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WORK IN PROGRESS
THE COLLECTIVE CONSCIOUSNESS

A JWT TRENDLETTER FEBRUARY 2009

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

One of the macrotrends we highlighted in our 10 Trends for 2009, the “Collective Consciousness” speaks to a new global mind-set: People are thinking less about “me” and more about what “we” can do together—whether for pure fun, for sharing resources or for addressing global issues like climate change.

The Collective Consciousness refers to a mind-set that’s common not among any one society or nation but rather among a group of global citizens around the world. These globalists are using digital technology to connect, swap ideas and organize events. They share an ethos of responsibility and cooperation that’s markedly different from the rollicking, individualistic party of the late 1980s and the 1990s.

This worldwide collaboration of smart, engaged citizens has the potential to produce viable ways to attack the world’s most difficult issues.

Key Questions

- What social and technological factors are enabling this trend?
- How do Web and mobile technologies help people share ideas and organize? How might people integrate their online and offline activities to accomplish collective goals?
- How might the collective consciousness trend evolve in the near future?
- What does this trend mean for marketers that want to tap into the collective mind-set?

Key Findings

People are pooling resources, sharing ideas and coordinating actions as never before. This trend is being fostered by several factors: the desire and ability to join communities based on fluid identities; the ease with which Web technology allows people to communicate, exchange ideas and organize collectively; a new generation’s desire to be more active and engaged in their world; and the growing realization that large-scale problems like environmental degradation need large-scale, collectively driven solutions.

Experimentation and innovation within the collective consciousness are flourishing as people integrate their online and offline activities to carry out collective goals.

Marketers can tap into the collective consciousness to create movement around brands. Businesses that successfully tap into the collective consciousness shift will have the ability to connect and form allegiances with consumers that go much deeper than the superficial and transactional.

Subway riders in Lisbon looked around in confusion, some averting their eyes in embarrassment. Despite the 46 degree weather—not to mention worldwide social norms—a group of commuters had boarded the metro bundled up in sweaters, scarves and hats but no pants.

These 40 Portuguese pranksters were not the only riders going pants-free that day. On Jan. 10, 2009, the so-called Urban Prankster Network coordinated a worldwide stunt called NoPants 2k9 on public transportation in 22 cities, including New York, Los Angeles, Vienna, Warsaw, Amsterdam, Sydney and Calgary. The point? Simply “chaos enjoyed,” as Charlie Todd, leader of New York’s NoPants 2k9, put it.

This sort of coordinated global action is one of the more whimsical examples of a trend we call the Collective Consciousness. One of the macro trends we highlighted in our fourth annual trends forecast last November, the Collective Consciousness speaks to a new global mind-set: People are thinking less about “me” and more about what “we” can do together—whether for pure fun or performance art (however you wish to regard NoPants 2k9), for sharing resources or for addressing global social issues.

The term “collective consciousness” comes from Emile Durkheim, one of the founding fathers of sociology, who used it to mean “the totality of beliefs and sentiments common to the average citizens of the same society.” Durkheim’s collective consciousness applies regardless of class, rank, generation or gender, forming the basis of a society’s morals and value systems. Some sociologists have described the negative aspects of the collective consciousness as groupthink and herd behavior.

Our definition differs from Durkheim’s. We are using “Collective Consciousness” to denote a mind-set that’s particular not to an entire society or nation but rather to a group of global citizens from around the world. These globalists are using the technology available to them to connect, swap ideas and organize events. They share an ethos of responsibility and cooperation that is a marked change from the rollicking, individualistic party of the late 1980s and the 1990s. While groupthink is a potential downside, the upside is enormous: that the worldwide collaboration of smart, engaged citizens will produce viable ways to attack the world’s most difficult issues, such as poverty and global warming.

This trendletter discusses the social and technological factors enabling the new collective consciousness, how this trend is likely to evolve in the near future and what it means for marketers that want to tap into the collective mind-set.

NO LONGER BOWLING ALONE

In 2000, Harvard public policy professor Robert D. Putnam published *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, observing that television, computers and other technological factors were degrading American civic culture. The book sees these technologies as keeping Americans from getting to know their neighbors, socializing with their friends, spending time with family and performing civic duties in their communities.

Fast-forward almost a decade and it seems as if Putnam's observations are losing relevancy. Yes, trends such as telecommuting, the fragmentation of media and the rise of personal everything—from computers and mobile devices to coaches and shoppers—makes it seem as if “me” is eclipsing “we.” And there is no doubt that in the U.S. and elsewhere, this focus on the individual has contributed to the erosion of social capital. But at the same time, technology is enabling new types of communities to emerge that go beyond the limits of geography, gender, age, race and national origin.

An explosion of choice over the past decade, fostered by the growth of media, technology and tolerance, is arming people with the ability to seek out like-minded souls and pursue common goals that are based on interest, faith, venues and needs, among other factors.

The number and diversity of these communities is increasing dramatically, giving people the power to pick their niche (be it macro or micro), regardless of historical constructs. Unlike many traditional communities, membership is not by default, nor is it exclusionary. Rather, communities are selected according to personal passions, core beliefs or inherent needs. They tend to encourage inclusion over cliquishness, xenophobia and/or bigotry. And while geography, gender, age, race and national origin may play a part in determining a person's selected communities, these factors are commonly joined by other definers (e.g., the Columbus Hispanic Working Moms Group).

Today, people are asserting their individual identities by choosing the communities they join in both the physical and the virtual worlds, and sometimes they're starting their own unique communities. Weaving fluidly in and out of these communities, self-selecting groups of I's form We's and begin to prioritize the community's interests above their own.

A GENERATIONAL THING?

The Internet's We potential is being explored and embraced most enthusiastically by people under 35. In the world's wealthier economies, these people have spent their professional lives, if not most of their formative years, with the Internet; chatting, e-mailing and Googling are second nature. They are at the fore of the technology wave, among the early adopters in their countries. Because this cohort is typically more tech-savvy than their elders (especially in places where Internet usage is nascent), they are more open to thinking and acting collectively using Web technology.

In some countries, online youth are using social media to make their voices heard in the political arena. In Egypt, for example, thousands of educated urban youth are using Facebook to organize street protests. (Facebook ranks third

after Google and Yahoo! as Egypt's most visited Web site, according to *The New York Times Magazine*.) A Facebook group called the April 6 Strike Group has 70,000 members—a notable number in light of the fact that a 2004 study by the Ahrum Center for Political and Strategic Studies in Cairo found that 84 percent of Egyptians aged 15-29 had never participated in a public demonstration and that two-thirds weren't registered to vote.

In Colombia, a Facebook group facilitated a worldwide protest against the FARC (a Marxist coalition that has kidnapped and murdered innocent Colombians) on Feb. 4, 2008. The group, Un Millon de Voces Contra las FARC (One Million Voices Against the FARC), was founded by then 33-year-old engineer Oscar Morales with 20 of his friends; less than 12 hours later, more than 900 people had joined, and by January 2008, the group included hundreds of thousands of members from around the world. Morales asked them to participate in protests in their home cities and to invite others along, and millions of young people from Bogota to Sydney to Paris turned out.

Social media and the proliferation of online technologies is only part of the story, however, especially in the United States. American Millennials (born between 1978 and 2000) are widely regarded as being more civic- and community-minded than their immediate predecessors. This is likely due in part to the fact that they're so-called "digital natives," but 9/11 has also played a significant role in their development. Academics including Putnam and John Della Volpe, polling director of Harvard's Institute of Politics, detected a shift in American values following the terrorist attacks and argue that 9/11 sparked a call to action for this generation.

Millennials are more politically engaged than American youth have been since the late '60s. UCLA, which conducts an annual poll of college freshmen nationwide, reported in 2008 that "for today's freshmen, discussing politics is more prevalent now than at any point in the past 41 years." Ninety percent of students polled said they had frequently or occasionally discussed politics in the past year.

One manifestation of Millennials' greater civic engagement can be seen in the growth of nonprofit management and leadership courses at universities across the U.S.: More than 230 colleges now teach these skills, up from 179 a decade ago, according to a Seton Hall University study from 2007.

COMMUNITY IN A WEB 2.0 WORLD

The notion that the Internet can stimulate a sense of community and encourage civic participation strikes some people as counterintuitive. After all, the Web is littered with navel-gazing blogs, self-promoting YouTube videos and millions of other "me"-centric behaviors.

Lakshmi Chaudhry, a critic for *The Nation*, argued in a January 2007 article that the Internet fosters narcissism and fame-whoring—and that the idea that the social Web can bring about "change, community, collaboration" is the "stuff of progressive fantasy." Idealists are "[substituting] individual self-expression for

collective action and [conflating] popular attention with social consciousness," she wrote.

Yet here we are two years later: Progressive fantasy has become reality. There are numerous examples of online tools changing offline behavior, encouraging people to meet, talk and organize in the real world.

Consider how social applications helped shape last year's U.S. presidential election. Barack Obama's campaign team created a social networking site, my.barackobama.com, where supporters could create profiles that tracked the campaign-related events they'd attended and how much money they'd raised. Volunteers could find local events, such as voter registration drives and phone banking efforts, or publicize their own efforts, such as debate-watching parties. They could also find neighbors who might help with fundraisers or carpools to nearby battleground states. The site was also used to recruit and train volunteers willing to make calls or canvass neighbors.

The online community surrounding the Obama brand is robust: On Facebook, President Obama has more than 5.5 million supporters and 500,000-plus wall posts, on Flickr, more than 700,000 contacts and on Twitter, 300,000 "followers." Overall, the online community generated 3 million calls to swing state voters in the campaign's final four days and more than 200,000 offline events in support of Obama. The site also helped Obama's campaign raise a record-breaking \$600 million from more than 3 million Americans, mainly through small contributions made over the Internet.

One might have assumed this social network would disband after Obama's victory, but the president's team is still communicating with supporters in an effort to maintain the communal spirit that thrived during the election and use it to rally support behind administration policies. A significant portion of this virtual community now expects such communication: According to a 2009 survey by the Pew Internet & American Life Project, 37 percent of online Obama voters who use social networking sites expect to receive updates from the administration on these sites; 34 percent of those who use e-mail expect updates in their in-boxes.

While the Obama campaign stands as one of the most innovative and successful examples of collective offline action facilitated by online social media, there are a wide range of others, such as the protests and demonstrations organized via Facebook in Egypt and Colombia. And in a novel twist on this concept, IBM workers in Italy held numerous offline meetings to organize a virtual strike against the company in the online world of Second Life.

In September 2007, more than 9,000 workers and 1,850 supporters attended a strike outside IBM's corporate campus in Second Life. According to the *Guardian*, they "marched and waved banners, gate-crashed a [virtual] staff meeting and forced the company to close its [virtual] business center to visitors." IBM agreed to renewed negotiations with the workers, who ended up with a better deal.

Collective action over the Internet is enabled by an array of Web applications that facilitate human interaction. The social networking phenomenon, which has given rise to MySpace, LinkedIn, Facebook, Hi5 and Bebo, among scores of others, is all about joining people into communities. These tribes organize around commonalities such as religion, school, workplace, goal or interest. By acting as social lubricants, social networking sites help people connect with far-flung friends and family or find new likeminded pals, and to cheaply and efficiently communicate with them.

The next iteration of this phenomenon is integrating the online world with offline activities to work toward collective goals, as Obama's campaign workers and the IBM union leaders did so successfully. How best to do so is still up for debate, as labor experts Brendan Smith, Tim Costello and Jeremy Brecher note in "Social Movements 2.0," an article that ran in the January 2009 issue of *The Nation*:

How does offline and online social movement building fit together? We know it is essential, but where and when to rely on face-to-face contact during an online campaign and vice versa is still unknown. When for example, do we call a virtual versus a nonvirtual protest; when is physical contact required to build lasting and deep solidarity versus cheap and fast Facebook or Twitter campaigns?

New technologies will help integrate the online and offline worlds. Social networking applications are evolving to take advantage of GPS-enabled mobile devices, making it easy for people to coordinate meet-up times and places. For example, mobile apps like Latitude and Loopt display a user's location on a map that friends can access. Anecdotal evidence indicates that such tools stimulate offline interaction, as writer Mathew Honan observed in the February issue of *Wired*:

These GPS tools were making me smarter. And more social. While working downtown one day, it looked like I was going to have to endure a lonely burrito lunch by myself. So I updated my location and asked for company. My friend Mike saw my post on Twitter and dropped by on his way to the office. Later I met up with a couple of people I had previous known only online: After learning I would be just around the corner from their office, we agreed to get together for coffee.

As experimentation in this realm continues and GPS-enabled devices are widely adopted, it will become increasingly clear how networks of people want to transition their online activity to the real world. What's already clear is that marketers and advertisers would do well to create multiple touchpoints online and off that complement what's happening in the consumer's virtual and physical environments. And by sponsoring virtual networks that help people become active offline with communities or causes, brands will strengthen ties with consumers in unique and authentic ways and provide added value to customers.

Meetup.com, a social site that allows members to create and publicize affinity groups—from the ordinary (Spanish conversation) to the obscure (dog-loving Brooklyn vegans)—began formally welcoming sponsorships in January. Now,

**EVERY LITTLE
BIT COUNTS**

brands like Huggies, Sony BMG and e-mail-device maker Peek are sponsoring thousands of relevant groups around the U.S., making monthly donations to group organizers to cover administrative costs. Some provide other types of resources: American Express Open, for example, has donated educational material on topics such as e-mail marketing to the 938-member Entrepreneur and Small Business Academy Meetup in Berkeley, Calif.

Online technologies are not only making it easier for people to connect and coordinate, they're also making it easier to pool resources.

As noted, my.barackobama.com proved to be a fundraising machine, collecting relatively small amounts from masses of people, and some nonprofits have based their model on this idea. The microfinancing organization Kiva.org collects small loans (starting at \$25) from members, who choose which entrepreneurs in developing countries they would like to help; a baker hoping to expand her business may request \$1,000, for example, which is then collected from (and ultimately paid back to) numerous lenders. DonorsChoose.org follows a similar model, taking modest contributions from site visitors, who can select which educational projects to help sponsor in U.S. schools.

This model is successful in part because it encourages participants to engage their social network in the cause. "If you can only afford to give \$10, [but] if you can send an e-mail out to 50 of your friends so they each give \$10, then you're at \$500—where you can send two girls to school for a year or do something that has significant tangible value," explained Joan Ochi, director of marketing communications for GlobalGiving.org, to a JWT trendspotter.

As the global economic downturn intensifies, more people and organizations will leverage the Internet to find and share resources. Watch for citizen philanthropy to become increasingly common as nonprofits find that funding from big individual and corporate benefactors, governmental organizations and foundations dries up. Casting a wider net online by soliciting modest contributions from sympathetic small donors may be the solution. "I think you're going to see more local charities or smaller charities reaching out online to pull in more of their community supporters," Annie Van Bebber, founder of information clearinghouse Fundraisers.com, told the *San Francisco Chronicle* in February.

More people will also use the Internet's resource-sharing capabilities to help themselves. On classified-ad sites such as Gumtree in the U.K. and Craigslist, people trying to get rid of their clutter can connect with others happy to take old televisions and shabby couches offered for free. The worldwide Freecycle Network specializes in such exchanges. "[A computer] is only four or five hundred bucks at Wal-Mart," one mother who got a computer through Freecycle told the *Columbia Missourian* in January. "OK, well, let's go buy a computer—or pay the electric bill, you know, and be able to eat. You know, for a lot of us ... that's how it is."

This "gift economy"—that is, people giving away goods for nothing in return—is one advantage that consumers in this recession have over those who suffered

through past downturns. The value of goods exchanged in this economy is likely in the millions. For cash-strapped households, these online resources can be a godsend. And for people looking to offload things they no longer need, these sites can help them strengthen ties to their communities.

A CLOSER LOOK **CLICKDIAGNOSTICS Q&A**

ClickDiagnostics is a “global tele-health company” founded last year by MIT and Harvard students who saw cell phones as the key to addressing one of the developing world’s most significant health problems: a dearth of doctors, especially in rural areas. Their idea—to use mobile technology to connect community health workers with remote medical specialists—won the 2008 MIT \$100K Entrepreneurship Competition in the Development Track and was one of two runners up for the USAID Development 2.0 Challenge. We talked to co-founders Donald Yansen, Click’s chief operating officer, and Ting Shih, vice president of services.

What inspired you to launch ClickDiagnostics?

Ting: It was literally born out of the MIT Media Lab. And it started with the simple challenge of how to improve the lives of at least a billion people. So it was in the classroom setting, facilitated by the director of the MIT Media Lab, Alex Pentland, who is our current adviser. We were a joint class between Harvard, MIT and Stanford. There were four of us who had the same general idea about using mobile phones to improve global health care delivery.

Was the idea of affecting a billion people daunting at all?

Ting: The question proposed was more exciting than daunting; it was like, “Wow,” because we knew by the end of the course that we were going to come up with some solution that will impact more than a billion people. You’re confident [thanks to] the school environment and the support, as well as your classmates, that it will happen. And part of the motivation was also the MIT \$100K competition. As part of the course, we have to enter the competition. So that further motivated all of us to develop a full-fledged business plan, demonstrate feasibility and implementation feasibility, to actually launch the service by May of last year, which we did.

What social trends do you see as contributing to the development of initiatives like yours? Why do you think people are so interested in making this work?

Don: There are two changes that have been happening in the last couple years, broad changes. One is recognizing that more can be accomplished by working with communities and connecting different communities and organizations—as opposed to going in and doing one thing, like try to overcome malaria or TB, or treating one thing. And the other aspect is there is definitely a trend toward a different style of development, one that is very consciously working to make any

program sustainable without government or NGO funding. So those trends have helped us get as far as we are.

Why do you think these trends are starting to take shape?

Don: Well, starting around 2001, there was some real major criticism of the way development was done by the World Bank and the IMF and all that. There had been a bunch of former World Bank people and economists saying, you know, development just hasn’t worked, this kind of going in and just building dams, building hospitals. The grassroots approach, which is more of a community approach, was ignored largely; it was more of a top-down development. And now this community-based or grassroots development is a response to the other approach, which didn’t work.

Do you think these trends will have a long-term effect on the way people think about community and the organization of grassroots movements?

Don: Yeah, I think the combination. I mean, the evidence is Obama gets elected and he started out as a community organizer. I think that communication and technology allow people to be connected much farther than they used to. And I think that

A CLOSER LOOK CLICKDIAGNOSTICS Q&A *(continued)*

lowers anxiety, to be connected to people. And so it's just absolutely gonna increase.

Do you think as this expands and as supply and demand changes, people will start to change their vision of what it means to be a global citizen and the way they interact with people in other parts of the world?

Ting: I definitely think so, because one thing we are also thinking of is that by partnering with university doctors and medical residents, it's a way for them to connect directly to patients abroad. I

mean, the world is really flat once we have this in place. They can view cases and really have an intellectual exchange in terms of, What are the ailments in countries outside the U.S.? And at the same time, from the rural communities, they can see how medical expertise can be applied. So there is definitely a two-way exchange, and we can also establish relationships between local doctors and the expert doctors abroad. So we are looking at increasing networks of medical knowledge exchange.

Don: Yeah, I think it's impossible for someone not to become, or have a

feeling of being, a global citizen, doing this. I wish everyone could do this—then you see that everybody is just the same and all these, to some degree, manufactured differences melt away.

Ting: The doctor we're working with, she has seen at least 300 cases from 12 countries in Africa, and her ability to see all those countries is only limited by the number of pilots we have set up. So she could cover the entire continent and more. And I don't think this is limited to developing countries. So there's definitely more room for expansion.

ALL IN THIS TOGETHER

The rollicking party of the past few decades is over, and most nations around the world are feeling the effects of the global economic recession. As people begin to see that today's overwhelming issues, from the economic to the environmental, can be addressed only through widespread collaboration (with a "we" rather than a "me" mentality), there is a growing realization that we're all in this together.

In Finland, a government campaign calls on citizens to put aside their own self-interest during the recession—which is leading them to save money—and to keep the economy afloat by spending. Posters feature a demonic-looking piggy bank that reads "Don't feed the recession." By appealing to the collective, the Finnish hope to avoid what economists call the "paradox of thrift" (the vicious cycle wherein people respond to a recession by curtailing their spending, causing the economy to keep contracting further).

In the U.S., The Alliance for Climate Protection has rolled out the "We Can Solve It" campaign, which it describes as a "mass persuasion exercise." Americans "from all walks of life" are urged to join together to address climate change by asking policymakers to switch 100 percent of America's electricity to clean energy sources. Using traditional advertising plus social networking applications, the campaign has so far recruited more than 2 million people to the cause, according to the Alliance's Web site.

Environmental issues are especially relevant to a “we vs. me” mind-set. Whereas concern for “the environment” once meant preserving distant rainforests and endangered animals, people now understand that to begin to reverse environmental damage that will affect everyone everywhere, it will take many millions around the world changing their habits. Global citizens realize that much of what they do in their everyday lives can either help address the world’s environmental problems or, alternatively, add to them.

While the collective consciousness is manifesting in unique ways around the world to address various issues and problems, the underlying social values behind this trend are the same, especially among the world’s middle class. As developing countries grow more prosperous, it seems that the core values of the middle class evolve, becoming more like those of developed, wealthier nations.

Thus the middle classes in countries like Russia, Mexico, Brazil, India or Malaysia will share more values in common with each other than with people of lower socioeconomic status living alongside them. For example, 69 percent of middle-class Ukrainians say global warming is a very serious problem—which accords with responses from middle-class people in countries including Argentina and Bulgaria—compared with 54 percent of lower-income Ukrainians, according to a 2009 study by the Pew Global Attitudes Project.

Watch as the collective consciousness among a global middle class grows stronger as its members exchange ideas and coordinate actions based on a common set of social values.

WHAT IT MEANS

The collective consciousness trend is a manifestation of several factors: the desire and ability to join communities based on fluid identities; the ease with which Web technology allows people to communicate, exchange ideas and organize collectively; a new generation’s desire to be more active and engaged in their world; and the growing realization that large-scale problems like environmental degradation need large-scale, collectively driven solutions.

As a result, people are pooling resources, sharing ideas and coordinating actions. Experimentation and innovation in this realm are flourishing as people integrate their online and offline activities to carry out collective goals.

Marketers can tap into the collective conscious to create movement around brands. But they cannot rely on virtual spaces alone; instead they must consider

their consumers' online and offline worlds as one integrated whole. Thinking broadly, brands should enable ways for consumers to show passion for and engagement with the product or category. Thus, for example, a baked-goods brand can help their virtual community of amateur bakers talk to each other, swap recipes and organize events such as baking contests and potlucks. This means giving up a certain measure of control—ceding power to local groups that can effectively organize and create excitement in their neighborhoods and among their real-life community groups.

Businesses that successfully tap into the collective consciousness shift will have the ability to connect and form allegiances with consumers that go much deeper than the superficial and transactional.



466 Lexington Avenue
New York, NY 10017
www.jwt.com
www.jwtintelligence.com

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Editor-in-Chief	Ann M. Mack
Associate Editor	Lois Saldana
Contributors	James Cullinane Alyson Valpone Jessica Vaughn
Copyeditor	Marian Berelowitz
Proofreader	Katerina Petinos
Design	Paris Tempo Productions

CONTACT:

Ann M. Mack
Director of Trendspotting
JWT Worldwide
212-210-7378
ann.mack@jwt.com

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