

Renaissance 2022

# The New People Shaping Our Future



# **Executive Summary**

**Understanding people has never been more vital in an age of rapid and unprecedented disruption that demands informed action.**

Society emerged from the Black Death of 1346 with advances in science, the arts, and politics. The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed us similarly to the frailties of life, shattering long-held assumptions and changing who we are, what we prioritize, and how we live. With that it brought about a rapid acceleration of digitization and new opportunities in science, technology, healthcare, education, manufacturing and more.

Today, we are more digitally connected and committed to personal improvement, solving the climate challenge, and wellness. We are also more willing to share data, try psychedelics for mental health, and invest based on social media, according to analysis by the Oliver Wyman Forum.

Our research, over the past 15 months of monthly surveys across 100,000+ people in ten countries, uncovered 8 critical personas of our age. Accounting for over half of the population, they are at the forefront of 30 critical macro trends disrupting society and organizations, and account for trillions in global spend. We invite you to discover more about **“The New People Shaping Our Future.”**

Who are “The New People Shaping Our Future?” New Collars getting the training they need for higher paid jobs, Virtual Natives who joined the workforce during the pandemic, and Climate Catalysts eager to engage business in solutions. There are also the Digital Bloomers who have become technology converts, and Citizens of the Metaverse who are tapping into augmented reality. The Hivemind Investor is rocking the investment world with independence and virtual communities. The Wellness Protagonist is now armed with data to focus on preventative health, and the Psychedelic Explorers are considering the therapeutic uses of psychedelics.

These personas are making their mark in 2022, most new or so changed that they’re hardly recognizable. What’s more, they’re evolving their habits as consumers and employees so quickly that the playbooks businesses once relied on are obsolete. Companies need to continuously reassess their strategies to keep current with these consumers and employees or risk falling behind. People have changed and are demanding action. Now business must too.



## The Citizens of the Metaverse

Ready to embrace an augmented reality, they're uploading their consciousness and not looking back.

The Citizens of the Metaverse (Metazens) are people willing to participate in the metaverse without hesitation. They are ready for the next iteration of the internet, poised to dive into the immersive and integrated parallel world it will forge. Buy a piece of real estate that only exists in the ether? Yes, please! Curate a collection of non-fungible tokens (NFTs) and make friends you've never met in person? Sure! Wear a device in your ear that tracks and analyzes your every move? Why not! In a way, this group is the extreme amalgamation of others. They embrace the virtual work lifestyle of the Virtual Natives, the investment attitudes of the Hivemind Investors, and the new age approach to wellbeing of the Wellness Protagonists. They are on the cutting edge of every technological frontier.

Placing immense trust in the direction of new technology, they are not naïve—they acknowledge there are risks involved. They're simply willing to take them, experiment with them, and pay for them. They want to enhance what they already use the internet for, then expand into uncharted territory. They are molding a new market and will shape how the metaverse emerges and becomes enmeshed into a global future.

**13%**

of the population

**70%**

are willing to pay to access the Metaverse

## How They Think

**They are willing to pay for access to the Metaverse.**

**70%**

are willing to pay for the metaverse, nearly 3x as likely as the general population

**They are challenging the notion of value.**

**2x**

as likely to say virtual assets are more or as valuable as other financial investments (64% vs. 33%)

**Gaming is a key entry point.**

**82%**

play video games that simulate worlds and 39% make regular in-game purchases, 4x as likely as the others. They also attend virtual concerts and digitize their fitness

## Why They Matter

**They are the vanguards of an immense market opportunity.**

The metaverse is predicted to reach market value of \$250-\$800 billion in the next 3-5 years.

**They will influence the way the Metaverse is developed.**

As its earliest adopters, they will have outsized influence on how the Metaverse is developed.

**They predict how other consumers will understand the emergence of the Metaverse...**

...such as how long it will take to accept the tech and how they will weave it into their lives. Our data shows that people are more partial to the Metaverse with time.

## Implications

The Metazens will be the first to use new tools and the first to provide feedback that will influence how technology develops. They create ample opportunity for businesses to capitalize on their receptivity to paying for net-new goods and services. They also could provide insights about how other consumers think of the emergence of the metaverse and how they plan to weave it into their own lives.

Because the metaverse is as boundless and expansive as we have the creativity to envision it, there is an endless opportunity to develop this space. With such tremendous market potential and a group of willing and eager test subjects as the Metazens, organizations still have the chance to get ahead of the wave before it crests.

As the Citizens of the Metaverse interweave our realities:

- To what degree is the immersive web 3.0 an inevitability?
- Are you tailoring your products and services to a blurring physical and virtual reality?
- How will you make your entrance into the metaverse?



## The New Collars

As the distinct colors of their collars fade, so too must outdated workforce expectations.

New Collars are blue-collar workers who used the pandemic to learn new skills so that they could find better jobs. Their transcendence of single-collar careers is helping lead a labor revolution. While the entire world felt the effects of the coronavirus to some degree, the impacts were not equal. Many blue-collar workers lost jobs as the pandemic began. When working, they clocked hours in person—putting themselves and their loved ones at risk—while they watched white-collar employees migrate to safe remote setups, with their jobs and pay protected.

Rather than accept this fate, many New Collars set their sights on new horizons. More optimistic, community-oriented, resilient, and risk-taking than the general population, they reinvented themselves. They learned new skills to get the compensation and flexibility they crave and deserve, and their hard work has started to pay off. Many are shifting to better jobs, creating an even tighter labor market as baby boomers also retire. Blue-collar work remains a crucial component of the global economy, and while wages are rising, employers must act swiftly to close the gap between job demand and workers available given the accelerating departures.

**23%**

of the population

**74%**

of pre-COVID blue-collar workers

## How They Think

**They aren't concerned about their job prospects.**

**70%**

are optimistic about their ability to find a new job

**They're heading towards future-proof industries.**

**1/4**

of those that have switched jobs, have gone to software, electronics engineering, or IT/data processing

**They're taking advantage of online courses, and are not going back to school.**

**49%**

took free courses and 40% took a paid course. Only 1% went back to traditional formal schooling

**They're willing to stay in their blue-collar jobs, for the right reasons.**

**97%**

of New Collars would stay at their current job under the right conditions. A pay raise, better work-life balance and more flexibility were most cited to make them stay

## Why They Matter

**They are dissatisfied, and correspondingly taking action.**

**51%**

are satisfied with their current blue-collar jobs, compared to 84% of those who have up-skilled to white-collar

**They are at the forefront of a blue-collar revolution.**

**41%**

of them are currently seeking a new job, with 22% having successfully transitioned

## Implications

Though automation and AI may ultimately change many jobs, the need for blue-collar work is now more crucial than ever, as order books are 6 to 12 months deep, and demand for blue-collar labor in many developed countries outstrips demand for white-collar labor. But hope is not lost for organizations, as nearly all New Collars indicate that they have not closed the door on their old jobs. There is history, culture, and community in blue-collar work, and they are careful to evaluate their options before they depart.

By listening to the New Collars and understanding what they want and need from an employer, firms can make current blue-collar work more viable while paving the way for a more stable workforce.

As the New Collars continue to accelerate the labor shortage:

- How will you attract the best of the highly motivated and change-making New Collars?
- How can you shift your perspectives from "human vs. machines" to "human and machines"?
- What will you do to advance and retain them within your organization more readily?



## The Hivemind Investors

Empowered by the masses, they democratize finance and are reinventing the world of retail investing

The Hivemind Investors are those for whom social media drives investment decisions. On the surface, they appear to have a penchant for chaos and disruption. They've generated an entire retinue, rife with a culture of self-deprecation and a hyperbolic anti-establishment sentiment. While seemingly antagonistic, our research reveals that underlying their seemingly volatile behavior is a search for community, learning, and information equality as these newly minted investors dive into the world of retail investing.

In their DIY learning journeys, they've often leveraged online forums to make decisions based on popular trends and the instincts of the collective. Investing has become a way for them to find and build community, democratize financial markets and investing, and prove themselves capable of navigating the financial world. Through their sheer size alone, they have sway over the markets and will continue to have influence if their numbers continue to swell, but their ability to persist through more bearish market conditions remains to be seen. To win the hearts of this cohort at the forefront of the new wave of retail investing, firms should seek to understand the underlying needs and values that drive them and establish guardrails to protect their long-term financial health.

**10%**

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of the population

**1 in 4**

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Retail investors

## How They Think

**They were born from social media.**

**53%**

would not have been investing if not for social media

**They are first movers in investing in the obscure.**

**27%**

have invested in virtual real estate, more than 6x as likely as other investors

**They learn investing from each other.**

**51%**

indicated that social media taught them advanced investment strategies

## Why They Matter

**They have market moving capability.**

The threat they pose may be as significant a consideration as the opportunity their investment dollars represent

**They are sizable, growing and expect themselves and the movement to persist.**

They represent 11% of the global population, and 28% of retail investors, and are driving persistent innovations in retail investing

**They challenge the value proposition of financial advisors...**

...and seek to address a broad set of underlying needs, both financial and emotional

## Implications

The tenacity of the Hive suggests that financial institutions haven't yet convinced a large swath of retail investors of the value inherent in professional financial advice and management. Are there retail market segments for whom new value propositions are needed? Perhaps ones that emphasize community, opportunities to learn, and self-determination?

Organizations that simply assume Hivemind Investors will fall by the wayside risk missing an important wave of change. Without taking this new breed of retail investors into account, some will find themselves out of touch with a meaningful segment of their potential market. Failing to take the emergent needs highlighted by the Hive seriously risks leaving opportunity on the table.

As the Hivemind Investors continue to re-write the investment rule book:

- How will you adapt to increasing levels of financial literacy and self-direction?
- What guardrails should be in place to promote long term financial wellness of traders, who are embracing social media and taking a more active interest in investing?
- On the spectrum of chaos and order, how do you strike the right balance for this new wave of retail investors?



## **The Virtual Natives**

**Demanding and in-demand, Virtual Natives are disrupting the working world.**

The Virtual Natives graduated during the pandemic and have since joined the workforce in an almost exclusively remote capacity. They are redefining the very nature of white-collar employment and office structure—they work from their bed, their living room, a rental in Costa Rica. They spend their days glued to laptop screens, and—though inured to the routines of online life—they feel slighted, having missed out on celebrating milestones and fostering relationships in-person. Yet the pandemic has allowed them to curate their professional surroundings to their specific habits, making them less willing to sacrifice comforts.

Flexibility. Perks. High salaries. Regular recognition and praise. Their exacting expectations are becoming the norm as turnover rates continue to rise. To retain top talent, employers will have to cater to the demands of the Virtual Natives and others learning from them.

**5%**

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of the population

**12%**

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of white-collar workers

## How They Think

**They believe their career has suffered.**

**94%**

felt their career has suffered in at least one way

**They feel unsupported.**

**62%**

have struggled to develop skills

**They want flexible working arrangements above all.**

**69%**

are willing to take a pay cut for flexible working arrangements

**They work socially, even if not with their coworkers.**

**69%**

will find ways to work in the presence of other people, with 69% willing to invest in a co-working setup

## Why They Matter

**They are a sizable and growing part of the future workforce.**

**12%**

of white-collar workers today, and some of the most junior employees

**They have, and will continue to redefine hybrid work.**

**86%**

reported they would quit if required to return to the office full-time

## Implications

Failing to address their demands will drain an organization's talent pool and create unsustainable churn. Virtual Natives are likely to appreciate logic and utility above rules and hierarchy and may resist complying with any mandates they don't see as valid. Finding ways to engage them and earn their loyalty will be a persistent challenge—they have already reallocated some of the emotional energy that might have gone toward working relationships to other avenues. While they are at the forefront of some retention issues organizations face today, they also represent a unique opportunity for leaders to reset their operating model foundations to prepare for the future of work.

As Virtual Natives continue to disrupt and shape the future of white-collar work:

- In what ways has working remotely made things better or worse at your organization?
- Have you tuned your value proposition to appeal to the new generation of workers?
- To what degree should you rethink your office locations and work spaces to allow for fluid blending of remote (digital) interaction and episodic in-person interaction? To what degree do these two models blur, and how should they be kept distinct?



## The Psychedelic Explorers

Embracing the therapeutic use of psychedelics, some used the lockdowns to travel further inside.

The Psychedelic Explorers are those intrigued by and willing to try psychedelics in a clinical or experiential setting. They are curious and open-minded, and as more of these therapies move closer to market, they will be in the vanguard of early adoption. As such, they will be at the forefront both in further destigmatizing mental healthcare, and in transforming the outdated perception of the 1960s era “hippy tripper.”

This group places a high value on validated scientific research—many are awaiting FDA approval and the confidence of controlled doses and environments before taking the plunge. Some have already dabbled, but they take their experiences in this realm seriously and feel their experiences have supported them on their personal journeys. The increasing numbers of Explorers are already impacting the market. With a plethora of extant start-up ventures and robust investment interest in the space, some are predicting this emerging sector will represent a >\$10 billion market opportunity within the next five years.

**15%**

of the population

**63%**

feel psychedelics should be more accessible

## How They Think

**They think psychedelics can meaningfully improve their mental health.**

**60%**

would be open to trying psychedelics in a clinical, controlled setting to improve their mental health

**They take an organic approach to health.**

**5x**

more willing to try alternative medicines, with 83% having tried at least one method, relative to the general population

**They would like more research and use cases.**

**20%**

believe that they need to do more research before trying psychedelics

## Why They Matter

**They are at the forefront of destigmatizing and innovating the mental health industry.**

**2x**

more likely to be facing health issues, and more likely to seek out alternative, and more unconventional forms of treatment

**They represent the mushrooming of the experience economy.**

**\$10-\$15B**

is the estimated worth of the psychedelics sector by 2027

## Implications

R&D for psychedelic drugs saw record shattering investment in 2021, more than ten times that of 2020. Encouraging research results combined with their lower cost, quicker development, and low addictive potential make psychedelics a plausibly attractive alternative to traditional prescription therapies.

Legalization or decriminalization in some areas could also have broader economic benefits, particularly job creation and government revenue via taxation. The rise of marijuana acceptance and even social media are providing an additional push behind psychedelics reentering the mainstream. Early investors are optimistic that their efforts will bring us closer to a future where psychedelics aren't so taboo.

As Psychedelic Explorers continue to stretch the frontiers of mental health treatment:

- Have you identified opportunities to position yourself for this burgeoning industry?
- How will you contribute to the shape of new societal norms?
- What kind of guardrails can lead to new heights—and not to new lows?



## The Wellness Protagonists

With a wealth of data in and at their fingertips, their health has entered the chat.

While the pandemic evoked a universal focus on wellness, Wellness Protagonists are those who took it to the next level and used every new and existing technology to enhance the full spectrum of their wellbeing. Their behaviors will permanently alter our understanding of healthcare and encourage society to integrate self-care into daily life.

They kept their gym clothes sweaty, got to know their doctors, downloaded apps to track their progress, and added anything and everything to their shopping cart that might support their path to an ideal state of wellbeing. But the Protagonists look like average people, and some were even prior couch potatoes. What defines them is not that they're chiseled fitness fanatics, but rather that they're taking the reins of their own holistic wellbeing, and will drive demand toward an emerging ecosystem of providers prepared to help them do just that.

As the world continues to migrate towards self-care, Wellness Protagonists will ensure it retains its place in our global consciousness and will push the boundaries of what it means to feel nurtured on every level.

**21%**

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of the population

**61%**

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regularly engage in mindfulness techniques

## How They Think

**They want convenient healthcare.**

**44%**

prefer managing their health digitally vs. visiting the doctor in person, twice as much as the general population

**They are proactive about their mental health.**

**1/2**

maintain their mental health through therapy, 4x more than the general population. 46% also regularly meditate, >5x more than the general population

**They are data driven and inquisitive about their health.**

**72%**

digitally monitor at least one aspect of their wellbeing, 4x that of the general population, and 58% are willing to share their health data for more indepth insights

## Why They Matter

**They present significant market opportunities...**

...as they push for the modernization of healthcare and drive demand towards industries that service this space

**They are at the forefront of disruption for...**

...wellness products and services across all aspects of wellbeing  
...healthcare delivery models, with acceleration of patient-centered care

## Implications

With Covid (and long-Covid) set to affect public health outcomes for years, the pressure to prioritize wellness will only broaden and compound.

The diversity of Wellness Protagonists emphasizes the pervasiveness and applicability of the desire to craft a life that feels better. Organizations—from governments to businesses—that provide holistic and personalized health solutions will capture the attention of this community and their market potential. Wellness is no longer for those who can afford it. Wellness is for everyone.

As Wellness Protagonists continue to mold the future of healthcare:

- Are you incorporating the modernized expectations of wellbeing into your value proposition?
- What expectations should employers have from caregivers, particularly health insurers, in an increasingly digitized world?
- With the advent of tools and techniques for the 'quantified self', what is the patient-physician relationship becoming, and what does it mean for you?



## The Digital Bloomers

The Bloomers' digital skills flourished during the pandemic, ushering the world one leap forward toward technology democratization

Digital Bloomers are those over 45 who entered the digital ecosystem due to Covid-19. Until now, they stuck with analog ways of doing things because the old ways worked well enough, and there was no compelling reason to change. That calculus shifted quickly. The Digital Bloomers adopted a variety of new digital behaviors, from ordering groceries and banking online to connecting with loved ones via video chat.

Nudged by rolling pandemic-era lockdowns and our heightened collective awareness of the risk/reward trade-off involved in being within close proximity to others, the last moorings tying businesses to the “old economy” have finally pulled loose with the blossoming of the Digital Bloomers. This is the group whose altered behavioral profile will ensure the ways we work, interact, and do business do not return to their prepandemic norms. What will this new world look like, ushered in by their digital blossoming? And are there parts of the old one that we ought to fight to preserve?

**12%**

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of the population

**42%**

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Sometimes struggle to learn digital tools without support

## How They Think

**They are generally more digitally eager.**

**62%**

are more willing to use digital products than pre-COVID

**They have difficulty with digital products.**

**74%**

indicated that they find digital products difficult to use either some or all of the time

**They are fairly independent.**

**57%**

indicated they are learning digital on their own over time

## Why They Matter

**They are a sizable segment.**

**12%**

of the population, with unique needs, providing opportunities to consider from a product design perspective

**They are here to stay.**

**70%+**

indicated their behaviors are sticky

**They are a growing segment.**

**71%**

indicated that they will likely use more digital products once the pandemic is over

## Implications

The Bloomers act as a new target audience for digital products, and their presence should shape new designs, offerings, and features. They are challenging digital companies' abilities to create and distribute products inclusive of all ages. Only about half the Bloomers believe this is happening and feel their needs are a consideration within the dialogue. They are increasingly willing to digitize more elements of their day-to-day lives leading to ample white space.

Businesses should focus on optimizing the experience of digital solutions for Digital Bloomers. To ensure the Bloomers continue to be an adequate part of the equation, organizations can begin with areas that demonstrate a lag in digital acceptance.

As Digital Bloomers continue to embrace developing technology:

- Are you ready to make your existing products and services more sticky?
- Given the share of wallet of these new consumers, how will you adapt your offerings?
- Are there partnerships and collaborations with other brands that are now within reach?



## The Climate Catalysts

**Insisting that businesses take responsible action, they’re pushing the leaders toward a sustainable future.**

The Climate Catalysts don’t believe businesses and governments are taking adequate steps to address climate change and have taken activism into their own hands. Time is short, and inaction is catastrophically unacceptable. Climate Catalysts skew older (35+) and are those who have been committed to recycling, buying carbon offsets, and writing to their government representatives since awareness of climatic shifts first appeared as a blip on the collective radar.

They may not be front and center in the media, but they are the ones walking the walk and putting their dollars behind it. They intimately feel what is at stake, both for themselves and their descendants, with increasing urgency. Operating at the “human” scale (recycling those cans, writing those letters) when what’s called for is drastic mobilization at the “humanity” scale is futile. To face the global climate challenge requires a Herculean coordination effort. Covid-19 has demonstrated that cooperation of this magnitude is indeed possible, accelerating the Catalysts' resolve to create positive change.

**13%**

of the population

**46%**

plan to boycott companies that are unable to take effective action on climate change

## How They Think

**They recognize no one solution is a quick fix to combat climate change.**

**34%**

believe improved energy & fuel are the way, but industry process and material improvements, more efficient construction, follow close behind

**They are frustrated by stagnancy.**

**60%**

are disappointed with the lack of progress made by world leaders in the past 5 years

**They expect businesses to do more.**

**65%**

feel businesses are not providing the products and services needed for individuals to do their part

**They are altruistic.**

**85%**

are worried for people worldwide, and 72% are concerned for their own children and grandchildren

## Why They Matter

**They use their dollars to speak to companies.**

**74%**

say they are less likely to buy from companies that do not value climate change, and 84% say they would pay a premium for sustainable offerings

**They are leading the charge towards a more sustainable future.**

**13%**

of the the population, they are bringing along their family, friends, and communities with them

**They are walking the walk.**

**55%**

have recently changed their dietary habits because of climate change and 97% are certain they'll sustain their behavior

## Implications

Climate Catalysts have reconsidered how they use every energy source, including how they fuel their bodies. They travel less frequently, both daily and for leisure, and rely more on their own two feet, with many forfeiting the luxury and excitement of taking flight. They even factor sustainability into their investment decisions independent of their return expectations. With an invested effort to modify how they live, they will accept nothing but the utmost sincerity from companies in offering products and services that will cater to these shifts.

Over the coming years, we anticipate climate activism taking on a new urgency, practicality and strategic organization spurred by this clarity and resolve. Climate Catalysts will engage in collective action as consumers and demand that businesses take responsible action and play the leadership role they must.

As Climate Catalysts demand faster change:

- To what degree should you incorporate climate goals as part of your mission?
- What responsibility do you have for enrolling policy makers and other business leaders?
- How will you create value for your customers, and capture value from them, through your climate actions?



## **The Specter of Disinformation**

**We look at how mistruths and misunderstanding have come to tug on the fabric of our society.**

Even as the “New People Shaping Our Future” present fresh avenues forward from the pandemic, the shadow of a ninth stalks them. The phantom in reference? Disinformation.

In his book, *This is Not Propaganda*, Peter Pomerantsev presciently described the ability of disinformation to confuse and lull a populace into complacency. Who benefits when a society is collectively disoriented? When millions of followers of grassroots generated misinformation are allowed to thrive on social media? When people lose a shared sense of what is real and what is right? Disconcertingly, the answer to “Who benefits?” isn’t “No one.” It is those with malintent, whether they be home-grown aspiring autocrats, external geopolitical rivals, or malicious individual or collective actors.

We are all – private citizens, businesses, and society as a whole – vulnerable to the evils that can arise. As such, it is incumbent upon corporate leadership to play an active role in monitoring, understanding, and actively combating disinformation. It’s not only the right thing to do, but also serves the self-interest of firms to shield against a severe and looming risk.

**18%**

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say Covid is a hoax pushed by government

**65%**

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say organizations are not doing enough on fake news

## How They Think

**They widely believe in topics related to disinformation.**

**37%**

of the population think COVID was released on purpose, 29% that pharmacy companies are prolonging COVID for profit, and 18% that COVID is a hoax

**They abdicate responsibility for solving the problem.**

**83%**

say disinformation is a problem, yet only 63% are worried about it affecting them personally, and only 32% admit to have fallen for fake news

**They have high confidence in their abilities to spot fake news.**

**66%**

of the population say they can spot fake news, compared to 31% who say they were taught how to identify fake news

## Why They Matter

**They are all of us.**

Even those that are most skeptical, cautious, and that have a penchant for evidence-based information may fall pray to misinformation

**They expect brands and employers to take up the fight.**

**65%**

think organizations are not doing enough to stop fake news

## Implications

With few institutions left that they trust, people expect brands and employers to take up the fight against disinformation. Trust has eroded in traditional information conduits. More people distrust than trust local and national governments, mainstream news, and social media. In this environment, businesses may be the last line of defense, and people expect them to step up. An unfortunate reality is that many of the topics around which disinformation tends to spring up have been heavily politicized. Companies therefore may be uneasy taking a stand, for fear that it can be seen as taking sides politically, something that most brands would like to avoid for fear of alienating customers.

Most of all, despite the challenges of doing so, it is critical that brands and employers—not only media and information companies, but all organizations—take a stand against disinformation, continuously calling out both truths and untruths as we see them. The fate of our world may very well depend on it.

As disinformation continues to disrupt and threaten life as we know it:

- How will you create offerings that provide trustworthy information?
- How will you handle disinformation as it impacts your operating model and customers?
- Will you tolerate agents of disinformation in your business ecosystems and supply chain?

# About the Artwork

## An Accidental Renaissance

### How it started

With a year's worth of research in hand, the in-house creative team at the Oliver Wyman Forum pitched ideas to bring the work to life. We explored ideas that are agnostic to race and gender as well as the fantastical and imaginative. But the parallels between the Black Plague and its influence on western culture couldn't be ignored, setting in motion the creative direction and deliberate imagery in the Renaissance 2022. The Oliver Wyman Forum spoke with real people in its research, and we needed to capture that humanity in our portraits just as humanism influenced art in the 1500s.

We found common inspiration in The Accidental Renaissance, a social media trend that shares seemingly random photographs that resemble paintings from Vermeer to Rembrandt. We settled on a direction after speaking to a broad range of voices in the firm, but we needed an artist to shape the contours and fill them with color and life. We needed an ambitious and collaborative Carrivagio. We found Michelle, and it was her enthusiasm that proved we were going to make great work.

### The Artist

Michelle Watt is a Hong Kong-born photographer currently based in Brooklyn, NY. She specializes in staging conceptual narratives with a whimsical flair, often addressing themes of freedom and restriction within a cultural identity.

Her portrait and fashion work engender rich narratives, telling real stories with surreal application with the aim of giving life to unique standards of beauty and culture, including ones informed by her Chinese-American background. She finds joy in assembling tiny discrete pieces to create vast meaningful worlds, embedding hidden "Easter eggs" as varying social commentary throughout her work. Her photographs have been published in The New York Times, USA Today, and Blanc Magazine.

Her unique aesthetic folded the baroque vision into a subvertly modern diorama. Michelle's passion for tableau was vital in presenting rich images of allegory and substance. Instrumental in guiding the details and decisions that make each portrait so potent. Together with this artistic approach, less determined by business logic, we developed a more personal and innovative language.

### **Creative Direction**

Our aim was to craft eight intimate portraits and one tableau to represent the archetypal consumer trends we saw coming for 2022. Each is a collection of human stories and not indicative of one individual. We want audiences to reflect upon and examine our new characters as they would a historic painting. Using the visual language of Renaissance art, more specifically the Baroque era, we are creating images that are a story in themselves, rooted in real research but taking on the qualities of lore. We are aware of this as a potential bias in western art; however, our ambition is to be aspirational and make unique work that incites discussion and contemplation and can be seen as a forward-looking reimagining crafted by many voices. Butterflies play a symbolic role; metamorphosis caused by the pandemic reflects new behaviors and habits; many individuals have transformed and society will be for the better.

### **The Shoot**

Planned before a spike in COVID cases, a very talented crew came together in San Francisco. Wardrobe, set, props, hair, and makeup. 26 people over two days built and transported sets to paint the portraits in rich detail and allegory. Rapid tests, masks air filters & humidifiers. Everybody had a backup, even our photographer. A scrappy work ethic and can-do attitude were a highlight of making something we can be proud of. This was a case study in contingency planning in the era of COVID.

### **Inclusion and Diversity**

Our mission is to use our platform to celebrate and value humanity's myriad differences. We rely on a data-driven approach to understand the world, but we also know that data alone will never be sufficient. Data is the starting point from which we imagine a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive future.

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