

# 2022 Global Brand Letter December Edition



007 theme composer



Tech products gender-hued



Talc no-good for babies



Irresistible Coke+coffee



Invented Two-Buck Chuck



Vuitton sustainability logo



Russia McD replacement/ Marriott



Flaming Tesla

# 2022 Global Brand Letter December Edition

“I believe in luck: how else can you explain the success of those you dislike?” - Jean Cocteau

“Now that I’ve grown old, I realize that for most of us it is not enough to have achieved personal success. One’s best friend must also have failed.” - Somerset Maugham

“Everyone is an artist until the rent is due.” - Paul Richard

Coastal Grandma has been spending a lot of time in hyperphysical stores, engaged in cross-dimensional content moderation. She swears KOLs have a first mover disadvantage, and is suspicious of Gen Alpha’s addiction to LARPs. An exercise in effective altruism can only result in intimations of additionality. She needs to address The Eliza effect with an eye on longtermism, but within the constraints of attribution science. It will take some serious nearshoring to de-occupy the UHNWI. What she really needs is a Chief Remote Officer.

“We’re developing a new citizenry. One that will be very selective about cereals and automobiles, but won’t be able to think.” - Rod Serling

## Advertising

In a case of collision collusion, Swiss insurance giant **Axa** staged a fake battery fire and crash, using a fashionable EV for a video intended to raise issues about road safety. The yellow Tesla was made to hurl toward an obstacle, flip over, and land upside down on its roof. Moments later a pop erupted from engine and the front end of car burst into flames. Agency pyrotechnics ignited it. The final soundtrack excluded the edited-out cheers of the crowd in attendance.

Following years of spending billions to establish visual brand recognition for primary marks, **LV, Prada and Valentino** adapted new core brand signifiers to represent sustainability efforts. Virtue signaling elevated to a new high, or fresh case studies for *reidentification*?

FMCG companies have been preparing for an **economic downturn**. Snack and deodorant makers will offer new brands and smaller measures in packaging to target penny-pinching shoppers. Supermarket own-brand products were taking market share. **Unilever** beefed up marketing, increased advertising, raised prices, passed along higher costs to consumers tempted by cheaper alternatives. Brick and mortar stores downsized, carried less inventory, shelf space tightened. Familiar brands sought strategies for reinvention.

**Oscar Mayer** believes its core target audience is now the *pragmatic optimist*, the consumer who does not over-index on reading entertainment, celebrity and gossip-heavy publications. Aiming to insinuate the brand more into the cultural conversation and expedite web searches, a new

wave of advertising emphasizes levity and fun. You've no doubt already tried the weiner cake bologna face mask. Prepare yourself for olfactory branding where scratch-and-sniff ads deliver the appetizing aroma of sizzling bacon.

"You can't trust anyone. You can only trust me." - Vladimir V. Putin

## AI

Could **generative AI** improve the following text? Not without hyperbole and editorializing. *Silicon Valley's newest craze launched a feeding frenzy among investors. Stability AI, the startup behind the popular Stable Diffusion image-generating algorithm experienced a rewarding \$101m fundraising round. The company's founder denounced targeted advertising.*

How the AI app **neuroflash** rewrote the above text, typo included:

*Silicon Valley's most recent sensation evoked a mad rush among capitalists. Stability AI, the startup known for its renowned Stable Diffusion image-rendering formula was rewarded with an eye-watering \$101m capital raising round. The company founder vociferously denounced targeting ads phrase after phrase in a imaginative manner.*

**DALL-E 2**, a popular image generator from Open AI, saw users create more than 2 million picture files every day. It's open source and the app had 200K+ downloads at release. This particular flavor of AI is untethered from corporate influence: it even has an *easily disabled* basic safety filter. Non-consensual nude images proliferated, and people created disturbing racist graphics of "violently beating Asian women."

A resentful **Russian robot** broke a seven-year-old boy's finger during the Moscow Chess Open. The robot had taken one of the boy's pieces, the boy made his own move, the impulsive robot then grabbed his finger. Four adults rushed to help the boy, who was eventually freed. The boy finished the final days of tournament with his hand in a cast.

**LinkedIn**, a Microsoft company, routinely ran large scale social experiments on 20 million users over five years without telling them. The company conducted social engineering experiments with potentially life-altering consequences, under the terms of consent which users accept. Fiddling with the "People You May Know" algorithm, LinkedIn tested an influential theory in sociology called *the strength of weak ties*. It caused LinkedIn members to form more connections to people with whom they only had weak social ties. The big winner: LinkedIn. Users involved created more than 2bn new social connections.

"If ISIS started a streaming service, you'd call your agent, wouldn't you?" - Ricky Gervais at the 2020 Golden Globes

## Celebrity

**Prince's** estate finally settled with the tax man, six years after his demise. Contentious heirs and the IRS agreed on a worth of \$156m on real estate holdings and recordings. A deal was also reached with Primary Wave - who handle Elvis, Marilyn Monroe and James Dean IP - to sell

their stakes in his writer's share, name and likeness, and the Paisley Park property. The IRS originally estimated total value at \$163.2m.

Amid diminishing profits, **Gap** hoped to be seen once again as a defining, disruptive staple of American fashion. The association with a high profile celebrity had the potential to generate \$1bn in annual sales. The proposed line was never going to be big enough to change Gap's fortunes completely, but needed to be powerful enough to elevate the rest of Gap's brand. The designer would receive certain stock warrants when defined sales goals were reached. Apparently nobody at Gap had seen a study commissioned by a decision intelligence consulting company that charted the risks of banking on celebrity alone. While the designer had a sneaker collaboration with Adidas which had brought in \$1.7bn revenue, there were no guarantees of success for an untested ready-to-wear line. There was no denying his cultural influence and compulsive watchability. There was no way to predict a swift meltdown and public nosedive. The designer did not see himself in any way constrained by deadlines or seasons. Designs were never put into production. Professionals from Balenciaga were brought in to engineer prototypes in Paris and Zürich. A Times Square Gap store takeover turned out to be the first time customers were able to see and touch the clothes. A line consisting of two items, a \$300 catsuit and \$220 cargo pants were heaped into 24 industrial sized sacks lined up in two rows. \$550 thigh-high vinyl boots had been promised, but were not released until a month later. Pre-orders were taken for a round puffy jacket with no closures, made from recycled nylon and polyester fill; the jackets arrived five months later. Today you can find the above mentioned **Yeezy Gap** items remaindered on the internet, shards of retail memory.

A Taliban spokesman urges women to stay home because fighters haven't been trained to respect them.  
- NYTimes headline

## Epiphanies

- Brands now cultivate communities around **merchandise**. The challenge is to lure consumers who spend hours of their day *in the plastic*. Hence, unlikely partnerships between dissimilar categories result. Apparel an especially popular brand extension.
- There is still an enormous amount of silly money sloshing around the *crypto world*, even after the SBF and **FTX debacle**. Unsurprisingly, the Orange Dude got into the action with a set of ginchy NFTs offered at \$99 each.
- Brands are experiencing pushback on an SEC initiative to toughen rules using **green or sustainability buzzwords** in company and product names.
- The oldest members of **Gen Z** enter their mid-20s and show top preference for YouTube, Google, Netflix, Amazon and M&Ms
- If you wonder why Rihanna is a billionaire, you will discover **Fenty Beauty** one of the top brands popular with Gen Z women. In the same list, alas: **Doritos**.

**Western brands are vanishing from China** with international parent companies suddenly pulling out of the market due to a diluted interest in global names, Covid-19 clampdowns, and competition from homegrown counterparts. Domestic outfits have the home court advantage, and are proving better at similar consumer offerings and engagement. They excel at agile turnaround. Multinationals overspent on investment in flagship locations rather than engaging with extremely fragmented consumer groups often segmented by city tiers, lifestyle or dialect. Foreign invaders discovered that direct translations and Chinese faces in campaigns aren't enough. Companies need to demonstrate personality, character and help consumers develop interpersonal relationships. Chinese consumers like body positivity and diversity and rely on the insights of countryside KOLs and virtual avatars. Recent non-Western crazes: *digital clothing, tea collaborations, male beauty*.

A team from Michigan State University found a way to make **gummy bears from recycled bioplastic** used in wind turbine blades.

**Snoop Dogg** launched Snoop Loopz, a breakfast cereal similar in appearance to Kellogg's Fruit Loops. The rap star claims it is the best tasting cereal in the game because it has more marshmallows. With it he aims to support charities, fight homelessness, abet obesity and alleviate the munchies. He also launched **Indoggo Gin**, featuring seven premium botanicals, which he says is *easy to drink* and will leave you wanting more.

**Molson Coors** created an ice cream flavor called Dive Bar to invoke the experience of swilling Miller High Life beer at your local tavern. It's infused with *peanut swirl* to reference the quintessential bar snack, has a hint of *tobacco smoke*, and a gooey *caramel swirl* to incorporate the sticky bar floor feeling. Chunks of *carbonated candy* provide the iconic champagne of beers bubble, and *dark chocolate coating* is meant to summon the dark wood and dim lighting ambience of a beer-drinking environment. A 6-pack costs \$36.

Short videos can influence what people eat and drink. A Tik Tok celebrity named Chef Pii smothered various food items with her eponymous sauce, then ate them on camera. The rosy goop looks unconventional, and she enthusiastically enjoys it. There is no indication of what **Chef Pii's Pink Sauce** tastes like. The mysterious chef started selling it on a website. The sauce is made without an inspected food manufacturing facility, quality-control ingredients or industry standard packaging procedures, this much is known. Online conversation turned from people wondering what it tasted like to people cautioning against buying it.

New licensees joined a fast-expanding **Toxic Waste Hazardous Sour Candy** campaign: ice cream, drinks, clip-ons, and key rings.

**Balmain** partnered with **Pokemon** for a limited edition apparel line to include hoodies, sneakers, jackets, and sweats to be sold through Balmain boutiques and a Stadium Goods store in Chicago.

**Fred Rogers** Productions extended its partnership with the Bezos Family Foundation. The grant, the fourth for the famous kid-friendly neighborhood, covers a two-year period.

Can **carbon markets and blockchain technology** be combined to keep oil in the ground and stop deforestation? ESG, meet NFT, meet Adam Neumann. The two worlds, both fast-moving and mostly unregulated, sound like a good fit for the disgraced billionaire WeWork founder. A new cryptocurrency startup venture backed by Neumann sells NFTs linked to parcels of the Brazilian rainforest, essentially gaming the environment, a heady mixture of the tangible and the ethereal non-fungible territory. The scam involves avoidance-based carbon offsets purported to account for each ton of carbon that has not been emitted, that would have otherwise occurred, recouping the investment by issuing carbon credits to reflect avoided emissions. Huh? The company claimed possession of 41,000 hectares of land in Amazonas state, but a public prosecutor ordered them to present deeds to the land and questioned whether it obtained consent from local people and from the government's indigenous people's agency. Accusations followed that the company pressured illiterate members of the indigenous community to sign critical documents. The company planned a cryptocurrency offering, to issue NFTs on the disputed land, build infrastructure including an airstrip and a road. A slick promotional video touts the virtues of the invisible, weightless tokens.

When **El Salvador** adopted Bitcoin as *legal tender* in September 2021, a single unit was worth around \$47k each. As of 1 January 2023 a single Bitcoin is valued at \$16.6k. The downturn in crypto prices hit the local economy hard. Cryptocurrency and blockchain are the critical building blocks to government-backed digital currencies. More proof that the future knowledge economy will define the global economy.

It proved rather difficult to give **Patagonia** away, but Yvon Chouinard and his family successfully transferred their ownership of the famed company to a specially designed set of trusts and nonprofit organizations. The company, valued at around \$3bn, will continue to operate as a private, for-profit corporation intent on influencing a new form of capitalism. Much of the focus will be on nature-based climate solutions such as preserving wild lands. The family will pay around \$17.5m in taxes on the gift, and receive no tax benefit. Profits of \$100m a year will be used to combat climate change. "I didn't ever want a company," the reclusive founder said. "I didn't want to be a businessman." Chouinard wears old raggedy clothes, drives a beat-up Subaru, does not own a computer or a mobile phone. A senior executive commented, "I don't respect the stock market at all. Every billionaire is a policy failure."

For the first time in the brand's 50 year history, **Ralph Lauren** has redesigned the iconic polo pony logo. It's part of a digital clothing and accessories collection designed for the online video game Fortnite. The brand wants to invest in consumer technologies, gaming platforms and immersive virtual worlds. The co-branded line ties to a physical apparel collection. Still, RL registers concerns over privacy in the metaverse.

**Luxury** continues its drift away from being solely about *products*. Look for a fresh infatuation with digital collectibles, the concurrent development of both virtual and physical spaces. Buyers want more than a means to simply purchase a static object. They seek new ways to express more extravagant and unapologetic affluence, premium social signaling. Efforts are afoot to curate well-networked, personalized communities, and organize people with shared interest while restricting access to products. Increased focus to be placed on individual's interests and the experience they have, rather than on what goods they receive. The hospitality sector will play a greater role. Luxury brands curate money-can't-buy moments for VIP customers, among them rest-inations, digital dining clubs, guestlist getaways, holidays specifically aimed at improving sleep, dining at the city's most sought-after resto, an expedition to Papua New Guinea to find a rare pigeon. This will entail refinement of efficient and differentiating CRM systems that take full ownership and make maximum use of the data they collect.

"They were playing quiet stuff now, early morning stuff, stuff that came from deep inside a man's shoes, stuff that wept into a horn and told of busted love and better days and empty hotel rooms and neons blinking to a rainy night."  
- Ed McBain

## Gaming

Vehicle rustlers won out over mythological cowboys. Rockstar says major online game support for **Red Dead Redemption** is headed for the last roundup, and resources will shift to the more popular **Grand Theft Auto**. RDR players have long complained the game was underserved and overlooked in comparison to GTA. The game did not deliver content upgrades and experienced a series of failures including botched implementation of a premium currency, game-breaking bugs, misleading content promises, low communication with users.

"Life is death." - Alberto, from *Angolo Palladio*

## IP

**Mattel** inaccurately calls itself a *children's entertainment company*. The much-anticipated Barbie live action movie is about to open, on the heels of a 30,000 sq ft World of Barbie touring show. The immersive attraction inspired by Barbie's luxurious lifestyle featured a dreamhouse, laboratory, pink rooms, a full size camper van, and themed cafe selling sweet treats. Mattel opens its vault to revitalize dormant brands. *Major Matt Mason*, *Big Jim* and *Pulsar* action heroes return to market, and a live action Hot Wheels movie is projected. In the toy aisle, everything is tied to a movie, tv show or video game. Mattel says it will make greater use of Comic-Con and introduce toys in smaller sizes to appeal to collectors of all ages. Conclusion: format sells, not name.

## International brand pirate updates

- A Manila court ruled in favor of a *trademark squatter* named Victor Martin Soriano and his company Cyclone Trading. The Filipino small business owner prevailed over **Louis Vuitton** and the **Sussexes** after he beat the big names to the punch and filed Philippine trademarks for specific terms in 2020. He claimed no conflicting similarity between the marks and goods he trademarked LV and Archewell Harvatara and continues to sell locally produced deodorant products and fragrances. The logo, he says, refers to his relatives' surname Lopez-Vito, and he has an LV tattoo on his neck to prove it. "We are a serious company and care so much for our reputation."
- Shenzhen resident Hu Liang filed application in Latin America, Brazil and Chile under the name Dunder Mifflin Paper company, covering various clothing items using the name of a fictional paper company featured in the hit NBC show *The Office*. **NBC** sells branded merchandise on its website via a subsidiary of Staples licensed to sell a range of products outside the US under the same name. NBC hadn't bothered to file for trademark until November 2020.
- Kenneth Talbert, a trademark squatter is alleged to have built a business based on registering **trademarks belonging to others**, including Dunder Mifflin, Dillon Football (from tv show *Friday Night Lights*), Nostromo (the space ship from movie *Alien*) and Hillman College (setting for tv show *A Different World*.) Talbert's self-defense centers on his life struggle as a person 5'5" high.

**Gen Z** registers zero interest in conventional luxury or the *unattainable*. They prefer collectible pop items that subvert tradition. Accessibility and community are crucial to their lifestyle. Inclusivity is to Gen Z what exclusivity was to millennials. Subcultures are now mainstream. Underground DIY brands have more chance than ever to succeed. Story is the new currency. A luxury name is not enough to appeal to this generation. Chanel experienced backlash for increasing prices; Hermès was criticized for its quota system. LV and Dior moved away from fast fashion and soulless consumerism, and reinvigorated their brands with a sense of relevancy to a younger, culturally conscious audience more interested in subculture, streetstyle, sports, skate culture and music. Niches emerge from a different fashion sensibility learned about on social media. Reflecting fluid ideas of self identification, a majority of Gen Zers reject easy categorization of their race, gender or sexuality. They want to see the real authentic TikTok you, *personality* and *values-based*, rather than solely image-based like on IG.



Would you be happy wearing the brand signature of your favorite **fast-food or convenience store**? These major players believe they will gain staying power by placing their logos in limited edition collections available online.

	McDonald's	7-11	Subway	WaWa	Circle K
Ecommerce shop	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊
Branded apparel	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊
Collectibles	😊				
Special license		Nike	Bioworld	Eddie Bauer	Port Authority
Partner			Primark		

When it came to the business of addiction, **McKinsey** played both ends against the middle. The ham-handed consultancy denied any wrongdoing as it helped market vaping, cigarettes, and opioids, or that its concurrent FDA contracts posed a conflict of interest. According to its annual report the consultancy meant to bring *a moral purpose to these businesses*. By late 2017, as smoking rates began to decline, vaping became popular, prefiguring the industry's transformation from selling a largely agricultural product to a scientifically-engineered cigarette with fine-tuned nicotine levels. Reconstituted tobacco was shown to help achieve toxin thresholds that researchers considered sufficient to ensure addiction. McKinsey advised Juul Labs as it helped the company gain a greater valuation than Ford. It offered advice on branding, organization, retail, flavor evaluation, youth vaping prevention, regulatory issues. It performed a pricing study for Juul's fashionable vaping device, surveyed teenagers as young as 13, asking them to rank flavor names. (The favorite flavor name among 13-21 year olds was *mint*.) A slide deck prepared for Altria, formerly Philip Morris, offered ideas on how the tobacco company could keep customers and lure new users. Consultants suggested a Marlboro smartphone app where smokers could win points redeemable for small prizes. A stated goal was to make one of its products the Nespresso of e-vapor. McKinsey had both a booming health care practice and lucrative contracts with Big Tobacco at the same time as it took in \$77m in consulting contracts with the FDA during the Bone Spurs presidency. For years its tobacco clients were filling hospital beds with the sick and dying at significant cost to society. The company continued to advise hospitals and government agencies on how to reduce health care costs and improve medical outcomes, an arrangement it preferred to keep secret. Amid a backlash of lawsuits and government sanctions, Juul dropped all U.S. advertising, discontinued most of its flavors in 2019, and paid a settlement of \$438.5m in 2022.

**Logitech** claims its gender-inclusive PC gaming accessories won't be subject to *the pink tax*. The products, specifically geared toward women, feature rounded corners and kitschy recreational colors. The pricey polychromatic collection disappointed buyers with short battery life. We're cool with the neon green headset, but what genius signed off on the unenlightened heart-shaped carrying case?

The 31 new **emojis** released in 2022 included a gender-inclusive pink heart, which smiley-centric people have requested for quite some time. Of the 3000 digital petroglyphs already in use, the most popular newbie is *shake face*, emblematic of the dilemmas of the new and reductive pictographic eloquence.

“Never argue with someone whose TV is bigger than their bookshelf.” - Emilia Clarke

## Metaverse

### A Short Treatise on Asia’s Idol Economy

A huge market fueled by toxicity, hysteria and youth-driven trends, it’s a vast pop ecosystem driven by expanding purchasing power. Fans spend gargantuan sums on merchandise, branded products, global-scale concerts, meet-and-greets, pumped up by celebrity ambassadorships. South Korea’s K-Pop industry lives largely in the metaverse. BTS, with 100m fans, sold out *virtual concerts* during the pandemic, as they earned stratospheric sums on merch sales. Blackpink, the South Korean girl group, is headed for 100m fans called BLINKs **블링크** and has 1bn YouTube music video views. The South Korean girl group Lightsum launched a *digital clothing* collection under the name M3TALOVE. All the groups stage *Web3 real-time virtual events*. The Taiwanese Mandopop star Jay Chou released digitally rendered versions of his “Phanta Bears”, sold as NFTs, the fastest selling non-fungible token in the world. He now expands his metaversal presence via *digital collectibles*. Web3 presents new possibilities for fans: a place to practice dance moves, take selfies, directly interact with new friends, purchase NFTs which support the artists and creators who continue to receive royalty fees from subsequent transactions. Fans select, purchase and own authentic *virtual special edition collectibles* and *digitally tokenized moments* which they locate in new corners of the internet that have yet to be regulated. While VIPs can engage with their communities, there is potential for scams and frauds. This has encouraged the rise of *virtual idols* to mitigate the risk, synthetic presences who do not come with the personal baggage an IRL celebrity carries.

In the Middle Kingdom, Beijing’s **Cyberspace Administration** placed stringent bans on the idol market. The agency prevented fan pages, limited the number of times a celebrity or associated product could appear on web pages. China has a non-existent resale sector for such assets, and no established secondary market.

“The only completely consistent people are the dead.” - Aldous Huxley

## Obits

### Sonny Barger, 83

Self-proclaimed Maximum Leader of the Hells Angels motorcycle gang, he was undisputed elder statesman of the biker scene. He admitted pulling a gun on Keith Richards at Altamont, was arrested almost annually, usually on assault, weapons or drug charges. At once hard core and media savvy, he realized there was profit to be made from the Angels’ notoriety and tried to clean up their image by hiring a PR firm. He trademarked the name and sued anybody who used it without permission, including Marvel Comics and the film director Roger Corman. He

wrote best selling books, consulted on biker films, retired to Arizona, took up yoga, stopped using drugs, and in his final years encouraged children to avoid nicotine products.

### **Fred Franzia, 79**

He said countless times over the course of his career that a person should not have to pay more than \$10 for a bottle of wine, that wine should be enjoyed and consumed on every American table. As such, he created the Charles Shaw brand, which enabled consumers to obtain a bottle of plonk nicknamed *Two Buck Chuck* for just \$1.99 each at their local Trader Joe's market. He accomplished this by buying and selling wine in bulk, only at opportune times.

### **Margaret Keane, 94**

She was the victim of an epic art fraud by her husband, Walter Keane, a charming rogue and an aggressive former real estate salesman who persuaded her to lock herself in her basement studio where she labored up to 16 hours a day. He claimed to have executed her work, promoted himself as a great artist and his wife as a dabbling amateur and threatened her life to secure her silence. Though savaged by critics, paintings of the big-eyed, sad children trapped in dystopian worlds of deprivation and misery gained popularity, appealed to the masses but not to art critics. Walter opened galleries in San Francisco and NYC, prices soared, he licensed prints, posters, postcards, coffee mugs, plates. Her unattributed works went into collections of famous entertainment personalities and politicians. She said nothing publicly, remained passively complicit in the fraud for a decade. In 1995 she won an uncontested court-ordered separation from her husband, then a divorce. Though awarded damages of \$4m, her husband declared bankruptcy and she never received a cent from him. Vindicated, a 2014 film by Tim Burton called *Big Eyes* told her story and helped to rehabilitate her reputation.

### **Dietrich Mateschitz, 78**

Dietrich was a salesman in Thailand for P&G and discovered *Krating Daeng*, the drink which was renamed Red Bull. The rebranded red elixir became the global market leader in energy drinks. Via generous sponsorships he associated the brand with extreme sports such as surfing, cliff diving, winter events, mountain biking. Later he bought sports teams in Austria, Brazil, Germany, Ghana and USA, and used his estimated \$25bn fortune to set up a Formula 1 team. He exploited technical gray areas, reveled in the role of disrupter with an abrasive approach to rule-makers and rivals. At the same time he helped to regenerate his native area of Styria in Austria, promoted local crafts and arts, and funded a spinal cord research charity.

### **Willie Lee Morrow, 82**

He became intrigued with its long, stiff tines meant to tease out curly hair after a family friend brought a traditional wooden comb from Nigeria. Morrow spent years refining the design, eventually had seven Afro Pick models and was selling 12,000 units a week. He developed dozens of hair care products, straightening and softening treatments, wrote books, started San Diego's first Black-centered radio station, owned *The San Diego Monitor* newspaper, traveled thousands of miles internationally training barbers and beauticians for the US Department of Defense. He was the barber of choice for pro athletes, California politicians, musicians and

movie stars. His shop, a mainstay of the San Diego community, featured a 10-foot tall Afro pick outside the entrance where his salon and lab were located.

### **Nichelle Nichols, 89**

In 1966 she was cast as Lt. Uhura on Star Trek, portraying a highly educated and well-trained technician with a businesslike demeanor, generally clad in snug red doublet and black tights. She was among the first Black women to have a leading role on a network tv series. In November 1968 she received the first interracial kiss in television history. She planned to leave the series in its third season, but MLK persuaded her to remain on the bridge of the Enterprise. In 1977 she became an ambassador for NASA, helped to recruit female and minority candidates for spaceflight training and furthered the cause of diversity in space exploration.

### **Monty Norman, 94**

He was busy on another assignment in 1962, but film producer Cubby Broccoli offered to fly him and his wife to Jamaica where location filming based on a popular novel by Ian Fleming was happening. He dusted off an earlier composition from an abandoned production, switched the main riff from a sitar to a twangy electric guitar, and audial branding history was made. John Barry arranged the film score, leading some to assume he had written the riff, and Barry did not disabuse the notion. But in the intervening six decades, Monty Norman's catchy *James Bond Theme* has opened each of the 27 films in the iconic series.

### **Rommy Hunt Revson, 78**

In 1986, after a stressful divorce from a Revlon heir, she bought a used sewing machine and taught herself to sew. She conceived of an inexpensive accessory which combined fabric and elastic, a band which held a pony tail without damaging the hair. After obtaining a design patent, big retailers like WalMart, KMart, Target, CVS and Walgreens agreed to become licensees and paid her over \$1m a year. Copycat manufacturers flooded the market, but her original design was worn by millions of women, including famous actresses. A Space Shuttle astronaut donated one she had worn in orbit to the Smithsonian. Ruth Bader Ginsberg had a collection of them. And Hilary Clinton considered an alternate title for her memoir, "The Scrunchie Chronicles".

*"Pueblo chico infierno grande."* - Mexican saying

## Place Branding

Arsonists started a fire which affected a nearly 60 hectare Unesco World Heritage Site on **Easter Island**. Enigmatic statues carved by a Polynesian tribe more than 500 years ago suffered charring and irreparable damage.

God Save the King in **Las Vegas**, where the mean lawyers who control Elvis Presley's image warned Vegas wedding chapels over the unauthorized use of his name, likeness, and random elements of persona in advertisements, merchandise and otherwise. The evil Authentic Brands Group - who also manage the estates of Marilyn Monroe and Muhammad Ali - sent Cease & Desist letters to chapels that specialize in or offer Elvis ceremonies. All 55 of the city's

freestanding chapels have the option of hiring an Elvis artist for a ceremony. Elvis weddings remain enormously popular, patronized by tourists from small towns. Loss of them might destroy a portion of the wedding industry, which produces an estimated \$2bn, a significant piece of Nevada's annual tourism pie. Those affected are small businesses just starting to recover from the COVID shutdown; a number of people could lose their livelihoods. Conceivably a chapel could reach a financial licensing arrangement. One egregious offender, Graceland Wedding Chapel, says the business performs 6400 Elvis weddings every year.

**Dubai** suspended a 30% tax on alcohol sales. The kingdom is promoting its historical sites and considering legalizing wider sale of booze. The Gulf's party capital has for decades managed to attract more tourists and wealthy expatriates than its regional rivals. But tourists regularly complain about the prohibitive cost of licensed restaurants, which mark up alcohol prices four to five times. The war in Ukraine has also seen Dubai emerge as a financial haven for big-spending Russians. The easing of Covid-19 restrictions in China is another potential new stream of tourists and property buyers.

"My life has been full of terrible misfortunes most of which never happened." - Michel de Montaigne

## Social Media

Kim Kardashian and Kylie Jenner led an online insurrection and forced **Instagram** to pause the rollout of new copycat features ignited by the popularity of TikTok. The TikTok app has now been downloaded more than 3bn times globally, the first app *not owned by Meta* to reach this landmark. The revamp planned more full screen video content to be promoted over photographs, and reduction of the number of recommendations. Kardashian and Jenner have combined followers of almost a billion. They employed a familiar-sounding slogan of "Make Instagram Instagram Again". Following backlash from users, influencers and celebrities, Meta announced it was pausing full screen testing, but said IG needed to evolve.

“Young men in polo shirts swarmed the deck, fist bumping to *I Rock I Sweat I Dance*, a Euro-house track that consists mostly of the title being said over and over again for three-and-a-half minutes.” - NYTimes article about the Hamptons

## Vocabulary

**angertainment** - programming, especially on television and talk radio, which provokes extreme negative reactions in its audience

**graymail/gray zone tactics** - the threatened revelation of state secrets in order to manipulate legal proceedings; campaigns of intimidation and psychological warfare, used to force the government to abandon a case.

**Higg Index** - an obsolete suite of tools in the apparel and footwear industry, once used for the standardized measurement of value chain sustainability. Greenwashing tool.

**Kidult** - consumer category encompassing Gen Z, Gen X, millennials, and baby boomers. The transition from kid play to adult play, a lucrative area of brand affinity development.

**kleptoparasitism** - when a bird beats up on another bird for its lunch.

**operant conditioning** - the underlying mechanism of social media addiction. Akin to the role alcohol plays in alcoholism.

**plasticity** - a process by which antidepressant drugs were able to regrow lost synapses

**shadowbanned** - digital exile: your posts are rendered invisible to other users. Makes your profile difficult to find without your knowledge.

**stealth wealth** - vital if you are rich. The practice of keeping your accumulated assets private. Prevents identity theft, and typically involves living below your means.

**stochastic terrorism** - ostensible random acts of violence, provoked by coded language, dog whistles and other subtext in statements by public figures.

**techodus** - migration of wealth from north to south. Miami in particular has become the destination for what some are calling a *mass thought experiment*.

**vibranium**- a rare mineral from Wakanda, with daunting military and industrial uses. See: *unobtainium*

"I can't go on, I'll go on." - Samuel Beckett

## What Is A Brand?

Does it still hold that a brand sits at the intersection of intention and action?

Now that we're solidly mired in an era that questions the very idea of truth, I am wondering if a brand is more a matter of perspective, entirely dependent on *who* is doing the looking.

Can a brand be different things to different people, stakeholder-specific?

This notion refutes the idea of a unified brand strategy, that one size fits all.

Thus, increasing emphasis on local, not global.

I've written about brands for over two decades, advised clients all over the world, and acted as brand guru for a prominent Swiss company.

I quote here from one of the founding principals of that firm.

**"A brand is for suckers." - Fritz Gottschalk**

But if you are feeling hopeful:

**A brand is a possibility for redemption.**

Wishing you all the best in your prime in 2023.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "SMoss". The letters are cursive and fluid, with a long, sweeping underline that extends across the width of the signature.