](#). For most, the benefits of having access to these platforms outweigh concerns about the personal data they share.

"With the rapid adoption and potential of digital wallets, we recommend businesses in Africa rise to the challenge of creating more secure and innovative services to enable Africans to own and trace their information. Businesses can help create trust and adoption through awareness of these technologies and their utility," concludes Carpenter.

"Shifts in control ultimately lead to shifts in power, and these seemingly small - yet profound changes - in human behaviour will alter the power dynamics between people and organisations," said David Droga, CEO and Creative Chairman, Accenture Song. "In roles as leaders, workers, customers, consumers and creators, people seek ways to regain control. The outcomes will look different - a new picture of progress - from what we've seen before thanks to changes in attitudes and maturing technology."

For more insights and guidance for businesses and leaders, please visit the full [Life Trends 2023 report](#).

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