

180 

# Culture Flash

Neo Third Places



vol.4

April, 2024



# Quick definition



Image by Warner Bros Studios

## Third Places

Coined by urban sociologist Ray Oldenburg, third places are informal public gathering spaces outside of home and the workplace.

These spaces foster interactions with others from playful, witty conversations, to deeper emotional bonding.

Accessibility, social equity, and the presence of regulars are determining factors that make third places a perfect playground to build meaningful connections.

# Context

## **An always-connected society that struggles to make connections: the downhill of third places**

Third places play an essential role in fulfilling the human need of connection. However necessary, concerns around their decline, or disappearance altogether, have snowballed.

In a world where digital spaces have unlocked ways of staying more connected than ever before, their algorithms that are designed to cater to individual preferences, can unintentionally fuel self-isolation.

This behaviour coincides with a growing loneliness epidemic experienced across all age groups.

Image by Pamela Wang

“[Loneliness] is like hunger or thirst, it’s a feeling the body sends us when something we need for survival is missing.”

Loneliness has been declared a “global public health concern” by The World Health Organization

‘Why do I feel lonely when I have friends’ had a +300% search increase on Google in 2023

5-15% of adolescents experience loneliness

(WHO)

1 in 4 older adults experience social isolation

(WHO)

# Emergence



## DIGITAL LOVE LANGUAGES:

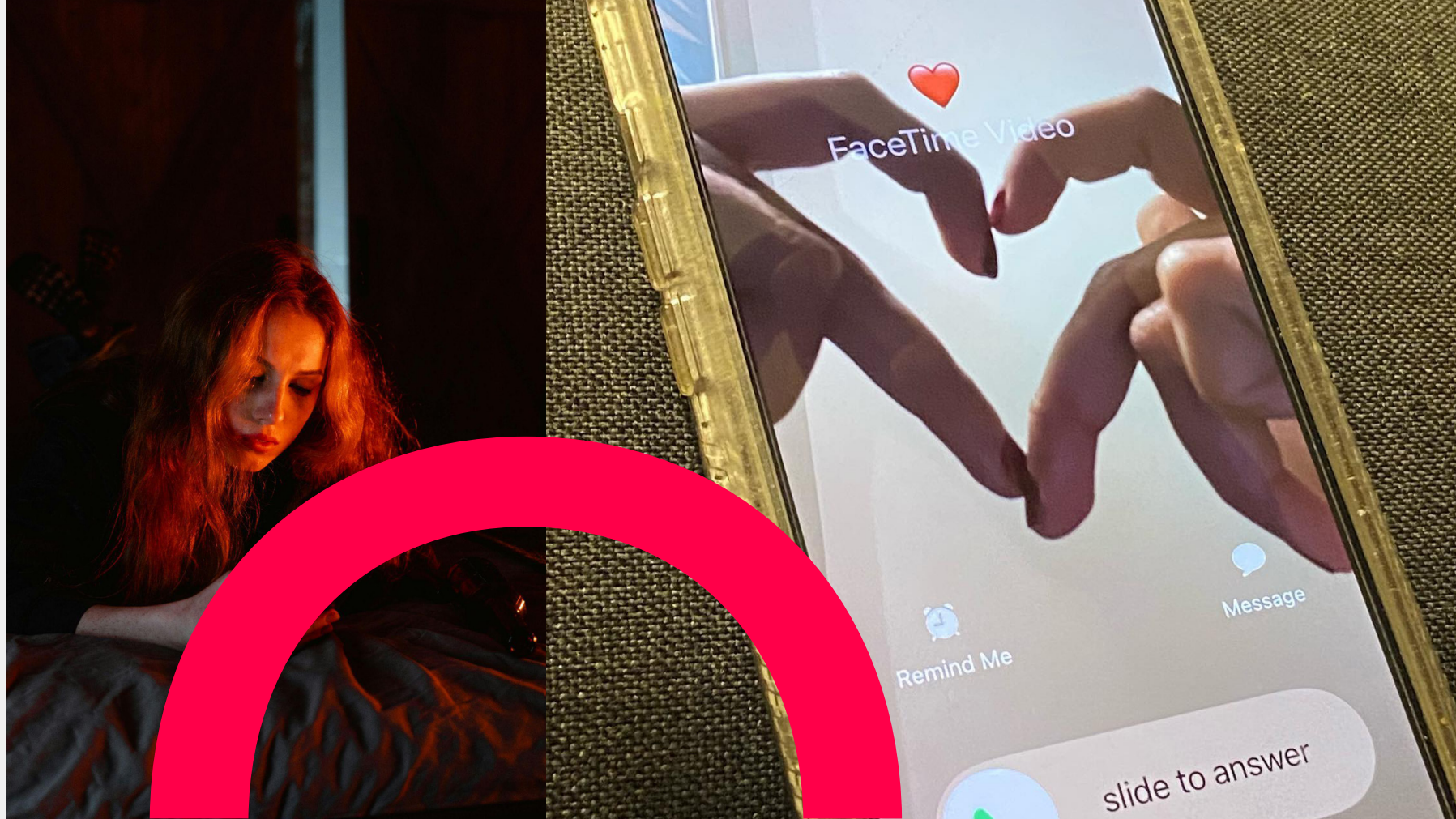
**Rediscovering the power of Social Media to overcome isolation by creating neo third places**

Accessibility, the sense of connection and regularity once provided by these physical third places seems to be diminishing. Which is why people are taking it into their own hands to emulate, recreate, or even replace them.

Users online are finding ways to overcome a spell of isolation and fight against increasing social distance.

They seek a feeling of belonging to come back to, through fostering existing and new through the formation of neo third places online.

# The shift



# From

A loneliness epidemic  
exacerbated by digital  
isolation

# To

The rise of neo third places  
fueled by social media

# The rise of connection cravings in digital spaces

# >4.5k

Articles on Google around  
'deep connections' since  
2023

A clear desire to  
reignite moments  
of reconnection in  
pockets of digital,  
giving rise to new  
neo third place  
behaviours .

# +276%

Interest increase around  
**#genuineconnections**  
on TikTok from  
December 2023 to  
March 2024

# +40%

YoY search increase  
around '**emotional  
intimacy**' according to  
Pinterest Predicts 2024

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**Social Media Is Fake** carousel trend garners over  
**66.3M views on TikTok** as of March 2024

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Google searches on '**how to make friends on social media**' was the "how to make friends on..."  
**top search query** in February 2024

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Interest around **#intimateconversations**  
spiked **+2383% on TikTok** from December  
2023 to March 2024

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'**Questions for couples to reconnect**' searches  
increased **+480% YoY** according to **Pinterest  
Predicts 2024**

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Searches on '**Bumble bff**' increased **+150%**  
**on Google** from January to March 2024

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# Key drivers leading the Shift

01

# The mainforces at stake

This shift is influencing the shape and behaviours of several factors on social.

01.

## Communities

As conventional community building opportunities are hard to find, individuals are actively finding mediums to form a community.

Whether it be personal initiative or an organized event, people are leveraging digital platforms to connect IRL and create neo third places.

02.

## Influencers

Friend-like influencers are in. Audiences seek authentic people they can genuinely connect with and relate to. Authenticity trumps follower counts

Content creators like Bibi-Jane Angelica have built a safe space for their communities creating "comforting" content and interacting with users as if they were friends.

03.

## Narratives

Feeding the loneliness gap new perspectives and takes on life that foster a sense of belonging and relatability.

Embracing vulnerability and connecting openly with the digital community has become commonplace: from posing vital questions to freely expressing thoughts.

DAYS	HOURS	MINUTES	SECONDS
4	10	40	49

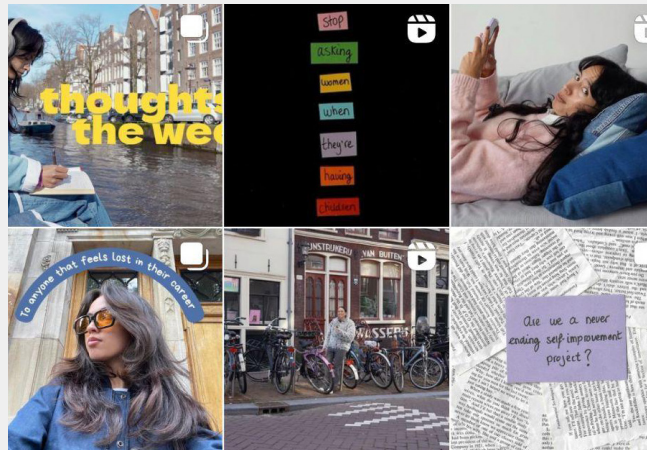
Left to register for the next dinner

## EVERY WEDNESDAY EVENING IN YOUR CITY, STRANGERS MEET FOR A DINNER.

*Will you join us?*

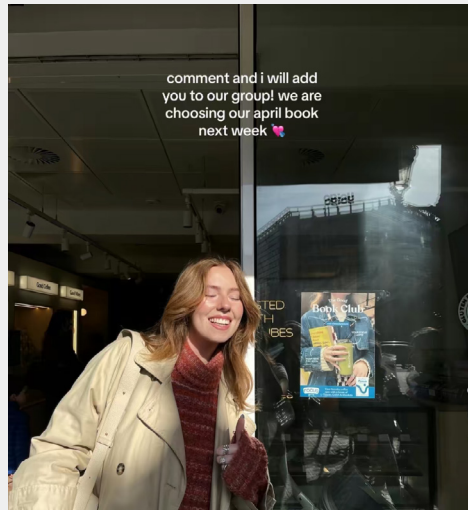
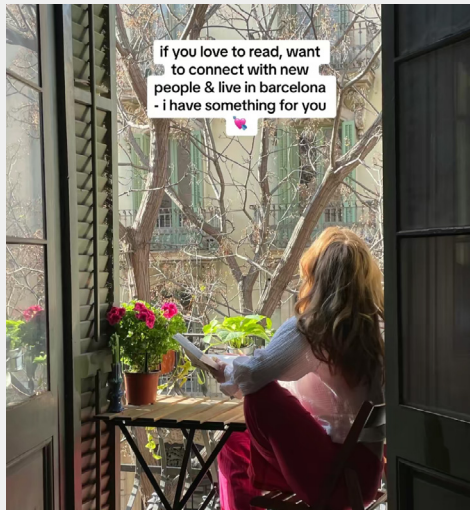
Sign up to join 5 folks, all matched by our algorithm, next Wednesday.

[Book My Seat](#)



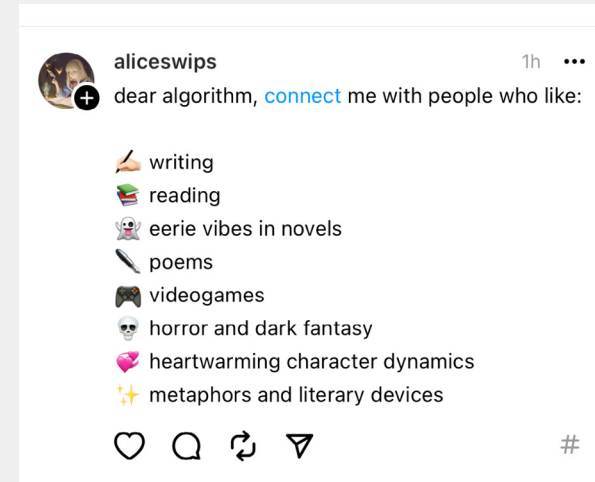
# Drivers: Individuals using social to scout & recruit new community members

@elsa.danielson on TikTok has turned to the platform to find new members for the book club she runs in Barcelona.



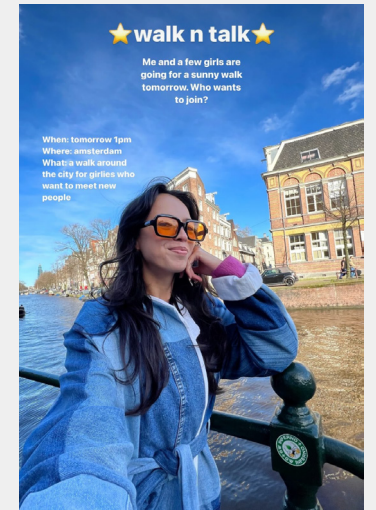
# Leveraging your own algorithm and followerbase to find people with passions alike

@aliceswips on Threads



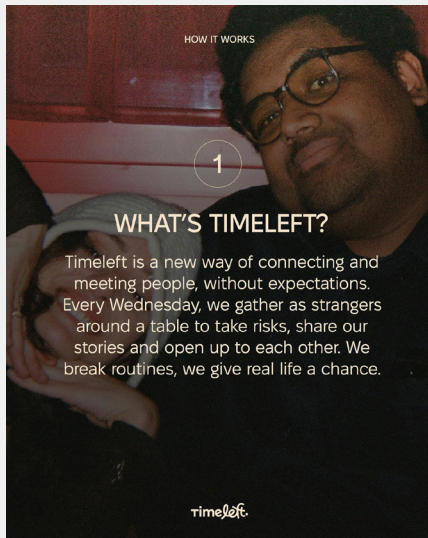
Meeting peers in real life can be difficult, with a decrease of opportunities that allow for informal, yet genuine interactions that ensue. Many users are leveraging social algorithms to recruit new members for IRL clubs and group gatherings by capturing activities they host and explicitly inviting others to join. When Threads launched in the EU, we also saw users starting with a clean slate and listing their passions in order to follow new people, instead of re-following their Instagram cohorts.

Bibi-Jane uses her Instagram and TikTok accounts to find girls that want to meet new people while walking around the city



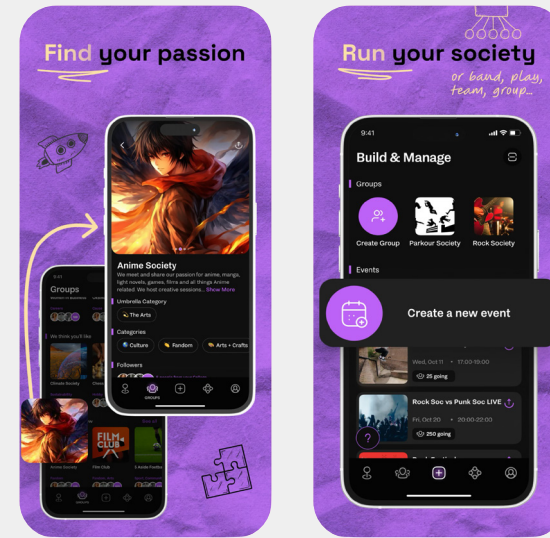
# Drivers: Digital-based initiatives as real-life connection fosterers

Initiatives such as **Timeleft** and **The Table** bring strangers together around a dining table. Born online, they foster a new type of building IRL connections.



## Rise in grassroots initiatives galvanising groups around a shared interest, through unique recurring experiences IRL

**Youni** is an app for University students to find all comms from societies in one stream.

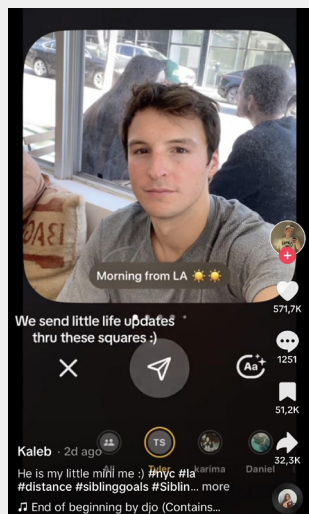


Initiatives and dynamic app experiences are being born with the means of acting as the connector to meet up with strangers with shared interests. These are uniquely shaped by their aim to unite people for a somewhat niche shared passion and cause.

Once you're in, the initiatives offer a curated stream of comms that keep users connected and involved beyond a one time interaction. Fostering a true sense of newfound community, that has a positive ripple effect to new potential joiners.

# Drivers: Apps supercharging existing connections through micro-actions

Locket is a widget app to add your friends into your home screen through picture updates.



“You can reconnect with friends and make new ones with the click of a button”

Agiennsnk on Locket, Apple Store

We're forgetting to remember – introducing new digital nudges to fuel reconnection

The Thoughtful: Connect deeper app helps people recenter and reach out to people you love every day to stay in touch.

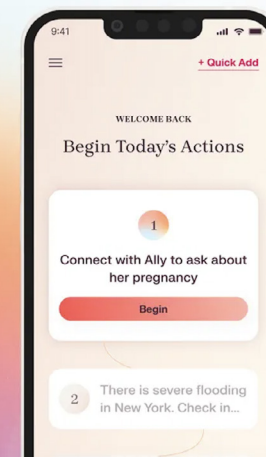
# Thoughtful

Deepen your relationships and change your life

With the decline of third places to simply catch up, paired with an overwhelming social feed, it's easy to lose touch with people in our lives, even more so when long-distance is a factor.

New apps are serving up gentle reminders to nurture relationships through meaningful micro-actions that emulate usual day-to-day behaviours: checking in, quick life update sharing, etc.

With some going beyond simple nudges, to offering up the right questions to ask to foster deeper connection.



# Drivers: The go-to third places are now homemade and DIY

@urgirlvic on TikTok hosts Saturday coffee runs creating her own home cafe for her friends to go by.



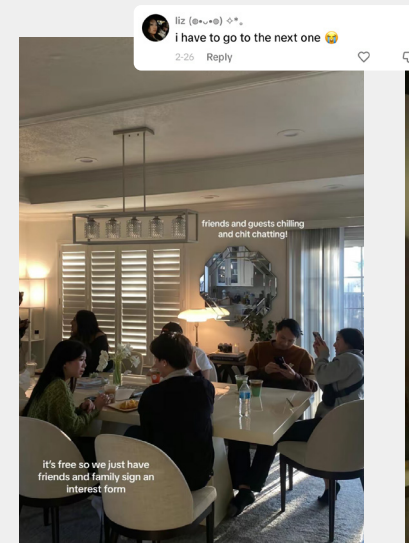
## Coffee trips and after work drinks inaccessible for Gen Z? No problem, just open your own cafe at home

As the cost of living shoots up globally, people are bringing outdoor social experiences home. Yes, instagrammable home cafés and bars are a thing.

While these are mainly made to gather with close friends and plus-ones, we're seeing more extending the invite out to lucky new visitors through social.

These elevate a more accessible way to connect with friends and new acquaintances in cozy spaces that foster interactions they miss, without the exorbitant €8 Matcha Latte entry fee...

@jellykellybellytelly on TikTok

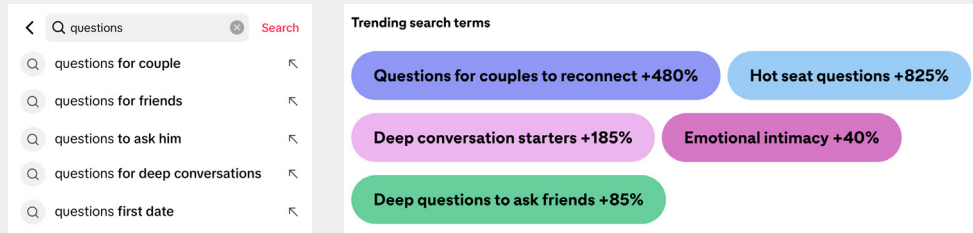


Shanghai's home bars for peers to chat over some drinks are increasing popularity



# Drivers: Re-learning how to have deeper conversations

“Big Talk” trend on Pinterest and TikTok suggested searches showcase people are using the platforms to improve their social interactions.



## But what do I even talk about? Social Media has got your back

Being out of practice of spontaneous chats, it seems like we don't know how to initiate or follow up a conversation anymore.

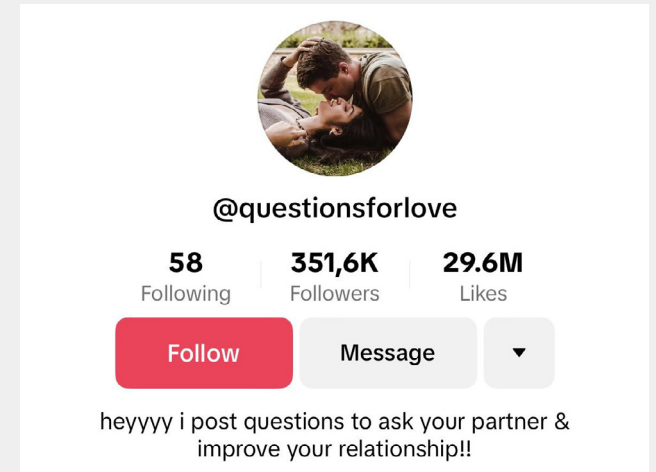
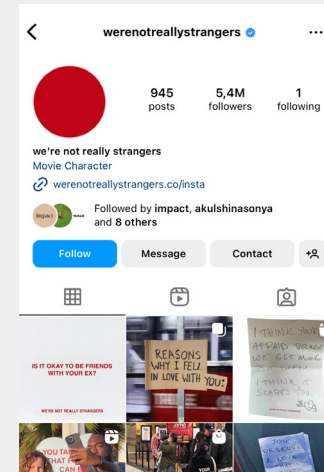
Many are using digital platforms as modern guidebooks to navigate social interactions, getting inspiration on what to talk about.

For instance, the 2024 Pinterest Predicts report found a rise around connection-seeking searches, and TikTok's top search suggestions show an interest for questions to ask loved ones.

The brand We're Not Really Strangers went so far as to create a product around this need, creating truly handy and saveable content to get chatting.

@werenotreallystrangers

@questionsforlove



# Drivers: The internet confessional: vulnerability online to bond and find comfort

## From oversharing at after work drinks, to TMI\* TikTok sharing

With fewer in-person spots that invite moments of vulnerability about personal struggles, exposing yourself online is becoming the outlet to find much needed counsel.

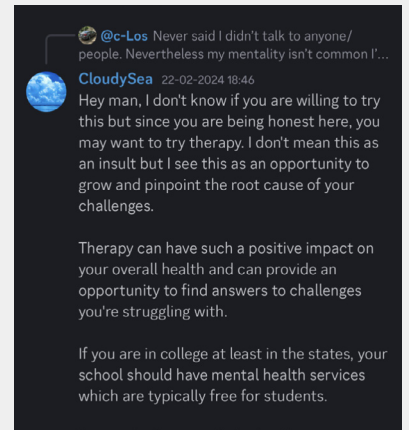
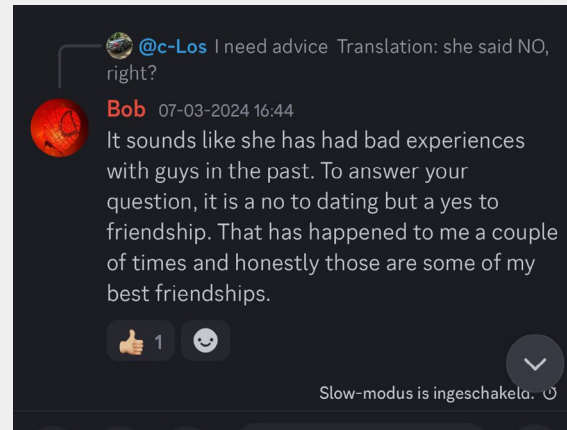
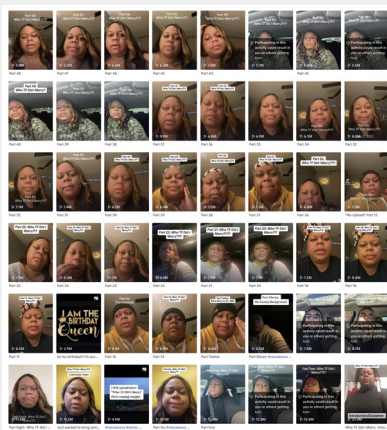
The more extroverted put all cards on the table, orchestrating long videos to reveal all details, with no real expectations of reactions and pushback.

Others still seek support, but with anonymity. For instance, young men are finding support through male-only Discord servers or Instagram accounts where they can anonymously submit their worries and seek actionable advice.

\*TMI - Too Much Information

@reesamteesa's 'Who TF did I marry' series went viral on TikTok. A personal experience genuinely shared to all in a 50 video series

@VisibleMan on Discord is a safe space for men to share questions and concerns for professional guidance



# Cheat Sheet

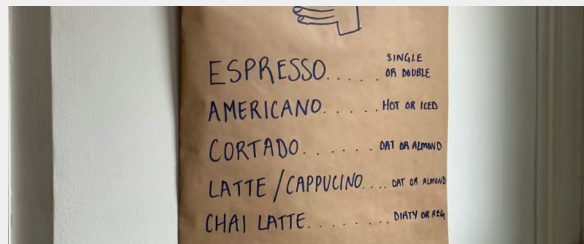
02

# In Short, Neo third places are being manifested through...



## Apps sparking micro-actions to stay in touch

Digital apps reminding us to take care of our relationships.



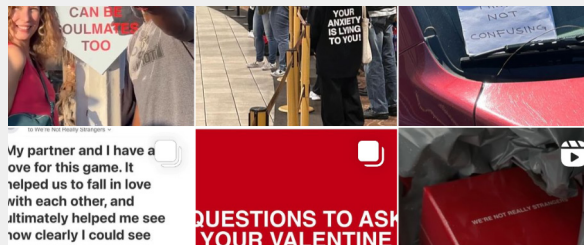
## Self-made home third places

Hosting outside activities at home.



## Individuals scouting community members

To find people with passions alike.



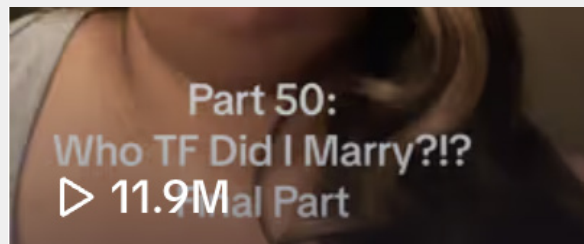
## Re-learning how to build insightful conversations

People using digital platforms as guidebooks to improve social interactions.



## Digital platforms fostering IRL events

Bringing strangers together for recurring events that are based on interactions.



## The internet confessional

Opening up to get counselling and achieve personal growth.

# Opportunities for Brands

## Conversational narratives <sup>01</sup>

Crafting content with a rich storyline and based on conversations between characters or monologues have the power to immerse fans and

make them feel a part of the discussion.

## Organized events as owned third places <sup>02</sup>

Brand events for fans, or influencers, play a great location for individuals with a shared interest to meet.

Creating an experience that is easily accessible and that emulates third places: cozy ambiance, conversation-based activities, etc.

## Host a branded online messaging club <sup>03</sup>

Creation of a digital hub that acts as the playground for fans to have conversations around the brand and get exclusive announcements.

Such as creating a Discord server for fans to interact between each other, but also with the brand.

## Let your product build connections <sup>04</sup>

Creation and/or extension of your product in order to enable customers to form connections with their communities.

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Every day, our **180 Social** team observes and analyses online communities.

Using a blend of social listening tools and qualitative / coolhunting approaches, in order to enrich analysis for brands & organisations.

We monitor rising trends & behaviors, and identify rising KOLs / KOCs within specific tribes.

Get in touch if you want to know more about our methodologies: [180 Global](#)

Any questions or comments about this Culture Flash series?  
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With love,

180 Social