



Enjoying the ordinary

Growing satisfaction with the basics of life focuses more on making the most of the day-to-day and increasingly valuing the ordinary.

Even before the economic downturn in Europe and the US that started in 2008, there were several signals that more people in these regions were seeking a less complicated life. As one participant commented: 'After fifty years in a consumer bubble, maybe it is time we again focus on what is really important.' Allied to this, some research shared at one of the early workshops pointed to a shift in attitudes. Europe is going back to basics – but with a twist. From restaurants to holidays, to the simple day-to-day activities like catching a bus, in developed societies there is notable momentum building towards placing a greater value of the ordinary. As austerity measures introduced into the same countries start to bite, some see that, rather than fighting against the economic necessity, many will embrace the opportunity to drop down a gear or two and enjoy the simpler times. This is certainly not currently on the radar in fast-growing emerging economies – where more, not less, is often the priority for many – but some see that this attitude shift may spread as people embrace a more sustainable and more holistic view of life.

At one level, this is fuelled by the continuing interest in the past, albeit a rose-tinted view. Traditional living in terms of values, design and food has been a growing aspiration over the past few years. The widespread popularity of Shaker kitchens, the global

success of simple Scandinavian and Japanese product design and the organic food phenomenon can all, in varied ways, be seen as ingredients in enjoyment of the ordinary. Equally, the popularity of organisations such as the Scouts and the enthusiasm for growing your own vegetables also point to a rising interest in the basics. In elements of society today, some commentators see this as a counterpoint to numerous fake, artificial and virtual worlds that we are being presented with. In addition, the continued pressure to perform is seen by many as 'an enemy of happiness' and they hark back to less intense times. But, in doing this, people want to 'connect with a reassuring reality in a non-romanticised way' and often with elements of modern convenience mixed in. So we can, for example, see the return to camping holidays but with extra comforts: from Mongolian yurts in Switzerland to eco-lodges in Portugal and rustic villages in Spain, 'glam camping' is a growing vacation option. Within the online world we can also see fascination in the everyday: already many people use Facebook, Twitter and personal blogs as online diaries and record the most banal comments with an unsentimental focus evoking a 'nothing much happening' view of the world.

Following varied discussions, what appears to be on the horizon for the next decade are two main shifts in attitudes – an increasing backlash against excess

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and a change in the perception of 'ordinary'. While pay restraint, higher taxes and reduced access to easy cash across Europe are now increasingly certain, many believe that the backlash against excess was already building ahead of the austerity programmes that governments are now implementing to reduce debt. As an increasing majority take satisfaction in 'lagom' or 'just enough', people are beginning to focus on living more sustainable lives and use tried and trusted credentials, such as local and familiar, to reinforce the relevance of what is the ordinary day-to-day.

Because we live in an ever faster-moving and ever more virtual world, many more people are now craving a familiar routine. Although there are many benefits to the increasingly connected world, it means that our time does not need to be segmented in the same ways as before – for example, few knowledge workers have a nine-to-five job nowadays. This means, in its simplest form, many want to have a few normal routines in place – having regular meeting times, exercise programmes, social engagements and so on. They do this because it is getting increasingly difficult to fit 'normal' life into the day.

A major consequence of this could be that many will seek to give the ordinary greater value – and in so doing, of course, making it less ordinary! Arguably this is already happening in some sectors (luxury

camping, for example), but also consider the way food and drink can be made more ordinary yet can be given a premium value at the same time – it's perfectly possible to pay a small fortune for that English staple of sausage and mash at any number of 'gastro pubs' across the British countryside.

By 2020, several consumer insight experts see that much higher value is expected to be placed on the ordinary and 'premiumisation' is one route through which this can be expressed and communicated. People already pay a premium for the more authentic product or experience. Looking ahead, this could equally apply to the more basic alternatives. 'Ordinary basic interactions are important for many and connections become enhanced both by making them more special and/or more simple.' The disadvantage, of course, is that in the future the 'ordinary' may well only be accessible to those who are wealthy enough to pay for it.

A parallel issue is what is being termed 'slow luxury'. Fuelled partly by image and partly by the sustainability agenda, high-end products and services are focusing more on enjoying experiences for longer. As Mark Philips of Jaguar highlighted in his point of view on the future of transport:

"Luxury goods buyers, I believe, will want to have items that are visually more discreet. At the height of the credit crunch, shoppers on New York's 5th Avenue were

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disguising their designer label purchases in brown bags – and this may not be a short-term fad. In other markets, we are leaving the era of buying disposable IKEA-esque goods and seeking items that offer longevity and quality – a future heirloom perhaps. This is, in some ways, a return to the values of previous generations.”

If slow luxury seeks to further promote nostalgia then, as other segments of the market follow on, premiumisation of the ordinary may become even more widespread.

A big question about enjoying the ordinary as a long-term consumer shift is in its global vs. regional scope. Western Europe is seen as the heartland for this, and some suggest that this is because it is in Western Europe where economic growth is starting to plateau, society is increasingly comfortable with itself, and an increasingly secular population is taking a more responsible, sustainable focus on life. The Scandinavian view of the interplay between people and nature is often cited as a role model here but many see this spreading further: 'In Western Europe,

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a desire for greater simplicity and more “me” and “us” time drives resurgence in the simple everyday.' Some experts, however, also point to similar attitudes emerging in parts of the US while others felt that 'enjoying the ordinary' is largely about adopting some core values that have somehow got lost in the economic scramble of the last few decades.

Maybe, as some have argued, a less consumerist, less consumption-based aspiration will evolve as a global ambition. The American Dream of economic prosperity leading to happiness could, by the end of the decade, be replaced by a more pragmatic goal of making the most of what you have.



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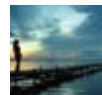
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