

## Trendspotting

A These days, urban lifestyles seem to change very fast. It is more than just clothing and hairstyles that are in style one year and out of date the next; it's a whole way of living. One year, people wear sunglasses on top of their heads and wear jeans and boots; they eat sushi at Japanese restaurants; for exercise they jog several miles a day. However, the next year everything has changed. Women wear longskirts; people drink expensive water from France and eat pasta at Italian restaurants; everyone seems to be exercising at health clubs. Then, suddenly, it has changed again. Men shave their heads and wear earrings; people wear only natural fabrics (safe for the environment);



▲ Are skateboard parks popular in your city?

they drink gourmet coffee and eat Thai food; for both leisure and exercise, adults may go bicycling; and some younger people may go skateboarding.

### Fads

B Almost nothing in modern life escapes the influence of fashion: food, sports, music, exercise, books, slang words, movies, furniture, places to visit, even names go in and out of fashion. For a while, it seemed that all new parents in the U.S. were naming

their babies Heather, Dawn, Mike, or Adam. These names were "in." Then, suddenly, these same names were "out," and Madison, Amber, and Jason were "in." It's almost impossible to write about specific fads because these interests that people enthusiastically follow can change very quickly.

### The Essence of a Fad

c This is the essence, the central quality, of a fad: it doesn't last long. Some fads disappear before we have even heard of them. How many people remember Greenpeace swirlsuits? (They changed color to indicate 30 polluted water.) And then there was "Beethoven Bread." Popular in Japan in 1994, it was expensive—\$20 for one loaf. It was made while classical music played in the kitchen. The woman who created this bread emphasized that "bread doesn't like rock music." In 2005, a company introduced a new toothbrush, "Tooth Tunes," which brought music "from 35 the teeth to the ears." These fads quickly disappeared.

### The Reason for Fads

d What causes such fads to come and go? And why do so many people follow them? Although clothing designers and manufacturers influence fads in fashion because they want to make a profit, this desire for money doesn't explain fads in other areas, such as language. For example, why 40 have English-speaking teenagers in the past 25 years used—at different times—the slang words groovy, boss, awesome, rad, or tubular instead of simply saying "wonderful"? According to Jack Santino, an expert in popular culture, people who follow fads are not irrational; they simply want to be part of something new and creative, and they feel good when 45 they are part of an "in group." Santino believes that fads are common in any country that has a strong consumer economy. However, because of TV, movies, and the Internet, fads are now common worldwide and spread very fast. Increasingly, they seem to begin in Asia, especially in 50 Hong Kong, Japan, and Korea.

### Fads and Trends

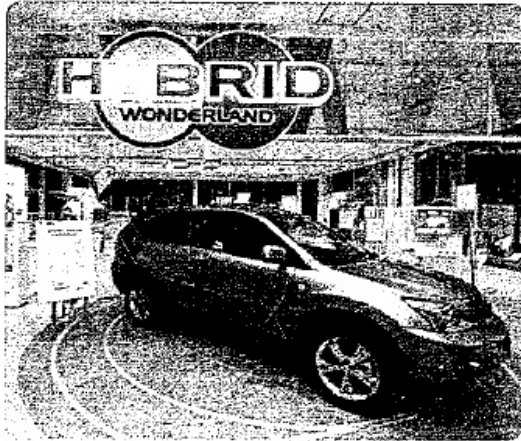
e Santino points out that it's sometimes difficult to see the difference between a fad and a trend. A fad, he says, lasts a very short time and is not very important. A trend lasts much longer. A recent trend is the 55 interest in good health, but many fads come from this trend: aerobic exercise, kickboxing, organic vegetables, or special diets like carbohydrate-counting. A trend in the 1980s was the use of personal 60 computers; certain computer games were fads. However, these days we can't really continue to call computers a "trend" because now they have become 65 an essential part of everyday life.



▲ Japanese anime: a fad or a trend?

## Trendspotting

F Trendspotting is the ability to identify a trend at an early stage—an extremely important skill in the business world. The first company that can correctly identify a new trend (and do something with it) has a competitive edge—an advantage—over other companies. The person who founded the Starbucks chain of coffeehouses was able to spot a trend—interest in quality and variety in coffee. Today, people buy Starbucks products in shopping centers, airports, and supermarkets



A Hybrid cars (gas/electric): a fad or a trend?

everywhere. But when a development in popular culture is new, it's difficult to distinguish between a fad and a trend. Trendspotters need to ask themselves: will this become an important global trend, or is it just a passing fad? "Hello Kitty" began as a fad but became a trend. People who invested their funds in Greenpeace swimsuits, however, probably regret their decision. Clearly, they mistook a fad for a trend.

## Popular Culture and the University

G Possibly because of the importance of trendspotting in business, more and more universities are offering classes in popular culture. Some even offer a *major* in popular culture. Parents of students at New York University have sometimes been surprised to find their children taking

such classes as "Inside the Mouse" (about the influence of Disney), "Golden Arches East" (about McDonald's in Asia), or "Hope in a Jar" (about the cosmetics industry). At Bowling Green State University, in Ohio, there has been a course on *Pokemon*, found in Japanese culture. At other schools, students might enroll in "The History of Rock 'n' Roll," "Addiction in Literature," and "Smoking and Advertising." Many people don't take such classes seriously. However, companies are seeking out graduates of Bowling Green, which actually offers a master's degree in popular culture. These graduates find jobs in advertising, television, publishing, and manufacturing. With an understanding of popular culture, these graduates are becoming the new trendspotters. The question now becomes this: Are courses in popular culture just a fad or a real trend?

## Fads and Trends in the 21st Century

A The 19th-century American philosopher Henry David Thoreau was famous for saying, "Simplify, simplify." Unfortunately, the trend these days seems to be "complicate, complicate" instead. Many people are working longer hours, spending more money, and getting in more debt than ever before. They are also relaxing less and spending less time with family and friends. However, there is also a countertrend—a trend toward **voluntary simplicity**. People in the voluntary simplicity movement take various steps to make their lives both simpler and more enjoyable. Some people **work fewer hours** each week. Some **move close to their workplace** to avoid a long daily commute; they **plant a vegetable garden**; this gives them fresh air, exercise, and time with their families—not to mention organic produce. But all people in the voluntary simplicity movement try to cut back—to buy less; they cut up their credit cards and stop buying unnecessary items. In short, the priority for people in the voluntary movement is to follow Thoreau's suggestion: simplify.

Topic: voluntary simplicity

Main idea: People in the voluntary simplicity movement take various steps to make their lives both simpler and more enjoyable.



▲ Mehndi or henna, a temporary decoration

5 A popular fad for many teenagers is tattooing. Parents are usually horrified by these permanent designs on their children's skin, but the young people see them as a fashion statement. In the new millennium, some parents are greatly 20 relieved when their teenage children turn to a new fad, a temporary form of decorating the hands, feet, neck, or legs—*mehandi* or *henna*, a method of painting beautiful designs that last only about three weeks. This "new" fad is actu- 25 ally very old; for hundreds of years in India, a woman's friends have painted her to celebrate her wedding day. Another fad from India, however, causes parents more worry—*bidis*. Children

and young teens are attracted to these thin cigarettes in candy flavors such 30 as orange, chocolate, mango, and raspberry. The problem? *Bidis* contain more nicotine than regular cigarettes. Unfortunately, many children think these are "cool"—fashionable. So until a new fad comes along, "Indian chic is hot," as one radio commentator observed.

Topic: \_\_\_\_\_

Main idea: \_\_\_\_\_

Another ancient art, aromatherapy, is also popular today. Of course, 35  
people have always used perfume to make them more attractive to other  
people. And we all have experience with the power of smell in a different  
way—memory. When we smell something for the first time in many years, a  
sudden rush of memories comes to us. We remember where we were and  
how we felt all those years ago when we first smelled it. In aromatherapy, 40  
floral scents and the smell of such things as lemon, pine, and mint are used  
to make people feel better in a variety of ways. Some scents make people  
more relaxed. Other scents make them more alert, more awake. As you  
might imagine, the market reflects interest in this trend. Businesspeople  
are happy to make scents available to their customers, for a price. 45

Topic: \_\_\_\_\_

Main idea: \_\_\_\_\_

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▲ Mountain bikes can go almost anywhere.

Another fad from the 1990s—dangerous sports—seems to be turning into a trend in the new millennium. People have begun to make traditional sports such as skiing and bicycling more challenging and dangerous. Instead of skiing, there is now snowboarding, which is basically skateboarding on snow. Instead of using a regular bicycle, some people use a mountain bike, which can go almost anywhere. Some thrill seekers, people who want more and more excitement and danger, have created new “extreme sports.” One of these, sky-surfing, combines sky-diving (jumping out of an airplane with a parachute) with surfing.



▲ Sky-surfing: a combination of sky-diving and surfing

In another, waterfall-running, a person rides a kayak off a high waterfall. The thrill seekers who are addicted to such sports don't seem to feel fear. They say they need to “focus 100 percent” in order to survive their experience. But they also say they feel “100 percent alive” only in those few moments of falling through air or water. But the question remains: Will this trend disappear, change into a different trend, or become part of the culture?

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Topic: \_\_\_\_\_

Main idea: \_\_\_\_\_

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areas	culture	economy	irrational
creative	designers	expert	so

### The Reason for Fads

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