

Healing humans, brands and agencies

 By [Dono White](#)

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Will we ever move from living in the abhorring twenties to the roaring twenties, as predicted?



While businesses and countries try reclaiming what was disrupted over the pandemic years and recover, Ipsos has tried to envision the world of 2025 and beyond. On a macro level, the research house predicts the world will return to some sort of familiar power with smoother economic recovery.

Around 2025, countries will start experiencing shifts to localised power structures as they focus on slower regional economies, shortening supply chains and pushing innovation forward.

Where does this leave the people, brands and agencies in 2022, while sandwiched between the crisis of the past and the localised innovation of the future?

Humans of 2022

Although 2020 brought pain, it also highlighted the importance of collective humanity. It's as if the world has woken up from the spell of capitalism that saw people as consumers, employees, resources, commodities, target markets and data points. Therefore, I am deliberate in using the terms 'humans' and 'people' as we can never truly go back. I believe we will see a lot of push-back in all areas, from working hours to customer service.

At the core, humans are valuing personal progress over perfection and this is manifesting in three ways:

Bruised hearts on the fend

We are bruised from the amount of loss we have experienced – not just through death and retrenchment, but also in our love lives. February and March are generally referred to as the annual 'divorce season'.

However, monthly divorce rates during the pandemic exceeded the usual peak. Dating.com called 2020 The Year of Break-ups, reporting 67% of its users experienced heartbreak.



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As we begin to heal and seek new genuine connections that match our values, we will see people wanting to find joy through simplicity, playfulness, balance and meaning. Heart healing will start with oystering – a trend where people will start seeing the dating world as their oyster and approach it with renewed vigour and excitement.

Like companies mandating vaccinations, humans on the dating scene will demand 'convaxibility' and a sound mental state. Hinge's 2021 global dating trends report shows 91% of users now only want to date someone who is working on themselves and in therapy. While it all seems positive, 'bench-warming' (keeping a *stukk* on the side) will become more common.

Bruised minds on the mend

While the QR code may have been the comeback kid in 2021, psychologists were overwhelmed as mental health was put firmly on the agenda. Discover.ai's whitepaper speaks of 'lone wolves' finding each other online to move from being fans to actively participating fandoms.

This is not just brand or celebrity stanning – it goes deeper, as fandoms are taking on social issues as well, which 'can escalate to social aggression' and what they've dubbed 'hyper engaged often enraged'.



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As we strengthen up, communities are becoming louder and taking no sh*t from toxic people, brands, and governments, as seen through the Periodt movement and South Africans refusing the Omicron discrimination and rebrand of Covid becoming an African problem.

Bruised wallets on the spend

Despite the inflation rising at its fastest pace in five years, I believe we will experience some level of revenge spending (and associated revenge travel).

In short, this is the money people drop on drip, goodies and travel to make up for lost time – a plaster, if you will. Don't be fooled though – not every brand will benefit. Qualtrics 2022 Global Consumer trends report shows people want value, with 50% believing brands need to focus on lowering prices and fees and 30% demanding omnichannel ease when interacting

and purchasing.

Impact on brand and agency

Not only are people looking for value; they are vocal in wanting to see brand action and brand citizenship continue post the pandemic years. Forrester predicts 2022 to be the year of being bold, saying 'the old ways of working no longer work. The future is up for grabs.' This will mean relooking brands and investing in brand value. Failing to do so may see more than fishpaste fall out of favour.

"Strategists are busier and more productive than ever, having increased their speed of working and become closer to clients as they cycle through crisis and recovery," according to Warc. As we re-imagine brands, the relationship between client and the agency strategists will be vital.



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Warc places importance on this relationship, calling for the partnership between brand manager and strategist to see the importance of the bigger picture, focusing on fresh positioning opportunities for a very well-defined end-user while engaging in "upstream planning to have the widest impact possible".

For the agency, the time has come to elevate the importance of developing and retaining the strategist as that ultimately leads to great creativity. While the strategist is working harder than ever, being the custodian of brand and barometer for the 'consumer', agencies should take note of Sweathead's feelings check-in. Almost 50% of strategists around the world are looking to leave their existing agency or exit their careers. So, with all this talk of people and humans, it's fundamental to realise that strategists are humans – not resources – as well.

As we start living 2022 with Covid, hopefully shifting from waves to waning and from pandemic to endemic, it's important to remember – as brands, agencies, strategists, and humans – that time only heals if you're moving with it.

ABOUT DONO WHITE

Dono White is the strategic planning director at VMLY&R and WPP BAV South Africa champion.

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