

EXPERIENCE INTELLIGENCE

BY GPJ

May 2026

From phone-free spaces and dark forests to academia nights and communal living, people are trading shallow consumption and perpetual connectivity for slower, smarter, and more collective ways of spending time together.



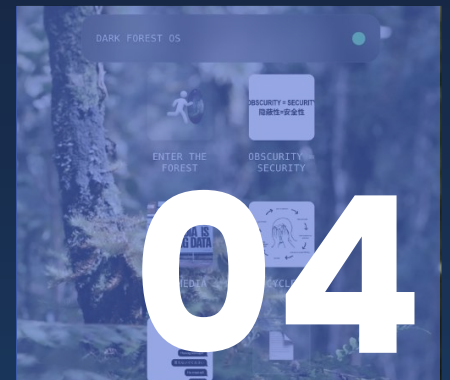
Mobile experiences are getting more intentional



Intellectual third spaces become social currency



Moving away from the traditional home



The Dark Forestification turn of the Internet



GEORGE P. JOHNSON
experience marketing

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Mobile experiences are getting more intentional

Trend spotted by **Donny Fox**

With digital detoxing on the rise, experiences pivot from content capture to physical presence.

In the era of social media addiction and [doomscrolling](#), consumers are increasingly fighting to [reclaim agency](#) over their attention. The push for digital detoxing has already begun to reshape social settings through [phone-free concerts](#) and [bars](#), and now, it's making its way into high-visibility brand events. [Pinterest](#) recently signaled a notable shift at Coachella—the ultimate social media stage—by asking guests to lock away their smartphones. It's a [bold strategy](#) that challenges the traditional influencer model, prioritizing authentic connections over instant content creation and Instagrammable photo moments.

Key Takeaway | Don't just capture the moment—enable attendees to live presently in it. Instead of removing smartphones entirely, brands should design for the true desires of their audiences, and cater the way they interact with technology to provide richer, more transformative experiences. Use tech to deepen the story, but let the physical world take center stage.

01



What it means

Leading brands in immersive experience design recognize the impact of prolonged screen time on younger, digitally-native audiences, and are creating experiences that make use of smartphones more intentionally. Rather than banning devices, brands use them to [direct participants back to the real world](#)—enhancing storytelling via physical touchpoints over digital add-ons.



Intellectual third spaces become **social currency**

Trend spotted by **Kianna Hendricks**

Ideas become identity through shared interpretation and a visible point of view.

From [Substack's evolution into a cultural engine](#) to the rise of "[bloomscrolling](#)," intellectual engagement is becoming social. Offline, this shows up in lecture series like Lectures on Tap and Profs & Pints which bring academia into nightlife, [PowerPoint nights](#) that turn analysis into entertainment and reading retreats like [Page Break](#) that blurs the line between media and gathering. In a culture dominated by short-form content, access to information is no longer differentiating, what matters now is having a POV and engaging in shared meaning-making with others.

02



What it means

We're shifting from passive consumption to participatory thinking. Depth is no longer solitary, it's social, increasingly performative and rooted in perspective. People want to engage with ideas and be seen doing so. Cultural relevance is now tied to intellectual credibility, signaling a move toward shared curiosity as a foundation for connection.

Key Takeaway | In a culture of surface-level content, brands that create moments for shared depth, dialogue and visible intellectual participation—rather than just talking about them—will stand out. Design experiences that invite audiences to debate, co-create, and visibly express their POV, turning thinking into something social, participatory, and seen.



Moving away from the traditional **home**

Trend spotted by **Jill Berry**

Shared living models are reshaping what “home” looks like.

The old way of living is unsustainable, literally and figuratively. Under pressure, people are opting out of older systems and redefining what “home” is. As people live longer, stay in school longer, and delay leaving the household, shared modes of living are becoming more common. Single mothers live together in [Mommunes](#), joining forces to split household bills and co-raise children. [Agrihoods](#) are popping up all over the U.S. [Birdnesting](#) allows the children of divorced parents to “nest” in their home while parents come-and-go. [Multi-generational housing](#) has quadrupled since 1971, where all generations share residential space, meals, stories, and support.

03



What it means

The shift from traditional nuclear family housing to intentional, communal living isn't just a housing trend—it's a *psychological shift* in how people define community, resource sharing, and belonging. To resonate with this new landscape, brands need to pivot from catering to individuals to catering to connected ecosystems.

Key Takeaway | Consider who else in a visitor's ecosystem needs to be a part of the conversation. Instead of booths, create common houses with a “lounge-over-lectern” approach. Offer incentives that kick in with sign-ups from the same organization or community. Host short-form council sessions rather than presentations. If your presence at the tradeshow feels like a tool that holds a group together, you've already won the psychological battle.



The **Dark Forestification** turn of the Internet

Trend spotted by **Jon Gaffney**

Attention overload is driving people to seek hidden places of connection and respite.

The “Dark Forest” comes from Liu Cixin’s sci-fi trilogy, [Three Body Problem](#). A Dark Forest means that at night the forest *feels* empty, yet in actuality everything is just hiding to avoid the risk of attention. [Yancey Strickler was the one who proposed](#) this internet trajectory towards a place of Dark Forests where the wider internet carried risk (judgement, tracking, cancellation, marketing) and withdrawing to closed spaces (Discords, Slacks, Telegram, group chats) could provide privacy, safety, quiet, and focus. Seven years on, the withdrawal pattern has only increased. This year, Strickler launched the [DFOS \(Dark Forest Operating System\)](#) to let people create their own “private internets,” while social media continues to be ever less social and, for better or worse, [Signal is being used for “Foreign Policy”](#).

Key Takeaway | There’s an opportunity for brand spaces to build their own Dark Forests rooted in the real tensions their audiences are grappling with. Shouting louder no longer works. Instead of trying to *steal attention* from your audience, *give attention* to them to understand their “why” for withdrawing. Doing so well carries a need to [exercise respect for their audiences](#). It’s hard work, but better than finding your brand alone in the forest.

04



What it means

Overload and saturation are at a breaking point. Attention fracking driven by the internet and smartphones have people giving up trying to “balance” and “curate their feed,” or just ignoring the noise. Instead, they’re stepping back into the bushes of Dark Forests—online and in real life. Private over privatized.

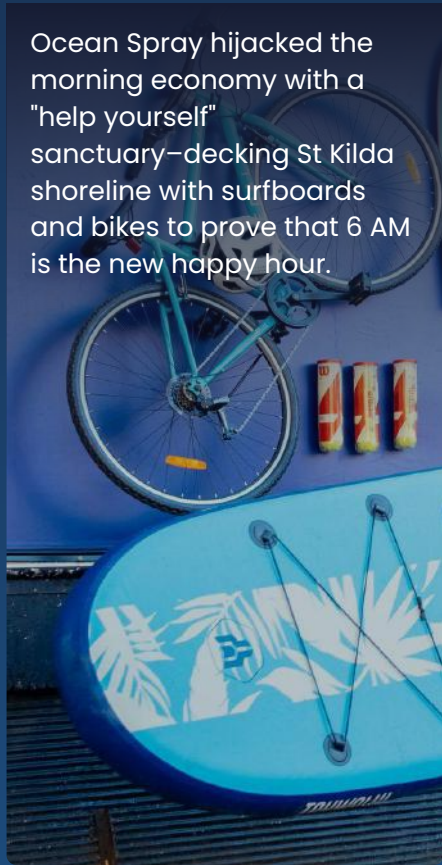


OUT-THERE EXPERIENCES

People, brands and marketers continue to push the boundaries of physical and digital experiences, with new and creative executions popping up across the globe.

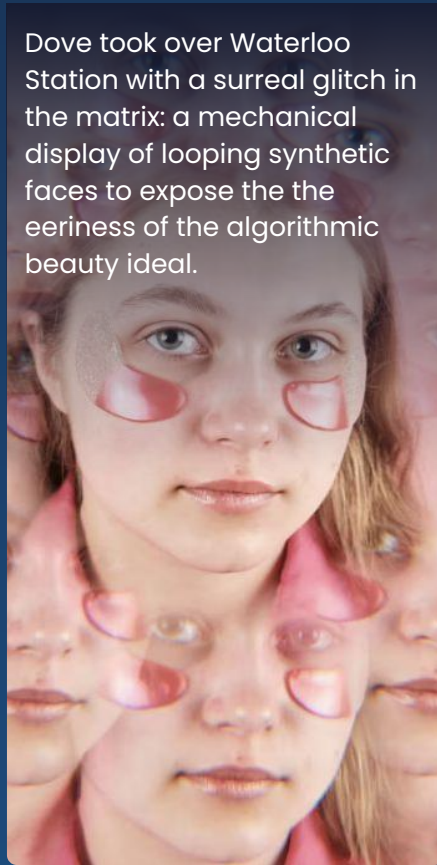
The Dawn Takeover

Ocean Spray hijacked the morning economy with a "help yourself" sanctuary—decking St Kilda shoreline with surfboards and bikes to prove that 6 AM is the new happy hour.



The Beauty Machine

Dove took over Waterloo Station with a surreal glitch in the matrix: a mechanical display of looping synthetic faces to expose the eeriness of the algorithmic beauty ideal.



Best Friend AI

Pedigree haunted São Paulo with a cryptic "Friendship AI," unmasking the tech as a matchmaking engine designed to drive real-world adoptions for shelter dogs.



Hobbit
3 years old



Lucho
4 years old

ND. AT |

The Block Party Reveal

Puma transformed Brooklyn into a global transit hub—deploying a fleet of trucks repping diaspora communities' local street foods, entertainment, and star-studded 4v4 matches.

