



SOUL
SEARCHING
2021

PART THREE

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After 'Digital Is The New Mainstream' and
'Lives Re-examined', Red Lab brings to you
the 3rd report in its Google Trends 2021 series.
Here we look at how increasingly,
Geography is becoming History...

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BRIDGING DISTANCES

Newton's Third Law of Motion – **“To every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction”** – could not have been more true even in a life context. The pandemic kept countless people physically apart, and consumers quickly found ways to adapt. In 2021, as the sense of separation deepened, consumers moved beyond finding brief moments of connection to finding new ways to express themselves and nurture deeper, more ongoing relationships, both online and offline.

COVID-19 is still a top concern for people, and consumers in APAC remain wary of being in close physical contact with others. In fact, **people in India feel more anxious about resuming normal activities compared with the global average.**¹⁷ But fears of resuming in-person activities haven't overridden the basic human need for personal connection and belonging. Regardless of physical distance, rising searches showed how people continued to find new ways to connect, and how they were increasingly open to using digital to do so.

Affection has got affected as people started to adapt the way they expressed their feelings for one another. In lieu of physical touch or time spent together, people are searching for gifts they can send their loved ones, and inspiration for the right words to wish them a **happy birthday** or **anniversary**. An October 2021 survey found that **one in two APAC consumers are still choosing to meet their loved ones virtually instead of in person,**¹⁸ and searches for online group activities like **escape rooms, food festivals** and **concerts** are seeing consistent growth.



TIME TO PUT EMOTION INTO MOTION

Convenience may well be one of the biggest drivers of digital acceptance, yet too often marketers have seen digital only as a means of driving functionality. As people seek to bridge not only physical but emotional distances and form more meaningful human connections, brands too need to move on from thinking of digital platforms as purely functional channels or just an online front end. Instead, brands need to consider ways of getting longer-term value out of connecting meaningfully with their customers online. With their channel strategies they now need to reach the human behind every 'like', 'click' or 'buy'.



63%

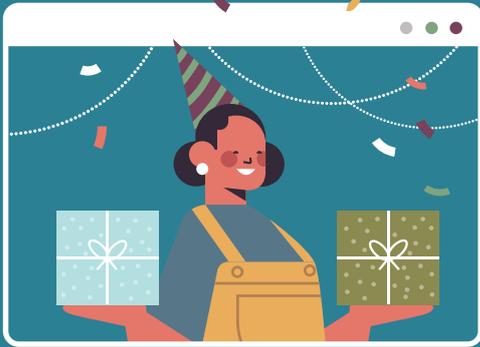


The 2 sub-trends under this over-arching trend of Bridging Distances are as follows:

1. Online expressions of affection

They say love has no language. Having said that, love languages too are keeping up with the changing times, with people searching for ways to show affection without in-person interactions. A recent survey showed that 63% of Indian respondents looked online for

+120%



inspiration on how to celebrate differently amid the pandemic, and some have even found new brands to help them do so.¹⁹

In India, search interest in **online celebrations** too grew by more than 120%.

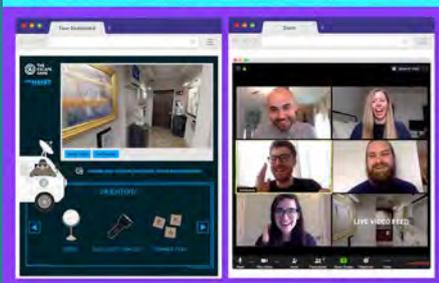
2. Digital for personal connection

Technology, which was till now considered to be impersonal, is now enabling people to connect in innovative ways, sparking interest in virtual versions of activities such as group meals, escape rooms and concerts. Even festive celebrations are going digital, with close to one in two Indians surveyed saying that they don't expect to host events at home for the upcoming holiday season, despite doing so in the past.²⁰

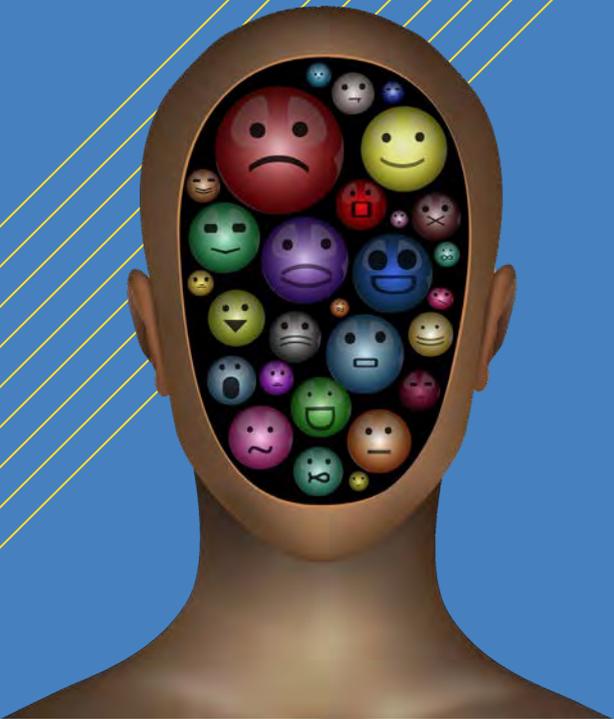
We see more than **120% growth in people searching for the online or virtual equivalent of offline experiences, such as 'virtual concert', 'virtual escape rooms' and 'virtual food festival'.**

As Indians look for ways to share meals together, even while apart, search interest in **'group order'** too has grown by 85%.

+85%



MARKETING IMPLICATIONS



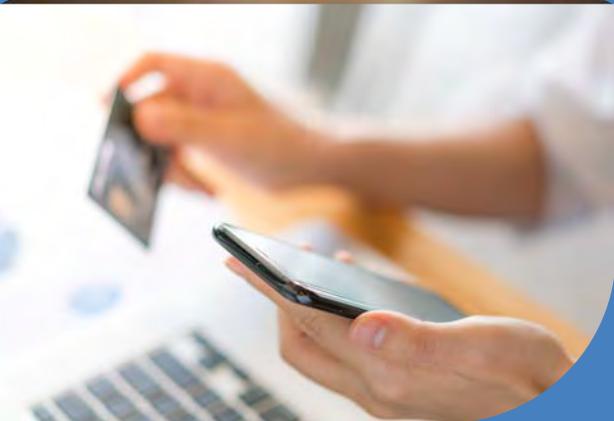
The emotional value of digital

Brands that only use digital as a functional channel are missing out on an opportunity to build and nurture deeper relationships with their customers, where both sides stand to gain and grow through emotional connection.

"Emotionally connected customers buy more of your products and services, visit you more often, exhibit less price sensitivity, pay more attention to your communications, follow your advice, and recommend you more — everything you hope their experience with you will cause them to do."

Harvard Business Review

An Emotional Connection Matters More Than Customer Satisfaction





Some of the implications of this trend are:

1. Build customer love and loyalty by consistently delivering at each touchpoint

Research shows how the consumer's path to purchase is driven by emotions. At each and every touchpoint, shoppers want to feel reassured and empowered, rewarding brands who help them navigate the messy middle.

Leverage the emotional power of digital to provide timely, accurate and relevant information across your organic and paid communication channels.

2. Tap into the value of virtual to augment real world experiences

Not everyone prefers in-person experiences, especially during a pandemic. Consider the value of virtual channels as a means of complementing or augmenting physical experiences, allowing the freedom of choice between online or offline events.

A case in point here is how **Bacardi India**, in November 2021, **transformed its annual NH7 Weekender music festival into a digital event**, using innovation and technology to create an experience that was just as enjoyable as its physical events in the past.



3. Invest in creatives that can connect and inspire



A brand's advertising efforts can be a key lever to build emotional connection and simultaneously drive campaign performance. In fact, creative is the dominant ROI driver across all media platforms, and especially so on digital.²¹

To bring your brand and products to life, ensure your ads showcase **how your brand can help people in their everyday life in an authentic way.**

What marketers need to remember is, that while selling more is their most important prerogative, even to do that, sometimes their best way out is to go beyond and be the bridge between their consumers and what they truly seek in their lives. That act, that gesture itself could turn out to be the best bridge between them and their consumers. **Community may still be the best bet to drive commerce!**



Sources:

Google Trends, India, Sep 1, 2019 - Aug 31, 2020 vs. Sep 1, 2020 - Aug 31, 2021, unless indicated otherwise

17. Ipsos, Essential Report, Oct. 7, 2021–Oct. 10, 2021.

18. Ipsos, Essential Report, Oct. 7, 2021–Oct. 10, 2021.

19. Google commissioned Ipsos COVID-19 Tracker, AU, BR, CA, CN, FR, DE, IN, IT, JP, MX, RU, ZA, KR, ES, U.K., U.S., n=500-1000 online consumers 18+ per market. Sept. 9, 2021–Sept. 12, 2021.

20. Google commissioned Ipsos COVID-19 Tracker, AU, BR, CA, CN, FR, DE, IN, IT, JP, MX, RU, ZA, KR, ES, U.K., U.S., n=500-1000 online consumers 18+ per market. Nov. 4, 2021–Nov. 7, 2021.

21. Nielsen Catalina Solutions, 2017.

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